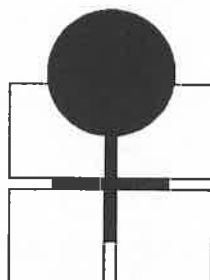


Feminist Research, Education, Development & Action Centre



FREDA

**ERASED REALITIES:
THE VIOLENCE OF RACISM IN THE LIVES OF IMMIGRANT
AND REFUGEE GIRLS OF COLOUR**

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This report is dedicated to the girls and young women who have shared their experiences, with hopes for a betterment of their lived realities. It is our intention that their hopes will be realized and coalesce through the development of more equitable policies and through social action.

Yasmin Jiwani

October 2001

'A crime of pure hatred,' Crown says

ST-ANDRE-EST, Que. – Aylin Otano-Garcia was six when she immigrated here with her mother from Cuba, and by the time she reached her teens she had blended in. She had many friends in high school and spoke French with no trace of an accent. "Nobody knew she was Cuban. She was a real Quebecer," recalled Niurka Perez, a close family friend. But somebody noticed Aylin's unusual family name and slightly darker complexion. In what a Crown prosecutor called a crime of "pure hatred," the pretty 15-year-old was targeted as an immigrant, lured to a remote sandpit and bludgeoned to death with a baseball bat last June.

(Graeme Hamilton, *National Post*; with files from George Kalogerakis, *The Gazette*. May 12, 2001)

The story of Reena Virk

VICTORIA, BC – On November 14, 1997, fourteen-year-old Reena Virk, a girl of South Asian origin, was brutally murdered in a suburb of Victoria, British Columbia. Reena was first beaten by a group of seven girls and one boy, all aged between 14 and 16. According to journalistic accounts, the attack began when one of the girls attempted to stub out a cigarette on her forehead. As she tried to flee, the group swarmed her, kicked her in the head and body numerous times, attempted to set her hair on fire, and brutalized her to the point where she was severely injured and bruised. Battered, Reena staggered across a bridge trying to flee her abusers, but was followed by two of them – Warren Glowatski and Kelly Ellard. The two then continued to beat her, smashing her head against a tree and kicking her to the point where she became unconscious. They then allegedly dragged her body into the water and forcibly drowned her. Reena's body was subsequently found 8 days later on November 22, 1997, with very little clothing on it. The pathologist who conducted the autopsy noted that Virk had been kicked 18 times in the head and her internal injuries were so severe as to result in tissues being crushed between the abdomen and backbone. The pathologist concluded that Reena would likely have died even if she had not been drowned.¹

¹ This composite is derived from the accounts presented in various newspapers and magazines over a two-year period (1997-1999). For more information on the media coverage of this crime, see Jiwani, 1999a.

INTRODUCTION

The brutal murders of Aylin Otano-Garcia and Reena Virk dramatically portray the specific vulnerabilities of racialized immigrant girls. They demonstrate, above all else, the inability of society to accept racialized girls as ‘Canadians’ and the struggles these girls encounter in their attempts to ‘fit in.’ These journalistic accounts highlight the erasure of racism as a daily reality for these girls, making it extremely difficult for the girls themselves to name it as a form of violence and to seek support for the protection of their human rights and dignity.

As a country, Canada is perceived to be a leader in the international human rights arena. It is regarded as an egalitarian nation, motivated by a desire for justice for minorities and the underprivileged. Canada is a signatory to various international accords, conventions and agreements which uphold the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities, including women and children.

This paper juxtaposes the progressive rhetoric of Canada’s obligations as defined by these international instruments with the lived realities and impact of domestic policies on the lives of racialized immigrant and refugee girls. The focus of the investigation is on the intersection between systemic forms of violence, such as racism, sexism and classism, with more intimate forms of violence. How are these different forms of violence understood and experienced by girls and young women from racialized immigrant communities? How do international, national and domestic policies impact on their lives and access to services?

Our point of departure in this report is that racism is a form of violence, and the task that we are confronted with is one of mapping the intersections between the different forms of violence bearing in mind that racism can best be understood “as modes of exclusion, inferiorization, subordination and exploitation that present specific and different characters in different social and historical contexts” (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992: 2).

RACIALIZATION AND THE PROCESS OF BECOMING AN ‘OTHER’

Drawing from the literature, we define racialization as a process whereby members of a given group are *marked* and treated as being different (othered), with that difference being negatively valued (Miles, 1989; Thobani, 1998; van Dijk, 1993). In the present context, we are referring to racialization as “any process or situation wherein the idea of ‘race’ is introduced to define and give meaning to some particular population its characteristics and actions” (Miles,

1989: 246). It is critical to note that the identification of phenotypic or cultural differences alone does not constitute racism. Rather, it is the arrangement of these differences on a hierarchy of values that defines racism and informs the process of racialization.

The overt and covert nature of racism in Canadian society has been documented extensively by advocates and academics. As Henry & Tator confirm: "In a white dominated society, the colour of your skin is the single most important factor in determining life chances, as well as your dignity, identity, and self-esteem" (cited in Fleras & Elliot, 1996: 35). In a context of intense and prevalent anti-immigrant sentiments, the reality of immigrants of colour is one of constant negotiation, adjustment, and retreat into the cultural community. And in the Canadian context where racism is more 'polite' and insidious, the processes of negotiation are more nuanced and often confounding.

GENDERED RACISM²

In looking at the intersections of racism and sexism within the context of gendered violence, it is clear that the kinds of violence that racialized immigrant and refugee women and girls encounter is mediated by their particular status as girls, as 'raced' subjects, and their official status in terms of nationality and citizenship. Thus, social location, cultural scripts and accessibility to resources mediate the experience and kinds of abuse that girls and women from different groups experience (Das Gupta, 1996; Dosanjh, 1994; Huisman, 1996; Rhee, 1997). It is apparent that a significant aspect of the lives of immigrant and refugee girls of colour is their own intersectionality – at the junctures of race, gender, class, and age.

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS – INTERSECTING OPPRESSIONS IN CONTEXT

The oppressive forces of racism and sexism come together in the lives of immigrant women of colour and their daughters. Ghettoized in particular jobs (Iyer, 1997; Ocran, 1997), many of these women also experience gender role dislocation in the family. The deskilling and unemployment of men combined with the more rapid employment of women in low paying jobs (Ng, 1993) such as domestic work, create additional tensions in the family. In a series of focus groups convened by the MOSAIC immigrant settlement society, women from the Kurdish,

² I am indebted to Jo-Anne Lee for drawing my attention to this particular combination of terms to highlight the intersecting forms of violence confronting women and girls of colour.

Somali, Vietnamese, Polish and Latin American communities in Vancouver discussed the gender shifts in their family and the potential for violence. "They felt that immigration and the resulting changes in the family roles and expectations, appear to increase men's insecurity in the relationship, and that insecurity, in turn, resulted in dysfunctional behaviour" (1996: 4-5).

Immigrant women's marginalization in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres of society also contributes to their sense of 'otherness' and lack of belonging. The retreat into their cultural communities exacts a price for immigrant women of colour who experience violence. When the community becomes the only site for a sense of belonging and self-esteem, jeopardizing one's reputation incurs social costs which could amount to stigmatization and exclusion (Dasgupta, 1996; Health Canada, 1994; Huisman, 1996; MacLeod & Shin, 1990; Rasche, 1988; Rhee, 1997; Wiik, 1995). In this sense, the plight of immigrant women who experience violence parallels that of rural women whose only choice in leaving a violent relationship becomes one of leaving their community (Jiwani et al., 1998).

Further, in a racist milieu where men of colour are increasingly criminalized, reporting violence can in effect be construed as 'race treason' (Davis, 2000; Flynn & Crawford, 1998; Razack, 1998). Fear of deportation and criminalization leads many immigrant women of colour to avoid authorities and any form of official documentation which could jeopardize their legal status. As well, economic dependency on the male sponsor also forecloses the potential to report violence.

Thus for immigrant and refugee women, legal status vis-à-vis citizenship combined with the processes of racialization as 'others' and gendering, contribute to their heightened risk to violence. Meleis (1991) has argued that immigrant women are in a high risk category. We would argue that that risk extends to their daughters as well.

SITUATING IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE GIRLS

In 1996, 24.3% of the visible minority population was under the age of 15, and *the majority of these youth were immigrants* (Canada, Human Resources and Development, 1998a). One out of every ten immigrants is female under the age of 15 years. A review of the literature reveals a paucity of Canadian studies examining the realities and experiences of racialized girls from immigrant and refugee families (Jiwani, 1998b). Rather than focusing on girls' experiences of racism and sexism, or on how girls are racialized, many studies have tended to concentrate on

issues of cultural and intergenerational conflict within racialized immigrant communities. The prevalence of these identity-oriented studies suggests a greater degree of comfort in looking at *cultural* issues of co-existence, conflict, or assimilation and acculturation (Drury, 1991; Jabbra, 1983; Kim, 1980), rather than structural factors influencing the stratification of groups in society. More recently, this trend has begun to shift (e.g., Bourne et al., 1998; Handa, 1997; Matthews, 1997).

Many of the existing studies reveal that girls from racialized immigrant cultures experience a greater degree of dissatisfaction with and strain from the normative values imposed by their own cultures (Hutnik, 1986; Miller, 1995; Onder, 1996; Rosenthal et al., 1996). The contextual factors influencing and shaping this dissatisfaction tend not to be examined in structural terms, i.e., as emanating from the subordinate position of the cultural group in relation to the dominant society, and/or the construction of racialized communities as deviant *others* (Handa, 1997; Razack, 1998; Thobani, 1998). Exceptions to this trend can be found in American studies which focus on the differential rates of violence against Afro-American girls and women (Kenny et al., 1997; Wyatt and Riederle, 1994), and studies examining girls at risk and who come from a variety of different cultural backgrounds (e.g., Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995; Musick and Barker, 1994; Razack, 1998).

