"WE ARE THE SAME PEOPLE, JUST AT DIFFERENT POINTS IN OUR LIVES"

ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCE IN PEER MENTORSHIP.

ALYSSA HOLT AND AMY MOIR

2021

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UREAP FINAL REPORT
THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY
JULY 2021

ALYSSA HOLT AND AMY MOIR
(SHE/HER) (SHE/HER)

SUPERVISED BY:
DR. JENNIFER MURPHY AND
DR. JULIANA WEST

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ABSTRACT

There is little research centring on the experiences of women who have been criminalized and utilize their lived experience in their work with women currently experiencing criminalization. This exploratory study applies an intersectional feminist and anti-oppressive/anti-privilege framework to explore how these women support other women, especially during times of COVID-19 affected services. Research demonstrates that women living with criminalization experience oppressive social relations and structural violence. The weakened social safety net and lack of community-based support force women into cycles of incarceration and homelessness. Peer support from women with shared lived experience is known to effectively support women to escape the incarceration cycle. This study investigates whether agencies use peer mentors and if so, how the mentors' lived experience of criminalization impacts their current role. Using purposeful sampling, 57 women-serving agencies across Canada were invited to circulate an online survey regarding the use and effect of peer mentorship.

The agencies were also asked to forward a recruitment poster to their employees, volunteers, and contacts for potential interviews. Five women with lived experience of criminalization participated in 30 - 45 minute semi-structured interviews via Zoom. Six major themes emerged from analysis of the survey and interview data: lived experience strengthens empathetic connections, navigating disclosure to service users, lived experience as an asset and challenge in the workplace, peer mentorship is fulfilling work, impacts of the past on current roles, and overcoming barriers. This research demonstrates the unique insight lived experience brings to peer support and the empowering effects for the mentors. The results of this research provide valuable new knowledge that can be used to inform social work practice in supporting peer mentorship and identify areas needing further research.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was conducted on the Traditional Territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including Siksika, Piikani and Kainai, as well as the Tsuut'ina and Stoney Nakoda First Nations, including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley; also home to Métis Region 3 (Treaty 7 Territory). As students of Thompson Rivers University, we would also like to acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc within Secwepemcul'ecw. We wish to honour and acknowledge all the Indigenous people across the place colonially known as Canada who continue to contend with colonial violence and are disproportionately affected by economic marginalization and criminalization.

During this time of mourning, when the discovery of 215 unmarked graves of Indigenous children found on the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation sparked the ongoing mass discoveries across the country, we express our deep horror and extend our sincerest condolences. We realize the importance of supporting Indigenous people who have been personally affected during this time. These disturbing discoveries further illuminate the urgent need for change and action. We understand criminalization as a different manifestation of colonialism; imprisonment is used as a strategy for controlling, separating, and assimilating Indigenous people (McGuire & Murdoch, 2021; West, 2014).

Canada must stop imprisoning survivors of the genocidal residential "school" system and discontinue the harm to Indigenous individuals, families, and communities.

As social workers, we acknowledge our profession's historical and ongoing role in harming Indigenous communities with colonial violence (West, 2014). We are committed to approaching social work practice and research from a decolonizing approach and advocating for change. As social work settlers who benefit from colonial privilege, we have a responsibility to hold the government accountable to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) *Calls to Action.* Particularly relevant to this research, community alternatives to imprisonment must be funded, and minimum penalties should be eliminated. Ultimately, Indigenous communities should be supported in gaining sovereignty over justice proceedings to stop imposing colonial retributive justice, which leads to the over-incarceration of Indigenous people.

Finally, we acknowledge that Indigenous voices must always be centred in decision-making to influence meaningful change. We recognize the importance of uplifting Indigenous women's voices, centring their lived experiences, and celebrating their strengths.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to our participants, who without, this research would not have been possible. We are incredibly thankful and honoured they shared their experiences so openly and vulnerably with us. Their stories exemplify strength and resilience, and they inspired us to continue speaking up against social injustice.

Thank you to Thompson Rivers University for supporting and funding undergraduate research, especially within the social work field, which often goes underfunded. Without their dedication to promote student research, this project would not exist.

We would also like to thank our families and friends for continually supporting us through our academic journey. They have always pushed us to grow both personally and professionally and believed in our capabilities every step of the way, and for that, we are extremely grateful.

Finally, we extend our gratitude to our mentors, Dr. Jennifer Murphy and Dr. Juliana West, who introduced us to social work research and supported us throughout every step of this project. We want to thank them for encouraging us, believing in us, and reminding us to step back and reflect and celebrate our accomplishments amid our busy lives. We are thankful for their exceptional support, wisdom, time, and inspiring us to pursue our passions.

Photo by: Alyssa Holt (2021)

INTRODUCTION

LOCATING OURSELVES

We (Alyssa Holt and Amy Moir) are both undergraduate students enrolled in the social work program at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, British Columbia. We are two of the recipients of the Undergraduate Research Experience Award (UREAP), which is a university-wide scholarship that provides student funding to conduct their own research. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we completed this research remotely in Calgary, Alberta.

This research was guided by an intersectional feminist approach and anti-oppressive anti-privilege (AOAP) theory (*1*) (Mullaly & West, 2018). Consistent with these paradigms, we locate ourselves as researchers and acknowledge how our privilege has shaped this research project and its findings (Mullaly & West, 2018; Reid et al., 2017). With that in mind, we acknowledge that we hold an unjust and unearned place of privilege in society due to our privilege as white (*2*) cis-women, our socio-economic status, and the fact that we do not have the lived experience of criminalization.

Women who have been criminalized often experience many other intersecting marginalized identities. For example, poverty, homelessness, mental illness, substance use dependency, trauma, and Indigeneity are all criminalized (Holt & Moir, 2020). Researching these experiences from the lens of an outsider gave us a position of privilege but also of naivety. Due to this, we made it a principle to deconstruct and share power with our participants throughout the research process as well as spotlight the voices of our participants throughout the finished report. It was of the utmost importance to approach this research from an understanding of how our privilege can render us unaware, and because of this, to emphasize how essential lived experience is in the helping professions.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to explore the effect of lived experience in supporting women experiencing criminalization. The concepts of peer mentorship and peer support programs have been identified within the literature as a vital way to support re-integration and break the cycle of incarceration, poverty, and trauma that many women become trapped in (Fels et al., 2019).

1. For more information on privilege and oppression at the personal, structural, and cultural levels please see:
Mullaly, B., & West, J. (2018). *Challenging oppression and confronting privilege: A critical approach to Anti-oppressive and Anti-privilege theory and practice.* 3rd ed. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford.
2. For more information on white privilege please see:
McIntosh, P. (1988). *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack.*

Although these programs have been identified in the literature as vitally important, we wondered if they were actually being implemented in agencies across Canada. We also wanted to hear from these peers directly to learn if they felt peer mentorship was valued, if they experienced stigma in their workplaces, and how they conceptualize the impact of their past with their current role. There is some literature available that speaks to the value of peer mentorship; however, peer mentors themselves have rarely been given the opportunity to narrate their experiences as a mentor. The purpose of this research was first to understand if peer support programs are being utilized in Canada and second to highlight the voices of the mentors themselves to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences in their role.

RATIONALE

We were both introduced to social work research in April 2020 through Research Assistant positions offered to us by our mentors, Dr. Jennifer Murphy and Dr. Juliana West. We were hired to conduct a literature review exploring the role a recovery house and resource hub could play in supporting women experiencing criminalization in affiliation with the Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society.

Through that project we saw the importance of peer support emerge as a recurring theme and it sparked a curiosity to continue researching the topic. As fourth-year Bachelor of Social Work students, we decided to apply for an Undergraduate Research Experience Award (UREAP) to acquire the funding and support required to conduct our exploratory study. We were awarded the scholarship on November 20, 2020, and received approval from the Thompson Rivers University Research Ethics Board on March 2, 2021. We worked on designing this research, collecting and analyzing data, and writing the report between October 2020 - July 2021.

We are both passionate about social work research and centring the voices of those with lived experience. We are incredibly grateful we had the opportunity to research such an important topic and add to the limited body of literature on the role of lived experience in peer support. This project allowed us to highlight the voices of those who have experienced criminalization and now support other women by focusing on empowering stories of strength while acknowledging realities of oppression and privilege. We intend to raise awareness and break the stigma surrounding women's criminalization. We hope our research can facilitate positive change by adding to the knowledge base regarding how to best support women who have been criminalized.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women currently represent the fastest-growing prison population (Pate, 2011). Although the rate of women incarceration is growing rapidly, women still only make up about six percent of the total federally imprisoned population (Correctional Service of Canada, 2019). This means that women's needs within the criminal justice system have historically been overlooked (CAEFS, 2013). Within this six percent, Indigenous women make up a little under half of the incarcerated women in Canada (Government of Canada, 2020). In other words, although Indigenous women represent only four percent of the total Canadian population, they account for 42 percent of women in prison (CAEFS, 2013). This alarming overrepresentation is an example of modern-day colonialism, in which Indigenous women contend with systemic racism, dehumanization, victimization, and criminalization, subjected to formal social control they never consented to (McGuire & Murdoch, 2021; West, 2014).

As McGuire and Murdoch (2021) explain, nearly all imprisoned Indigenous women have histories of trauma, and almost half have been affected by residential schools and child welfare removals. Their criminalization exists on the victimization - criminalization continuum, where they are punished for resisting genocidal harm. The over-criminalization of Indigenous women amounts to a phenomenon known as genocidal carcerality, which refers to space used to destroy rather than support. Indigenous women are being targeted by the criminal justice system in an attempt to continue erasure.

Women are most often convicted for non-violent "offences;" typically these "offences" are related to women's economic survival (CAEFS, 2013). In her doctoral thesis, Maidment (2005) describes a cycle known as transcarceration. Maidment writes, "the law and the criminal justice system are actually *in conflict with women*. The majority of women's crime is directly related to their economic oppression... the criminal (in)justice system creates additional barriers to women's economic and social equality by criminalizing poverty, mental illness, past histories of abuse, and race/ethnicity" (p. 26). Successful community reintegration can be immensely challenging, and women cite concerns over mental and physical health, employment, stable housing, substance misuse, fractured relationships, and stigma (Ahmed et al., 2016; Bergseth et al., 2011; Fortune et al., 2010; Sered & Norton-Hawk, 2008).

Social support is a critical factor for women re-entering the community post-imprisonment (Severance, 2004), especially during pandemic restrictions (CAEFS, 2020). Supporting women with reintegration is essential to disrupt the revolving door of prison, in which women continuously return to prison (Fels et al., 2019). Peer support is an empowering component that counters stigma and coercive prison dynamics by providing space for healing with collective associations (Heidemann, 2013; Pollack, 2004; Walsh et al., 2012). Peer support reduces isolation and improves the community re-entry process while underscoring that women who have been criminalized have skills, the ability to take on responsibilities, and are trustworthy (Fortune & Arai, 2014; Pollack, 2004; Reingle Gonzalez et al., 2019). Peer mentors also benefit from their roles; it has been described as empowering, rewarding, and life-changing, and can promote a sense of co-recovery through positive feedback loops of support (Fels et al., 2019; Heidemann, 2013; Nixon, 2020).

Having lived experience of criminalization as a peer worker is invaluable for effective service delivery, for building rapport and credibility, in addressing practical needs, and can strengthen decision-making abilities and empathetic connections (McLeod et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2012; West, 2014).

Lived experience also increases understanding of the emotions and practical issues upon release and has been found to be invaluable in supporting women's transition from prison to the community (Fels et al., 2019; McLeod et al., 2020). Valuing workers' lived experience increases inclusivity and fosters transformative programming (Pollack, 2020). Given the opportunity, women who have been criminalized desire to positively impact their communities and thrive when supporting other women to create better futures (López-Garza, 2016).

Although lived experience creates unique, invaluable insight, the stigmatized nature of being a provider who has experienced social control mechanisms or accessed services creates challenges in peer mentorship (Newcomb et al., 2017; Nixon, 2020). This stigma stems from the pervasive othering of service users in the helping professions, particularly in social work, where a sense of shame is associated with accessing the very services one provides (Newcomb et al., 2017; West, 2014). Peer mentors often contend with stigma and hostility from colleagues without lived experience, which can pose barriers to opportunities and the mentors' sense of self (Nixon, 2020). Mentors are also at risk of being exploited as some are in a position of minimal options due to criminal records (Nixon, 2020).

It can be challenging for mentors to stay hopeful while witnessing people's struggles and navigating their own emotions and recovery simultaneously (Fels et al., 2019; Nixon, 2020). In the face of stigma and exclusionary forces, supportive networks of women can redefine how women see themselves and reduce isolation and marginalization (Fortune et al., 2010; Pollack, 2009; Yuen et al., 2012). Providing peer support based upon the lived experience of criminalization can be an important facilitator of community reentry and inclusion (Fels et al., 2019; Heidemann, 2013; McLeod et al., 2020; Nixon, 2020; Pollack, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our research is grounded in intersectional feminist and AOAP theories and approaches. Because our research is centred around women's experiences within the criminal justice system and the criminalization of marginalization, we believed it was essential to ground our research in these two guiding frameworks. Subjectivity is a key component within feminist methodologies; it approaches research by questioning who is encouraged to know and create knowledge and who is not (Reid et al., 2017).

Historically, women (especially women with intersecting marginalized identities) have been excluded from research. A critical feminist approach to research centers women's voices, highlights and deconstructs power imbalances, and attempts to bring together theory and practice (Reid et al., 2017).

An intersectional approach to research considers how social locations can interact and overlap to create various experiences of oppression, privilege, and power (Crenshaw, 1989; Reid et al., 2017). Most women who have experienced criminalization also experience other layers of oppression through intersecting identities. For example, many women who have been criminalized also experience poverty, homelessness, mental illness, trauma, and substance dependency (Holt & Moir, 2020). Indigenous women are also overrepresented within the system, representing a new expression of colonialism (McGuire & Murdoch, 2021). Due to the many layers of oppression that women experiencing criminalization face, approaching this project from an intersectional framework was key.

An AOAP approach to research takes an intersectional analysis farther by understanding, deconstructing, and resisting how intersecting identities and varying experiences of oppression, privilege, and power are carried out on the personal, cultural, and structural levels of society (Mullaly & West, 2018).

As our research participants belonged to multiple intersecting marginalized communities, we felt it was crucial to ground our research in these paradigms. In order to embody these frameworks, we sought to deconstruct and share power with our participants by bringing as much choice to the survey and interview process as possible. For example, prior to the interview, participants were given a list of our guiding questions before agreeing to meet with us. This was done to deconstruct the barrier between researchers and participants and bring transparency to our work.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Our research began guided by the question: how can women with lived experience in the criminal justice system help support women currently experiencing criminalization? As our study progressed and gained focus, we developed two main research questions, each with sub-questions. The questions we explored were:

1. Do social service agencies that work with women who have been criminalized incorporate peer support in their service provision?
   a. If so, how, why, and what are the benefits and challenges?
   b. What are the impacts of COVID-19 on this work?

2. What are the experiences of women who have lived experience in the criminal justice system who now work or volunteer as a peer mentor?
   a. How do they conceptualize how their past affects their role today?
   b. What are the benefits, and challenges or tensions of being a peer mentor?

We utilized a mixed-methods approach to explore these questions through a Canada-wide online survey and semi-structured interviews via Zoom. The survey was open to individuals who work or volunteer at a women-serving agency and intended to gather data on the use of peer support for women experiencing criminalization. Survey respondents who fit the criteria were invited to attend a confidential interview to elaborate on their survey responses and provide a richer narrative regarding their own experience as peer mentors. It was not a requirement for interview participants to have completed the survey, but we anticipated most would.

INCLUSION CRITERIA

Both the survey and interview were open Canada-wide. The survey was divided into two parts with different criteria for eligibility. Anyone currently working or volunteering in an organization that offered services to women who have experienced criminalization could participate in the first half of the survey.

