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Gender, Migration, and  
Identity: Building Bridges and  
Resiliency Through  
Technology for New  
Immigrant Mothers and their  
Young Daughters

Peel Institute of Research and Training





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## **Introduction**

Migration is a complex process bringing a wide range of challenges. The experiences of and impacts of migration are far-reaching, extending beyond the individual migrant to their children, whether that child is a migrant themselves or not (Espin, 1999). In today's immigration context, women make up a large portion of the world's migrants, accounting for 47.9% of international migrants in 2019 (United Nations, 2019). However, there is a lack of focus in policies, programs, and studies on migration that consider how gender itself impacts the experience of migrants. With the recognition that gender is a key consideration in the migration experience, the Peel Institute of Research and Training (Peel Institute on Violence Prevention)– Family Services of Peel launched a study focusing on the experiences of migrant mothers and their young daughters.

The purpose of this study was threefold. First, PIRT endeavoured to learn more about the specific migration experiences of mothers, with a specific focus on the challenges endured. Second, the focus was placed on the mother-daughter relationship, with a specific consideration into how mothers transmit knowledge regarding gender, sexuality, and relationships to their daughters. Lastly, PIRT preliminarily examines the role of technology and social media within mother-daughter relationships.

These results will be used to develop and implement a series of workshops for both mothers and daughters. The workshop for the daughters will be created as a space for these young women to come together to ask questions and create a connection to help relieve the stress associated with the process of self-discovery. For the mothers, the workshop developed will provide them with a learning space for gathering information regarding the popular social media platforms that their daughters use, as well as, provide a space to share their concerns and receive expert answers to any pressing questions they may have.

These results will also be used to aid service providers and policymakers in their decision-making around programming for immigrant mothers and their daughters, and how to include this population in policies in a specific way.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a mixed methods approach using surveys and focus groups. A mixed method design allowed PIRT to gather data from a wide range of participants which increases the generalizability of findings through quantitative data, as well as enabled PIRT to gain deeper insights into the complex realities of mothers and daughters through qualitative inquiry.

### **Sample**

A total of 42 mothers and 41 daughters participated in the survey. For the focus group, there were 8 participants, including 4 mothers and 4 daughters.

## Recruitment

The survey for mothers and daughters was made available online and disseminated widely in the Region of Peel in an attempt to attract a wide range of immigrant mothers and daughters from the Region. Participants for the focus group were recruited using snowball sampling, as participants were recruited through personal contacts. All participants in this study were volunteers and were compensated monetarily for their time.

## Surveys

Two surveys were conducted, one for mothers and one for daughters. Surveys were collected both electronically and prior to the start of the focus group. There were a total of 83 mother and daughter survey respondents.

### *Data Items Collected from Mothers*

The survey for the mothers was intended to discover more about mothers' experiences of migration and value and knowledge transmission to their daughters. Areas of focus for the survey included: demographics, migration experience, relationship with daughter, and technology. Mothers were also asked what words of wisdom they wished to pass on to their daughters.

**Demographic data:** demographic variables collected included: age, ethnicity, marital status, current living situation, language(s) spoken, education level, annual income, age of immigration, number of sons, number of daughters, and where children were born.

**Migration experience:** 6 variables were included: the reason for immigration, why Canada, what life was like in the first three years in Canada (work, children, education, marriage), challenges in the first three years in Canada, goals in coming to Canada, and challenges in achieving goals.

**Mother-daughter relationship:** 3 variables were included: relationship back home, topics discussed with daughter specific to gender, sexuality, and relationships, and level of comfort on specific topics.

**Technology:** 1 variable was included: what are you interested in learning about social media.

**Words of wisdom:** mothers were asked to provide a statement of words of wisdom they would extend to their daughters.

### *Data Items Collected from Daughters*

The survey for daughters asked questions related to the following areas: demographics, mother-daughter relationships, and technology. Daughters were also asked to share words of wisdom that their mothers has provided to them.

**Demographic data:** demographic variables collected included: place of birth, age, age of immigration, language spoken with mother,

**Mother-daughter relationship:** 6 variables were included: what did your mother share about her immigration experience, topics related to gender, sexuality and relationships discussed, abuse, relationships with men, and differences between mother and daughter.

**Technology:** 2 variables were included: effects of social media on the mother-daughter relationship, how you communicate with your mother

**Words of Wisdom:** daughters were asked to share words of wisdom offered to them by their mothers.

### **Focus Group**

One two-hour focus group was conducted with 8 mother and daughter participants. The approach used was a semi-structured life narrative interview. An approach of life narrative interviewing and the retelling of life stories is not only useful as a research tool but has also been shown to have a healing effect when it includes migration.

A focus group was chosen as it allows for generating subjective findings on the experience of migration and how mothers transmit values to their young daughters. It also allowed for understanding how mothers and daughters interact through their conversation. Thus, we were able to analyze both participant responses, as well as how they interacted with one another.

There were several objectives that guided the conduction of this focus group. First, we anticipated that the insights gained from the focus group would supplement the survey findings, providing a more detailed picture of migration stories and the mother-daughter relationship. Second, our goal was to discover not just if mothers transmit values and knowledge, but how this process occurs. Finally, we aimed to learn more about the role of technology in mother-daughter relationships.

A relational approach was taken to the conduction of the focus groups with the moderators sharing their own migration stories and experiences of culture transmission between mother and daughter throughout the conversation. The purpose of the moderators sharing was to create a more open and comfortable environment and to remove the sharp boundary between researcher and participant.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Survey Data**

For each item within the surveys, a count was taken regarding participants' answers. For the words of wisdom shared, key themes were formed, statements were categorized accordingly and a count based on the theme was conducted. Data from the questions for mothers and daughters regarding what topics were discussed and words of wisdom shared by mothers are compared.

#### **Focus Group**

The focus group was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for qualitative analysis.. The interview transcripts were then analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to categorize the data. Such an approach allowed for delineating key themes that arose throughout the conversation. A

researcher also took notes during the focus group to make note of key interactions between participants and nonverbal communication signals that were key to the findings. Notes were subsequently compared with the transcript from the focus group.

## Limitations

One main limitation of this project is that the sample of participants was restricted. Recruitment for this project was quite challenging. As such, PIRT relied on its connections with specific immigrant groups to recruit participants. This limits the population from which the sample was drawn, which may have led to skewed results. Many of the participants were higher-educated and of a higher socioeconomic status, limiting the generalizability of the findings to immigrant groups of lower socioeconomic status and who are less well-educated.

## Survey Results

The following section outlines some of the key findings that come out of the survey responses.