The marginalization of racialized girls and women from racialized ethno-cultural communities has been linked to their silence about the violence they may have experienced within their families and communities (Burns, 1986; Lucashenko, 1996; Razack, 1994). For many, to disclose abuse would lead to increased stigmatization and discrimination against their own as well as other racialized communities. In a context of prevailing racism, the protection of the community and its reputation often become paramount considerations both for the families affected and the entire community (Yousif, 1993). Thus, a code of silence prevails. The mainstream media's preoccupation with negative news and with construction of different racialized and immigrant communities as deviant, fuels this concern (Jiwani, 1992; 1993). On the other hand, the silencing of girls in terms of their ability to articulate their abuse appears to be reinforced by social forces inherent in the dominant society.

In her study of South Asian girls in Canada, Handa (1997), demonstrates how the girls' lives are shaped by competing discourses. On the one hand, they have to deal with the pressures

of assimilation in the context of school, employment and acceptance in the wider society. On the other hand, as signifiers of culture by their families and communities, there is an emphasis on protecting them from the westernizing influence of the dominant society and ensuring their conformity and maintenance of cultural traditions. Western traditions are perceived as weakening the moral fabric of community life. Yet, in order to belong and gain a sense of acceptance, the girls have to engage with the dominant western norms and mores in the public domain of their lives. This is the site of the 'cultural' conflict. However, Handa problematizes the notion of culture that is couched within the conflict paradigm. Culture is perceived to be static and 'frozen' rather than dynamic and relational. The discourse of cultural racism and cultural violence marks the lives of immigrant girls and young women. But cultural racism and cultural violence are predicated on the gendered and racialized context of immigrant and refugee girls and young women. Racism becomes culturalized by virtue of its use of culture as the signifier of inferiorized difference. Cultural norms and traditions that are perceived to be 'different' and negatively valued become the vehicles through which the hierarchy of preference and privilege are communicated and sustained. Violence is similarly culturalized because it is understood as stemming from a cultural conflict rather than a structural inequality (Razack, 1998). In other words, violence is perceived to be an inherent feature of the culture or its failing in adapting/assimilating to the dominant, western context.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study consisted of multiple strategies for gathering the necessary data. First, background research into the applicability of various international instruments as well as national and regional/provincial policies pertaining specifically to immigrant and refugee girls in British Columbia was undertaken. Several background papers were completed and made available through the FREDa Website (www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda) and through our community partners.³ These papers include a literature review of the factors

³ These include: Sokhansanj, B. (2000) *A Survey of International Human Rights Documents of Relevance to the Refugee and Immigrant Girl Child in Canada*; Manhas, S. (2000) *Intersecting Influences: Bicultural Identity Development among Girls of Colour: A Preliminary Analysis*; Bhandar, B. (2000) *A Guilty Verdict against the Odds: Privileging White Middle-Class Femininity in the Trial of Kelly Ellard for the Murder of Reena Virk*; and Janovicek, N. (2001) *Reducing Crime and Victimization: A Service Providers' Report*. The latter study was co-funded by the National Crime Prevention Centre, Community Mobilization Program.

influencing racialized girls' identity formation (Manhas, 2000).

The literature reviews and background research provided the overall portrait of the situation of immigrant and refugee girls of colour including those born in Canada, and outlined the main emergent themes that could be explored within the context of focus groups and individual interviews. Focus group and individual interview questions were developed in consultation with several immigrant girls of colour who were contacted through community connections. The finalized focus group and individual interview questions were then distributed to participating community organizations and advocates who were hired as interviewers and focus group facilitators. The second phase of the research focused on analyzing information derived from the focus groups and individual interviews in terms of the specific policies that influenced the young women's daily lived realities. In addition, an extensive review of the relevance of international instruments and agreements in light of the international policies that impact and shape the lives of immigrant and refugee girls of colour was conducted and is presented here.

FOCUS GROUPS & INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

In total, 5 focus groups were convened with a Persian (Iranian) girls group; an African-Canadian group of girls; a Latina group of girls, and two mixed groups of girls of colour. In addition, individual interviews were conducted with a total of 14 girls located in rural and urban areas. The main requirement was that the girls and young women participants were between the ages of 14 and 19 years.

Through partnerships with community organizations and community researchers, a total of 52 girls/young women participated in the project. The youngest was 13 years of age and the oldest participant was 22; the majority of the girls were between 15 and 16 years old. Their countries of origin, or their parents' cultures of origin, included Antigua, Barbados, China, Congo, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ganzhou, India, Iran, Jamaica, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, St. Kitts, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad, and Zaire. Ten girls participated in the focus group with Latin American young women. Seven participated in the focus group with Persian girls. Five girls from the Caribbean participated in a focus group conducted by the Congress of Black Women. A two-day focus group workshop was convened with 16 girls of colour from from a variety of countries such as China, Mexico, Pakistan, India and West Africa. This focus group utilized

Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* and was facilitated by Angelo Lam and Catherine Ho of Jumpstart Consulting who were initially involved in the project through our community partnership with SUCCESS, a Chinese-Canadian settlement service agency. The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of British Columbia (AMSSA) conducted a girls' focus group with 6 participants, 4 from Eastern European backgrounds and 2 from African backgrounds. Fourteen girls were interviewed individually. In addition, 10 service providers were interviewed.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING DATA

We encountered several barriers to accessing immigrant and refugee girls of colour who were able to participate in the study. First, our contact with these girls was limited by structural issues such as a strike by employees of the City of Vancouver. This effectively curtailed contact with relevant staff at community centres and youth outreach workers. As well, we were reluctant to access girls through the school system. In the wake of several high profile incidents such as the murder of 14-year-old Reena Virk, the suicide of other teens, and cases involving bullying, it seemed to us that schools would be not be willing to participate in a study focusing on violence against immigrant and refugee girls of colour. As well, we were concerned about working around the gate-keeping function of school principals and hence decided not to pursue this avenue of potential access. Liability issues were also a significant factor deterring us from accessing girls through the normal 'systems' of education, settlement services, and other similar services. However, we did request copies of policies and procedures concerning racism and violence from all BC school districts, and received a response from 30 of the 59 districts contacted (see Appendix II).

ETHICAL DILEMMAS

One of the most obvious dilemmas that faced us as researchers was the issue of obtaining parental consent. We were aware that girls who are under legal age (i.e., 19 years) would have to obtain such consent before participating in the research project, as this is a requirement of the various ethics committees in universities. In cases of violence occurring in the home, we knew that girls would not want to disclose (unless they were ready to leave), nor would their parents be willing to have them participate in a project conducted by a violence research centre. Our

research had already indicated that a code of silence is extant in situations of domestic violence, as it is in situations of peer-group violence. This would make it difficult to access girls who may have otherwise participated but who were too afraid to be in a situation of potential disclosure. We did, however, obtain through the ethics committee, permission to conduct the interviews and focus groups without requiring the participants to produce letters of consent from their parents. Our justification for such a waiver is presented in detail in Appendix I.⁴

We were also aware that should the girls or young women reveal ongoing experiences of violence at home, we would be obligated to report their situation to the authorities. The fear of being reported is enough to deter young women and girls from revealing these experiences, unless they are ready to seek assistance from external sources. In fact, in some situations, reporting of experiences of violence has resulted in further endangerment of the safety of young women (Handa, 1997).

The following sections outline in some detail our findings with regard to the analysis of international and domestic instruments, and the analysis of the focus group and individual interviews. We conclude by drawing attention to the specific policies that impact on the lives of young racialized immigrant women and girls and proposing recommendations accordingly.

RELEVANCE AND APPLICABILITY OF INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS⁵

The immigrant or refugee girl child,⁶ has a significant presence within Canada and British Columbia. The immigrant and refugee girl child also takes a special place on the world stage, at least rhetorically, in a number of international instruments to which Canada is either signatory or is, arguably, otherwise bound to uphold. However, Canadian rhetoric at the international level does not match the lived experiences of racism and poverty of immigrant and refugee girl children living within Canada. Canadian legislation, policies, provision of services and common

⁴ The justification that I provided for the purpose of gaining ethics clearance was based on prior consultations with the BC Civil Liberties Association, various sexual assault centres and government-based victim assistance services.

⁵ In this section, I draw extensively from work completed by Angela Cameron and Banafsheh Sokhansanj with respect to their background papers on the applicability of international instruments. These papers are available on the FREDa website: www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/

⁶ Hereinafter 'immigrant and refugee girl child' refers to that population specifically. Other references to the 'girl child' refer to all female children, unless otherwise specified. Often statistics or studies do not break down findings along the lines of immigration status.

law do little to mediate their experiences. The immigrant and refugee girl child lives at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression.

Both internationally and domestically, the immigrant and refugee girl child faces unique barriers to social, economic, spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual fulfillment. *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995) explicitly notes in Paragraph 32, the role of intersecting oppressions in creating multiple barriers to the girl child:

We are determined to:

Intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls who face multiple barriers to their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, or disability, or because they are indigenous people.

The following sections provide an overview of Canada's obligations to the girl child under international law with respect to treaties and non-treaties. This will be followed by an exploration of specific areas where gaps exist between these international obligations and the lived realities of immigrant and refugee racialized girls and young women. Comments illustrative of these disjunctures as articulated by the participants in our study are included in italicized form.

CANADA'S OBLIGATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW

At the international level Canada is bound by international 'law.' There are several forms of international 'law' including treaties and customary law, both of which are discussed below.⁷

TREATIES

Not every document generated by an international conference or United Nations body can be considered 'law.' Treaties,⁸ however, are binding on the parties which become signatory to them (Malanczuk, 1997). Treaties are agreements entered into by states (often multilateral)

⁷ This paper deals only with human rights instruments under the auspices of the United Nations. It does not cover the International Criminal Court, or the Organization of American States except where examples of litigation from Inter-American bodies speak to the potential to address human rights violations.