The second half of the survey asked questions specific to women's experiences of being peer mentors. For this reason, the second half of the survey was eligible only to women or non-binary people with an experience of criminalization who were currently working or volunteering in a peer support capacity.

The criteria for the interviews were the same as the criteria for the back half of the survey. All participants had to identify as a woman or as non-binary, have a prior experience of criminalization, and currently work or volunteer as a peer mentor. Due to language barriers and time limitations, both the survey and the interviews were offered in English only.

These stipulations for participation were for a handful of reasons. The first half of the survey was open to a larger audience because we sought more demographic and generalized data and wanted to collect as much information as possible. However, the second half of the survey and the interviews were targeted to a far more niche audience because, in alignment with our guiding research paradigms, we wished to spotlight the voices of peer mentors and give a platform to a community that has often been ignored.

Additionally, we did not collect any demographic data apart from the province in which the participants resided.

We did not ask any participants in either the survey or the interview about their race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, or any other questions that could be seen as intrusive. We chose not to ask these questions for a couple of reasons. First, we felt that this information was invasive, and second, we felt that it was not pertinent to our research questions.

However, due to the overrepresentation of incarcerated and criminalized Indigenous women and other women of colour, we later believed that it would have been important to gain an understanding of our participants' identities. One woman we interviewed did identify as Indigenous and spoke to her experiences extensively in our interview, but we cannot assume the identities of our other participants. Exploring identity, oppression, and criminalization in relation to peer support is outside the scope of this research but would be a fascinating area to explore further.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

In order to recruit participants for both the survey and the interview, we created informational posters (see Appendix A). These posters contained details such as the goals of the study, our background as researchers, as well as information about eligibility, confidentiality, and anonymity.

At the bottom of both posters was a link that directed the user to the corresponding consent form (see Appendix B).

These posters were then sent out to 57 agencies all across Canada through email, FaceBook, and Instagram. Agencies were chosen based on two qualities. First, if the agency provided support for women and second, if the agency served a population of people involved in the criminal justice system. For example, all Elizabeth Fry Societies were contacted due to their relevance to the research target population. In the message to agencies, we requested they forward all the information to relevant contacts as well as share these posters on their social media channels for increased exposure.

To encourage participation, survey respondents were able to leave their email address to enter into a draw to win a $35.00 gift certificate. All interview participants were sent a $35.00 gift certificate of their choice after the interview was completed. Due to COVID-19 and the remote nature of the study, all gift card options were for companies that provided e-gift certificates that were then emailed to the participants.

Due to the two-pronged approach we took, we ended up having a variety of documents. To streamline all the documents and have all the important information in an accessible place, we created a joint LinkTree and Instagram.

INFORMED CONSENT

Obtaining informed consent and ensuring voluntary participation was of the utmost importance to our study to ensure ethical requirements were met. We received approval from the Thompson Rivers University Research Ethics Board before commencing the project. We wrote two separate informed consent forms (see Appendix B) for the survey and interviews. These detailed the purpose of the study, potential benefits and risks, what the survey and interviews would entail in terms of questions and expected time length, and how we would protect confidentiality and anonymity. The forms also included resources for mental health support for participants who may experience distressing feelings and require professional support.

To access the survey, participants were asked to read the survey consent form and click “I agree” at the end of the form, which opened the survey. Before scheduling interviews, participants were asked to read the interview consent form and either submit a signed copy or provide verbal consent recorded on Zoom before the interview began. We designed the survey and interview questions to focus on the present-day experience of peer mentoring and how the lived experience of criminalization impacts this. We did not include pressing questions about past experiences of criminalization to protect participants’ emotional safety and avoid potentially triggering and retraumatizing them.

Ensuring interview participants knew what to expect and felt free to withdraw without penalty was essential for ensuring their safety. We included the interview questions in the consent form, along with an explanation that the interview will be semi-structured and the participants are free to disclose as much or as little as they wish and decline to answer any questions. The consent form explained the participants' right to withdraw at any point during or after the interview without penalty, meaning they would receive their honorarium (of a $35.00 e-gift-card) regardless of withdrawal at any point. At the beginning of each interview, we reiterated the key points of confidentiality and voluntary participation and gave participants the opportunity to ask questions or express concerns. Survey respondents could also skip questions or select "prefer not to answer" and were still entered into the draw for the honorarium if they chose to be.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Protecting the participants' confidentiality is central to conducting ethical research and providing a sense of safety. The online survey was hosted by SurveyMonkey; the consent form explained that the responses would be stored in Canada and provided a link to SurveyMonkey's security statement.

Participants had a choice to leave their email address to be entered into a draw for the honorarium or be contacted to schedule an interview. Participants could also complete the survey without leaving their email address. The email addresses were stored on an Excel spreadsheet on our secure, encrypted computers, separate from the other survey responses, and only used to randomly generate a winner for the honorarium and contact participants interested in an interview. This ensured survey responses could not be linked to respondents' email addresses which could contain identifying information. We input all the survey responses into the data analysis software, Cmaps, which we explain in detail in the data organization and analysis section. If respondents included identifying information in their responses, we redacted this before inputting the response into Cmaps. To select a winner for the honorarium, we assigned numbers to the email addresses and entered the numbers to the website, Wheel of Names, which randomly generated a winner.

The interview was hosted and recorded by Zoom, saved to our secure, encrypted computers, and transcribed by Otter.ai. During the Zoom interviews, we were the only people present in the building to ensure no chance of being overheard or interrupted.

The recordings and transcripts were only viewed by the Co-Principal Investigators (Alyssa and Amy). Our supervisors, Dr. Juliana West and Dr. Jennifer Murphy, only viewed cleansed versions of the data from the interviews and survey on Cmaps. As with the survey responses, we went through each transcript and redacted any identifiers such as names or agencies to ensure anonymity. Then the transcripts were inputted to Cmaps and printed off so we could comb through line-by-line to pull patterns and identify themes. The electronic recordings which contain sensitive information and hard copies of transcripts will be permanently deleted and shredded upon project completion, with December 2021 being the latest possible date.

The interview participants were asked to choose a pseudonym either from a list of options we generated or make up their own. They could also choose to use their first name to represent their contributions if they wished. Following the interviews, we only used this name to refer to the participants' contributions. We did not include specific details regarding the location and agencies of the interview participants to protect their anonymity.

ONLINE SURVEY

The survey in total was 25 questions, with the first half of the survey 12 questions in length and the second half of the survey 13 (see Appendix C for the list of survey questions). The first half (which was open to anyone working in an organization that serves women who have been criminalized) sought general information about an agency's services and peer support programs. The only demographic data collected was which province or territory the respondent worked in; otherwise, no other demographic data was requested. The first half asked questions regarding the agency's services, if the agency employed peer mentors and why or why not, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their work. The majority of these questions were multiple choice and took those who only answered the first half on average about five minutes to complete.

The second half of the survey was only available to individuals who have experienced criminalization and currently work or volunteer in a peer support capacity. These questions were much more in depth and required participants to type out their responses. Respondents were asked about their experiences of disclosing their lived experience at work, why they chose to become a peer mentor, and what they perceive is the largest barrier women face upon community re-entry.

On average, the individuals who qualified for both parts of the survey took about 27 minutes to complete the entire survey. The final question in this section was an invitation to connect through Zoom and expand upon their survey responses. Interested participants were able to leave their preferred email address for us to follow-up with.

Our original goal was to reach 20 survey responses. However, we received 18 responses between March - June 2021 and then closed the survey to focus on data analysis and writing the report.

ZOOM INTERVIEWS

Women who fit the criteria detailed above were invited to a 30 - 45 minute, semi-structured interview via Zoom. We sought to recruit six interview participants, but due to factors discussed in the limitations section, we only conducted five interviews between March - May 2021. The interviews were intended to build upon the survey and give the women an opportunity to elaborate and offer a richer narrative. It was not a requirement for interview participants to have completed the survey; however, four out of five interview participants did. As Co-Principal Investigators, we facilitated the interviews together and alternated asking questions.

Since the interviews were recorded for transcription purposes, we took minimal notes to remain present and engaged with the women. The only notes we took were some keywords of interest to circle back to and ask the women to elaborate.

We adopted qualitative attitudes, listened to understand, and conceptualized the interviews as collaborative, knowledge construction projects with the participants (Roberts, 2020). We also implemented McNamara's (2009) eight principles of preparing for interviewing by choosing a setting with little distraction, explaining the purpose, confidentiality, formation, time length, and how to contact us, providing space for questions, and using the Zoom recording feature to capture the interview.

The interviews were guided by seven open-ended main questions and four relevant follow-up questions to elicit elaboration (see Appendix D). We developed the interview questions under the expertise of our mentors and guided by the literature. Our questions aligned with the literature on peer mentorship and the experiences of women who have been criminalized. For example, we asked about their experiences with supports and barriers as we saw these topics repeatedly appear across the literature.

Our questions were posed neutrally and worded to be non-judgemental to invite participants to explore their experiences (Charmaz, 2014; Turner, 2010).

We considered the order of our questions and started with simple questions to develop trust and rapport before moving into deeper questions (Roberts, 2020). We closed the interviews by giving the participants the opportunity to share anything they felt was important that we did not ask. This was an important final question in alignment with our intersectional feminist, anti-oppressive anti-privilege approach, to provide space for the participants to speak about anything we have missed due to our positionality.

We chose a semi-structured format to create structure and focus on discussing the participants' conceptualizations of the impact of their lived experience and their insights into the benefits and challenges of peer support. The semi-structured format also gave us the flexibility to engage with each participants' unique individual story and use probes to explore responses on a deeper level (Reid et al., 2017). This format allowed the participants to influence the interview as well; they could choose to share as much or as little as they wished and expand beyond the questions to speak about topics of importance to them.

Each interview was unique and brought interesting and valuable contributions. Some commonalities across the interviews were each participant spoke about their experiences with stigma and expressed a strong belief in the value of their lived experience in increasing their empathetic connections and ability to understand mentees. Following each interview, we debriefed together to acknowledge and reflect on the interview and discuss our initial thoughts on themes, connections, and unexpected information (Roberts, 2020).

DATA ORGANIZATION AND ANALYSIS

As Co-Principal Investigators, collaboration, organization, and quality control were of the utmost importance. Conducting research in a partnership or team requires a clear system of organization and the ability to continually check-in with members of the research team to ensure everyone is on the same page. We also utilized social media to help organize our information and have all documents in one easily accessible place. We created a joint email address to contact agencies and participants, a joint Instagram account to highlight our research process, and a LinkTree to store all documents in one place.

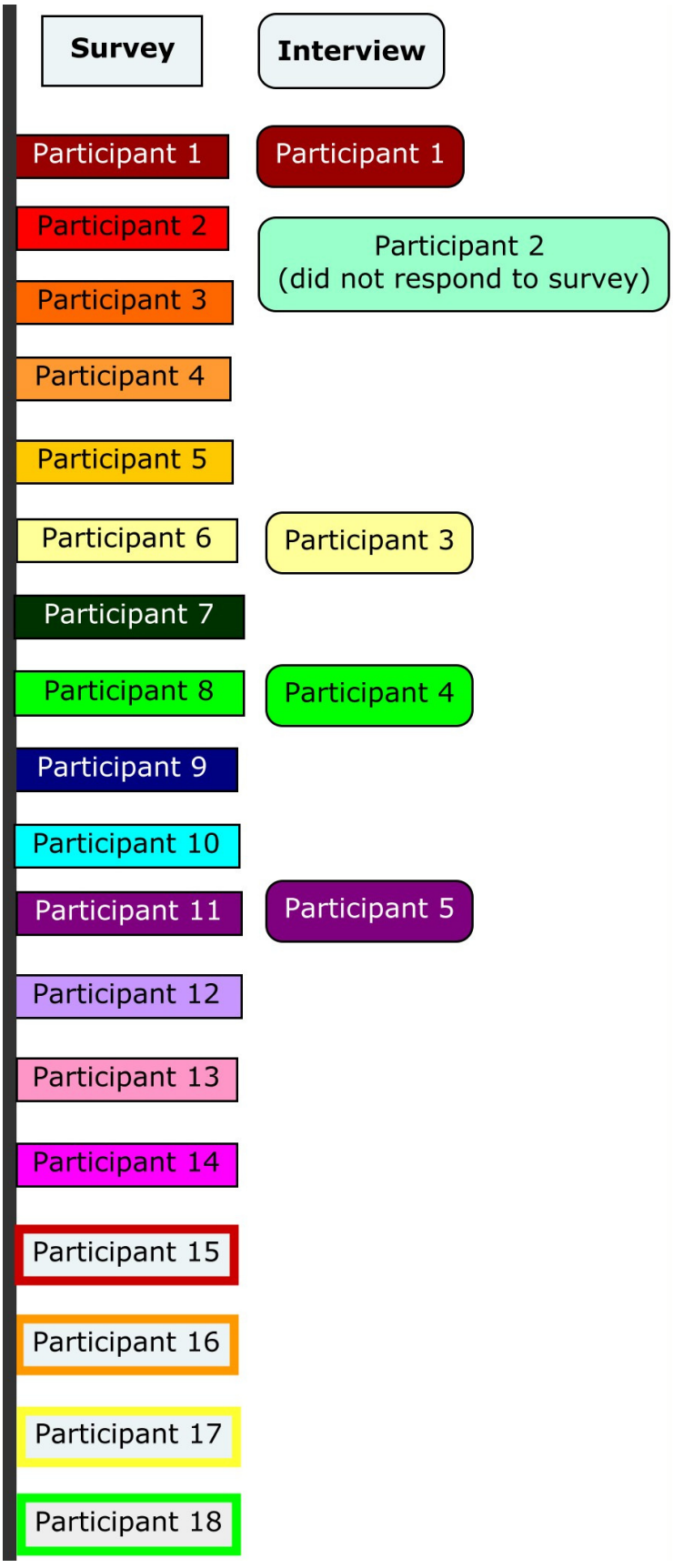
To organize all our information, we created a shared Google Drive folder.

Within this folder, we created subfolders for the research proposal, ethics application, survey, interview, and final report. We created a "tracking sheet" in which we tracked various important details, such as our research hours, tasks completed each day, agencies that have been contacted to participate in our research, our research timeline, and our budget. This tracking sheet helped us to stay on the same page and ensure we were leaving a paper trail to demonstrate the research process. We also employed a colour coding system to visually divide up the work. We assigned a colour to each of us and used this colour to highlight sections each person would take the lead on. Finally, we utilized the comment feature on Google Drive constantly. We would highlight paragraphs and leave a comment with any questions, concerns, or ideas. The research process involved almost a continuous loop of feedback with one another.

We utilized the software CmapTools to organize and analyze the data for both the survey and the interviews. Cmap files were created for each survey and interview participant, every survey and interview question, and emerging themes. To create a paper trail, we kept all versions of every file. To limit confusion, old drafts were moved to a separate folder and the newest draft of each file was saved as "version a/b/c etc."

Cmaps allowed us to collaborate with ease; we both worked on all the files and included our names with the version label to keep track of who updated them last. Survey responses were added as square boxes, and interview responses as circular boxes. Each participant had their own unique colour to represent their contributions. This way, when analyzing the questions and coding for themes, we would know who is who (for example, a participant who completed the survey and an interview had the same colour square and circular box). This allowed us to differentiate between survey and interview responses, and for those who participated in both, we could easily see the responses came from the same participant based upon the colour of their box.

To analyze the data from both the surveys and interviews, we undertook a thematic analysis which involves analyzing the entire data to search for repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We engaged with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases; first, we familiarized ourselves with the data by re-reading the surveys and interview transcripts. Next, we developed preliminary codes by bolding keywords in Cmaps for the interview and survey responses, highlighting printed interview transcripts, and writing out words and phrases of interest from survey responses.