### Mothers

#### Demographics

**Figure 1: Age of mothers**

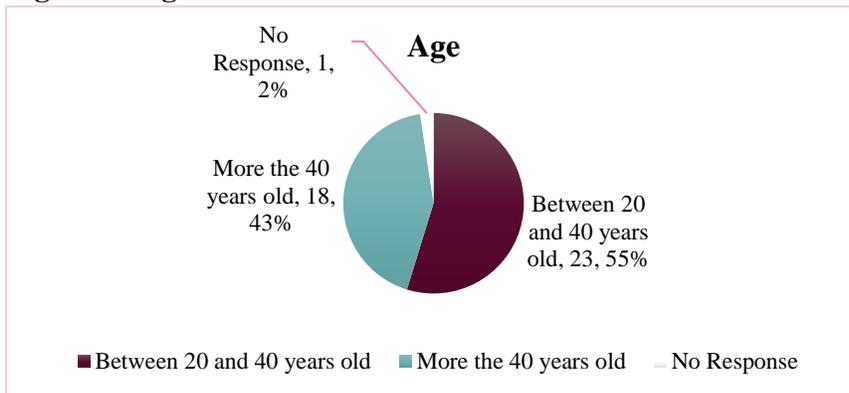
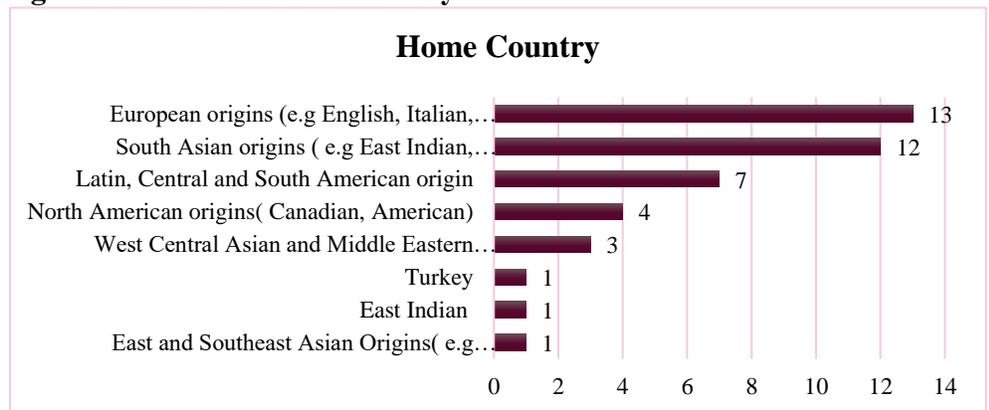


Figure 1 shows mothers' ages. 55% of mothers were between the ages of 20 and 40 years and 43% of mothers were over the age of 40.

**Figure 2: Mothers' home country**

Figure 2 illustrates the countries from which mothers migrated. The majority of mothers migrated from Europe (13 mothers) or South Asia (12 mothers). What we found is that mothers have migrated from a wide range of countries, which corresponds with the diversity of immigrants living in the Region of Peel.



**Figure 3: Living arrangements of mothers**

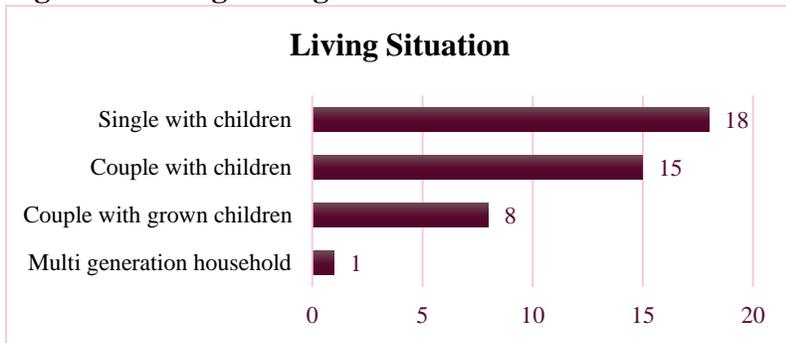


Figure 3 shows that the majority of mothers (18 out of 42) reported being single-parent families. Mothers living as a couple was a close second (15). The fact that the majority of mothers are single-parents may potentially have an effect on the mother-daughter relationship.

**Figure 4: Education level of mothers**

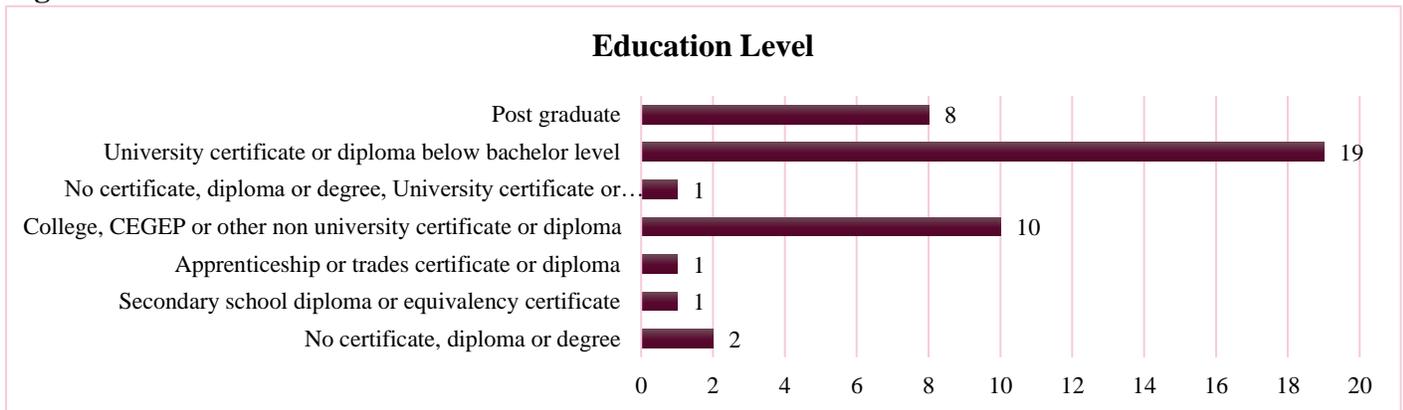


Figure 4 shows that immigrant mothers are quite highly educated with 8 mothers reporting postgraduate degrees, 19 mothers reporting having a university certificate or diploma below a bachelor level, and 10 mothers reporting having completed college or some other non-university certificate or diploma.

### *Migration Experience*

The mother's responses from the survey highlight the multitude of challenges that mothers faced in their first three years of being in Canada as they begin the process of adjusting and adapting to their new life.

**Figure 5: Challenges to education in Canada for mothers**

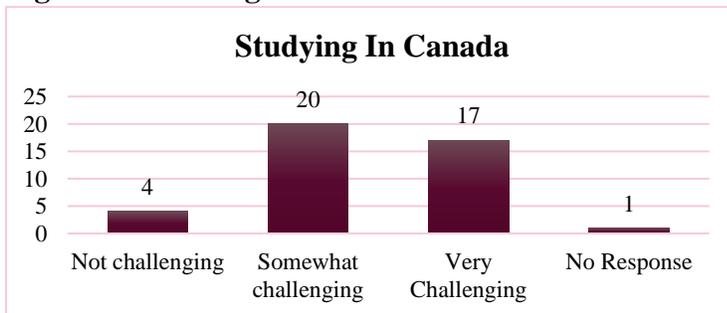
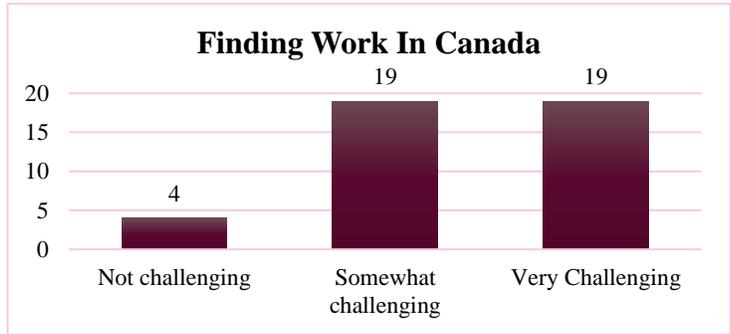


Figure 5 illustrates that for the most part acquiring education in Canada was a challenging process. The vast majority of mothers reported finding studying to be somewhat challenging (20) or very challenging (17).

**Figure 6: Challenges in finding work**

Figure 6 demonstrates that it was quite a challenge for mothers to find work in Canada, with 19 mothers reporting it was somewhat challenging and 19 mothers reporting it was very challenging.