⁸ The term 'treaty' is seldom used. More often the words 'convention' (Canada's preference), or 'declaration' are used. 'Declaration' has been used both for formal (binding) and less formal (non-binding) agreements (Kindred, 1993: 82 & 87).

which, in the human rights realm, articulate the rights of those individuals specified within the treaty. There are a number of treaties, to which Canada is signatory, which speak to the legal rights of the immigrant and refugee girl child. Canada is bound by the provisions of *The Convention on the Status of Refugees* (1951); *The Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees of The Refugee Convention* (1967); *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* (1981); and *The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)* (1989),⁹ all of which impact upon the rights of the immigrant and refugee girl child. None of these treaties specifically refers to the immigrant and refugee girl child, however they do articulate the rights of certain groups of people which include her,¹⁰ and also protect against rights violations to which she is particularly vulnerable such as sexual exploitation and gender inequality in education and health care.¹¹

Beyond these three treaties, Canada is also bound by other treaties which may be cited as articulating some right of, or state obligation to, the immigrant and refugee girl child. The application of these conventions to rights of the immigrant and refugee girl child in Canada is more oblique than the three conventions noted above. These include the: *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)* (1965); *Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery* (1956) (*Slavery Convention*);¹² *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*

⁹ The *CRC* is the United Nations' most ratified treaty. Only the United States and Somalia have not ratified it at this point. However, feminist commentator Frances Olsen (1992) has noted areas where the *CRC* could be used against the interests of women (namely the mothers of the children in question, or older children).

¹⁰ *The Refugee Convention*, although not age or gender specific, protects everyone who is a refugee as defined by Article 1 of the Convention, including a refugee girl child. *CEDAW* contains no age restriction and protects 'women' against numerous human rights violations. *CEDAW* applies equally to all females regardless of age (Bernard, 1996:8). In practice, girl children are often conveniently treated as women regardless of their age, with some child-brides as young as 12 years old, and other girl children engaged in employment and the care of male children to support their families. *CRC* covers everyone who is under the age of 18 (Article 1), including the immigrant and refugee girl child.

¹¹ The role of the *CRC* and *CEDAW* in protecting the human rights of the girl child was confirmed and emphasized by the United Nation Commission on the Status of Women (1998).

¹² Entered into force April 30, 1957.

(ECOSOC) (1966); *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)* (1966); *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948);¹³ and *Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)* (1987).

While the rights protected in these conventions may appear to be gender-neutral, it has been asserted that measures which create substantive rather than formal equality are necessary to see their true implementation (Charlesworth, 1994; Sokhansanj, 2000). Even if treaty rights *may appear* to be implemented, in actuality it may take extra, special steps to truly implement them for those who are more vulnerable to rights violations because of factors such as race, age, gender, sexual orientation or disability. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has emphasized that “enjoyment of rights and freedoms on an equal footing ... does not mean identical treatment in every instance” (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1998).

NON-TREATY INSTRUMENTS

Beyond the treaty there are numerous international instruments which speak to the human rights of the immigrant and refugee girl child. Documents such as resolutions, guidelines, declarations, plans of action and results of an international conference or statements from United Nations bodies, while not *prima facie* ‘law’ have an important role to play in defining the rights of the immigrant and refugee girl child in Canada. These instruments *may* become accepted as customary international law,¹⁴ or due to their persuasive power over states that participate in their drafting, become ‘soft law.’¹⁵ ‘Soft law’ may affect the way states interact with one another, or, in laying out emerging international norms, form the basis for future international law (Kindred, 1993).

¹³ Resolution, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, GA Res. 217(111), UN GAOR, 3d Sess., Supp. No. 13, UN Doc. A/810, (1948) 71. This was originally drafted as a non-binding resolution, but it is now widely claimed that it has acquired the status of customary law (see Szabo, 1982: 11).

¹⁴ Canada is bound by customary international law. The mechanisms by which such documents become customary is beyond the scope of this paper (see Kindred, 1993: 81 & 147; and Malanczuk, 1997: 53).

¹⁵ ‘Soft law’ is said to operate in the area between law and politics, allowing states to ‘try out’ concepts and obligations before actually signing on to them in treaty form (see Kindred, 1993: 78; and Malanczuk, 1997: 54-55).

Regardless of their formal legal status these instruments provide parameters and norms which, at a minimum, give us interpretive standards by which to measure Canada's protection of the girl child. Three examples of such documents which may inform the rights of the immigrant and refugee girl child in Canada are *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995),¹⁶ *The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action* (1993) and *The Declaration and Agenda for Action Formulated at the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children* (1996).

ENFORCEMENT OF TREATY RIGHTS

Globally, a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms often leaves the international community unable to oversee the domestic implementation of treaty rights (Kindred, 1993; Malanczuk, 1997). Instruments such as the proposed Optional Protocol to the Women's Convention (CEDAW) may improve the ability of individuals to enforce their rights, should Canada choose to ratify it. Such an instrument, under another international human rights convention, was successfully used by Sandra Lovelace, a Maliseet woman in Canada, to argue her rights as an Aboriginal woman.¹⁷ Enforcement mechanisms as they currently exist, however, are weak (Charlesworth, 1994).

Domestically, there are serious legal barriers to a full implementation of international treaties at the level of the individual Canadian. Constitutional divisions of power and adoption mechanism for treaties cast serious doubts on whether the average Canadian can truly claim the progressive rights articulated in many treaties (Bayefsky, 1994; Malanczuk, 1997). Provincial legislation and policy does not need to measure up to treaties signed by the federal government (Kindred, 1993). This severed line of responsibility violates the spirit of these treaties, effectively allowing Canada to maintain an excellent appearance internationally, while simultaneously refracting responsibility for many treaty rights to the provinces, who are not bound by the treaties. The effect is that treaty rights are not being enforced where they are needed, at the level of the individual Canadian.

¹⁶ The *Platform* especially focuses on the plight of the girl child, and should be quoted extensively in conjunction with other instruments when advocating for the girl child.

¹⁷ Lovelace, Communication No. R.6/24, 36 UN GOAR Supp. (No. 40) at 166, UN Doc. A/36/40.

This problem is mitigated to an extent by two factors. First, Canada has imported many of the rights contained in international human rights law into the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. It should be stated, however, that this is an under-utilized mechanism for rights enforcement. Due to such barriers as cost, time and power imbalances in school and at home, the rights of immigrant and refugee girls are rarely, if ever, litigated using the *Charter*. We also know that there is a wide gap between rights articulated in the *Charter* and the lived reality of the immigrant and refugee girl child (Bazilli, 2000).

A second mitigating factor is that Canadian courts have, on occasion, imported international legal norms or principles in cases involving equity in law or policy. The cases of *Baker v. Canada*¹⁸ and *Canada Trust Co. v. Ontario Human Rights Commission*,¹⁹ saw two of Canada's highest courts drawing on human rights as articulated in international instruments to influence a domestic court decision. This practice, however, is rare, and resisted by most of the judiciary who see the Constitutional barriers described above as prescriptive of such adoption on a consistent basis.

Enforcement mechanisms aside, Canada is **bound** by both international treaty and customary law. It is also significant to note that Canada's international reputation as a nation which respects and enforces human rights makes all levels of government particularly sensitive to criticisms of human rights violations, as demonstrated by the Lovelace case. The international mobilization of shame may have a much greater impact than any other enforcement mechanism which may or may not be at work (Cameron, 2001).

Generally, many instruments articulate rights such as the right to be free from discrimination on a number of grounds including gender and race,²⁰ and the *CRC* (Article 42) requires that the provisions of that convention be made known to Canadians. More specifically several instruments emphasize the role of parents and families in the lives of children. For instance, parents are given the primary economic responsibility for their children (*CRC*, 1989: Article 27), primary responsibility (and rights) around the religious education of their children (*CRC*, 1989: Article 14, *ICCP*, 1966: Article 18[3]), the right to choose schools which provide a

¹⁸ *Baker v. Canada (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration)* [1999] *SCJ* No. 39 (see Bazilli, 2000: 14).

¹⁹ *Canada Trust Co. v. Ontario Human Rights Commission* (1990) 69 DLR (4th) 321 (Ont., CA).

²⁰ For instance the *ICCP* requires that the Convention itself be applied equally to men and women (Article 3), and provides a general prohibition against discrimination (Article 26).

particular religious or moral education (*ECOSOC*, 1966: 13[3]), and the economic support of both parents is mandated (*CRC*, 1989: Article 18). The family is recognized as the primary unit of care for the child, and protection for this unit is demanded (*ICCP*, 1966: Article 23, *Vienna Declaration*, 1993: Paragraph 21[3]).

The *Refugee Convention*, although having direct bearing on the rights of the refugee girl child, outlines only very general rights, such as the right to (under certain circumstances) remain in a country of refuge,²¹ practice religion, be employed, receive subsistence housing and food, etc. Except in extremely rare instances Canada meets its minimum obligations to refugee girl children under this convention once they are permitted to remain in Canada.

However, state definitions as to who constitutes a legitimate 'refugee' has severe and limiting effects on the safety of the girl child. For example, the recent Chinese migrants who arrived in British Columbia via a hazardous journey by sea were subjected to mandatory confinement. In the majority of cases, their refugee status was not recognized by the Canadian state. Rather, they were perceived to be 'economic migrants' and hence not accorded the refugee rights as defined in the various conventions. The young women in the group were forcibly removed from their families and placed in group and foster homes by the Ministry for Children and Families.²²

AREAS OF DISJUNCTURE BETWEEN POLICIES AND REALITIES

The following areas constitute the dominant thematic categories under which there are marked disjunctures between international obligations and the realities of refugee and immigrant girls in Canada. Obviously, these areas are not exhaustive but rather highlight some of the most glaring shortcomings between domestic policies and practices, and international instruments ratified by Canada. They include: lack of gender and age-specific data; the issue of increasing child poverty; the proliferation of trafficking and sexual exploitation; violence against girls; racism; adequacy and availability of services including education; and media influence and literacy. Quotes from focus group participants and individuals interviewed for this project are

²¹ The differential impact of Canada's immigration laws on immigrant and refugee girl children attempting to gain entry to Canada is beyond the scope of this paper.