Cmap Participant Key

We used colour-coding when coding on hard copies. For example, we highlighted the interview transcripts with pink for phrases that explained benefits, yellow for challenges and barriers, and green when the participants spoke about funding or finances. We used the same colour codes when writing out codes from the surveys. We coded for as many themes as possible in this stage; some of our early themes included benefits and challenges for mentors and mentees, understanding of experience, experience and education, stigma, empathy, gratitude, and giving back. Some codes fit into multiple preliminary themes, for example, the experience of disclosing fit under benefits, challenges, and stigma.

Third, we began to organize our codes into themes. We analyzed how our codes could form overarching main themes and sub-themes and utilized Cmaps to create concept maps (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We referred to this phase as "theming the themes," we added "(NQ)" (an abbreviation for no quotes) to the title of our Cmap files to indicate the files consisted only of themes and did not contain survey or interview responses. Please see Appendix E for an example of a coding file and "NQ" theming file. The fourth phase involved reviewing the themes; we collaborated with each other and our supervisors to assess the validity of the themes in relation to our entire data set and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The themes were defined and named during the fifth phase; we consulted as a research team to ensure our interpretations and articulations of themes captured the essence of our data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved defining and redefining themes as major themes and sub-themes as we analyzed the meanings and connections between themes. For the final sixth step, we wrote up our analysis to produce a comprehensible discussion of the themes and selected quotes that clearly reflected the context of the data, ensuring a variety of participants were represented (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We returned to our research questions throughout the analysis and sought to answer them through our discussion of the themes.

Our analysis is known as an inductive analysis or "bottom-up," as the themes emerged from the data little by little and were not created to fit into a pre-existing framework (Braun & Clark, 2006; Reid et al., 2017). We also approached the analysis from the narrative research perspective as our research intended to engage participants in meaning-making and challenge dominant assumptions (Fraser, 2004). Our findings should be understood as tentative; we make no claim of being objective or certain in our interpretations and hold that our findings are subject to re-interpretation (Fraser, 2004).

When coding the data, organizing themes, and drawing implications, we contemplated questions outlined by Fraser (2004) to self-locate as researchers and consider aspects of influence on our analysis and conclusions we drew. Some examples of these questions include, "do the stories support, negate or unsettle specific claims made about relevant discourses?", "what do the stories say about the (multiple) lived experiences of class, gender, race, sexual orientation, age, dis/ability, religion and/or geographical locations?", " how are the experiences mediated by the material conditions in which the narrators are living?" and "do your analyses maintain a respectful tone towards participants?" (Fraser, 2004, pp. 193 - 196).

TRUSTWORTHINESS

To establish the credibility of our findings, we employed several strategies including, triangulation, peer-debriefing, member-checking, reflexivity, and kept a rigorous audit trail on Cmaps (Reid et al., 2017). We did not divide the thematic analysis; as Co-Principal Investigators, we each coded and themed every response from the survey and interviews to validate the themes we each arrived at. We continuously engaged in triangulation throughout the process of analyzing the data by discussing the themes emerging from each of our analyses and examining points of overlap or agreement and gaps or disagreement.

Our supervisors, Dr. Jennifer Murphy and Dr. Juliana West were also involved in triangulation. We met over Zoom several times each month to collaboratively analyze the data by screen sharing Cmaps. We also sent Cmap files demonstrating the progression of our analysis and arrival at major and sub-themes via email for our supervisors to triangulate. We committed to peer-debriefing with each other as Co-Principal Investigators throughout the research to affirm our interpretations and reflect on the process (Reid et al., 2017).

Each interview participant was asked if they would like to receive a draft of our analysis to review and provide feedback to whether they agree and feel accurately represented. Four out of five participants requested this, and we sent them the transcript of their interview with sections flagged and highlighted to indicate themes we pulled and potential quotes being considered for the final report. We framed the email to eliminate pressure to respond if they were busy and explained we would assume they don't have any requests for changes if we did not hear back. Two of four participants responded and validated our analysis; we cannot interpret the non-response from the other two participants.

Member-checking was incredibly important to us to ensure our research truly centres the voices of our participants and reflects our intersectional feminist and anti-oppressive anti-privilege approach. Also in alignment with our approach and as explained under "locating ourselves," we centred reflexivity throughout the research process to understand and be transparent about the impacts of our social locations and biases on this study. The data organization section explains how we used Cmaps to create a rigorous audit trail that transparently demonstrates the thought process involved in coding and organizing themes (Reid et al., 2017).

LIMITATIONS

The findings from this research are intended to be exploratory and not generalizable. This research was funded through the TRU UREAP award, which is a grant intended to fund student's original research. Due to this, the study was limited in terms of budget and time. The study was a small sample size; in total we had 19 participants (18 survey respondents, five interviewees- only one of whom did not complete the survey). There was also a delay in ethics approval, which pushed our timeline back, resulting in the inability to reach out to more potential participants.

The survey and interview were also restricted to people living in Canada who spoke English. This was a requirement due to a lack of time or budget to conduct a larger international study. Further, we only received a few responses from Western provinces such as Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon, and none from the other prairie provinces, the other territories, or the East Coast. The majority of our responses were overwhelmingly from Ontario, making this research more location-specific rather than Canada-wide.

Conducting research in the middle of a pandemic also proved to be challenging at times. Completing all interviews remotely posed challenges such as audio issues, technical failures, and time-zone confusion. We also faced an unexpected barrier in terms of reaching out to agencies and receiving a response.

Due to COVID, many people experienced internet and email burnout. We found that many agencies simply did not see our emails about our research due to the overwhelming amount of emails staff are currently receiving. We also had a handful of people reach out to show their interest in participating, only to not respond again. Additionally, the lack of staff working in their offices during our recruitment timeline prevented our research from being shared by word-of-mouth. If this research had been conducted during a typical year rather than during COVID-19, we would theorize a better response rate.

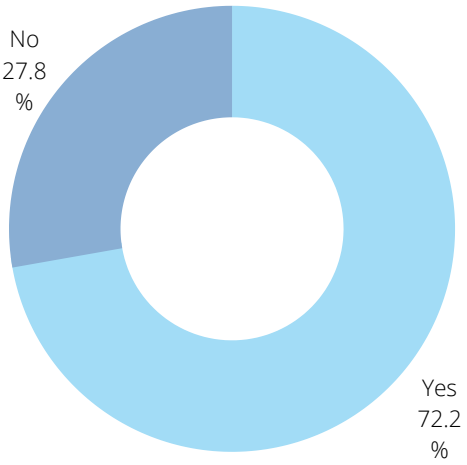
FINDINGS

The survey received 18 responses over a three-month period, with only one response being partially incomplete. The majority of respondents only qualified to fill out the first half, with 61 percent filling out part one and 39 percent filling out both sections.

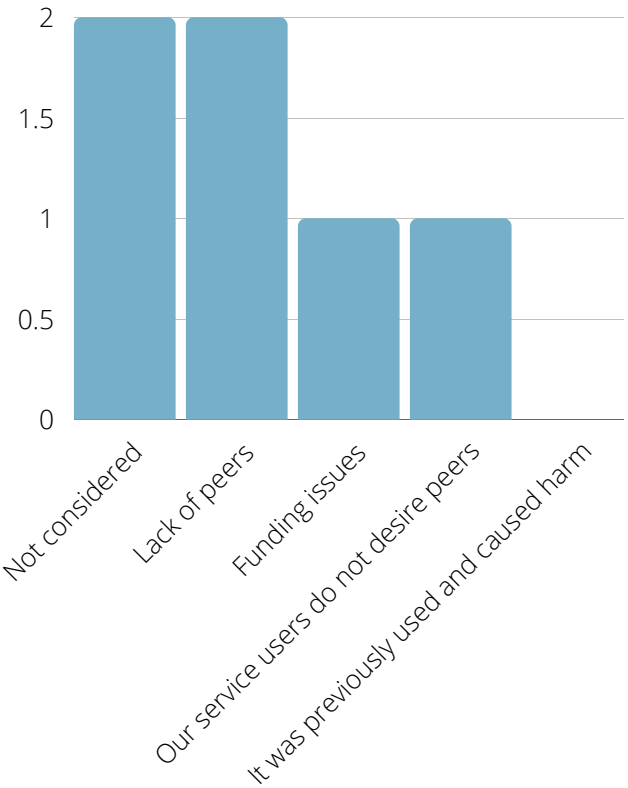
The survey revealed that peer support is utilized in the service provision of 72 percent of agencies. Those that utilized peer support most often attributed their choice to the protective factors peers provided, the connections they fostered with service users, and the hope they instilled.

Those that did not utilize peers in their work most often attributed this choice to a lack of peers willing to provide mentorship in their community or a lack of consideration to employ peers as workers.

DOES YOUR AGENCY INCLUDE A PEER MENTORSHIP COMPONENT (HIRING OF INDIVIDUALS WITH THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CRIMINALIZATION)?



(IF CHECKED NO) PLEASE EXPLAIN WHY YOUR AGENCY DOES NOT PROVIDE PEER MENTORSHIP.



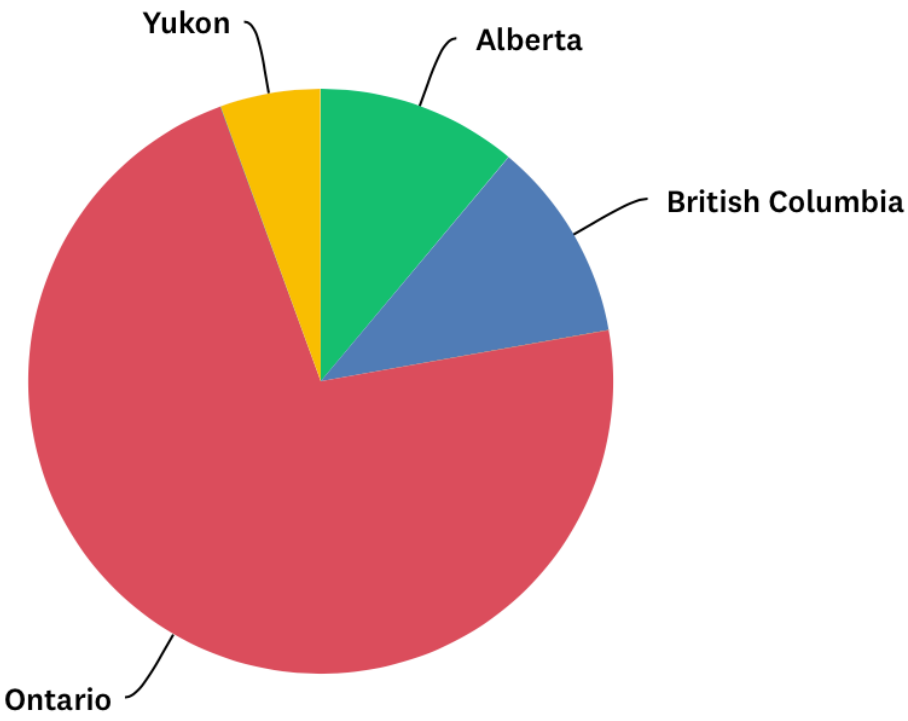
The vast majority of survey responses were from the Ontario region (72 percent). Although we attempted to connect with at least one agency in every province and territory, we only received responses from Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and the Yukon. We hypothesize the over-representation of Ontario responses is due to the sheer amount of Elizabeth Fry Societies there are in Ontario (seven) compared to the other provinces and territories (about one to three), as we reached out to every Elizabeth Fry in Canada.

We hosted a total of five interviews over Zoom. Each woman we interviewed was either currently or had recently been employed in a peer mentorship capacity.

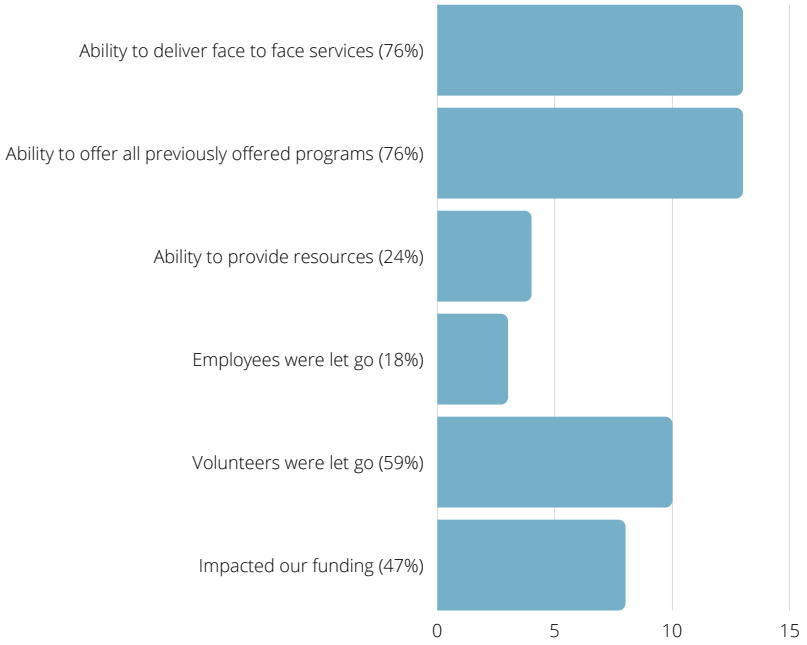
Two of the women we interviewed worked as peer support managers, whereas others provided front-line and outreach support. Although each woman's role was different, all of them spoke to how their lived experience influenced the work they did.

Each woman was given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym or use their first name; for confidentiality reasons we will not be disclosing who chose a pseudonym and who did not. Over a period of three months, we were honoured to have the opportunity to hear the stories of Pam, Marty, Brook, Annette, and Chelsey (note- those that requested the option for a pseudonym have had their names changed)

THE AGENCY YOU WORK FOR IS LOCATED IN?...



COVID-19 IMPACTS



Results from the survey and interviews indicate the COVID-19 pandemic has had various major effects on the delivery of and experience providing peer mentorship services. The graph above represents responses to survey question ten, "COVID-19 has impacted the agency you work for in the following ways... (please select all that apply)". Seven of the 17 respondents (41 percent) also selected "other/elaborate" to explain how the pandemic altered their service delivery, in particular by forcing them to "pivot" how service users are contacted and reducing their ability to provide support. Three participants wrote that although volunteers at their agencies were not let go, their services had to be suspended.

One of the most poignant impacts of the pandemic involved agencies being forced to change their service delivery, as evidenced by 76 percent of survey participants indicating their service delivery and ability to offer all programs was impacted. This includes programs being shut down, reducing hours of operation, mentors working from home, and shifting to virtual service delivery. Working from home and the lack of in-person services resulted in feelings of disconnection for the mentors and great concerns about their service users. In response to a survey question that asked how COVID-19 affects challenges for women experiencing criminalization, a participant wrote:

> "Not being able to meet face to face with women. Women's mental health is a huge struggle [due to] isolating away from loved ones" (Survey Participant 16).

Isolation was compounded and stigma exacerbated,

> "Women have been further stigmatized by COVID-19, they sometimes are treated poorly because they're coming from prison [where there might be COVID cases]. Also women are being segregated when entering correctional centers which is very challenging" (Survey Participant 1).

Another notable impact is the creation of new barriers and existing barriers being heightened. Waitlists grew, options for referrals shrunk, and people's progress was put on hold.

"Things are held up... if you were in the middle of working really hard with housing, that's been put on hold" (Marty).

Service users without access to technology had no way of connecting with their mentors and receiving critical support.

"During COVID-19, the main challenge is balancing health and safety measures with client needs. Most clients do not have access to a phone and with most public places closed, it is difficult to meet clients in spaces that are safe and accessible to them" (Survey Participant 14).

The mentors were unable to keep in touch with their service users and had to endure agonizing periods of unknowing, then found out people they had been supporting died months after the fact. In addition to these challenges, the mentors explained how fear of becoming ill prevented people from attending programs and described navigating risks to their health throughout the pandemic.