**Figure 7: Challenges in making friends**

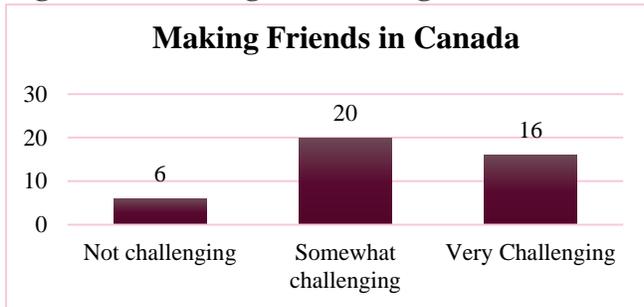
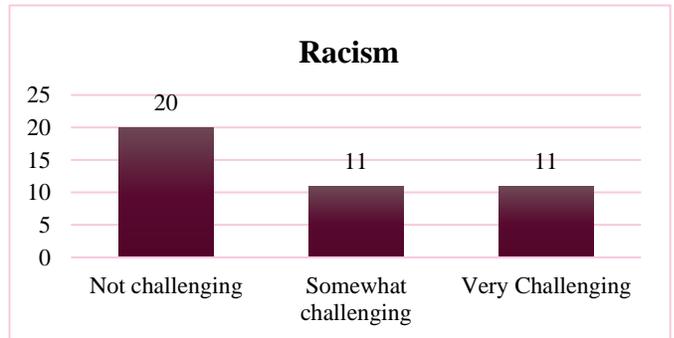


Figure 7 depicts that making friends and developing a social support network was relatively challenging for mothers. 20 mothers reported making friends in Canada to be somewhat challenging and 16 mothers reported it to be very challenging. This is an important challenge to recognize as social support is key to the mental health of immigrants.

**Figure 8: Challenges related to racism**

Figure 8 illustrates the challenges caused by racism that mothers experienced. Just under half (20) of mothers reported that racism was not challenging. This may be due to the fact that 13 mothers migrated from Europe and 4 had North American origins (Figure 2), and because these mothers are more likely to be white, they may have experienced significantly less racism than racialized mothers. 11 mother reported racism as somewhat challenging and 11 mothers reported racism as being very challenging in their migration experience.



**Figure 9: Challenges to understanding Canadian society**

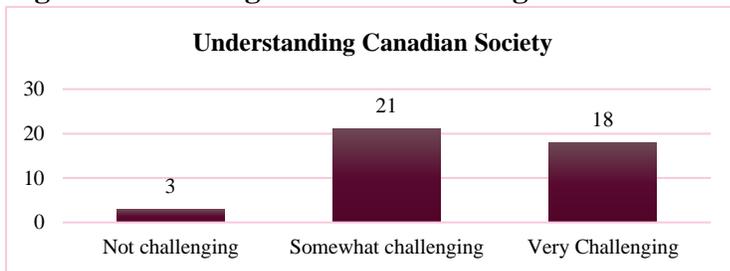
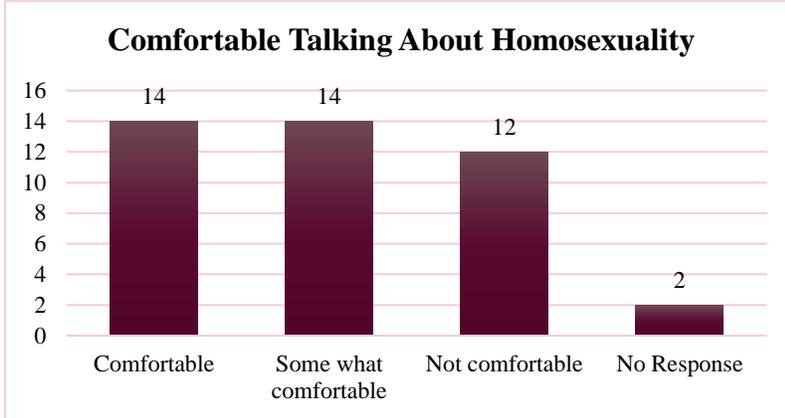


Figure 9 demonstrates that a major challenge for mothers was understanding Canadian society with 21 mothers reporting this to be somewhat challenging and 18 reporting it to be very challenging.

### *Mother-Daughter Relationship*

Since the main focus of this study was how mothers transmit knowledge and values to their young daughters, we asked them about their level of comfort in discussing certain topics related to sexuality, gender, race, and religion.

**Figure 10: How comfortable are you in discussing homosexuality?**

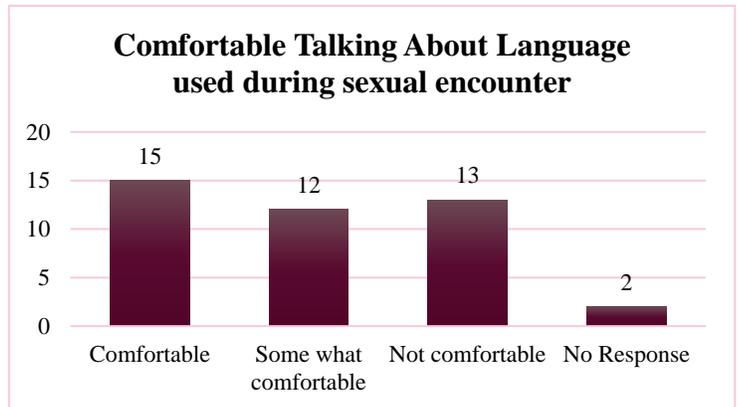


Results showed that mothers are relatively comfortable in discussing homosexuality with their daughters, with 14 mother reporting they are comfortable and 14 reporting they are somewhat comfortable. This willingness to discuss homosexuality demonstrates an openness on the part of the mothers. 12 mothers reported

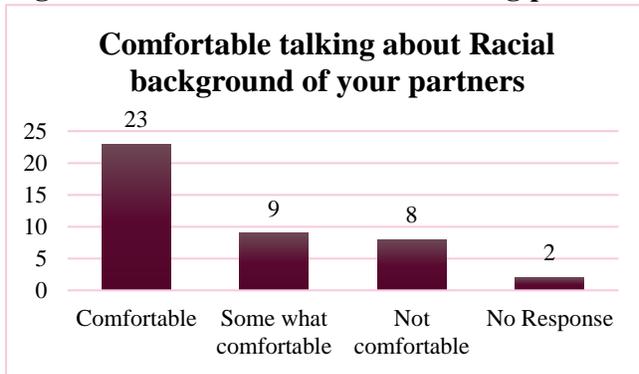
they are not comfortable speaking with their daughters about homosexuality, which may impact how the daughters obtain information about this topic.

**Figure 11: How comfortable are you discussing the language used during a sexual encounter with your daughter?**

Figure 11 shows that most mothers have a relatively high comfort level in discussing language use during sexual encounters with their daughters. 15 mothers reported being comfortable with this topic, 12 mothers were somewhat comfortable, and 13 reported not being comfortable.



**Figure 12: Comfort level in discussing partner's racial background**



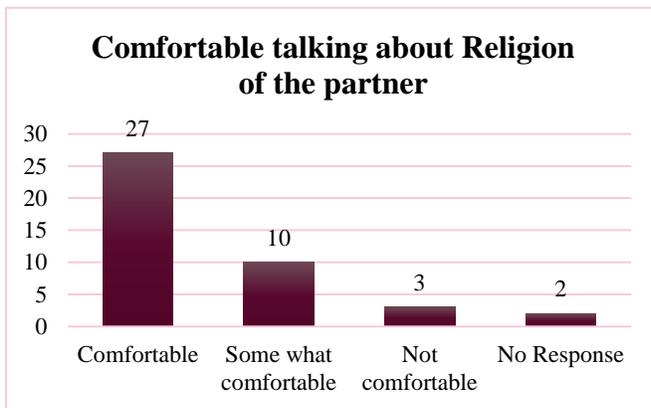
The majority of mothers (23) responded as being comfortable discussing the racial background of partners with their daughters. 8 mothers reported not being comfortable in having such conversations with their daughters.