²² See for instance, the research report on the Chinese Migrants released by the Direct Action Against Refugee Exploitation group (DAARE, 2001).

inserted to juxtapose the discrepancies between the protections afforded by various international instruments and the lived experiences of racialized girls. Also included are other key issues and themes raised by focus group participants and individual interviewees.²³

Our interviews and focus groups highlighted a number of themes including racism, understandings of violence, and definitions of racism as a form of violence. Moreover, the girls and young women noted how they were criminalized on the basis of their racial appearance, and how this served to 'other' them in ways that differentiated them from white Canadians. These practices underscored their lack of belonging and 'fit' within the dominant culture. As this Latina girl commented:

I have a Caucasian friend, she is very intelligent, the best one at school. She always tells me that white people are the best and when I say that I would like to do this or what I am going to do, she goes, "oh no." She says that GAP is for white people. Because I had something from GAP and she asked me "where did you buy it?" "In GAP." [She said]: "Don't you know that that place is for white people?"

In responding to questions about violence, girls who participated in the focus groups and interviews immediately brought up the issues of racism and inter-cultural violence. They identified their schools as key sites of race-based violence, and discussed the inadequacy of existing counselling services. Many explained that racist violence in the schools is fostered by an inaccurate portrayal of their cultures in school curricula and mass media. Few girls talked about the lack of services for immigrant families outside of the schools. They underlined the stresses caused by the clash between their parents' expectations and those of the dominant white culture. Settlement workers agreed that this was a common experience of immigrant families and argued that settlement policies need to balance the transition of girls and their families.

LACK OF GENDER AND AGE-SPECIFIC DATA

Despite instruments specifically calling for the collection and dissemination of gender and age-specific data, there is a notable lack of such data on the refugee and immigrant girl child in Canada (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, 2000; Tipper, 1997). Existing data also reflect a lack of sophisticated gender and/or race analysis and may indicate survey questions

²³ Based on a thematic analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts completed by Nancy Janovicek.

or methodology that were not designed to highlight the effects of these forms of oppression (Canada, Health Canada, 1999). This lack of research limits our knowledge of the true situation of the immigrant and girl child in Canada, and inhibits our ability to tailor policies and programs to meet her unique and pressing needs.

POVERTY

Recent reports indicate that child poverty in Canada has increased to 49% since 1989, and that Aboriginal and visible minority children are faring the worst (Campaign 2000). Many visible minority children are immigrants or the children of immigrants, and suffer disproportionately from the effects of poverty (Canada, Human Resources and Development, 1998b; Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000). Immigrant and refugee children are more likely than other Canadian children to live in lower income families, despite a higher overall level of education and employment among immigrants compared to the rest of Canadians (Canada, Human Resources and Development, 1998a).

The devastating effects of poverty have a disproportionate effect on lone-parent families headed by women (Campaign 2000). There are strong links between systematic discrimination against women, and poverty (Working Groups on Girls, 1995). Immigrant and refugee women in Canada face economic discrimination, and due to the effects of systematically enforced poverty, the children of lone-parent families led by immigrant and refugee women may suffer a decline in health (Canada, Human Resources and Development, 1998a). The impacts of poverty on the girl child are varied and generally negative. They include physical and mental health risks, an inability to fully participate in school activities, and social isolation (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, 2000; Tipper, 1997).

Many of the girls who participated in our workshops and interviews stated that their parents decided to immigrate to improve their children's opportunities. Some argued that their parents could not secure meaningful employment in Canada because their credentials were not accepted here. Consequently, many girls feel that it is their responsibility to study hard in order to secure a good job. Others were concerned that they will not be able to find jobs that will bring them out of poverty because of discriminatory hiring practices and assumptions that immigrant youth do not have the skills to work in a professional career. These thoughts are representative

of the aspirations and the anxieties of young immigrant girls as reflected in the following quotes from our focus group participants:

Like my dad for example, when he came here, I guess he thought he'd be able to get a job [being a firefighter] that he was in Jamaica, he'd come and get the same job. But he can't do it because, I don't know, because of colour or what. Because normally say a Black person against a white person, the Black person has to work ten times harder just to get the same job. (Afro-Caribbean-Canadian focus group participant)

Most of the time ... they'll be like, "You know what? Forget it. I'm not even going to bother. I just know they're going to judge me for what I look like. They know that I can't speak English well, so I'm just going to sit back and work at McDonald's" or whatever. Do you know what I mean? It kind of hurts me to see that. (Jumpstart workshop with girls of colour)

TRAFFICKING AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

Despite the efforts of the United Nations and Canadian governments the girl child continues to be the victim of trafficking and sexual exploitation both internationally and domestically. In Canada the girl child continues to be the victim of sexual exploitation in many forms (Philippine Women Centre of British Columbia, 2000; Russell, 1996; Shortt, 1998). Due to factors such as previous exposure to violence, poverty, low self-esteem and the adversity of a racist and sexist Canadian society, immigrant and refugee girl children are particularly vulnerable to this type of exploitation (British Columbia, Attorney General, 2000; Davis with Shaffer, 1994; Holmes and Silverman, 1992; Jackson, 1998; Jiwani, 1998b; Save the Children, 2000). The Internet continues to provide a venue for those who victimize children, due to the difficulties in legislating and policing its activities (Joseph, 1995; Pierce, 1984).

Immigrant and refugee girls face a unique sexualization by the dominant culture. Although none of the girls in our focus groups discussed trafficking and sexual exploitation explicitly, many spoke about the simultaneous construction of their culture as exotic, and its devaluation. In this construction, the 'exotic Other' is sexually available to the dominant culture. One Black girl described being mistaken for a prostitute:

I was on the street. My cousins were here. And we were waiting for the bus and a police car walked by and we started showing off. And they stopped and they walked around the block and they looked at us. And they walked around the block and they came back and they walked around again. And I'm like, "We're not prostitutes. We're waiting for the bus." (Afro-Caribbean-Canadian focus group participant)

The vulnerability to trafficking and sexual exploitation can be traced to a number of factors. Foremost among these is the pressure to 'fit in.' Such pressure may take the form of luring young girls and women into the sex trade with the reward of access to instant cash, shelter and food. Alternatively, the pressure to fit in may manifest itself in being a member of an 'in' group engaged in the sex trade, or of being with a boyfriend who requires such participation as a price for his affection. These factors are also applicable to girls who are not of immigrant and refugee backgrounds. However, in the latter situation, the issue of increased poverty, devaluation, and pressures of assimilation combine to exert a significant influence (Jiwani, 1999b). As well, in the case of immigrant and refugee girls, the fear of having their intimate relationships disclosed to parents or other caregivers who do not condone such relationships, can be a driving force pushing them into the sex trade. Such fear is often used by their 'boyfriends' as a coercive measure to sexually exploit them.

VIOLENCE

The immigrant and refugee girl child continues to experience violence in her home, at school, and on Canadian streets. The marginalizing effects of her social location make her an exceptionally vulnerable target for many types of violence.

Legislation designed to protect the girl child from violence in her home is riddled with faults, and recent failures of the child protection system point to serious inadequacies in Canada's ability to protect our children from violence in the home (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, 2000). The immigrant and refugee girl child is further at risk due to poverty and, significantly, cultural and social isolation (Friedman, 1995). Often both mainstream culture and the culture of their home country devalue women and girls. Canada provides insufficient and insensitive services, leaving the immigrant and refugee girl child with inadequate protection mechanisms in a situation of abuse (National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada, 1993).

Immigrant and refugee girls may also encounter barriers to adequate protection in situations of dating violence. Due to the strains of acculturation, the girl child may find herself torn between the anger of a family which views dating and sex as parental choices, and mainstream society which validates individual autonomy and sexuality (Handa, 1997; Mogg, 1991; National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada, 1993; Tyagi,

1999). A recent study on violence and bicultural girls found that those who were in abusive dating relationships were being manipulated by partners to stay in the relationship on threat of disclosure to the girl's parents of prohibited dating (Handa, 1997).

Other forms of violence such as sexual harassment, have compounding effects on the immigrant and refugee girl child. Because of her social location, racism, sexism and ageism of the wider society, as well as the strategic silence around issues of sexuality within her own cultural community, the immigrant and refugee girl child is marginalized to a greater extent.

None of the girls who participated or were interviewed disclosed personal violence. This may have been because interviewers explained to the girls that they would be obligated to report abuse if it had been disclosed in the interviews. Although the girls did not disclose violence, they did discuss tensions with their parents that arose from clashes between their parents' values and those of Canadian youth culture.

When I speak to my dad, I don't talk too loud because I respect my dad, I'm almost scared of him because I respect him. But he wants me to be innocent and not act like boys or whatever. Say if I'm hugging a guy friend, he'd like, "Maybe you shouldn't do that." And I tell my dad, "This is Canada. It's not Iran any more. I'm a grown woman. I know what I'm doing. It's just a hug."
(Individual interview, Persian girl)

Despite the conflicts over values, most girls identified their families as sites of support. Many girls stated that their parents would rather return to their country of origin but are making sacrifices by remaining in Canada so as to improve opportunities for their children.

RACISM

For a large number of immigrant and refugee girl children, racism is a key factor in their experiences of marginalization (Wright, 1998). Although there is a paucity of research and statistical data on the effects of race and racism on children (and the girl child specifically) in Canada (Canada, Human Resources and Development, 1998a; Jiwani 1998a) several areas of concern have emerged in the research thus far.