Our data also demonstrated the resilience of agencies, mentors, and mentees in response to the pandemic. Pam described continuing to consistently deliver needed services to women reintegrating, despite having to adapt and overcome challenges.

"It's been challenging, but it hasn't really impacted how we work so much. We've worked completely through COVID-19, we've never stopped picking people up. I mean, we had to change things a little bit like the safety, you know, masks, hand sanitizer" (Pam).

Chelsey also spoke about remaining consistent to meet service users' needs and adjusting to challenges such as increased demand, as her agency was one of the few services that remained open for drop-in,

"It was constant, we would get like 40 people, if not more a day. And it just got so hectic" (Chelsey).

Interestingly, Chelsey also explained how the pandemic increased interest in volunteering and the shift to virtual programming created more opportunities for students.

"The students have more of an opportunity in COVID because things are virtual. They've been able to have their own clients, which we've never really been able to do before, to do counselling and group therapy and things with people online. And we've been able to take more students to do more things...Lots of people are looking to volunteer, they want to get out of the house, they want to do something, they lost their jobs or [got] laid off, so a lot of people are looking for something" (Chelsey).

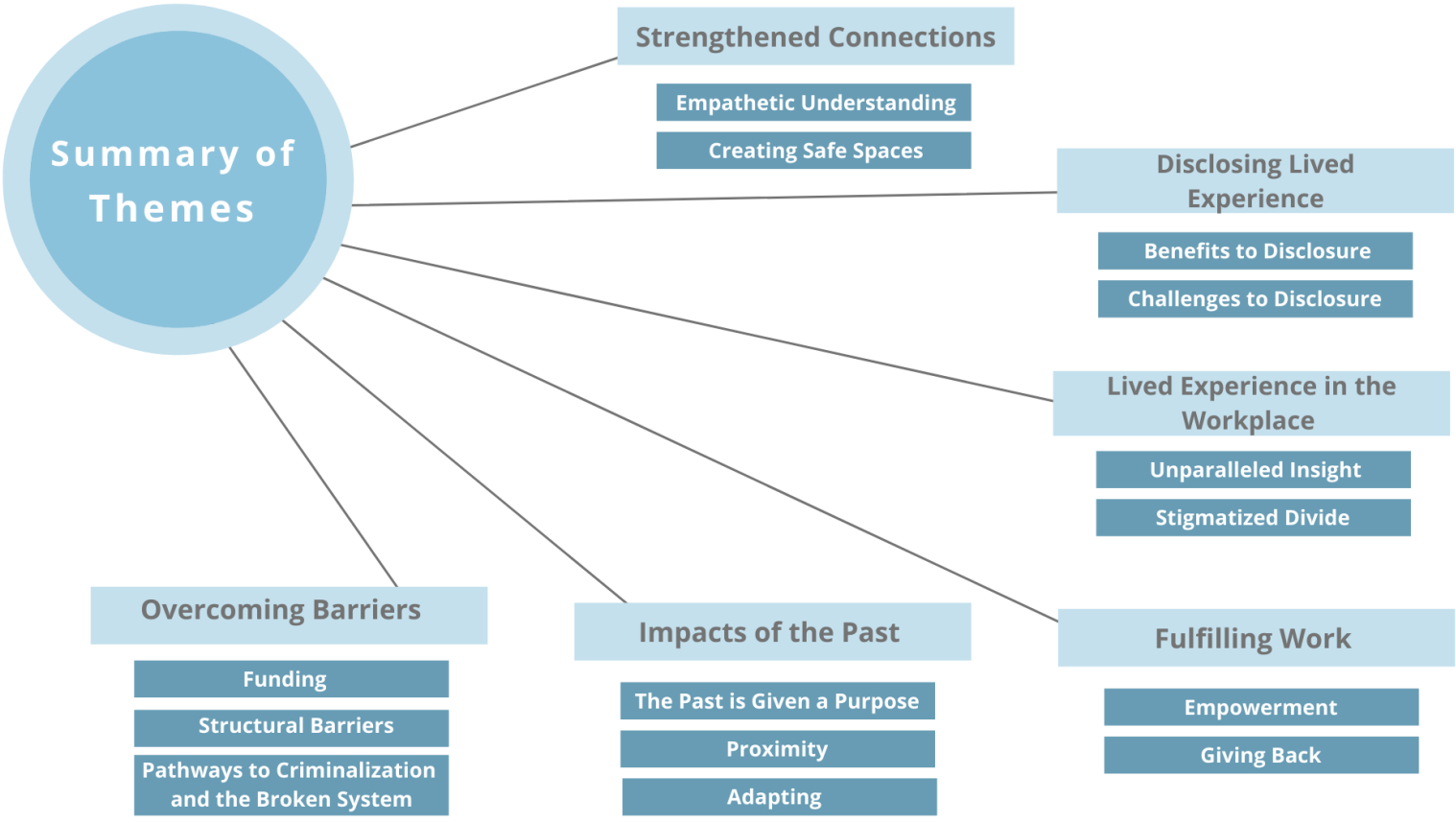
DISCUSSION

Our thematic analysis resulted in six major themes: strengthened connections, disclosing their lived experience, lived experience in the workplace, fulfilling work, impacts of the past, and overcoming barriers, which we will expand on below.

Throughout our data analysis, we saw the concept of stigma emerge as a persisting factor across many facets of peer mentorship; such as how it shows up in professional spaces to create divides, how it affects women's navigation of disclosing their experiences, as well as it being exacerbated due to COVID-19. While we refer to this phenomenon as stigma (as coined by Goffman in 1963) (*3*), it was not always defined as such by the participants who spoke to their experiences contending with judgement, resentment, and professionalism. The mentors' experiences with stigma is a critical consideration that has wide effects on the delivery of peer support services. Therefore, rather than discussing stigma as its own theme, which we initially considered, it has been integrated throughout the themes and explained as relevant, including in the COVID-19 findings section above.

The next section details the six major themes, including 14 sub-themes intended to uncover the nuances of utilizing lived experience in peer support services. The themes flow from the beneficial, positive aspects of lived experience in peer mentorship towards the tensions and challenges inherent in the work. The discussion leads into important implications to consider to improve how lived experience is incorporated and valued in peer mentorship, social work practice, and the helping professions in general.

3. Goffman (1963) defined stigma as categorizing people based upon assigned social attributes that will inform how others interpret and treat the person. Stigmatized individuals are marked as different and inferior.


Summary of Themes
Strengthened Connections
Empathetic Understanding
Creating Safe Spaces
Disclosing Lived Experience
Benefits to Disclosure
Challenges to Disclosure
Lived Experience in the Workplace
Unparalleled Insight
Stigmatized Divide
Fulfilling Work
Empowerment
Giving Back
Impacts of the Past
The Past is Given a Purpose
Proximity
Adapting
Overcoming Barriers
Funding
Structural Barriers
Pathways to Criminalization and the Broken System

STRENGTHENED CONNECTIONS

"I am able to sympathize and empathize with the women I serve. I truly understand what they may be experiencing and feeling. I am able to navigate a very broken system because I had to navigate myself through a very frustrating process" (Survey Participant 16).

Empathetic Understanding

One of the most important themes that emerged from our data is the incomparable connections mentors can form with their mentees based on empathetic understanding. Having shared or similar lived experience creates a unique opportunity for mentors and mentees to experience deep empathetic connections with one another. Pam shared how her experience helps her to have empathy and connect with service users.

"I've been through it all, so I can really relate to what people are going through, [my lived experience] helps me have so much more empathy and understanding as to what their real struggle really is, it's kind of something you can't really learn from a book. It's just that whole being able to connect with that person on a different level than say, anyone [without lived experience], than most people could" (Pam).

These types of connections strengthen the helping relationship and increase engagement as connecting based on shared experiences largely counters the judgments typically experienced when accessing service. Mentors have rare and valuable understandings of their mentees experiences and underlying needs; Annette explained how she understood the need to prove herself to her mentees by overcoming mistrust:

"So, when I go to help a client, I always remember that they're not trusting me, right? So, I don't go running into a client's house and go, "Okay, well, we're gonna do this, and we're gonna do this." I go to the client's house first and get to know them. And more importantly, get them to know me. Because it's not a matter of me knowing them, because I know them, I know, they're my client, I know I have to help them. It's a matter of them getting to trust me enough so that they'll let me help them. And I think through my lived experience, that's really where I'm aware of" (Annette).

*Participants either chose to use their first name or picked a pseudonym.

A helping professional without lived experience may not have such a deep, personal understanding of the need to overcome mistrust and could be more likely to neglect this during the engagement process. As explained by a survey participant, having peer mentors with lived experience creates opportunities to receive a higher quality of support and feel deeply understood,

> "Peers provide a level of support that cannot be provided by someone who has not lived the same life or been through the same experiences as our service users" (Survey Participant 10).

The empathetic connections we heard about are not solely based on shared experiences. Chelsey thinks it's important to understand that peer support exists in different forms. While relating to similar experiences is an incredibly valuable way to connect, mentors can draw on different experiences that elicit similar emotions to experience empathetic connections. Connections also occur between professionals with lived experience who can relate to the unique experience of being a provider with experience and navigating stigma and professionalism. As explained above, COVID-19 has reduced the mentors' ability to experience these meaningful connections with colleagues and service users.

Although mentors hold an inherent power differential given their role as a service provider, our participants illuminated how their lived experience helps mitigate this as they can personally relate to the position their service users are in. Many participants spoke of feeling no different from their service users.

> **"We are the same people, just at different points in our lives,** and I find that people really connect to it that way" (Chelsey).

This notion can provide important inspiration for women living through criminalization to see hope for a different future. While the mentors identified *feeling* no different, Marty made an important observation in the material differences between her and the people she supports.

> "I'm no different than them. It's just that I now have a roof over my head. And that makes a big difference" (Marty).

The impact of having access to the necessities of life will be explored further under "overcoming barriers." Connecting based on empathetic understanding facilitates meeting service users where they are at, which leads to strengthened helping relationships and safe spaces for women to heal.

Creating Safe Spaces

Due to their empathy and increased insights into the needs of service users, peers can create safe spaces for both service users and colleagues. Peer support often differs from traditional forms of care such as counselling. Peer support is often more open-ended and less goal-orientated than traditional helping services. Peers focus on the connection with service users and build upon their similar experiences to deliver client-driven support. Another strength of peer support is that it is not abstinence-based, meaning that service users can still access support even when they are using substances. Many peer support programs also do not run on an agenda or time limit; it is a flexible program to meet the needs of each unique service user. Often, service users feel safer discussing their stories with peers as the power difference between worker and service user is diminished.

This type of support is crucial to employ in conjunction with more traditional forms of care, as different styles of support work for different individuals. A survey response spoke to the importance of incorporating peer programs into service delivery because...

> "they meet clients where they are at and are able to connect with them at a level that a professional is unable to. Some individuals do not connect or benefit as much from professional counselling; peer support is able to fill that gap." (Survey Participant 14).

Incorporating both peer support programs and professional counselling in service delivery is key, as they both provide different but equally valuable support. One interview participant, Chelsey, spoke to this balance when asked if she thought formal counselling or peer support was more effective,

> "... being able to relate that way [peer to peer] is really important. I don't want to say it's more effective or less effective, because it depends on the person. But I think having both options are really important, because sometimes you need the more structured and sometimes you just need someone to be like "yeah, man, I get it, I've been there, I understand" (Chelsey).

Peers offer support from a person who has "lived the life" (Chelsey). This shared commonality of experience helps to foster trust, build rapport, and create a safe space where service users feel they will not be judged for their past or present.

DISCLOSING THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCE

Benefits to Disclosure

Disclosing lived experience to service users or colleagues can be an intimidating experience. In their survey and interview responses, many women spoke about the complexity of navigating disclosures and the benefits and challenges associated with it. The majority of women spoke of being incredibly open and transparent in their disclosures to both service users and colleagues, stating various reasons why transparency of their past was vital to the work they do as peers.

Peers utilized disclosures in various ways to connect with both the individuals they serve as well as the people they work with. One peer spoke about how she felt proud to share her story marked by strength, survival, and resilience;

> "it doesn't bother me to let people know where I've been. Actually, I'm quite proud that I was able to dig myself out… I'm not embarrassed to say that, I survived it" (Annette).

Others disclosed their experiences to provide hope, show authenticity, and build rapport with service users and co-workers. Through transparency regarding their past, peers created safe spaces for service users to reciprocate that transparency and foster trust.

The safe spaces that peers foster do not apply only to service users; one interviewee discussed how peers allow other staff members to feel safe opening up about their lived experience as well.
One participant spoke to the importance of disclosing as a tool to normalize and challenge the stigma associated with criminalization,

> "I use my lived experience as often as I can, especially in managerial/professional spaces, as a way to fight stigma and normalize peers" (Survey Participant 11).

Challenges to Disclosure

However, although many peers spoke of the benefits of disclosing, a handful also discussed the tensions involved in discussing their past with both colleagues and service users. Due to the stigma of criminalization, peers shared that they sometimes felt hesitant to share their stories, particularly with other colleagues or community partners, because they were uncertain of their reactions.

One survey participant wrote,

"using your lived experience in such a space can be difficult - you have to know what to say and when to say it, and be prepared to experience the consequences of the stigma and assumptions that come with disclosing lived experience" (Survey Participant 11).

Because of this uncertainty, many peers engage in a tense balancing act of knowing when to and when not to share their story. Peers also must be skilled at knowing how much or how little to share at any given moment in time. This balance can be challenging to maintain, as one peer says,

"It's a really delicate balance... you can't tell everyone everything and you can't tell everyone nothing. Because even though you are a peer, you're also in the professional role as someone's worker" (Chelsey).

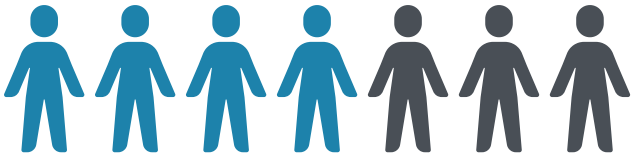
Chelsey went on to describe the complex relationship between being a peer and a professional,

"It's almost like there's this belief that you can't be a professional and have lived experience at the same time. You're either one or the other, you drop the lived experience to be the professional or you drop professionalism to talk about your lived experience" (Chelsey).

Peers also occasionally struggled to balance between empathizing with a service user by sharing parts of their story and overtaking a client's story by disclosing their own experiences. To mitigate this, one peer discussed the importance of creating and enforcing boundaries regarding disclosures.

DO YOU DISCLOSE YOUR LIVED EXPERIENCE TO THE WOMEN YOU SERVE AND/OR YOUR COLLEAGUES?

(Results from the survey)



4 out of 7 respondents disclose to both

2 out of 7 respondents disclose to service users but not co-workers

1 out of 7 respondents prefer not to answer

0 out of 7 respondents disclose to neither or to only their co-workers

LIVED EXPERIENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

> "I think the both of them [lived experience and training] work together awesomely, because I wouldn't have known from my lived experience how to administer Naloxone, how to de-escalate a violent situation, and keeping my boundaries...I don't think one is better than the other...I needed both of those to do what I'm doing in a decent and proper way" (Marty).

Unparalleled Insight

The insight created through mentors' lived experience is an invaluable asset to the delivery of peer support services. Lived experience helps to inform programs to be the most relevant and beneficial for service users; one of the survey participants wrote about the value of incorporating lived experience into service provision.

> "It is an opportunity to improve our services by listening to our peer support team who can provide insight into how our services should be delivered in order to be most effective to those we serve" (Survey Participant 10).

Having been through the other side of services, mentors are skilled in navigating systems and find it easy to locate necessary resources as not long ago, they were accessing the same resources and understand what is most helpful. The mentors' knowledge from their lived experience also helps counter the common top-down approach to programs and services by centring truly relevant needs and experiences on the front lines. Some mentors we spoke to work in management roles and oversee programming with little of their role involving front line work. No matter how far removed mentors become from the front lines, their lived experiences will always maintain their feelings of connection and insightful understanding of front line work and service users' experiences.