**Figure 13: Comfort level in discussing transgender partner**

Figure 13 shows a relatively even split into comfort levels for mothers in discussing their daughters having a transgender partner. 14 mothers report they are comfortable, 12 report they are somewhat comfortable, and 14 report that they are not comfortable.



**Figure 14: Comfort level in discussing partner religion**



Mothers show the most comfort in discussing the religion of a partner with their daughter, with 27 mothers reporting being comfortable. Such a finding is unsurprising given that religion is a topic that is much more widely discussed across cultures compared to sexuality and gender identity, therefore increasing the likelihood that mothers from diverse backgrounds would have higher levels of comfort in discussing such a topic.

## Social Media

**Figure 15: What do mothers want to know about social media?**

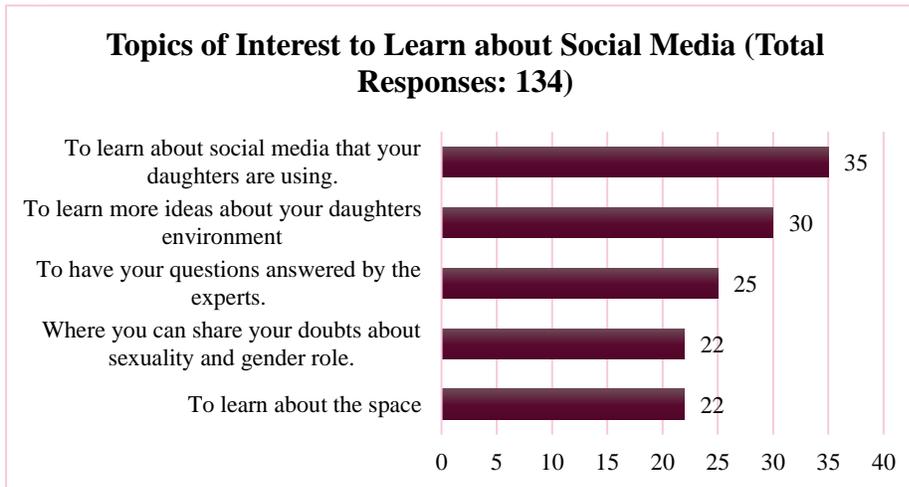


Figure 15 provides information on what topics about social media mothers want to learn more about, particularly in regard to their young daughter's use of social media. Mothers appear to be relatively interested in all response options; to learn about social

media that daughters are using, to learn more ideas about their daughters' environment, to have questions answered by experts, to learn about where they can shares doubts about sexuality and gender roles, and to learn more about the social media space. These results demonstrate a need and want for a workshop for mothers on social media in which they can be provided with information on the platforms and have their questions and concerns addressed by experts. Such a workshop would be beneficial in providing mothers with more knowledge on social media and how their daughters are using it.

## Daughters

**Figure 16: Have daughters ever experienced abuse?**

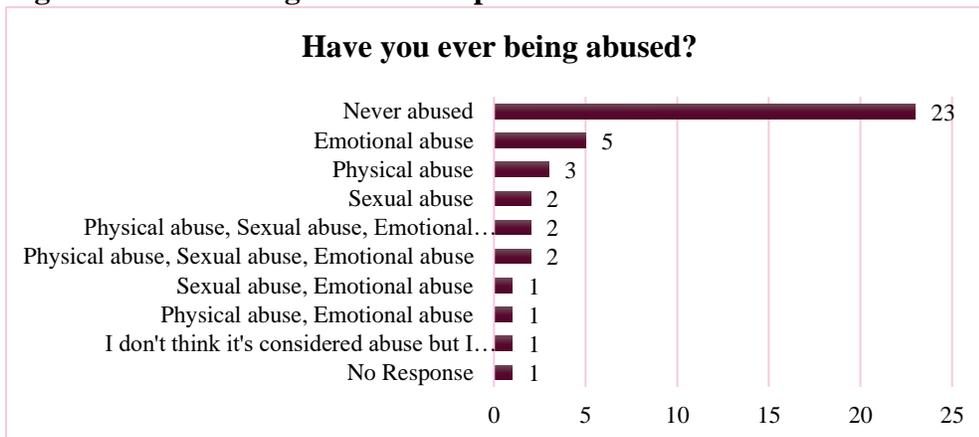


Figure 16 shows that the majority of daughters (23) reported having never experienced abuse. However, 17 daughters do report having experienced some form of or combinations of forms of abuse.

**Figure 17: Primary language used in communicating with mother**

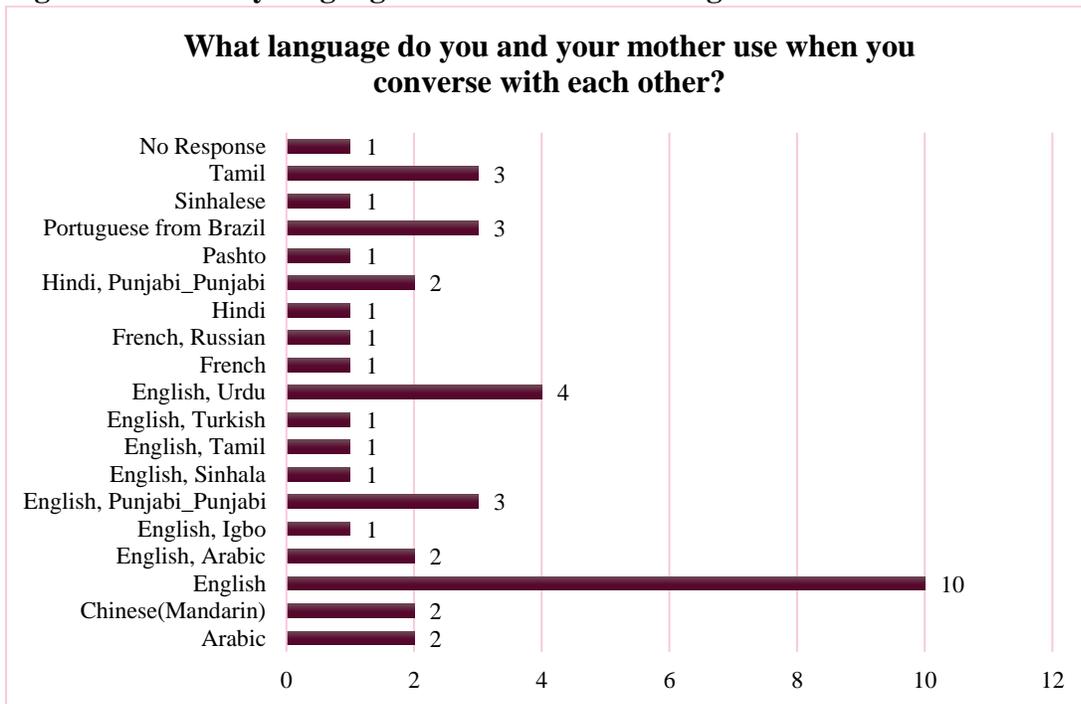


Figure 17 shows that the majority of daughters communicate with their mothers English (10) or in a combination of English and their mother’s first language (13). Language is important to consider as it is one of the primary ways in which values and knowledge are transmitted from mother to daughter.