At the level of the individual experience of the girl child, the interaction of racism and sexism create an environment in which "... racialized girls are inferiorized and ... (where) they internalize dominant values which embody a rejection of the self and their cultural communities" (Jiwani, 1998b: 7). Research has shown that the experiences of young women of colour are

deeply informed by their experiences of racism and their understanding of race. It has been asserted that this, in itself, creates a profoundly different set of experiences for young, visible minority women and those of young woman situated in the dominant culture (Wright, 1998). A visible minority girl child is often confronted with the task of forming an identity within the context of two cultures which both devalue or sexualize women and girls, while attempting to navigate the racism of mainstream society and media. In some recent focus groups with immigrant and refugee girls they identified the result as an inability to name, and therefore resist, all but the most blatant forms of racism or sexism, such as name-calling.

In our focus group with Latino young women, the girls discussed the link between power, racism, and violence. It was interesting to note that their definitions collapsed the different forms of oppressions they experienced within an overall rubric of racism. As these girls stated:

Racism is also the fight over power because someone is higher up than others and then they step on them, do not want to grow.

There is also lots of racism against homosexuals, the lesbians ...

Racism also happens between a man and a woman. We call it machismo or feminism.

There is a lot of racism within the same race.

The participants also stated that racism, like other forms of violence, is based on unequal relations of power, and a hierarchy of preference and privilege.

In a recent series of focus groups with visible minority youth conducted by the Canadian Council on Social Development (2000), “(m)ost of the focus group participants reported experiencing racism and bigotry.” At the same time, however, the participants noted that racial discrimination in Canada is “generally disguised.” Younger participants in the focus groups spoke of poor treatment at school by both teachers and other students, while older participants addressed difficulties in obtaining employment,²⁴ and harassment by the police because of their physical appearance.

The impact of racism is particularly painful for girls whose parents immigrate to protect them from ethnic and racial conflict. One girl responded to an account of a Ku Klux Klan (KKK) hate act in the following way:

²⁴ An alarming observation in light of the previous discussion of immigrant and refugee families living in poverty.

My parents ... they're constantly [saying] like I'm giving my kid a better [life]. But what is better? That's not to say it doesn't happen in our countries. We hear it constantly, ethnic warfare and political strife but they think that it's so much better here and then you hear things like that and it totally breaks down your faith in human-kind and Canadian nationalism and pride. I don't want to have pride in that. If that's Canadian, I don't want to be Canadian. (Jumpstart workshop with girls of colour)

SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE

As with most children, school is the focal point of many immigrant and refugee girls' existence. School, especially high school, can be a daunting experience for the most prepared and advantaged child. The immigrant and refugee girl child faces the added effects of a new country, new friends, a new language, and the loss of old, established networks in the home country. This lack of familiarity, coupled with racism and sexism in the school environment, can be overwhelming. As this participant reported:

[My parents] always ask me to make Canadian friends, but you know, it's hard. The culture is different so it's hard to make friends with them sometimes when they speak different. They talk slang. ... I don't understand what they're talking about. So I just remain silent. (Jumpstart workshop with girls of colour)

Three factors have been consistently identified as contributing to the girl child's sense of isolation within the school environment. First, everyday racism exhibited in subtle forms of othering and inferiorization combined with overt expressions of racism and sexism create a sense of difference and marginalization (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000; Mogg, 1991). Second, these actions and attitudes may be mirrored by the staff and administrators of the school (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000). Finally, the school curriculum itself has been criticized on a number of fronts. First, it does not contain sufficient race, gender and culturally-specific material (Capuzzi, 1996; Kelly, 1998). Second, it does not contain sufficient anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic material and, finally, education on human rights and fundamental freedoms is lacking (Lonsway, 1996; Randall and Haskell, 2000). One of the focus group participants in our research commented that:

In school they don't teach you anything about Black people really. They don't teach you anything about your culture or anything. And if they teach you anything they teach you about Africa. That's not the only place where Black

people are from. I think they should teach you about other places, not just one area. (Afro-Caribbean-Canadian focus group participant)

These findings have been echoed in recent studies undertaken by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (2000).

In our focus groups and interviews, the issue of school-based violence was mentioned by many of the participants and interviewees. Many explicitly mentioned racism as a form of violence and referred to internalized racism as a complicating issue. One girl defined violence in the following manner:

It doesn't have to be physical ... if someone calls someone a Black bitch or something, that's still violence because obviously that pissed you off because you went and busted the girl in the head. So obviously anything that breaks someone down, that doesn't make them feel good. (Afro-Caribbean-Canadian focus group participant)

Another participant in the mixed theatre workshop group noted:

A lot of violence stems from racism. Sometimes you'll hit someone first and then when you stop and think about why did I do that, it's like it can be a backwards path. I hear what she's saying, about how racism can trigger violence. But violence can just be an action and then the mind process behind it would be, "I feel racist towards a certain race." (Jumpstart workshop with girls of colour)

How schools communicate inequalities ranges from a seemingly 'harmless' lack of comprehension of other cultures to violent confrontations between youth from different cultural groups. Girls who participated in this study attributed their peers' racism to a lack of understanding of the impact of their remarks, which are often based on misconceptions about racialized cultures. Like gender-based violence, racism operates on a continuum of violence. Ignorance of another person's culture, and fear of diversity may not be as explicitly threatening as name-calling and bullying. However, common sense racism is just as damaging because it reinforces the position of the dominant culture and creates an environment which allows violent racist acts (Kelly, 1998). The following comments describe the common sense racism girls encounter at school:

You'll hear things down the hall. I guess there are racist things but there's not a sense of racism behind it. It's just a remark that nobody really understands.
(Individual interview with South Asian girl)

Someone asked me if we have TV in Iran. If you see someone, and you see they're not closed-minded but because of the limitation that they have, that they don't really have a good idea of what it's like so I have to explain to them in order to get the idea. (Persian girl focus group participant)

The quotations repeatedly revealed that these girls were willing to excuse their peers' lack of knowledge about the history and customs of racialized minorities. However, girls were not tolerant of misconceptions held by their teachers. Girls indicated that teachers have the power to change misinformed ideas about their cultures. Instead, their ignorance is perpetuating the ideas that feed racism. One girl explained how her teacher's dismissal of Canadian slavery affected her:

In school we were learning about slavery and she goes, "Oh we all know that there was never slavery in Canada," and then it kind of made me feel bad because I know there was slavery in Canada ... I went up to the teacher and I told [her] she said there was never slavery in Canada. And the teacher said, "Yeah, there was slavery in Canada but it wasn't as big a deal as the States." ... They should check their research on it before they teach it instead of reading the school books and then teaching what it says. Because a lot of the school books about African history is not true. (Individual interview, Afro-Caribbean-Canadian girl)

The girls who confronted their teachers explained that their concerns are often dismissed. Yet they understood that the misrepresentation of their cultures and histories fostered the racism they experienced on a daily basis. In essence, they realized that their histories and cultures were often erased in the context of the classroom and in the services they encountered or attempted to access.

Racism in the schools is also fostered by teachers and administrators who refuse to speak out about violence. One girl in our focus group explained:

The teachers, they keep it to themselves, the principal. They always try to keep it in secret. They don't go out and say we need to deal with this issue. (Afro-Caribbean-Canadian focus group participant)

Inter-Cultural Violence / Maintaining the Hierarchy

The struggle for power among young people from different cultural groups was the most prominent theme in the interviews with the girls. Power struggles between groups are often violent. There is a perception that schools are becoming more violent, but the systemic reasons for the violence are rarely acknowledged. Instead, generic bullying policies mask the racism and

sexism that girls face. The murder of Reena Virk, and the erasure of racism as a factor in her bullying, demonstrate the consequences of failing to analyze the systemic causes of schoolyard violence (Jiwani, 1998a).

While media and school policies ignore the racist nature of school violence, the girls who were interviewed pointed to racism as a key reason for violence in the schools. Girls recognized inter-cultural tensions as a feature of school life, but many did not have a framework to help them understand why young people from immigrant and racialized communities are perpetuating the hierarchies of power established by the dominant culture. In the following quotations, the girls name racism and the high school culture as the problem, but do not explicitly link it to the inequitable social relations of Canadian society:

You know in high school, people are like that. They talk behind each other's backs. I don't know why. They hate them because of their culture, where they're from. Because people in this school hang out with each other, Korean hang out with each other, Indian hang out with each other ... they just like hanging out with their own country people. (Individual interview, Persian girl)

Read outside of a postcolonial framework, one could conclude that young people are perpetuating racist attitudes that are endemic to their own cultures. This interpretation overlooks how the hierarchical power structures operate in white settler societies. Canadian culture is based on the myth of 'two founding nations' – French and English. In this narrative, the inherent rights of First Nations people to the land is denied, and immigrants and refugees from racialized communities are portrayed as a threat to Canadian values of liberal democracy, capitalism and Christianity (Bannerji 1998; Stasiulis & Jhappan, 1995). The girls' understanding of inter-cultural violence must be read within this context.

Sherene Razack argues that communicating across social hierarchies and eliminating concomitant inequities requires an understanding of how the dominant culture manages responses to subordinate groups. She argues that dominant culture maintains its control over marginalized groups by denying the privileges accorded to white culture. White privilege is maintained by promoting a rights-based agenda based on formal liberalism which denies the historical relations of power that underpin current social and economic inequities. In this analysis, inequities are linked to cultural differences, which are constructed as inferior to democratic, liberal ideals. Cultural differences are discursively constructed in a decontextualized manner. The most damaging consequence of the liberal framework is that it homogenizes

cultural differences and masks relations of power that perpetuate social inequalities (Razack 1998). To develop effective strategies for change, we must uncover the insidious processes that reify white privilege. When we listen to what girls say, we must also consider how girls are internalizing the dominant culture's representation of their countries of origin and of their place in Canadian society.