Lived experience helps mentors understand the needs of their service users and creates a unique viewpoint that allows them to think creatively when it comes to their helping relationships. We heard that past experiences of having to think quickly to survive make mentors apt at problem-solving, which is a great asset in their mentoring. As Annette explained, her lived experience gives her insight into service users' underlying emotional needs that she might not otherwise understand.

"It [lived experience] gives me different points of view that I feel you wouldn't be able to get from a book...they're lacking something in them and the only reason I know that is because of my lived experience. I did lots of cocaine throughout my years- all my youth, because I was lacking love. And it wasn't because nobody loved me, it was because I didn't love myself. So therefore, I didn't let anybody love me. So that's how I know when I go in and deal with a client, that there's something emotional going on, and that if you deal with the emotional issue first, then everything falls into place. But if you don't deal with the emotional, nothing works, it'll all just keep lapsing over and over and over again...So that's why I feel that I'm really able to be a mentor to help people because even if they don't know what's hurting them, I know, because I've been there. I know what's hurting them" (Annette).

While all the mentors believe their lived experience is invaluable for their roles, some also spoke about how their formal training and education complement their lived experience. Some of our participants have social work education; others described the training they completed in preparation for their mentoring roles, such as professional communication, de-escalation, overdose prevention, anti-racism, and boundaries. The combination of education and experience gives mentors practical knowledge and skills and an unparalleled insight that make them uniquely skilled helpers. The insight from their experience adds additional expertise that is extraordinarily valuable and can not be learned from a book.

"A textbook can't teach you that stuff. It has to be peer support people who have lived it, to do it right, and have the true empathy, desire, drive, and passion" (Marty).

Stigmatized Divide

However, although peers' lived experiences cause them to have unparalleled insight and the ability to form deeper connections, having lived experience at work is often not seen as a positive trait. Many people in both the survey and the interview spoke to what we have named "the stigmatized divide," which is the divide in the workplace between individuals labelled as "peers" and those deemed as "professionals".

Navigating stigma in the workplace can be a challenging task; often, peers find themselves in the position of having to "prove" their skills or value. Pam discussed this barrier in detail,

> "the biggest challenge was early on, we weren't really accepted by the correctional system, because we had the lived experience. I don't know- they didn't take us seriously or something. But as time has gone by, they've seen that we always show up, and we're always there to support people, and we get lots of referrals now, but that was a challenge early on, when we first started the project" (Pam).

Peer support is often not taken as seriously as other more traditional forms of care such as counselling; some peers discussed the challenge of proving that the work they do as peers was just as valuable and impactful as the work of social workers and other formally trained staff. Other times, a service would start from the bottom-up with peers leading the way to create change, only for peers to be pushed aside in favour of "professionals."

Peers also sometimes felt resentment from colleagues over their experiences,

> "I find that a lot of people that have had school training, that have spent all that money and years do become- I wouldn't say angry, but somewhat more judgmental towards me than others because, I lived it right. I experienced it. And I don't have a book or a degree...I find there's a difference between people in the hierarchy of life" (Annette).

Finally, peers experienced this stigmatized divide in the unequal treatment they received at work. Brook spoke in detail about the lack of equal treatment between peers and other staff at her agency,

> "we aren't getting the same amount, we aren't getting the same treatment, as a person coming out of school does- I think that's twice the pay. [They] get all the benefits, [they get] days off, sick days, we don't get any of those" (Brook).

This unequal treatment displays the devaluation of peers' labour and skills. The unparalleled insight peers bring into the workplace is not often regarded as valuable enough to be compensated fairly for it. Additionally, many individuals with a criminal record struggle to gain employment, so some peers feel as though they have no choice but to accept the unfair treatment in the workplace due to a lack of options.

FULFILLING WORK

"Is anything else you would like to share that you feel is important for people to understand about being a peer mentor?"

"I find that it's fulfilling. People need to know that it's emotionally fulfilling to be a mentor for somebody and to be able to know that you're actually making a difference and helping" (Annette).

Empowerment

Through the survey responses and interviews, we discovered that peers felt that providing support and mentorship is often more empowering on them than even on the mentee.

Peers appreciated feeling valued by their agency and needed by their service users. They enjoyed working in a career they were passionate about and one that was rewarding and meaningful to them. By providing one-to-one support, distributing resources, and helping service users with system navigation, peers felt they were creating change and reframing their lived experience to be viewed as an asset rather than a challenge.

Some peers felt that offering mentoring services helped increase their sense of self-worth, even if they originally experienced self-doubt. Pam spoke about her experiences when she first began peer mentoring,

> "I had someone reach out to me and asked me if I might be interested, and I really didn't have the confidence. At first, I was very nervous, and didn't know if I had anything to offer. But then after my first time mentoring someone, it was so empowering. I think I got more out of it than the person actually did. You know, it was so good for me. It just felt like a right fit for me. So, from then on, I always just stuck with it. But I've never had any doubt about it being my passion and wanting to give back and support other people going through what I went through" (Pam).

Other peers spoke of how offering mentoring and experiencing the gratitude from service users helped them feel that they were growing as a person,

> "they [service users] don't even have to say thank you, just their reaction in their faces. That's why I do it, because it gives me back the pleasure that I never [had]. That I want and that I need to make myself feel like I'm actually growing" (Annette).

Finally, peer mentorship was also an empowering experience because it helped peers find their voice. Becoming a peer mentor gave some peers the confidence to speak up and redefine who they are. Marty spoke quite a bit to this process,

> "now I have a mind of my own and I stick up for issues that I believe in. I don't just follow in the path of the next person in front of me. I have thoughts in my brain, and I express them. I'm not aggressive about it. But I will speak- I will speak my mind and what I believe in" (Marty).

Giving Back

The desire to "give back" emerged as a primary motivation for the mentors to provide peer support. Many of the mentors spoke about the lack of support that existed for them during the times they contended with challenges associated with criminalization and how they don't want others to face the same barriers.

> "There was nothing for us, there was no support for my daughter, I lost custody... I had no say in anything, and this would not happen today. So you know, having to fight through that by myself. I know how people really feel alone" (Brook).

On the other hand, we also heard mentors express wanting to give back the support they once benefitted from.

> "I always wanted to give back to my community by providing support to women that I received many years ago" (Survey Participant 16).

Feeling as though they are "giving back" plays a significant role in the empowering component of peer mentorship described above. A central aspect of "giving back" involves creating new opportunities for people in similar circumstances as the mentors once were. Annette spoke extensively of this, explaining the necessity of offering positive options to create alternative pathways other than the common pathway to substance use and criminalization she sees in her community.

The mentors described being committed to providing needed support and services within their communities and enjoyed offering hope and inspiring others through their personal experiences surviving criminalization. It became clear that many mentors we interviewed are extremely humble and experience their work as gratifying. In response to our expression that she makes an incredible difference in her role, Brook said:

> "I don't know if I'm making a difference, but if it's one person, then that's great, that's all I care about" (Brook).

Marty also spoke to the inherently rewarding component of her job:

> "[her job] makes me feel good...I'll never be a millionaire, I'll never have loads of money...But it's rewarding in another way, it makes me feel good as a human being" (Marty).

IMPACTS OF THE PAST

The Past is Given a Purpose

Through utilizing their lived experience to help support service users, peers re-story their past and give it purpose. A few women discussed the desire to transform their negative past experiences to help positively impact others and make a difference in their lives. Chelsey spoke about this feeling,

> "I don't want to waste this time, these years that I feel like I've wasted doing drugs, treating people like crap, stealing, going to jail, and all that crap, I don't want to waste that, and it needs to be for something" (Chelsey).

Annette spoke about a similar desire,

> "now I want to do something good, to take all that negative that I was impacted in and probably impacted a few people along my way too, that I want to change it and make it better" (Annette).

Another peer spoke about how she would not be doing the work she is today if it was not for her past,

> "I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now if I hadn't gone through what I went through, absolutely not" (Marty).

Others use their lived experience as a tool to spread awareness, as one survey participant wrote,

> "I use my past as a method of teaching" (Survey Participant 8).

In this way, the past is re-storied and reframed to present lived experience positively, something that can be a strength, rather than a deficit.

Proximity

Past experiences with criminalization can create challenges in providing peer support related to working in close proximity to people and situations reminiscent of the mentors' pasts.

One of these challenges is working around triggers and temptations; Marty spoke about her experience working on the front lines with people using substances.

> "I come across people who are using, it's in my face, it's a little bit of a struggle, it's a little bit of a temptation" (Marty).

In addition to maneuvering working very close to substance use as individuals who have overcome their own problematic substance use, mentors identify feeling triggered by their work.

> "Sometimes a woman's story can be triggering. When I get home, I have to do my own work with why, and what was triggering" (Survey Participant 16).

Mentors can find retelling their story again and again to be difficult and triggering; feelings they must navigate and work through in order to stay well in their work. Although they mostly describe the benefits of sharing their story, it can also impact them negatively, especially if they don't feel adequately supported by their agency with supervision and time for wellness or feel their boundaries are poor.

Another layer of the challenges working in close proximity is centred around literally working in close physical proximity to their past. This occurs more often in smaller communities where mentors run into their service users at programs such as AA and when people they had connections with in the past while experiencing criminalization become their clients. A survey participant wrote about this in response to a question that asked about the benefits and challenges of peer mentorship:

> "connections to outside communities, i.e. seeing clients at AA meetings, clients are past friends/dealers, etc." (Survey Participant 11).

Another challenge to overcome involves learning how to navigate one's feelings and reactions to working with people involved in certain violent acts and other criminalized activities. An interviewee explained how she found it difficult to work with people who have perpetrated sexual violence when she first became a peer mentor but has grown as a person and overcome her initial judgements of people based on their pasts. The mentors described contending with these challenges that stem from working in close proximity and how they have been able to navigate the challenges and adapt to their roles.

Adapting

Mentors experience a learning curve while adjusting to their new roles. As explained in depth under "empowerment," a large part of this journey involves gaining confidence and overcoming initial self-doubt experienced when first entering a mentoring role. Another piece is adjusting to a thoroughly different lifestyle; Annette spoke in detail about how she had to adapt, especially related to scheduling time commitments and staying in one place when her past consisted of moving around very often:

> "Before [becoming a peer mentor], time didn't have any place in my life... So, for me to be able to schedule my time was a really big problem. I was able to schedule stuff, but to be able to keep the schedule was a whole 'nother thing. But I found that after probably about a year of pushing myself to go to meetings and pushing myself to make my commitments that it just started getting easier" (Annette).

> "I've never really had a stable place to call my own...because of my being uprooted so often as a youth...I was unable to stay in a residence for longer than two months at a time. So, it's hard to ground myself to be able to stay, but I have" (Annette).

Related to overcoming the proximity challenges discussed above, mentors employed a strategy of dismissing friendships and severing connections to avoid substance use temptations and to distance themselves from their pasts as part of adjusting to their new lives. This can cause isolation, which compounds the common experience of lacking support that women experiencing criminalization already face. In response to a survey question asking about the biggest challenges for women living with criminalization, a participant wrote:

> "Reconnecting to friends and family (rebuilding broken connections can bring up a lot of hurt and struggles)" (Survey Participant 16).

Several interview participants also told us their relationships with their families are fractured. Prior to transitioning to a mentoring role, their friends "on the street" who they had to "dismiss" acted as their sole network of support. Adapting to a new life as a mentor or adapting to the community post-imprisonment is often a distressing experience that forces women to lose support from the limited support base they have to begin with.

Transitioning to a mentoring role may not be a quick or easy adjustment, but mentors described pushing themselves for change as they desired more in life and feeling proud of their ability to adapt to their new roles. Some mentors expressed vast gratitude for their new life and job opportunity. For example, Marty said:

> "I got housing and I'm really lucky for it. I'm very grateful...I ended up with a criminal record. It's very hard to get a job now. But peer mentors have lived experience and it's wonderful. We finally have jobs that we can go get and there's lots of them and it's awesome...So, it [peer mentorship] is awesome. I'm really pleased that this has come about and that they want people with lived experience" (Marty).

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Funding

The devaluation of peer work extends beyond the stigmatized divide in the workplace. Peer programs are often underfunded compared to more traditional approaches to support. Due to stigma, many people do not want to fund or support peer-led services. This struggle came up many times in the survey. One respondent wrote,

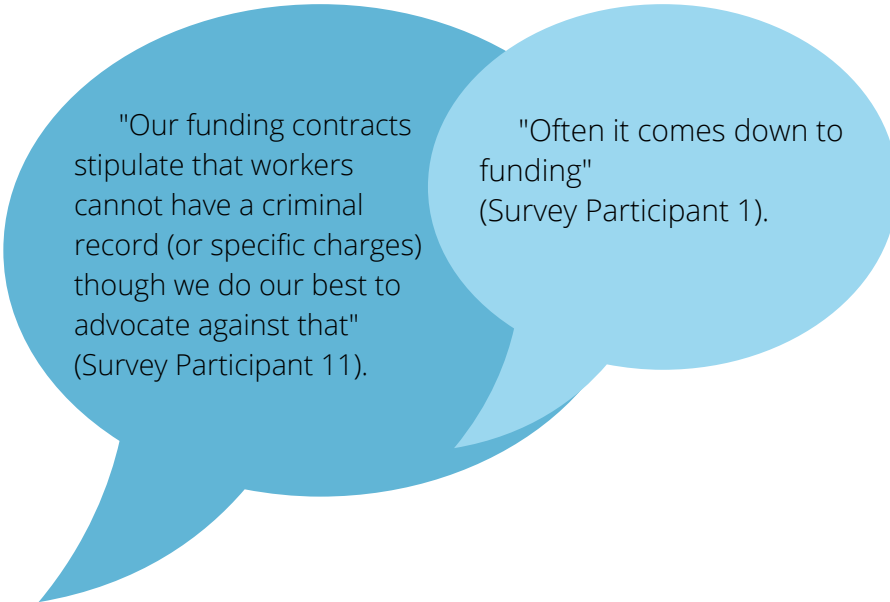
> "there is not a lot of government support and some donors do not want to associate [with peer support programs]" (Survey Participant 4).

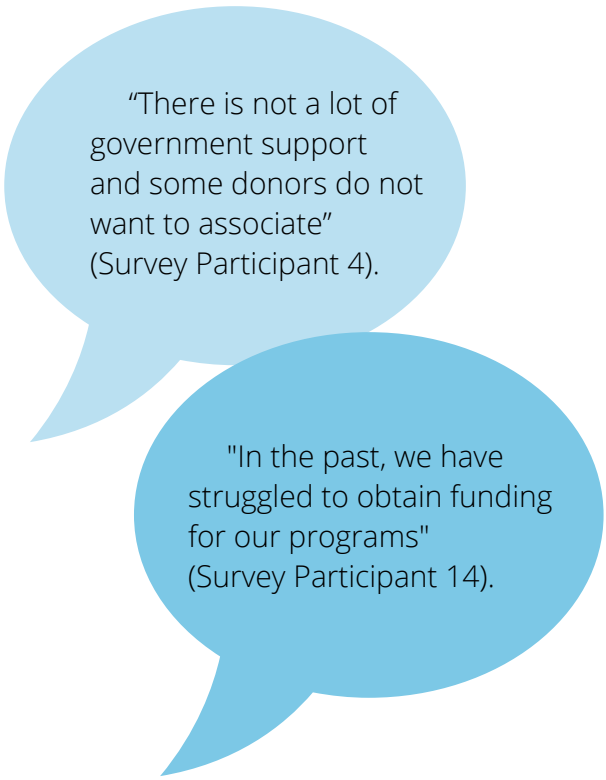
Funding was a common barrier discussed through both the survey and the interview. Many peers spoke of the challenge to acquire and maintain funding for their programs. In other cases, funding is provided, but with a caveat. As a peer support manager, Chelsey discussed the ridiculous stipulations funding contracts would have for hiring peers,

> "they can't have certain charges; they can't have been on probation in a certain time period. And I'm like, "but you want a peer worker, right? Like you want a peer worker, but you don't actually want a peer. That's the thing" (Chelsey).