### Mother-Daughter Relationship

**Figure 18: What differences do daughter see as existing between mothers and daughters**

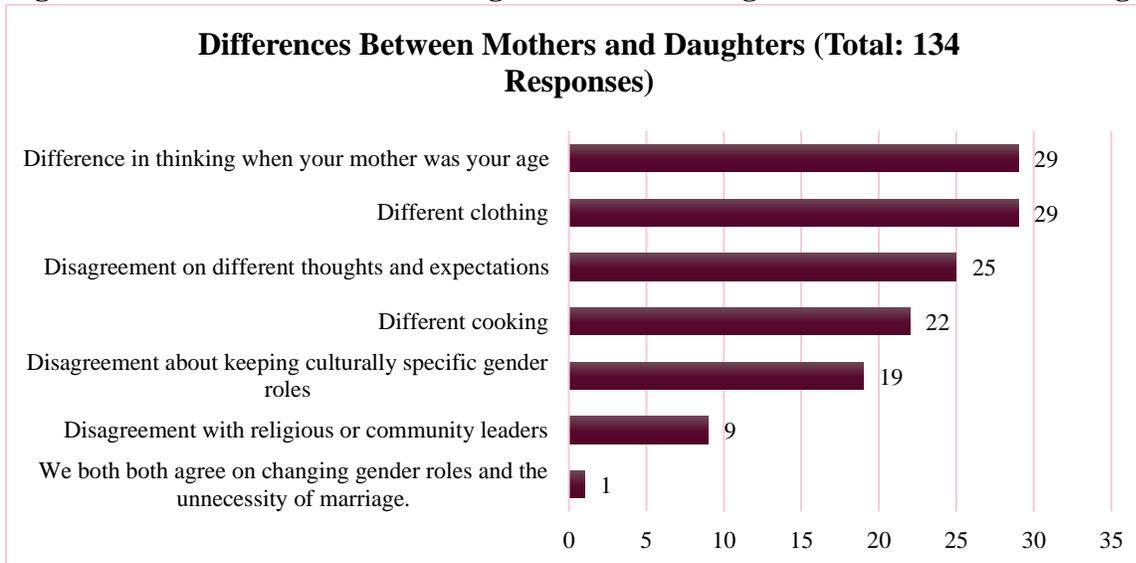


Figure 18 illustrates that there are a number of differences that daughters see as existing between themselves and their mothers. The first major difference exists in their thinking patterns. 29

daughters perceive their thinking to be different from that of their mothers when the mother was their age. This could be for numerous reasons, such as the generational difference, living in a different cultural environment at their current age than their mother did, or due to the role of social media and technology present in the daughters life that was not present in their mothers life at that age. Differences in thinking do have the potential to increase conflict in the mother-daughter relationship. Another area of difference that could increase conflict is disagreements in thought and expectations. 25 daughters reported this as a difference. Conflict may also arise due to disagreement on gender roles. Such differences in thinking and expectations and disagreements in gender roles could be due to an acculturation gap between mothers and daughters, resulting from being immersed in differently in the mother culture of origin and mainstream Canadian culture. Children who migrate with their parents tend to acculturate faster than their parents, which has been linked to the creation of conflict within the parent-child relationship. Such conflict can place strain on the mother-daughter relationship.

**Figure 19: Communication between mothers and daughters**

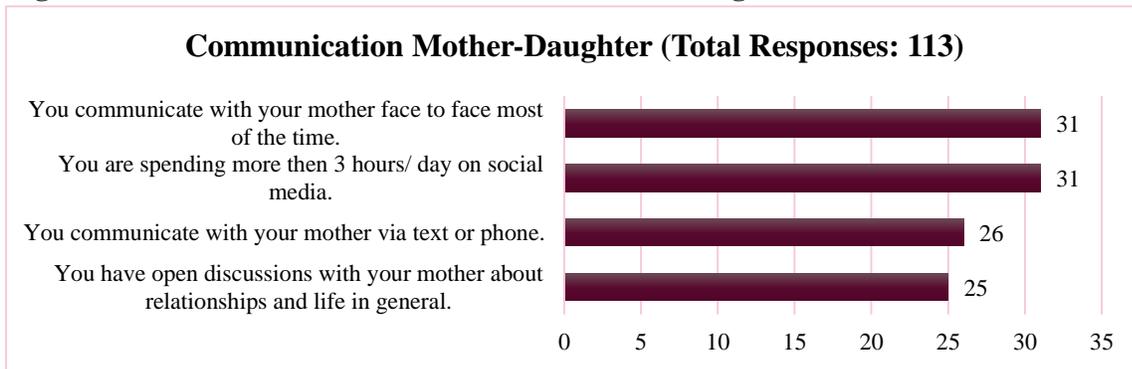


Figure 19 displays the results regarding daughters’ responses to the communication between mothers and daughters. The vast majority of daughters (31) report they communicate with their mothers face-to-face most of the time, which was confirmed by daughters in the focus group. This is likely due to the majority of daughters being under the age of 20 and thus, still living at home with their mothers, increasing their face-to-face interactions. The majority of the daughters (31) report spending more than three hours per day on social media, which can impede their engagement in relationship-building activities and conversations with their mothers, which could potentially have an impact on the mother-daughter relationship. The majority of daughters (25) report having open conversations with their mothers about relationships and more general life topics, which is an indicator of strong mother-daughter relationships.

**Figure 20: What stories did your mother share with you?**

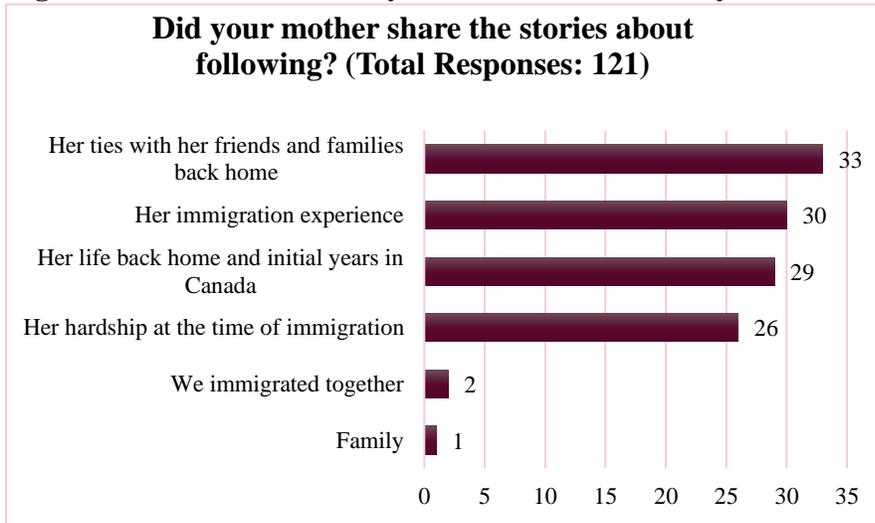
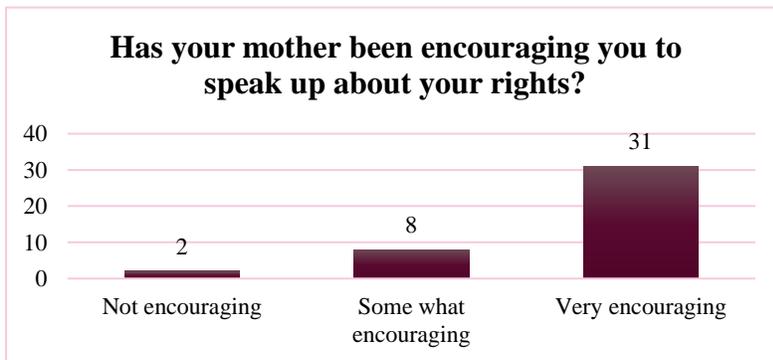


Figure 20 illustrates that mothers shared a variety of stories with their daughters in relation to their experience of migration. One of the key areas mothers discussed was their ties with their loved ones back home, as 33 daughters reported their mothers sharing these stories. This finding highlights the importance of social ties back home

and relates to how migration can invoke a sense of separation. 30 daughters also report their mothers sharing their immigration experience and 26 reported their mothers sharing the challenges of immigration. The high response rates to these important topics of conversation highlight strength in mother-daughter relationships, as these can be highly challenging topics for mothers to discuss.