FITTING IN AND BELONGING

Many girls spoke poignantly about the difficulty of fitting in to the dominant culture. Girls who are differently located because of race, sexual orientation, disability or class are vulnerable to taunts and violent acts because this society does not value those who do not conform to white, middle-class ideals (Jiwani, 1998b). The most vulnerable immigrant and refugee girls are those who have just arrived in Canada. In schools, recent immigrants are called "FOBs," an acronym for "fresh off the boat." One girl defined FOB as:

FOB is like "fresh off the boat." It means that you're really ... geeky and you don't know how to speak and stuff. You dress stupidly or whatever, right?
(Individual interview, Persian girl)

Her definition encapsulates the racism and classism that are rarely named and spoken about in Canadian society. Given the derision that new immigrants face in schools, the most effective strategy for immigrant and refugee girls is to learn how to 'fit in.' Distancing oneself and one's peer group from those who have just immigrated is one way to fit in. One Iranian girl explained her reaction to the heightened scrutiny that marks this form of racism and the internalization of dominant norms and perceptions:

Persians are loud people. ... People would be looking and staring at us, white people. And I'd be like, "Shut up. Don't speak so loud. Everybody's looking at us." Because I don't like that kind of stuff. Like we should balance out. We don't like everybody to stare at us. We don't want everybody to say, "Oh, those people are so loud." (Individual interview, Persian girl)

However, fitting in is a contradictory process for many girls who are trying to find a balance between their family's cultural values and those of the dominant culture. One girl described her frustration with her peers' unwillingness to learn about her culture:

I want my name to be what it is. I don't have to shorten it for people to make it easier for them. I mean I have to learn their way to fit in but they can't say my

name properly, spell my name properly, or pronounce it properly. Like if I don't say it right, they would make fun of me. They'd like, "Oh, you're an FOB."
(Individual interview, Persian girl)

Assimilation is one way in which girls try to fit in. This often entails a loss of identity with the parent culture or negotiating a balance between two, often competing traditions and discourses (Handa, 1997). As these participants noted:

Sometimes I feel like I have to lose my true identity to fit in. (Afro-Caribbean-Canadian focus group participant)

I don't think being a Canadian means that you're not something else. Like if someone was to ask me where I was from, I'm still from Pakistan. I'm always going to be from Pakistan and ultimately, somewhere deep down inside, that's my baseline foundation. But I have a Canadian flag on my backpack and if I were to backpack for a year ... I'd be Canadian. (Jumpstart workshop with girls of colour)

The latter quote highlights the relational and contextual nature of Canadian identity as it is experienced and expressed by these girls. In part, their sense of belonging is influenced by their hybridity emerging from their diasporic location on the one hand, and the rejection from the dominant society on the other.

MEDIA INFLUENCE AND LITERACY

The use of racial and cultural stereotypes in television and film media has been noted as having a negative effect on the self-image and peer acceptance of immigrant and refugee youth (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000). These types of racist media images coupled with sexist media content can deeply influence the identity formation of the refugee and immigrant girl child (Manhas, 2000). Social messages about who is and who is not desirable and what characteristics constitute 'beauty' converge to affect the self-esteem and self-image of racialized girls. The results include self-consciousness about body image, low self-esteem and eating disorders (Basow, 1999; Sarigiana, 1993).

The girls we interviewed were keenly aware of media stereotypes about their racial groups. As these participants from the Afro-Caribbean-Canadian focus group noted:

And on TV and stuff, if they're showing you about a Black place, there'll be like nice places in the country but they show you the poorest areas. I hate that because they're showing you the worst place of the country to make it look really bad.

[TV] portrays all the bad things like it's known for marijuana or ganja or whatever drugs. They always come up to me [at school] and go, "So do you know where the drugs are?" "No I don't. I don't even know what the tree looks like." So I always tell them saying, "Yes, I have some in the backyard of my house and if they want some, they can come over later." Because I'm sick of it. That's about all you hear.

A South Asian girl pointed to the discrepancies between the exoticized and depressed representations of their cultures and homelands.

It shows it being very exotic, with Madonna and her mendhi [henna] and saris being turned into drapes and the masala and everything being exotic. When I went to India it was not like that, it seems very exotic. But on the other hand it's shown as a welfare culture. It's the kids on the UNICEF ad. So on one hand it's like this big rich silk industry which does henna on the side and on the other hand it's the nude baby with the over-swelled tummy on the UNICEF ad.

SERVICES

Accessibility to and availability of services are important issues for all Canadians. The immigrant and refugee girl child faces numerous and unique challenges in her development and, therefore, the provision of adequate services is a vital link to her survival. The following factors have been identified as seriously impeding the girl child's access to services: a lack of funding, culturally insensitive programs and/or service providers, laws requiring mandatory reporting of violence and the attendant lack of confidentiality, and a lack of gender- and age-specific programs.

Immigrant and refugee girls feel unable to access school counselling services, due to experiences of racism portrayed as cultural insensitivity, language barriers, and a feeling that their disclosures may not be held in confidence – that they will be shared with parents or school authorities (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000; Handa, 1997). This unwillingness to use certain services is also mirrored in the reluctance of parents of immigrant and refugee children to access services (Janovicek, 2000; National Association of Women and the Law, 1999).

Across the board, from basic counselling to shelters for street-involved youth, there is a need for girl-specific services. The backlash against gender-specific programming is having a serious and deleterious effect on the funding and availability of such programs (Jiwani et al.,

1998). Gender-specific services that are based on a critical, anti-racist and anti-sexist perspective are essential to meet the unique needs of the immigrant and refugee girl.

School Support

The lack of support for immigrant and refugee girls restricts their choices. Services for immigrant girls in the schools are limited to ESL courses. These services are concentrated in urban centres. One Thai girl who lives in a small town reported that she attended school for two weeks before her father informed the school that she did not understand English. Since there were no ESL courses available in the schools, she was placed in remedial classes. Moreover, immigrant and refugee girls in rural communities are more isolated because they do not have peers who share their cultural background. A service provider from the same town described the experience of two sisters she worked with:

At home, they were loved by their parents and the parents wanted them to learn and go to work and do everything like anybody else does. But at school, these two young girls felt very isolated. People would look at them, stare at them, and call them names. ... People won't sit beside them because they felt East Indian girls were smelly. So their experience at school was very, very difficult. All they wanted to do was learn but they didn't look forward to going to school.
(Service Provider from small town in rural BC)

Given that isolation is a key risk factor for violence (Jiwani, 2001), the situation of immigrant and refugee girls in rural areas is in one sense, worse than their urban counterparts. The sheer lack of alternatives often forces these girls and young women into either internalizing the violence and rejection they experience or fitting into peer groups that are not always accepting of their difference.

Although less isolated than their rural counterparts, girls in urban communities still face a hostile school environment. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many principals and teachers refuse to acknowledge racism in the schools. Many girls described their frustration with teachers who discriminate against immigrant girls, and principals who dismiss them when they describe racist acts:

I wouldn't go to a principal because they would go against me, too. It has happened a couple of times that they would say, "Oh, this is not about race." ... Somebody in our school got suspended because she said she felt one of her teachers was really racist. She got suspended even though she didn't say who it was. (Individual interview, Persian girl)

This quote highlights the denial and dismissal of racism by white school authorities. More than that, it demonstrates the fear that girls experience in calling attention to such racism, and the potential retaliation they might experience as a result. Another interviewee outlined the severe consequences for girls who maintain silence about racist acts and incidents:

From what I've seen, the kids fear it so they won't go and tell people about it. They'll just keep it inside. And I think that sooner or later, it's just going to make them explode. So if I could give them advice, I'd tell them, number one, go to a person who you know you can trust. I wouldn't say first to go to somebody at school. (Individual interview, South Asian girl)

These experiences suggest that schools are perceived as sites of external control rather than in their role as *loco-parentis* – with a duty to care (Shariff, 2001), i.e., as places of trust and development. It is apparent that language training is not the only program that immigrant and refugee girls need. To help girls deal with the impact of dislocation and racism, schools must actively promote a more conducive milieu of acceptance. Cultures that do not conform to white, middle-class ideas are often treated as being inferior in Canadian society. Respect for diversity in such a context cannot be achieved without commitment to an anti-racist agenda.

The girls identified different solutions to the tensions in the schools. When researchers asked girls how to reduce violence they recommended programs that would bring together students from various backgrounds to unpack the social hierarchies and racism that shape day-to-day relations among peer groups:

They could have this program, if they could bring people from different groups together and take them somewhere so they had to all bind in together and understand each other and work their problems out together, come up with ideas together. That would help. You don't judge people the way they look, the way they dress, the way they are, what their personality is. (Individual interview, Persian girl)

Other Services

One girl offered the experience of her friend when she was asked about family violence:

I know a person, she gets beaten up by her parents ... I've told her, "Hey, why don't you go call the police or call organizations that help people – would help you with this problem." But she's like, "They might take away my dad." So she's kind of scared of telling anybody except me and a bunch of her other friends. (Individual interview, Persian girl)

The girl's apprehensions about social services reflect an absence of sensitive services and programs for immigrant and refugee communities. Her concern for her father's safety demonstrates that immigrant and refugee communities do not trust government services. Settlement workers agree that Ministry for Children and Families' workers are not cognizant or sensitive to the hierarchical nature of Canadian society and the subordinate position of immigrants and refugees. This attitude assumes that immigrant and refugee families are bringing new problems to Canada, and neglects the fact that family violence is a widespread feature of Canadian society.