These stipulations further divide people with lived experience into "desirable" peers and "undesirable" peers. Funding stipulations and mandates also affect service accessibility; some programs require service users to fit certain criteria such as identifying as having problematic substance use or a mental health condition. Some peers spoke to overcoming this barrier by "finagling," in which mentors use creativity to ensure everyone with a need receives support, regardless whether they fit the restrictive criteria.

As discussed in the stigmatized divide section, peers are often underpaid and overworked. This can lead to burnout, vicarious trauma, and mental health issues. Some women desire to pursue education to help them in their work as peers and earn a higher paycheque. However, peers often face barriers to accessing post-secondary education. Not only is the expense a barrier, but disclosing their past and facing judgement is a fear.





Structural Barriers

Service accessibility was identified as a major barrier; participants explained how limiting criteria and timing can prevent people from accessing needed services. Programs tend to be structured with skeleton staffing without the benefit of adjunct services. Further, peer mentorship services are often in high demand, services such as shelters fill up, and due to other barriers discussed above (such as funding stipulations with exclusionary criteria), there aren't enough mentors to provide support. The high demand and lack of mentors lead to mentors being overworked without enough time to engage in self-care practices to promote their wellness.

This can intensify the challenges of working in close proximity, such as feeling triggered by repeatedly discussing their own experiences and recovery. The funding inadequacies previously discussed play a large role in forcing mentors to be overworked and not receive the necessary supervision and support to take care of their needs while supporting others. As explained in the findings section, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these barriers by reducing and altering services, which caused services that remained open to be extremely busy and also led to isolation, disconnection, and stalled progress.

Criminal records and the practice of requiring background checks for employment in the helping professions is an immense structural barrier that perpetuates cycles of incarceration and exacerbates people's vulnerability to exploitation. Some mentors expressed deep gratitude for their jobs, which emerged from their understanding of being viewed as traditionally unemployable due to their criminal records. Participants explained that without the opportunity to work as a peer mentor where their lived experience is valued, they feared police checks would block their chance ever to get a job. One participant said that before she received a pardon, she felt her options were extremely limited, and she would never be hired.

Stigma was named as one of the most impactful barriers by many survey participants. We heard about how stigma shows up in professional spaces to create challenges in working with other professionals and agencies, especially when working with community contacts such as local prisons, police, lawyers, and other court members who may not take peers seriously. This stigmatized divide created between professionals with and without lived experience influences peers' ability to support their service users across many facets. For example, some agencies will refuse advocacy from a peer, resulting in a service user being denied access to service. Pam explained how stigma impedes health care by causing people seeking help to fear judgement from medical professionals and other service providers:

> "There's so much stigma around all of it, people are already pre-judged by medical professionals, by healthcare, by a variety of different services. And it's unfortunate, it's really hard for people to trust and be open to go into something simple like going to the doctor or going to the emergency or just getting some help. They've been treated poorly, labeled as drug-seeking all the time...So it's a real barrier for people" (Pam).

Stigma has sweeping effects on the lives of mentors, mentees, and service delivery; from the micro-level with interpersonal interactions between professionals to funding from donors, stigma insidiously invades and negatively influences many aspects of peer mentorship services. The general lack of understanding and stigma surrounding criminalization can be mitigated by workers with lived experience who have unique perspectives, valuable insight into experiences, and offer safe spaces free of judgement.

Pathways to Criminalization and the Broken System

The stories our participants shared with us illuminated their pathways to criminalization were rooted in challenges related to societal failings. All of the interview participants spoke about substance use in relation to criminalization, and the majority described their personal experiences with substance use and homelessness. With the insight of their personal experiences, the mentors explained how trauma often leads to people becoming criminalized by our broken system, which criminalizes mental illness and substance use, issues that Marty says are "on the rise."

The mentors observed a pattern of how "addictions" are a tool for people to soothe their pain and explained the need to address underlying human needs to disrupt cycles of addiction.They expressed deep frustration with how the system treats people in need of support and explained how crucial it is to address people's underlying trauma and get them housed (*4*). A safe home is a precursor to health and wellbeing, and our participants shared how housing was the first step for them to escape the cycle of criminalization.

Further, Canada has a long-standing history of perpetrating genocidal violence against Indigenous people (*5*). The ongoing impacts of colonial violence are often obscured in the dominant narrative. Annette spoke to the impacts she continues to see in her community, specifically describing the practice of sending youth out of the community for school, which is reminiscent of the residential school system, and she reiterated the importance of providing peer support.

> "They're just basically being sent to town. It reminds me of the residential school thing still going, but it's our time, right? But it's the older kids going off and coming back as adults. So, I'm finding that if they at least had the mentoring, they would be able to make better choices for themselves...I can't see any other way than starting a mentoring program for the youth to be able to give them a fresh start, an opportunity to make their own choice. Because I was kind of thrown into it, it was like "okay, here you go, off you go. We're not going to worry about you, we'll see you at Christmas." And that's the way it was and it's still that way now. So, I'm finding it really barbaric, it's just still this kind of genocide that communities are going through" (Annette).

Annette works to overcome these ongoing impacts of colonialism through her mentoring groups, which create spaces for women and youth to belong to supportive groups and connect to the positive aspects of life. She also revealed a need for holistic healing in her community as she recognizes a lack of services for men, which creates only "one-sided healing."

4. For more information on Housing First, please see:
Gaetz, S., Scott, F., & Gulliver, T. (2013). *Housing first in Canada: Supporting communities to end homelessness.* Canada Homelessness Research Network. https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/29317
5. For more information on colonial violence and reconciliation, please see:
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future.* http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/res-Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Calls to Action.* http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

It is clear Canada must take action to reconcile past harms and stop perpetuating colonial violence. The way Canada deals with social issues such as economic marginalization, homelessness, mental illness, and substance use is also long overdue for a transformation. Our participants urge for better public education on the impacts of trauma that lead people to substance use and criminalization (*6*). With the wisdom from her personal experiences with homelessness and substance use, Marty has a different vision for our country:

> "I don't think addiction should be criminalized. There are so many factors why people have gone that route...Nobody is perfect, we've all got an issue, whether a big one or small one, but mental health issues are on the rise. And unfortunately, a lot of people get arrested for their dealings with police when they're under mental health, the police don't know how to respond, they need more education in that area...Now I don't think that people should be arrested because of their drug addiction, it's a form of mental illness...There's a reason why and a lot of these doctors put them in this situation with the opiates, put them on serious heavy drugs, and then cut them off. So, what do they do? They have to go to the street and get it. You know it happens to the older and the young and the teenagers, everybody's into this fentanyl stuff, and it's really dangerous. I think we need to do something more, figure something out...the mental health issues and the drug addictions and homelessness are high priority needs to be addressed. And the homelessness is being addressed and that's wonderful. Now what can we do for mental health? I don't think it should be punished and criminalized" (Marty).

Though our participants were let down by our social service sector, policing, and the health care system, they expressed hope for a better future. A future that entails destigmatizing mental health and substance use and reimagining our responses to social issues to provide holistic support that will prevent others from living through criminalization.

6. For more information on the pathways to women's criminalization and cycles of social control, please see: Maidment, M. R. (2005). '*Doing time on the outside': transcarceration and the social control of criminalized women in the community* (Doctoral dissertation, Carleton University). https://curve.carleton.ca/system/files/etd/a8deec9e-6780-4ae5-9911-9a8dc109a2fa/etd_pdf/c9c98d4730c89e8e648c6653b91f3211/maidment-doingtimeontheoutsidetranscarcerationandthe.pdf

IMPLICATIONS

Through the survey and interviews, it became clear that peer support programs can be life-changing for both mentees and mentors. Agencies that employ peers often view them as an integral aspect of their service provision, and the women working as peers strongly believe in the work they do. Peer support is an empowering process that helps individuals to heal from their past and re-story their life. We strongly believe that peer to peer support is a key part to any agency that works with people currently re-integrating after incarceration. Although this type of support is crucial, we believe it is currently not supported and recognized as such in most agencies and in academia. Stigma and structural barriers impede the potential of peer support to radically transform services for women experiencing criminalization.

We have created a list of seven implications that we hope helps spark change within the social work field to address structural barriers and recognize and appreciate peers for the value they bring into our practice. Our implications are outlined above.

Funding

Criminal Records and Background Checks

Equal Compensation and Appreciation

Social Work's Responsibility

Integrating Expertise

Opportunities to Give Back

Transformative Change

FUNDING

Our research makes a case for why and how peer mentorship and peer support programs are valuable. However, these programs are not able to operate without funding. Many participants in both the survey and the interview spoke to the challenge of acquiring and maintaining funding.

Due to stigma, many donors and funders do not want to support the work that peers do. However, peer-to-peer support is essential and the limited funding available results in peers being overworked and underpaid. These programs need to be funded, without stipulations, in order to best support both the service users and the peers themselves.

CRIMINAL RECORDS AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

The practice of attaching criminal records to people and completing background checks as a prerequisite for employment delegitimizes criminalization by rendering the context surrounding one's "crime" as irrelevant. The results of our study demonstrate criminal records can perpetuate cycles of incarceration and homelessness; many participants could not access meaningful employment and move forward in life before their peer mentorship roles. Those who have been criminalized by an unjust system should not be obstructed from moving forwards and permanently stigmatized with a criminal record.

While many mentors in our study were grateful for the opportunity for meaningful work through peer support, they should have more options for employment outside the realm of criminalization. When people have little to no other options for meaningful employment outside of peer mentorship, they are in a vulnerable position where they can be easily exploited by agencies who recognize their lack of alternatives. Criminal records and background checks create conditions for mentors to be devalued and unequally compensated. Compared to men, women are particularly disadvantaged by criminal records in terms of acquiring employment, accessing services and housing, and parenting (*7*). Canada must revise criminal records and background checks to counter the disproportionate, exclusionary effects they inflict on women who have survived criminalization.

EQUAL COMPENSATION AND APPRECIATION

Through the six main themes and various subthemes, it became clear that peers are often not equally valued or compensated in the workplace. The expertise and insight that peers bring to their role are incomparable and crucial to an ethical practice. Peers offer a different but equally valuable approach to support, but because peer support differs from traditional forms of care, it is often not valued or compensated equally. In order to encourage more individuals with lived experience to become peer support workers, the career must be a viable one. This involves paying peers a living wage, one that is equal to their colleagues without lived experience. It also involves showing peers that they are a valuable asset to a workplace and are treated as equal; this includes providing peers with paid time off, sick leave, and other important benefits. As one of our interviewees said, it is crucial to "share the wealth" (Brook).

7. For more information on the gendered impacts of criminal records, please see: CAEFS & NWAC. (2008). Women and the Canadian legal system: Examining situations of hyper responsibility. *Canadian Women Studies, 26*(3-4). https://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/viewFile/22118/20772

SOCIAL WORK'S RESPONSIBILITY

As social workers, it is our responsibility, as outlined in the CASW *Code of Ethics*, to promote and advocate for social justice and equity (CASW, 2005). We believe an essential part of this commitment is advocating for fellow colleagues who are not valued or compensated equally. It is vital to recognize that peers with lived experience are an essential part of any social service agency, not just within the confines of criminalization. Peers can build rapport with service users in a way others cannot, and they offer a unique perspective that is extremely valuable to a workplace. Although their experiences and past differ from those with a social work degree and formal training, it is no less valuable. It is imperative that social workers and other professionals recognize this and acknowledge peers' labour and skills. Social workers should pay closer attention to the stigmatized divide we have described above and work to deconstruct the barrier between those with lived experience and those without. As social workers committed to social justice, it is crucial to name this divide, create space for peers to share their voice and unique perspective, and advocate alongside peers to be treated equally and compensated fairly.

INTEGRATING EXPERTISE

This research established the unparalleled insight and expertise peer mentors bring to their work on the front lines and in informing programs and managing service delivery. The participants spoke of their lived experience as invaluable and a complement to their formal education and training. We believe that opportunities for women with lived experience entering a professional helping role to integrate the expertise of their experience with theoretical knowledge and practical skills would be incredibly impactful. The mentors in this study spoke of learning to balance disclosing their lived experience, navigate boundaries, and experienced a learning curve as they adapted to their new roles. Formal programming could support the integration of their unique expertise with social work skills during this phase of adjustment.

Although the mentors understand how their experience creates valuable expertise, stigma from other professionals restrains their ability to integrate it into their work. Training and educational opportunities with a focus on incorporating lived experience into learning how to support others as a professional could legitimize lived experience while supporting the adapting phase the women described. As well, at the program development level, services must be informed by lived experience as our research suggests the most relevant, effective services centre lived experience.

OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE BACK

The empowering process of "giving back" emerged as a considerable theme in our research; participants reiterated how supporting others positively impacts their recovery and wellness. Peer mentorship is just one avenue for women to engage in "giving back." More opportunities for women exiting prison and escaping criminalization could redefine women's sense of self by providing a sense of fulfillment and alter their life path. Due to barriers created by criminal records and background checks, women lack options to give back to their community as they are prevented from most volunteer positions and generally restricted from working with other people. Creating more options for women to give back if they desire has the potential to promote holistic healing in addition to being productive for society and humanity. "Giving back" opportunities should be offered as both individual experiences and in a group format; the latter could also provide social support. Some examples include gardening, facilitating groups, community kitchens, working with rescue animals, and creating art for the community.

TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

As explored under "pathways to criminalization and the broken system," there is an urgent need for transformative change (*8*) in how social issues are responded to. Economic marginalization, homelessness, trauma, mental health, and substance use are closely linked; these issues can exacerbate each other and lead to criminalization. As our participants explained, barriers to education and housing reduce people's ability to escape cycles of poverty and criminalization. We firmly believe offering a guaranteed liveable income, Housing First (*9*) for all, and universal education could shift unequal social relations and give people who have been marginalized a chance at experiencing substantive equality. Ultimately, we must stop criminalizing poverty, mental health, and substance use and punishing people who have been victimized by an unjust system through a harmful, retributive approach to "justice."

8. For more information on the need for transformative change, please see:
Pate, K. (2006). Advocacy, activism and social change for women in prison. *Canadian Woman Studies, 25*(3). https://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/viewFile/5889/5078
9. For more information on Housing First, please see:
Gaetz, S., Scott, F., & Gulliver, T. (2013). *Housing first in Canada: Supporting communities to end homelessness.* Canada Homelessness Research Network. https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/29317

FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the time-limited nature of this research, we focused on the experiences of peer mentors themselves. However, future research diving into the perspectives and experiences of those who have received peer mentorship support as service users would be extremely valuable. Additionally, it would be beneficial to delve deeper into how peer mentors broke the cycles of criminalization and transcarceration in order to become peer mentors. We believe that exploring the relationship between the past and present in peers' lives is critical to add to this field of research.

Future studies could also collect demographic information and analyze how the intersections of complex identities affect the experience of providing and receiving peer mentorship. Lastly, the non-association parole condition (*10*) that forces women exiting prison to dismiss their supports could be studied regarding how it impacts accessibility to peer support. We are interested in investigating how this parole condition acts as an extension of colonialism by separating women from their supports and communities.

10. For more information about the non-association parole condition, please see:
Turnbull, S., & Hannah-Moffat, K. (2009). Under these conditions: Gender, parole and the governance of reintegration. *The British Journal of Criminology, 49*(4), 532-551.doi:10.1093/bjc/azp015

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This research investigated why social service agencies incorporate peer support for women who have been criminalized and how the mentors conceptualize their roles. We discovered that peer mentors and their colleagues generally value the insight mentors bring to service delivery and see how lived experience strengthens the helping relationship. The major challenges of incorporating peer support into service provision involve structural barriers related to inadequate funding with restricting stipulations and stigma impacting how peer mentors are perceived and treated by other professionals. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated barriers to accessing peer mentorship and forced agencies to shut down and thoroughly alter their programs.