**Figure 21: Encouragement to speak up for your rights**

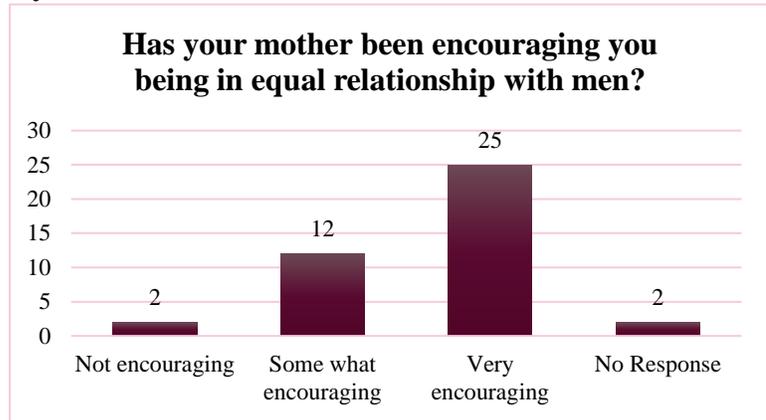


The next set of graphs illustrates some of the key values that mothers instilled in their daughters, including standing up for their rights and equality with Figure 24 displays the results of responses provided by mothers regarding what topics they discussed with their daughters.

The most commonly discussed topics include the responsibilities of being a woman, being a mother, marriage, puberty, gender roles, and heterosexual behaviours. All of these topics had responses from 21 (50%) or more of the mothers. The least talked about topics mothers reported included sexuality, violence in relationships, having children, transgender identity, bisexuality and lesbianism, responsibilities in general, and education. All of these categories had a response rate of less than 50%.

**Figure 22: Encouragement of equality with men**

Figure 22 illustrates that mothers have been quite encouraging of their daughters having equal relationships with men, with 25 daughters reporting mothers being very encouraging. Again, this is an important value that mothers have worked to instill in their daughters and demonstrates mothers' own value systems regarding gender roles and the importance of challenging traditional gender roles.



### *Social Media*

**Figure 23: Social media and the mother-daughter relationship**

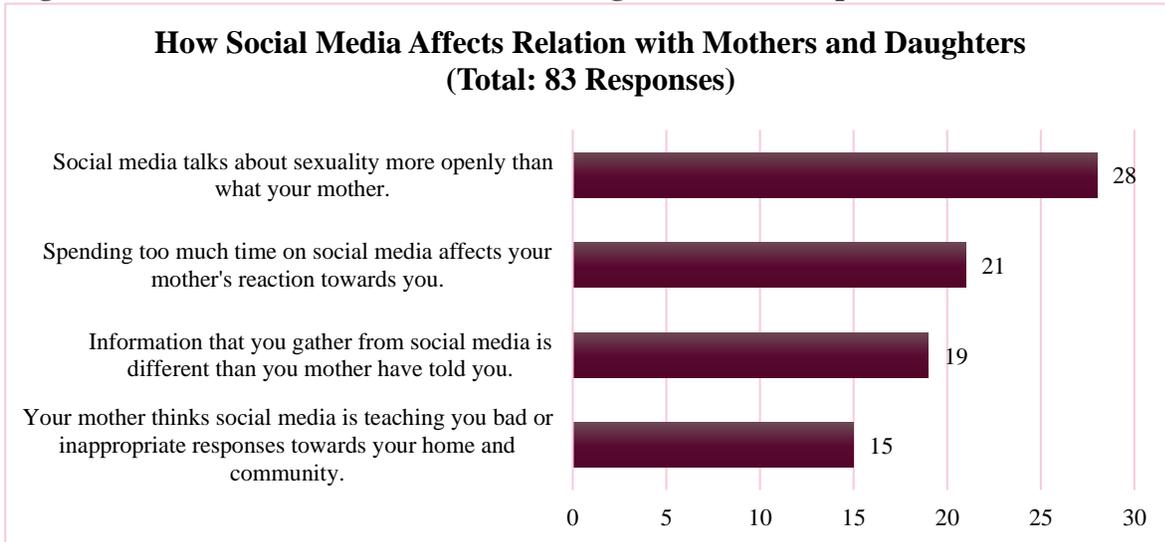


Figure 23 illustrates the results of daughters' responses to the question of how social media impacts the mother-daughter relationship. Daughters largely reported that social media talks more openly about sexuality than their mothers (28). This corresponds to the fact that the majority of daughters did not report that mothers that their mothers spoke to them about sexuality, bisexuality and lesbianism (Figures 24 and 25). This indicates that daughters are getting more of their information regarding sexuality from social media rather than their mothers. 21 daughters reported that their higher amounts of time on social media affects how their mothers react to them, which demonstrates the discrepancy in social media use between mothers and daughters. 19 daughters reported that there are differences in information acquired from social media compared to that which came from their mother, which highlights differences in mothers' value systems than what social media portrays. It also calls into question which information source daughters rely on more heavily.

## Comparing Mothers and Daughters

**Figure 24: Topics mothers reported sharing with daughters**

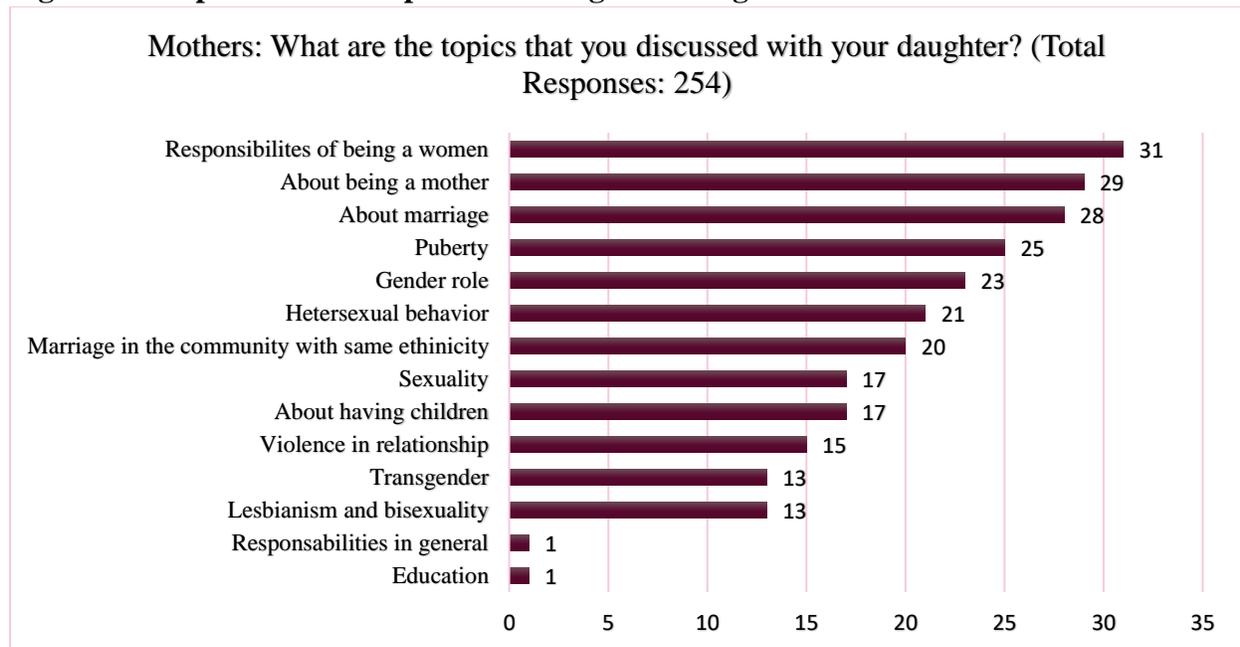


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**Figure 25: Topic/stories mothers shared with daughters as reported by daughters**