Most settlement services in British Columbia are concentrated in Vancouver. Thus, a significant portion of the immigrant and refugee community has restricted access to services. For example, although ethnic minorities comprise 15% of the population in the South Okanagan, the only program that serves immigrant and refugee families is the Settlement and Adaptation Program offered by the Penticton & District Multicultural Society, funded by the Ministry of Multiculturalism. All staff are newly hired part-time workers, so that they have limited connections with workers in government-run services. Their marginalization is augmented by the fact that few agencies acknowledge the value of cultural liaison workers. Nor do they appreciate the diversity of values and experiences of migration within immigrant and refugee communities. One settlement worker described her experience working with the Punjabi community in the Okanagan:

It is my experience and understanding that many Punjabi parents of these young children are first generation Canadian and somehow they do not understand what a counsellor or a psychologist can do to help their child. Because there is a lack of understanding and they have never used these services before, they do not go anywhere and they do not know how it would benefit the children or themselves. ... So there is no referral system because there's a lack of understanding.

Cultural liaison workers are necessary to enable immigrant and refugee families to have knowledge of and access to the services that are available. Moreover, these workers can act as advocates for immigrant families who want to access services. Cultural liaison workers are also necessary because teachers and caregivers are obligated to report cases of suspected abuse to the Ministry for Children and Families. Immigrant and refugee girls and their families who are involuntarily involved with social services need advocates who understand their culture and the systems to help them negotiate through the bureaucracy.

Health service provision to the immigrant and refugee girl child is impeded by similar difficulties. The lack of sensitive service providers surfaces again and again as a concern of both youth and adult immigrants and refugees (Masi, 1993; Matsuoka and Sorenson, 1991). Funding, consistency and duration are concerns for settlement services provided to immigrant and refugee families (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, 2000).

Fear of disclosure to parents and other caregivers remains a serious concern impeding these girls from accessing relevant and needed services. Guarantees of confidentiality and autonomy are therefore necessary to facilitate such access. Similarly, mandatory reporting guidelines need to be either waived or reconsidered in situations where girls and young women are extremely vulnerable to retaliation and to the potential loss of their group membership in a cultural community resulting from disclosure and the attendant loss of reputation.

THE REFUGEE GIRL

In order to be accepted into Canada as a refugee, the refugee girl child must have a “well founded fear of persecution.”²⁵ Simply by meeting this legal test, the refugee girl is much more likely than the immigrant girl to have experienced or witnessed violence, war, or government policies which foster violence against women. Her needs as a survivor of various forms of persecution will likely be different from the immigrant girl child.

Refugee children face increased health risks compared to immigrant children (Canada, Human Resources and Development, 1998b). Studies have indicated a need for refugee-specific health care and awareness, as well as specialized treatment for war and gender-related injuries (*Guidelines*, 1996; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1991). HIV education and treatment has also been targeted as a special health need of many refugees. Funding, duration and types of settlement services for refugee families is also inadequate (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, 2000).

In addition, there is a lack of monitoring with regard to the implementation of the immigrant and refugee girls’ rights as defined by the Charter and in various international instruments. Clearly, this poses a systemic barrier to the full and equitable recognition and

²⁵ *Refugee Convention* (1951), Article 1(2).

implementation of these rights. Effective intervention can only occur when systemic barriers are dismantled.

SUMMARY

The girls who were interviewed identified inter-cultural tensions and racism as the most significant forms of violence they face. Some girls did not make connections between the tensions between cultural groups and the social inequalities that define Canadian society. Those who did understand the links between racism and the factions in their schools were willing to forgive their peers. They believed that peer racism was due to their lack of knowledge, and blamed teachers who misinformed students about different cultures.

The girls identified their families as supportive, and were proud of their cultural identity. However, they explained that it was often difficult to fit in at school and follow their parents' values. They admitted that this created tensions at home, but none of the girls disclosed violence. Settlement workers explained that immigrant and refugee communities are reluctant to access services because social workers are intolerant of their values and customs. Because there is no commitment to accommodating difference within social services, immigrant and refugee girls need advocates to help them through the systems. They also explained that girls need more than language training when they immigrate.

Settlement services for immigrant and refugees are provided by non-profit agencies which operate on sporadic government funding. Due to lack of funding, they are staffed by part-time workers and volunteers. They are mandated to provide services for specific ethno-cultural groups. However, these groups are artificial constructions which conform to Canadian categorization of immigrant groups rather than self-identified cultural affiliation. These organizations operate on the margins of the social welfare system. It is acceptable for settlement workers to provide language training and to promote cultural programs, however they are excluded from the mainstream of social work and are thus unable to promote a critical anti-racist reframing of policies and protocols that impact negatively on immigrant and refugee communities. As Uzma Shakir noted at a recent conference, rather than promoting social and political change, settlement services have become a tool for managing diversity (Shakir, 2001).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In his review of the situation of immigrant students in Canadian schools, Lam (1994) makes the following recommendations, which were also reiterated by focus group participants and interviewees:

- “Integrating a culturally diverse perspective in texts and curriculum
- Hiring teachers and counsellors who culturally represent the student community and who can act as role models to both immigrant and Canadian-born students
- Developing testing methods that are free of cultural bias
- Encouraging involvement from students’ communities in work co-op programs, mentoring and curriculum development
- Educating teachers about racism, and the effects that discrimination may have on student performance
- [implementing] Peer mentor programs for recent immigrant students.”

In addition to these, focus group participants and interviewees mentioned the following:

- That racism be recognized and treated as a form of violence.
- That policies of multiculturalism be scrutinized and reframed within an anti-racist framework rather than as they currently operate.
- That intersectionality of different forms of oppression be recognized and treated as a point of departure for policy development and implementation at all levels.
- That mechanisms be instituted at all levels and within all related institutional domains to provide support and protection for the immigrant and refugee girl child.
- That the constitutional divide between federal ratification and provincial implementation of treaties be eliminated. The first step is to emphasize that this division is a violation of the spirit of the treaties, and include this information in all research which deals with international human rights instruments.
- That the federal, provincial and territorial governments implement a working group and mandate it to work toward a harmonization of policies and legislation so that the latter fulfil Canada’s international obligations to various accords, conventions, declarations and treaties. This working group should operate in partnership with non-profit organizations who have expertise in the different areas.

- That policies which work against the interests of the immigrant and refugee girl child, e.g., policies requiring parental consent for access to services, be changed in order to accommodate the special vulnerabilities of these racialized girls and young women.
- That the federal, provincial and territorial governments make a special attempt to gather gender and age specific data which is also segregated on the basis of ethnicity or race so that future policy decisions are predicated on a more accurate foundation of knowledge.
- That consultations with girls be based on the principles of participatory action research.
- That popular education tools about women's equality rights and international human rights instruments for women's and girl's equality-seeking groups be developed and disseminated.
- That training tools for lawyers and judicial education tools around international legal obligations be developed and disseminated.
- That NGOs be supported to develop and disseminate evaluation tools (such as shadow reports and report cards) to be submitted to government and the UN during Canada's reporting periods.
- That international human rights law and norms be used to interpret the Charter and other domestic laws in domestic equality litigation. This should include the Conventions themselves, General Recommendations of relevant Committees, Concluding Remarks of relevant Committees on Canada's reports under Conventions and any documented discussion on Canada's reports between Canada and the relevant Committee.
- That there be improved methods of consultation with governments about Canada's international positions.
- That Canadians are educated on the extreme poverty levels of immigrant and refugee families and visible minority groups generally. That such education emphasize that this is the product of international and domestic institutionalized racism.
- That culturally appropriate, consistent and sufficient services are provided to female-headed lone-parent households. This includes employment training, childcare and financial assistance.
- That immigrant and refugee and visible minority youth are educated on their rights under the various provincial and federal *Human Rights Acts*. It is imperative that these youth be equipped to recognize when racism is a factor in hiring, and use their legislated recourse to address the wrongdoing.
- That all levels of government provide consistent and sufficient funding for programs that are aimed at immigrant and visible minority girls and youth in general.

- That school personnel including principals, teachers and support workers be trained to acknowledge and respond to racism. In other words, anti-racism training needs to be implemented with commitment. Anti-racist pedagogy needs to be incorporated into teacher training programs. Offering one course on anti-racism is not enough.
- That schools develop comprehensive strategies to increase awareness of human rights, especially children's rights, and particularly the rights of girl children.
- That zero tolerance policies on violence be scrutinized to ensure that they are not simply leveling the field and erasing differences between groups, but rather working towards embracing principles of substantive equality.
- That students who are from racial minority backgrounds or marginalized not be treated in a punitive fashion but rather offered counselling and education programs that can equip them to deal with the everyday racism inherent in their lives.
- That immigrant settlement services be provided with increased funding to hire cultural liaison workers and provide additional services for settlement in order to reduce the isolation of girls and their families.
- That counsellors and others who are familiar with different cultural traditions be hired within schools and service organizations. It is critical to note that such counsellors need to be trained within an anti-racism paradigm so that their services are not mere cultural prescriptions but are framed within a knowledge basis that clearly recognizes the power relations underpinning the hierarchies of cultural preferences.
- That a serious attempt be made to reflect a more representative portrayal of racialized communities and perspectives in Canadian mass media as per Canada's international obligations and its domestic policies and legislation.
- That curricula which build children's ability to decipher, question and resist the sexist, racist and homophobic messages of the media (especially the Internet) are developed and implemented in schools and other settings.
- That media literacy courses be made a mandatory part of school curricula and that initiatives toward this end be encouraged and funded within the non-profit sector, especially with regard to equipping young women from racialized communities to tell their own stories.
- That governments at all levels are encouraged to meet our obligations under international law regarding children's exposure to harmful media content.
- That qualitative research be encouraged to examine the impact of specific legislation and programs on the immigrant and refugee girl child. Such research should also focus on the avenues through which girls and young women who are marginalized because of racism, sexism, classism, sexuality and ability, can acquire strategies of resistance and resilience to violence.