This research also explored the experiences of peers themselves. Through surveys and interviews, we discovered that peers experience many positives from providing peer mentorship. Peer mentorship enables them to feel as though they are giving back, re-storying their past, and connecting with service users in a meaningful way.

We learned that peer mentorship is an empowering process that is emotionally fulfilling for peers. However, we also heard in detail about some of the challenges associated with being a peer. Many of the women spoke to challenges with funding, stigma, and unequal workplace treatment. The past also affected the women greatly in their work; they had to navigate how to disclose their lived experience, adapt to a new life, and manage working in proximity to their old life.

We hope this research helps to destigmatize peer support that incorporates women's lived experience of criminalization. Clearly, lived experience is an incredible asset for supporting others in similar positions. Individuals with lived experience should not experience judgement or feel shame over their pasts; they should be honoured and supported. As well, service providers in the helping professions should be able to access the services they offer without being stigmatized. We aspire to eradicate the stigma surrounding criminalization in general by increasing public understanding of the pathways to criminalization.

Individuals must be understood contextually; the impacts of social and environmental factors need to be considered. The common victim-blaming narrative of women who have been criminalized needs to shift; centring the knowledge that social issues and inadequate social services create pathways to criminalization is a critical first step to destigmatizing.

This research makes the case that peer support is an integral aspect of social service agencies. Peers have the ability to build rapport and navigate the system in unconventional ways that traditional service providers may lack. They hold a unique perspective from their lived experience that is a valuable asset to the workplace. This asset must be acknowledged and appreciated. Further, peers need to be given a seat at the table; their voices and unique perspective need to be valued. We hope this research displays the importance of listening to those with first-hand knowledge.

Throughout this research, we have continually returned to the voices and stories of our participants to explain the nuances of peer support and provide the insight we may lack. Due to this, it is only fitting to close with a quote from our interview participant Brook. She spoke in detail about the importance of peers being listened to,

"Nothing about us without us. It is important for peers to be involved in an agency. We are valid and we have things to say" (Brook).

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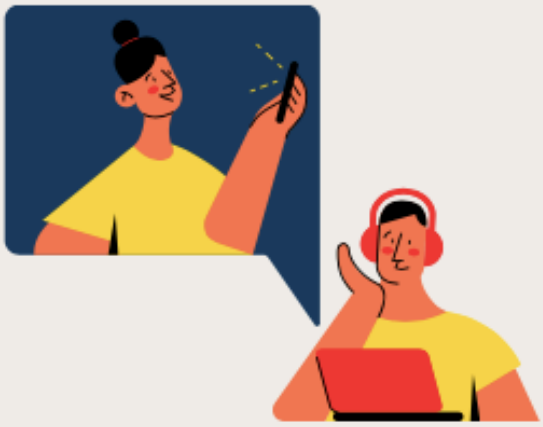
APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT POSTERS



Who we are

The Co-Principal Investigators are both fourth-year students in the social work program at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, British Columbia. We have previous research experience as Research Assistants and are interested in understanding the realities of women who have experienced criminalization.

Does your agency serve women who have experienced criminalization?

If you answered yes, please consider filling out an 8-12 minute survey regarding your work with women who have experienced criminalization.
All respondents will be entered into a draw to win a $35.00 e-gift card and help contribute to exploratory social work research.

We are interested in hearing about....

- Your work with women who have been criminalized.
- If you employ women who have a past experience of criminalization as staff or volunteers.
- If so, what are the benefits and challenges of utilizing this type of peer mentorship?
- How has COVID-19 impacted your work?
- If you yourself work as a peer mentor, how has your past experiences shaped your role today?

Eligibility

- We are looking for Canadian agencies that serve women who have been criminalized and are interested in discussing their unique experiences and needs.

Confidentiality

- All data will be encrypted, stored on password-protected computers, and destroyed by December 2021.

Safety

- You are free to skip questions or exit the survey at anytime with no repercussions.

Please click here to be directed to the survey consent form

This research has been approved by the TRU Research Ethics Board. If there are any concerns regarding the research, please contact the Co-Principal Investigators Alyssa Holt and Amy Moir at holt.moir.tru@gmail.com or our supervisors Dr. Juliana West at jwest@tru.ca and Dr. Jennifer Murphy at jemurphy@tru.ca.

What exactly is a peer mentor?

For our research, we are identifying a peer mentor as anyone who has a past experience of criminalization and now works or volunteers in a role supporting women currently experiencing incarceration or re-integration.

Are you currently working or volunteering as a peer mentor?

If you answered yes, please consider attending a forty-five minute interview over Zoom regarding your position as a peer mentor.
All participants will receive a $35.00 e-gift card as a token of our appreciation.

We are interested in discussing...

- Your formal or informal work as a peer mentor.
- How your lived experiences impact the work you do today.
- Any benefits or challenges you face as a peer mentor.
- How COVID-19 has impacted the work you do

Who we are

The Co-Principal Investigators are both fourth-year students in the social work program at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, British Columbia. We have previous research experience as Research Assistants and are interested in understanding the realities of women who have experienced criminalization.

Eligibility

For the purposes of our research, we are looking for individuals who meet these three criteria,

- Identify as a woman or as non-binary.
- Have a past experience of criminalization.
- Currently work or volunteer as a peer mentor.

Confidentiality

- All names and other identifying information will remain completely confidential and anonymous.
- All data will be encrypted, stored on password-protected computers, and destroyed by December 2021.

Safety

- Participants are free to stop the interview at any time.
- If participants are feeling emotional about what they discuss, resources are available to provide support.

Please click here to be directed to the interview consent form

This research has been approved by the TRU Research Ethics Board. If there are any concerns regarding the research, please contact the Co-Principal Investigators Alyssa Holt and Amy Moir at holt.moir.tru@gmail.com or our supervisors Dr. Juliana West at jwest@tru.ca and Dr. Jennifer Murphy at jemurphy@tru.ca.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

"Women Helping Women: Analyzing the Incorporation of Lived Experience in Peer Support for Women Experiencing Criminalization"

Undergraduate Social Work Research Project

Informed Consent for Survey Participation

Alyssa Holt and Amy Moir

Co-Principal Investigators

Dr. Jennifer Murphy and Dr. Juliana West

Faculty Supervisors

THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

We invite you to take part in this study exploring the role of lived experience with criminalization in supporting women currently experiencing criminalization as a peer mentor. You are being invited because you work or volunteer with a women-serving organization or have been identified as being potentially interested in participation.

As researchers, we are interested in learning about:

- How peer mentorship and/or lived experience is conceptualized and incorporated by women-serving organizations across Canada?
- The benefits and challenges of implementing this type of support?
- What are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on this work?

In this survey, you will be asked a variety of questions regarding your work and the agency you work for. Specifically, we will be asking questions about peer mentorship, the incorporation of lived experience, any benefits and challenges that occur with peer mentorship, and how COVID-19 has impacted this work. This survey will be divided into two parts. Section one will be open to anyone working with women who have been criminalized. However, section two will only pertain to those who have the lived experience of criminalization. In this section, individuals with lived experience can choose to answer questions specific to their past and its impact on the work they currently do. If this does not apply to you or you do not wish to disclose, there will be an option to end the survey after part one.

Part one of this survey is estimated to take about four minutes. Part two has more opened-ended questions and is estimated to take about eight to twelve minutes, depending upon your response length.

As a token of our appreciation for taking the time to help our research, participants will be entered into a draw to win a $35.00 e-gift-card of their choice from the list below.

- Starbucks
- Tim Hortons
- Indigo Books
- Homesense
- Rocky Mountain Soap Company
- Lush
- Walmart

Your participation in this survey will help to inform understanding of how lived experience and peer mentorship positively impact the mentor and the mentee, as well as any challenges that occur with peer mentorship. This knowledge can help inform policy and practice in social work and other helping professions.

GOALS OF STUDY

This study aims to increase understanding regarding the role of peer mentorship and lived experience in working with women who have been criminalized and how or if COVID-19 has impacted this work.

CRITERIA

There are two parts to this survey with different criteria.

1. The first part is open to all people working or volunteering within an agency that serves individuals who have experienced criminalization. This could involve serving people currently incarcerated or working with people re-integrating back into the community.
2. The second part of the survey is focused on lived experience. For this reason, we are asking that only people who identify as a woman or as non-binary, who have experienced criminalization, and who are now working formally or informally as a peer mentor continue with this section.

THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

DEFINITIONS

Peer Mentorship: For the purposes of this research, peer mentors are defined as individuals who have experiences of incarceration who now formally or informally work or volunteer with those currently experiencing criminalization.

Formal Mentorship: Formal mentorship refers to those working or volunteering under the specific title of "peer mentor" or a similar role title.

Informal Mentorship: Informal refers to those with a different official title or role but still engage in peer mentoring through their work.

BENEFITS

- Participants will contribute to new social work research to promote a better understanding of the role of peer mentorship in supporting women who have been criminalized.
- Participants will be entered into a draw to win an e-gift card of their choice from the list provided above.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. Individuals are free to close the survey at any time. Individuals are also free to skip any questions they prefer not to answer.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Your confidentiality and anonymity are of the utmost importance to the research team. In the survey, you will not be asked to reveal any identifying information apart from the province or territory you work in. At the end of the survey, there will be an option to leave your email address for the e-gift card draw or to be contacted for a follow-up interview. You are not required to enter this information if you do not wish; this section can just be left blank.

If you do choose to leave your email address, this contact information will be stored on a spreadsheet that is separate from your survey responses. In other words, your contact

information will not be linked to your other answers.

Your survey responses will be kept confidential. If you choose to disclose identifying information in one of the drop-down answer boxes, this information will stay between the co-principal investigators and will be cleansed before writing the report.

All the information will be encrypted and temporarily stored on password-protected computers. Research data will be permanently destroyed after the project is completed, with the latest date being December 2021.

PERCEIVED RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The perceived risks of participating in this study are low. As stated above, you can choose to exit the survey at any time, and there is no pressure to answer questions you do not feel comfortable with. We acknowledge that explaining how past criminalization experiences affect peer mentoring roles could potentially be triggering, and so we have provided a list of resources and supports to contact below.

While all precautions are taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, should your employer become aware of any potential criticisms, this could possibly lead to negative implications with your employment. Please be assured your data will be protected and identifying information altered to prevent your employer from gaining access to your responses. However, please consider this and do not reveal more than you are comfortable with.

ONCE YOU CONSENT

At the bottom of this consent form, there will be an option to click “I agree to participate” or “I do not agree to participate.” By clicking “I agree,” you agree to participate in the survey and for us to collect data on your survey responses. After reading and signing the consent form, clicking “I agree” will take you to a direct link for the survey. Once you open the survey, the first question will appear. The first few questions are aimed to compile demographic data, and then the survey will ask questions specific to peer mentorship and COVID-19. Finally, part two of the survey will open only to those who meet the criteria listed above. At the end of the survey, you will have an opportunity to provide your email address if you are interested in attending a follow-up

interview. This interview is intended to build upon your survey responses and elaborate on your answers. The interview will only be for those who meet the criteria for part two.

If you wish to retract your responses from our data, please contact us at holt.moir.tru@gmail.com and we will remove your information.
There is no penalty for skipping questions, exiting the survey early, or requesting that we retract your information. All respondents will be included in the e-gift card draw.

STUDY RESULTS

The results of this study will be disseminated in the following ways:

- A research poster to describe the early findings at the TRU Undergraduate Research Conference in March 2021.
- A final research paper will be submitted to the TRU Digital Commons Library and shared with the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.
- We will be seeking publication of the final report in a peer-reviewed journal.

DATA SECURITY

The survey will be conducted through the online survey platform SurveyMonkey. The responses from the survey will be stored in Canada. If you wish to read more about SurveyMonkey's security, please read their security statement.

All the information recorded through this survey will be reviewed and cleansed of any personal identifiers by the co-principal investigators, who, along with their supervisors, will be the only ones with access to any raw data. Data will be stored on password-protected computers and will be destroyed after the completion of the research project (December 2021).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This research had been approved by the Thompson Rivers University Research Ethics Committee. If you would like any additional information about this study or your rights as a

study participant, you may contact us, the co-principal investigators of this study, at holt.moir.tru@gmail.com. If you wish to discuss this research with someone else, you can contact the Chair of TRU Research Ethics Committee at TRU-REB@tru.ca or our supervisors Dr. Juliana West at jwest@tru.ca and Dr. Jennifer Murphy at jemurphy@tru.ca.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Alyssa Holt
Co-Principal Investigator
4th Year BSW student
Thompson Rivers University
holt.moir.tru@gmail.com

Amy Moir
Co-Principal Investigator
4th Year BSW student
Thompson Rivers University
holt.moir.tru@gmail.com

RESOURCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

If you are feeling upset, triggered, or traumatized from the topics discussed in this survey and need to debrief this experience, receive emotional support, or speak to a counsellor, please contact any of the resources listed below.

Click here to be directed to a master list of Canadian e-counselling services.

Canada Suicide Prevention Service (24/7/365 support)

Website: https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/

Phone: 1-833-456-4566

Text: 45645

Hope for Wellness Hotline (24/7/365 support for Indigenous people, available in English, French, Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut).

Website: https://www.hopeforwellness.ca

Phone: 1-855-242-3310

Text: chat box provided through website

Elizabeth Fry Society of North America (multiple locations across Canada, in person support, targeted towards women who have experienced criminalization)

Website: https://www.efrynorthernalberta.com

RESOURCES IF YOU ARE FEELING SUICIDAL

- Call 911
- The Canadian Suicide Prevention Service: 1-833-456-4566
- Go to your nearest hospital emergency room

THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Research Project

"Women Helping Women: Analyzing the Incorporation of Lived Experience in Peer Support for Women Experiencing Criminalization"

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. If you do not wish to participate, simply close this window or choose "I do not wish to participate". By clicking "I Agree" you agree to participate. The "I agree" button contains a direct link to the survey.

I consent to participate in this study by allowing my responses to be included as data.

I understand that all personal identifiers will be removed and that my contributions will be anonymous.

I understand that the data will be stored in password protected files and destroyed after the completion of the research project.

I read the description of the study, am over the age of 18, and agree to the terms described.

[I Agree] [I do not wish to participate]

THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

"Women Helping Women: Analyzing the Incorporation of Lived Experience in Peer Support for Women Experiencing Criminalization"

Undergraduate Social Work Research Project

Informed Consent for Interview Participation

Alyssa Holt and Amy Moir

Co-Principal Investigators

Dr. Jennifer Murphy and Dr. Juliana West

Faculty Supervisors

THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

We invite you to take part in this study exploring the role of lived experience with criminalization in supporting women currently experiencing criminalization as a peer mentor. You are being invited because you work or volunteer with a women-serving organization or have been identified as potentially interested in participation.

As researchers, we are interested in learning about:

- How women peer mentors help support women currently experiencing criminalization?
- What are the benefits and constraints involved?
- What are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on this work?

You will take part in a semi-structured interview via Zoom guided by the open-ended questions listed below. These questions are aimed at understanding the process and experience of providing peer support. This interview is intended to build off the survey questions from the survey portion of this research project. However, it is not a requirement to fill out the survey in order to complete this interview. You will have the opportunity to explain the impact your lived experience has on your current work with peer mentorship. You will receive a $35.00 gift card to a business of your choosing, as a thank-you. Due to COVID-19, all interviews will be conducted remotely. Due to this, all gift cards will be sent electronically. Some options of e-gift cards are:

- Starbucks
- Tim Hortons
- Indigo books
- Homesense
- Rocky Mountain Soap Company
- Lush
- Walmart

Your responses will contribute to the body of research in this area and will likely lead to further research to improve services for women experiencing criminalization.

THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

QUESTIONS GUIDING THE INTERVIEW

We will not ask pressing questions about your past, and you may choose to disclose as much or as little as you wish. The questions are as follows:

1. Why were you interested in participating in our research?

   Follow up question:

   How did you hear about our research?
2. Can you tell us a bit about what your role entails?
3. Can you tell us how you became a peer mentor, including your inspiration and any barriers or supports you encountered?
4. How has your lived experience affected what you do as a peer mentor?

   Follow up question:

   a. Do you see your lived experience as an asset or as a challenge at work?
5. What are some benefits and challenges or constraints to your role?

   Follow up questions:

   a. Can you tell us a bit about disclosing your lived experience to colleagues and/or to clients?
   b. Do you feel that peer mentorship is valued by your agency?
6. Has COVID-19 affected the work you do? If yes, how?
7. Is there anything we have not asked that you would like to share that you feel would help us to understand your experience as a peer mentor?

GOALS OF THE STUDY

The focus of the study is exploring how women peer mentors support women who currently live with criminalization.

You will be invited to attend a confidential 30 - 45 minute semi-structured interview via Zoom.

How will this be done?

You can accept the interview invitation by electronically agreeing to this informed consent form after reading the information and either contacting us or leaving your contact information to set up an interview. We ask that you please sign this consent form at the bottom and send the completed form in your email. The interview will be confidential, and data from your responses will be anonymized. All identifying information will be removed from the transcript in the final research report. The interview will take approximately 30 - 45 minutes, but you may choose to end earlier or extend. You will be asked the above open-ended questions related to your experience providing peer support to women going through criminalization. You will be provided with an honorarium in the form of a $35.00 e-gift card to a business of your choice. You may decline to answer any question in the interview, and may withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the interview, your contributions will not be included. All interview participants will be given a list of resources to support any potential difficult emotions that may arise from this interview.

BENEFITS

- Participants will contribute to new social work research to promote a better understanding of the role of peer mentorship in supporting women who have been criminalized.
- All participants will receive a $35.00 e-gift certificate as compensation for their time and contribution to the research.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the Zoom interview at any time without penalty. Regardless of withdrawal at any point, you will still receive a gift certificate of your choosing. You are free to decline to answer any particular questions you do not wish to answer for any reason. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may exit the Zoom call or inform the researchers you wish to withdraw. If you exit

the call without explanation the researchers will follow up with an email inquiring whether you are withdrawing or if a technological error has occurred, you do not have to respond to this email if you are withdrawing. If the co-principal investigators receive no response, withdrawal will be assumed and any information and contributions will be permanently destroyed and deleted.

RECORDING

The Zoom interview will be recorded within Zoom for the purpose of transcription verification and data analysis. The recording and transcription will only be viewed by the co-principal investigators and their supervisors Dr. Juliana West and Dr. Jennifer Murphy, and remain completely confidential. It will be temporarily stored on encrypted, password-protected computers, and permanently destroyed upon completion of the research project, December 2021.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Your confidentiality and anonymity are of the utmost importance to the research team. Your responses, the Zoom recording, and interview transcription will be kept absolutely confidential. All the information will be encrypted and temporarily stored on password-protected computers. Your name and all identifying information will be coded for analysis and not appear in the final research report. You will have the opportunity to choose a pseudonym or the researchers may assign one if you prefer. Research data will be permanently destroyed after the project is completed, the latest possible date being December, 2021.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are minimal foreseeable risks to participating in this Zoom interview, you will not be asked pressing questions about your past experience of criminalization. The focus of the semi-structured interview will be on your current role and you may choose to influence the direction and discuss topics you feel most comfortable with. However, the topic of

criminalization can be uncomfortable and difficult. You are free to decline to answer any question, stop participating, or withdraw from the interview at any time for any reason, without penalty. A list of resources will be made available to you prior to the interview.
While all precautions are taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, should your employer become aware of any potential criticisms, this could possibly lead to negative implications with your employment. Please be assured your data will be protected and identifying information altered to prevent your employer from gaining access to your responses. However, please consider this and do not reveal more than you are comfortable with.

ONCE YOU CONSENT

After reading this Consent Form, you are free to decline to participate or withdraw by not *Agreeing to Participate* at the end of this form or exiting the Zoom call. By agreeing, you consent to participate in the Zoom interview. There is no penalty for choosing to withdraw from the study at any time.

STUDY RESULTS

The findings of this research will be disseminated in the following ways:

- A research poster to describe the early findings at the TRU Undergraduate Research Conference in March 2021.
- A final research paper will be submitted to the TRU Digital Commons Library and shared with the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.
- We will be seeking publication of the final report in a peer-reviewed journal.

DATA SECURITY

The interview will be hosted by Zoom. The recording and interview data including notes and the interview transcription will be encrypted and kept safe and confidential. For more information about Zoom data security, please visit

https://zoom.us/security .

All information from the interview will be coded and personal identifiers removed. The data will be encrypted, temporarily stored on password-protected computer hard-drives in secure locations, and permanently destroyed upon project completion (December 2021).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This research had been approved by the Thompson Rivers University Research Ethics Committee. If you would like any additional information about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may contact us, the co-principal investigators of this study, at holt.moir.tru@gmail.com. If you wish to discuss this research with someone else, you can contact the Chair of TRU Research Ethics Committee at TRU-REB@tru.ca or our supervisors Dr. Juliana West at jwest@tru.ca and Dr. Jennifer Murphy at jemurphy@tru.ca.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Alyssa Holt
Co-Principal Investigator
4th Year BSW student
Thompson Rivers University
holt.moir.tru@gmail.com

Amy Moir
Co-Principal Investigator
4th Year BSW student
Thompson Rivers University
holt.moir.tru@gmail.com

RESOURCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

If you would like to debrief this experience, receive emotional support, or speak to a counselor for any reason after the interview, please see the list of free online counselling services below.

You are invited to screenshot this information for future reference. This list will be made available to you again via email upon completion of the interview.

Click here to be directed to a master list of Canadian e-counselling services.

Canada Suicide Prevention Service (24/7/365 support)

Website: https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/

Phone: 1-833-456-4566

Text: 45645

Hope for Wellness Hotline (24/7/365 support for Indigenous people, available in English, French, Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut).

Website: https://www.hopeforwellness.ca

Phone: 1-855-242-3310

Text: chat box provided through their website

Elizabeth Fry Society of North America (multiple locations across Canada, in person support, targeted towards women who have experienced criminalization)

Website: https://www.efrynorthernalberta.com

RESOURCES IF YOU ARE FEELING SUICIDAL

- Call 911
- The Canadian Suicide Prevention Service: 1-833-456-4566
- Go to your nearest hospital emergency room

Informed Consent for Research Project:

"Women Helping Women: Analyzing the Incorporation of Lived Experience in Peer Support for Women Experiencing Criminalization"

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. If you wish to withdraw, you may exit the Zoom call at any time and/or inform the researchers that are withdrawing your contributions.

I consent to participate in this study by allowing the interview to be recorded and my responses to be included as anonymous data.

I understand that all personal identifiers will be removed and that my contributions will be anonymous.

I understand that the recording and data will be stored in password protected files and destroyed after the completion of the research project.

I agree to participate ☐

Participant name: _____

Signature:_____

Date:_____

Please contact us at holt.moir.tru@gmail.com with your signed consent form to set up an interview time.

APPENDIX C
SURVEY QUESTIONS

SURVEY QUESTIONS PART ONE		
Question Number	**Question**	**Response Options**
Q. 1	The agency that you work for is located in…?	Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, PEI, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Yukon.
Q. 2	What percentage of service users at your agency experience criminalization?	None, less than 25%, 25-50%, 50-75%, more than 75%, unsure.
Q. 3	What kinds of services does your agency provide? Select all that apply.	None of the above, housing support, basic needs support, family services, cultural support, substance use support, mental health support, violence support, legal support, advocacy, education, employment support, counselling, support with community reintegration, other and/or elaborate on choices.
Q. 4	Does your agency include a peer mentorship componment?	Yes, no.
Q. 5 *(if checked yes to Q. 4)*	Please explain why your agency offers a peer metorship component.	No options- written response.
Q. 6 *(if checked yes to Q. 4)*	What barriers or supports impact your agencies ability to provide peer mentorship?	No options- written response.
Q. 7 *(if checked yes to Q. 4)*	Is the peer mentorship formal or informal and/or paid or unpaid? Select all that apply.	Formal, informal, paid, unpaid.
Q. 8 *(if checked yes to Q. 4)*	What are the benefits and/or challenges of peer mentorship services for the women you serve?	No options- written response.
Q. 9 *(skip to Q. 9 if checked no to Q. 4)*	Please explain why your agency does not provide peer mentorship. Select all that apply.	It was never considered, it was used before and caused negative outcomes, lack of funding/resources, lack of individuals with lived experience willing to provide peer mentorship, the individuals we serve do not desire peer mentorship, other and/or elaborate on choices.
Q. 10	COVID-19 has impacted the agency you work for in following ways… Select all that apply.	Ability to deliver face-to-face services, ability to offer all previously offered programs, ability to provide resources, employees were let go, volunteers were let go, impacted our funding, other and/or elaborate
Q. 11	Part two of the survey involves questions specific to those with the lived experience of criminalization, we ask that only those that meet the criteria listed below continue on to part II. If you answer no to the question below you will have the option to leave your email for the e-gift-card draw before the survey closes. Do you identify as a woman and/or non-binary, have past experiences of criminalization, now work formally or informally/paid or unpaid as a "peer mentor", and feel comfortable answering a few questions specific to your role as a peer mentor with lived experience?	Yes I fit all the criteria above, no I do not.
Q. 12 *(if checked no to Q. 11)*	If you are interested in being entered for the e-gift card draw, please leave your email address in the box below.We thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.	No options- written response.

SURVEY QUESTIONS PART TWO		
Question Number	**Question**	**Response Options**
Q. 13 *(skip to Q. 13 if answered yes to Q. 11*)	Please select all that apply.	I am a paid staff, I am a volunteer, I have an official role as a peer mentor, I offer peer mentoring but it is not a part of my official title or role, other and/or elaborate on choice(s).
Q. 14	Please explain how the women you serve benefit from your peer mentoring.	No options- written response.
Q. 15	Do you disclose your lived experience to the women you serve and/or your colleagues?	I disclose to neither, I disclose to both, I disclose to service users but not my colleagues, I disclose to my colleagues but not service users, prefer not to answer
Q. 16 *(if respondant discloses to neither)*	Please explain why you do not disclose.	No options- written response.
Q. 17 *(if respondant discloses to one or both)*	Please describe how often you disclose and the impact this has.	No options- written response.
Q. 18	Please explain how your lived experience and/or role as a peer mentor affects your professional identity and/or ability to provide relevant services.	No options- written response.
Q. 19	Why did you choose to offer peer mentoring services?	No options- written response.
Q. 20	Please describe any challenges you experience in being a peer mentor and/or service provider with lived experience of being criminalized.	No options- written response.
Q. 21	Please explain how you support women as a peer mentor (what do you do?)	No options- written response.
Q. 22	What are the biggest challenges facing women living with criminalization?	No options- written response.
Q. 23	How has COVID-19 affected these challenges?	No options- written response.
Q. 24	If you are interested in being entered for the e-gift card draw, please leave your email address in the box below.	No options- written response.
Q. 25	Thank you so much for completing this survey. We are interested in hearing more about your experiences as a peer mentor and invite you to participate in a confidential interview over Zoom. If you are interested please click here to view the information poster and here to view the consent form or leave your preferred email below and we will be in touch.	No options- written response.

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why were you interested in participating in our research?

    a. Follow up: How did you hear about our research?

2. Can you tell us a bit about what your role entails?

3. How did you become a peer mentor? Please include your inspiration and any barriers or supports you have encountered on your journey to becoming a peer mentor.

4. How has your lived experience affected what you do as a peer mentor?

    a. Follow up: Do you see your lived experience as an asset or as a challenge at work?

5. Can you tell us about any benefits, challenges, or constraints you experience in your role as a peer mentor?

    a. Follow up: Can you speak a bit about disclosing your lived experience to your colleagues or your clients?

    b. Follow up: Do you feel that peer mentorship is valued by the agency you work for?

6. Can you speak to the impacts COVID-19 has had on your work?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share that would help us understand your experience as a peer mentor?

APPENDIX E
CMAP EXAMPLES

Survey Question 5. Coding. Version E

5. Please explain why your agency offers a peer mentorship component.

Give opportunity. Empower. Inspire leadership and pay it forward.

There are a couple of reasons:
1. It **provides opportunities** for individuals who have been criminalized the **opportunity to find employment and share their experiences with service users**
2. Peers provide a level of support that cannot be provided by someone who has not lived the same life or been through the same experiences as our services users
3. It is an opportunity to improve our services by listening to our Peer Support team who can provide insight into how our services should be delivered in order to be most effective to those we serve

My agency believe that there is a lots of circumstances people can fell specially women and get involve in criminalization but **still they are someone who have potential**. And also offer legal services

We provide this to help promote a sense of contributing to the community while **learning new employment skills** and build confidence.

As a protective factor for women with barriers to traditional employment streams.

Opportunities (especially related to employment), potential, protective factors

We provide this to help promote a sense of contributing to the community while learning new employment skills and **build confidence.**

Give opportunity. **Empower. Inspire leadership** and **pay it forward.**

Empowerment, paying forward/giving back, inspiring, contributing, and confidence building

We have a program dedicated to being peer-run and focusses on substance use and risks of overdosing. **This allows individuals who are struggling with substances,support from those with lived experiences which can help to facilitate a deeper understanding of the circumstances.** These peers also support the individual with court processes if need be and work closely with other staff that do work specifically with criminalization and courts.

To build women connections and to support those that want it.

We see the benefits of peers working with peers and the strength in that shared experience

Deeper connections, understanding, same experiences, support, strength, and valuable asset

Peers are a valuable asset towards recovery and connecting with our service users. Our Peers are a part of a federal grant through the Substances Use and Addiction program (SUAP) which employs peers to support individuals with substance use concerns and frequent associated hospitalizations. **They meet clients where they are at and are able to connect with them at a level that a professional is unable to.**
Some individuals do not connect or benefit as much from professional counselling; peer support is able to fill that gap.

There are a couple of reasons:
1. It provides opportunities for individuals who have been criminalized the opportunity to find employment and **share their experiences with service users**
2. Peers provide a level of support that cannot be provided by someone who has not lived the same life or been through the same experiences as our services users
3. It is an opportunity to improve our services by listening to our Peer Support team who can provide insight into how our services should be delivered in order to be most effective to those we serve

We are firm believers that **individuals with lived experience bring something to front line service that is unique and invaluable.** We have 2 peer support programs for substance use and mental health, and many of our staff in other programs also have lived experience with criminalization.

There are a couple of reasons:
1. It provides opportunities for individuals who have been criminalized the opportunity to find employment and share their experiences with service users
2. Peers provide a level of support that cannot be provided by someone who has not lived the same life or been through the same experiences as our services users
3. It is an opportunity to improve our services by listening to our Peer Support team who can provide insight into how our services should be delivered in order to be most effective to those we serve

Utilize expertise that comes from experience unique and valuable insight, effective services

They work for the women and youths who have been affected by criminalization

We have a program dedicated to being peer-run and focusses on substance use and risks of overdosing. This allows individuals who are struggling with substances,support from those with lived experiences which can help to facilitate a deeper understanding of the circumstances. **These peers also support the individual with court processes if need be and work closely with other staff that do work specifically with criminalization and courts.**

To support with addiction

Practical/systems support

Interview Question 5b. NQ Theming.Version b

5b. Do you feel that peer mentorship is valued by your agency?