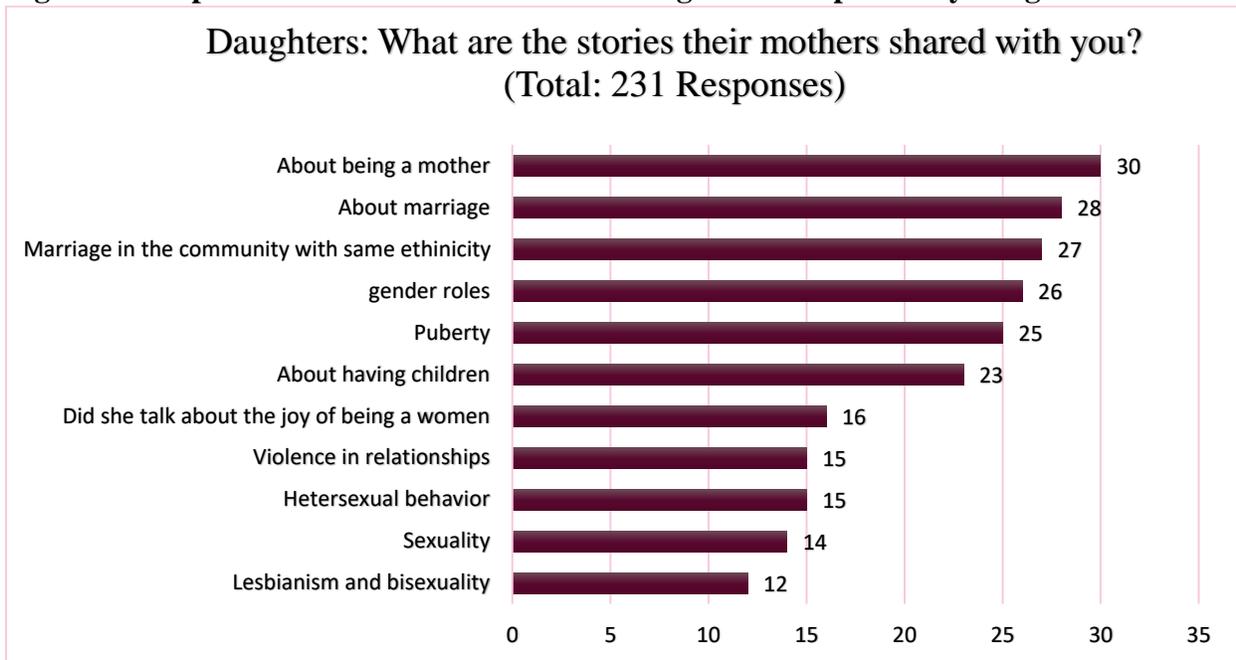


Figure 25 displays the results provided by daughters regarding what topics they discussed with their mothers. The most commonly discussed topics include motherhood, marriage, gender roles, puberty, and children. More than 50% of daughters responded to these as topics discussed with their mothers. The topics daughters reported were least discussed with their mothers include the joy of being a woman, sexuality, violence in relationships, heterosexuality, and lesbianism and bisexuality. These topics all had a response rate below 50%.

**Figure 26: Words of wisdom**

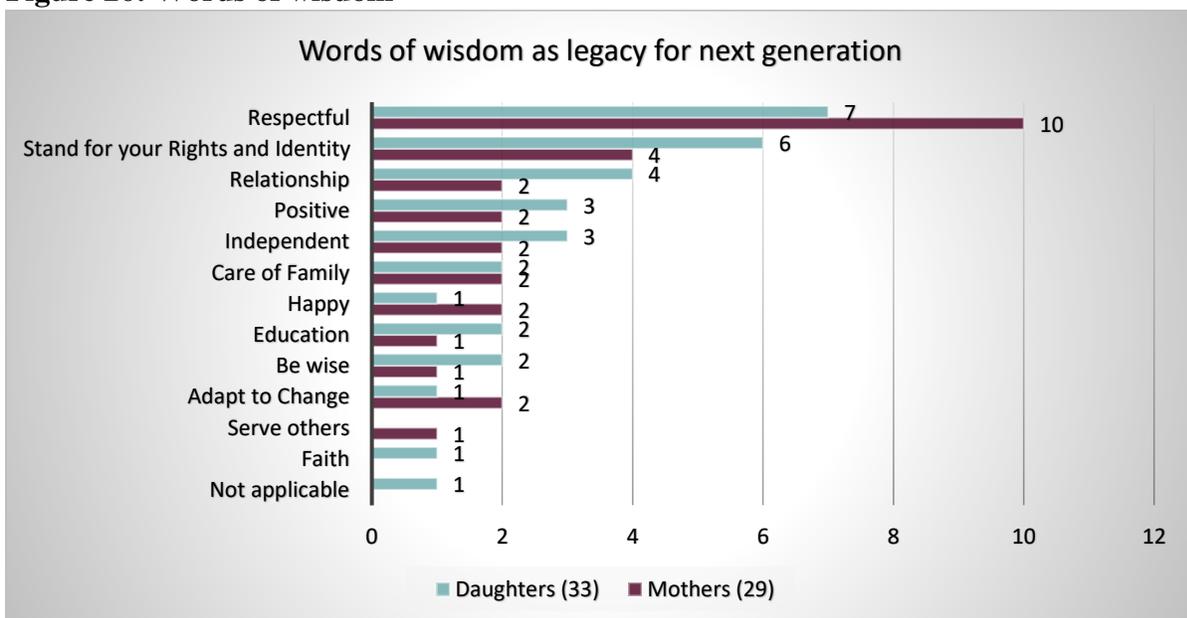


Figure 26 compares the key themes arising from the words of wisdom mothers shared with their daughters and that daughters shared that their mothers provided them with. Based on these results, it is clear that mothers passed on a great deal of wisdom regarding respect and the importance for daughters to stand up for their rights and identity. A total of 7 daughters and 10 mothers shared words of wisdom within the theme of respect and 6 daughters and 4 mothers shared words of wisdom within the theme of standing up for rights. This corresponds with the findings from daughters that mothers were highly encouraging of daughters to stand up for their rights (Figure 21) and to have equal relationships with men (Figure 22). Such a finding points to the importance of the values of respect and standing up for oneself for migrant mothers to pass on to their young daughters.

## Focus Group Results

Throughout the duration of the focus group a series of guiding questions were asked focusing on migration stories, family configuration, knowledge transmission regarding relationships and womanhood, violence in relationships, technology use, and conflict in relationships. The findings for each topic are discussed here with reference to specific quotes from the participants.

### Stories of migration

#### *Migration and its Multitude of Challenges*

One of the key themes that came up when the mothers were discussing their stories of coming to Canada is that they faced a number of challenges. One mother discussed the challenges of finding a place to live, even though her family was financially stable. She adds that even when they did, it was not a safe space conducive to raising a young child.