- That a separate monitoring mechanism be implemented to ensure that immigration and refugee policies are being adhered to and applied in cases involving girls and young women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds.
- That every attempt be made to provide services and programs to reduce the risk of isolation of girls and young women from immigrant and refugee communities.
- That in the area of health care, culturally sensitive service provisions be developed in partnership with the cultural and ethnic communities being served.
- That efforts be made to increase the sense of belonging of these girls, and that such efforts be implemented in schools, the mass media, and other key institutions in society.

APPENDIX I

REQUEST SUBMITTED TO THE ETHICS APPROVAL COMMITTEE, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Request for a Waiver for Parental Consent Forms

As all girl participants will be 14-years-of-age and older, it is considered they will be competent to understand the project and will be able to decide on their own if they wish to participate or not. Those who are not competent to provide their own consent will not be included in this project. All participants in the focus groups and interviews will be asked to sign a consent form. Children under the age of 14 will not be involved in the project. We will ensure that all participants are aware of the voluntary nature of their participation. While it is not the specific goal of this project to identify sexual abuse, girls will be advised that if they reveal personal experiences of sexual abuse which are not yet known to the authorities, or threaten to harm themselves or others, it will be necessary for us to report such incidents. In all other cases, confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly maintained.

The principal investigator requests a waiver of the requirement to have parents/guardians sign a consent form which would permit the girls to participate in an interview or focus group. The rationale for the request is as follows:

These girls are old enough to provide informed consent themselves. At age 14, they have the legal right to consent to sexual relations and to request health services (Section 16, *Infants Act*). Further, by age 16, the province now recognizes their right to make decisions regarding their living arrangements. Note that the independent living program instituted by the Ministry for Children and Families is applicable to youth who are 16 and older. The right for these girls to be able to participate in a focus group or interview without having parental consent, is also predicated on the rights of the child as articulated in the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, to which Canada is a signatory nation. Specific articles of the *Convention* which are applicable in this regard are identified below. The critical aspects however, relate to the best interests of the child, and the ability of the child to be able to express her own views and ideas. According to the *Convention*:

Article 3

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. (Source: *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989.)

Regarding the issue of the best interests of the child, it can be surmised that if a girl has experienced violence at home, her parents may be less likely to sign a consent form for her to participate in this research project. Thus, her own best interests may not be served. Additionally, her parents/guardians may not want her to reveal those experiences for reasons that it might cause shame to the family, reflect badly on the particular community, and tarnish her reputation in the community (see Razack, 1998 for an empirical study regarding the factors inhibiting disclosure). Once again, suppression of these experiences may not serve the child's best interests.

Existing literature also documents the fear and suspicion with which recent immigrant and refugees view government officials and professionals (i.e., social workers, academics) (see Health Canada's consultation with ethnocultural groups, 1994). To have these parents sign a consent form which they may not be able to read and which appears official (in terms of asking for their signature, address, and a witness to sign), may make them fearful and thus compliant, or may result in them rejecting any kind of participation in the study for fear that their results will be scrutinized. Guarantees of confidentiality do not assuage this fear.

Our past experience with a focus group that was cancelled at the last minute in Kelowna last year, also indicates that if parental/guardian consent forms are required, the girls who are interested in participating will not provide these and consequently, cannot participate in a focus group. In the Kelowna situation, girls showed up for the focus group and expressed considerable interest in participating. However, the facilitator had to inform them that she could not hold the group because they did not have their parental consent forms signed and returned. These girls were effectively silenced by ethics requirements.

Should parental consent forms be required, the impact on the findings will be quite significant. For one, only those parents who are either not aware of abuse or whose children have not been abused will sign these consent forms. On the other hand, the requirement for signed consent forms will likely lead the researcher to choose a population that is more compliant in this regard – namely those children who are under the care of the state (social workers are willing to sign consent forms on behalf of their clients). The end result will be interviews with a high risk population and a low risk population (those who are supposedly in well-adjusted, non-abusive families). We will not be able to access those girls who are in the middle range, and who in fact are our target population.

In the situation of street-involved girls, requiring them, or us, to obtain parental consent may put them in positions of danger. Many girls enter into prostitution at an early age because they flee the parental home due to abuse. And because of chronological age requirements, these girls “fall through the cracks” in terms of their ability to officially access services. Many of our service providers allow these girls to become part of their girls groups in order that they can receive some kind of assistance. Yet they are not officially part of a guardianship situation. We cannot, in good conscience, request parental consent for these girls. Again, their voices will be silenced.

APPENDIX II

School policies

FREDA requested copies of policies and procedures concerning racism and violence from all school districts; 30 of the 59 BC school board districts responded. The policies FREDA received included codes of conduct that prohibited violence as a source of conflict resolution, weapons policies, disciplinary procedures, safe workplace policies, harassment policies, multicultural policies, and equity policies.

These policies showed a lack of coordination between multiculturalism policies and anti-violence policies. Some policies included well-worded statements about the need to foster appreciation and acceptance of cultural diversity, the desire to promote harmony and understanding, and a commitment to resisting racial biases. They do not make connections between violence and racism or sexism. To address the problems that the girls identified, school policies must adopt anti-racist agendas. Generic 'anti-bullying' policies are ineffective because they fail to recognize that sexism and racism are key factors in school violence.

Multiculturalism and anti-racism

Most of the school districts that responded to FREDA's request for policies included multiculturalism policies, anti-discrimination policies, anti-harassment policies, and/or race relations policies. These policies are couched in the rhetoric of multiculturalism. They recognize that diversity has a positive influence in their communities, and strive to promote racial and ethnic harmony and improved cross-cultural understanding. Only one policy recommended professional development to equip teachers to work with people from different racial and ethnic origins.

In their study of multiculturalism policies in BC schools, Marvin Wideen and Kathleen Barnard argue that the weak link between the Ministry of Education, the district, and the schools means that policies are rarely implemented. The key shift in policy is that diversity is no longer treated as a problem. Nevertheless, multiculturalism policies are insufficient because they do not acknowledge that racism is a systemic problem that requires radical social change. Rather than taking a proactive role in promoting equity, multiculturalism policies rely on the myth that Canada is not a racist society. Moreover, multiculturalism policies are not supported in the same way that other policies have been. For example, when the government developed a new science curriculum in 1997, it sponsored workshops to improve pedagogy. It has not taken a leading role in promoting anti-racist pedagogy. The emphasis on celebrating difference does not address the problems that arise from the lack of respect for diversity. Further, the policies themselves contribute to the 'othering' of cultures that do not conform to the dominant White culture, which is simply assumed as the 'true' Canadian culture (Wideen and Barnard, 1999).

Wideen and Barnard argue that multiculturalism policies may be more harmful than having no policy because they give the illusion that something is being done to address racism. Rather than effectively addressing the actual problems in the schools, 'zero-tolerance' policies

and anti-harassment policies deny the forces that cause violence. Nor do they include curricula to teach students and teachers how subtler forms of racism affect racialized minorities.

School curricula and teachers who are not adequately trained to teach history about different cultures further exacerbate the tensions in schools by disseminating stereotypes of racialized 'Others.' The myth of *terra nullius* and the commitment to a strong National narrative continues to shape the way history is taught. In the Canadian meta-narrative, 'minority groups' are fit into a history which presents Canada as a tolerant society. The resistance to recognize racism as a powerful force in Canadian nation-building means that the unjust events in Canadian history such as slavery and unfair immigration policies, are rarely taught. Subsequently, White students are not taught to critically analyze how White privilege is historically rooted in the governance and institutions of Canadian society. For immigrant and refugee girls, the erasure of the histories of their cultures cuts them off from their roots and strips them of their identity. Promoting the history and culture of the dominant culture forces oppressed groups to measure themselves against White culture. Immigrant and refugee girls from racialized communities will never measure up, though, because White culture reifies its dominance by constructing their cultures as innately inferior (Bannerji, 1998; Kelly, 1998; Noel, 1994). These discussions are not merely academic.

Participants identified improved education for teachers as necessary for improving tensions between cultural groups in the schools

Educate the teachers about our culture, and how we are not from a third world country ... [we] don't have camels.

Especially the teachers because they have the power ... if a social studies teacher does not know about Iran enough, that's just bad.

(Persian girl focus group participants, Vancouver)

Anti-bullying policies

The provincial government in British Columbia appears unwilling to acknowledge that the increasing violence in schools is linked to unequal race and gender relations. Existing policies addressing racism, violence and multiculturalism are often contradictory. Many school board policies include racial slurs and sexual harassment as forms of violence that occur in the school.

The school district policies on violence and anti-bullying that FREDA reviewed focused on disciplining students who repeatedly intimidate and assault their peers. The anti-violence policies range from benign zero-tolerance statements, to policies which include carefully thought out definitions, regulations, reporting mechanisms and protocols for dealing with discrimination and harassment. Protocols target individual perpetrators and disciplinary measures include suspension of the student, transferring the instigator of violence, or expulsion in severe cases. Some policies require students to seek counselling, and to design a corrective plan for their behaviour prior to re-admittance in the school. There is no reference to anti-racism or anti-sexism education as part of their counselling.

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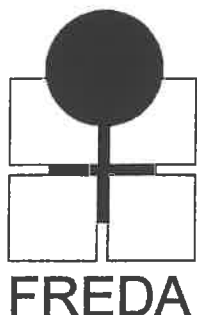
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Feminist Research, Education, Development & Action Centre

The Feminist Research, Education, Development and Action (FREDA) Centre is one of five violence research centres funded by Health Canada, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Since its inception in 1992, the FREDA Centre has worked with numerous groups in British Columbia on various aspects of violence against women and children. The Centre has also published a report dealing with violence against women in the Yukon.

FREDA is a collaboration of community groups, and feminist academics from Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia. The Centre's mandate is to undertake and promote action-based research on violence against women and children. As well, the FREDA Centre works with community groups to forward recommendations for action to relevant policy makers and mandated agencies.

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