“[I]t was really hard, really hard for us to find another place to rent because they want a lot of stuff. You know, like, if you don’t have a job, if you’re a newcomer, even if you have money, they don’t want to give you any place and ... it took, like, maybe one and half months to find a place... And then we find an apartment in a very bad building. There’s crime all the time, where the police is coming, where you see very strange stuff.”

Another mother spoke of the challenges to find work upon her arrival in Vancouver.

“Nobody would give me a job. I would seriously want to, wanted to work because I wanted to live here. People – because in Vancouver everybody knew where I came from, whatever. So, they thought I was just joking that I wanted a job. So, they didn’t, I didn’t get a job, nothing.”

#### *Body Image*

The one mother who migrated back to Canada a number of years after leaving shared a major challenge that her daughter, who was around the age of 12 at the time faced:

“[My daughter] was in sixth grade. And when we moved here, everything changed for her. She, maybe because of her age. She wasn’t thinking about her body or her image when she was back in

Saudi Arabia, but here, she thinks that everybody's judging her. Like, you know. Because you - we wear, like, big dresses in Saudi Arabia. Nobody cares about your body or, they only look at you as a person."

### *Immigration and separation*

Another challenge that arose was living apart from family. For a few of the families, this was a part of their story at one point in time. They note the ramifications of this and the sense of loss this living a part evoked. When these mothers spoke of these experiences of separation, the pain and associated emotions they experienced were evident. For one mother, in particular, her husband had never moved to Canada, and they had always lived apart. She shared:

"So, we opted for this, that I come here. So, I came her with my son after he finished his grade 10... [N]ow I do six months there, six months here ... But the fact that we both had to live apart, you know, it's been 11, 12 years. Nobody's going to return us that time. So, you know, I have - we have lost out on that big time, big time.

The sense of loss this mother feels at having lost out on that time with her husband being in her and her children's lives was palpable. There was grief in her voice as she shared the sacrifices she and her family made for her children to have a better life and better opportunities.

One of the other mothers shared how she and her husband lived apart from their children for a number of years. Her and her husband were both working full-time and life became to challenging to handle. However, this had long-term ramifications, leading to the children feeling a sense of loss in having been separated from their parents. This mother shared:

"So, then we went back home. We left both our kids there. So, they were there for almost five years... So, there were those family struggles which my kids, they still come in and say 'why did you do that to us? Why did you drop us?' I said, 'it was hard for us. No family, no parents, no support, just me and him.'"

Another common thread in the discussions of the mothers was a questioning of why they migrated in the first place and desiring to go back home. For one mother, this questioning resulted in her family moving back to their country of origin. She and her family did ultimately end up coming back to Canada a few years later after living in Turkey for a while as well as Saudi Arabia. This mother recounts that experience of questioning why:

"Why are we here? ... Everybody's back there? And all the family is back there and why are we raising our child here? With no family?"

Another mother shared how the challenges of adjusting to life in Canada left her questioning her choice to come to Canada. However, she chose to stay.

"Why am I living in this country? ... I thought 'oh god, why did I choose this life?"

One mother shared how even while going through the steps to become a resident in Canada she would hope that she would be rejected.

“I wanted to go back. I just did not want to stay here .. [W]hen [my husband] applied for my residence, it was under common law, and the lawyer – and I was very happy – because the lawyer told me it could get rejected. And I was so happy it was going to be rejected. I’ll go back.”

Migration brought with it not only a variety of practical challenges, but also a deep pain for many of the mothers.

“So, you know, I just thought, ‘what have I done to earn this.’ You know, this is too much ... And every day I would cry walking in the snow ... So, I cried. Cried for six months”

“Same here. I don’t – I still can’t adapt, but on the other hand, I feel it’s very criminal for the kids.”

### **What was your family’s configuration?**

When asked about family configuration, a key theme that arose from the conversation among the mothers was the importance of community rather than individuality. One of the mothers spoke of growing up in a joint family, in which they lived with extended family members. She said that

“one good thing is that I never say anything is mine because it is ours ... [we] learned about community.”

This idea of ‘mine’ vs ‘ours’ resonated with the other mothers, with one mother say that

“here it’s different, kids, mostly they prefer to say ‘it’s mine’; my room. Back home, it’s ours”.

When discussing family configuration a key theme that arose was the idea of “ours” vs. “mine”. This demonstrates the difference between growing up in a collectivist culture compared to an individualistic culture. The majority of the mothers came from India, where the culture is largely collectivist, and thus, values of sharing and of community are dominant. This differs from the context in which many raised their daughters and other children. Mainstream Canadian culture values individualism, and this is evident in how the mothers discuss how their children refer to items, using the word ‘mine’ rather than ‘ours’. What this demonstrates is the influence of Canadian culture on the values of daughters. Even though the mothers held values of collectivism and community, they were not so clearly transmitted to their daughters within the Canadian context.

## **What did mothers tell their daughters about being a woman? About relationships? About menstruation?**

Two of the daughters shared that their mothers never sat them down to specifically have a conversation about menstruation, sex, and relationships. Rather, they shared that these topics of conversation would come up quite organically in conversation and in ways that allowed fluid and open conversation to occur or occurred when the daughters had questions. When discussing this, these two daughters mainly engaged in conversation with one another, rather than with their mothers.

“ I would say that whenever I had any sort of question about sexuallike periods or like puberty or anything, like, that, my mom was very open and she always, like told the truth and she never tried to cover anything up or hide anything or try to go around corners and stuff like that ... Sometimes I approach her, but sometimes, it’s just like, when we’re drinking tea and like, [the] convo is just going”.

For one of the daughters, her mother was older and more reserved, so they never had conversations about menstruation and sexuality.

“[M]y mom is more reserved. She came here in the late 70s. And she’s more old school ... We never really talked about that stuff.”

For another one of the daughters, due to the large age gap between her and her older sister, it was her older sister who she often had these conversations with, rather than her mother.

“So. My older sister, we have an age difference of almost 11 years, it’s like ten and half years. So, growing up, she was kind of a little bit of a second mother in a way. So, she would talk to me about those kinds of things.”

## **What did mothers tell their daughters about relationships with men and violence?**

The daughters shared that their mothers did raise the topic of violence in relationships with them and that they also were able to reach out to others in their circle for advice as well.

“Yeah. Especially because, like, a lot of men are alcoholics and just even, like, our experiences seeing uncles or other people. That was a conversation we had almost all the time. All the time and it was very comfortable and very open talking about it. But if we didn’t feel comfortable enough talking to our mom, there was always someone else that we can talk to.”

When asked if they knew anyone who has been abused physically or sexually, both mothers and daughters said that they did not. They did report seeing and hearing of some mental abuse within

their communities. There was some discussion of older women having experienced mental abuse, but not speaking to it due to family shame.

### **What does the use of media look like for mothers and daughters?**

When asked about what technology mothers and daughters use to communicate with one another, the vast majority said WhatsApp. WhatsApp is also the way that the mothers reported using to communicate with their family back home and with other extended family members.

“My mother, since we moved, WhatsApp messages and video me. Then my daughter sends to me. Me sending it to my daughter. So these days you know, grandmothers are also, like, very techno savvy and very expressive. Every day, ‘good morning,’ ‘good night,’ ‘happy Sunday,’ ‘happy Monday’ would come from India.”

“And I find myself communicating a lot with everybody through WhatsApp. Even my sisters are in Chile.”

There was also some discussion on the use of Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat.

“We obviously communicate with each other on, like, Instagram, most, and maybe TikTok here and there. [Or here,] look at this funny video on Snapchat”

The mothers shared that their daughters would send them videos or pictures of items that they wanted using various technological means.

“[They send] what they want to eat, okay. This looks really nice on TikTok, they’ll send it to you”

“[They send] what is it, some things on their bucket list, what is it they want to buy? That they will send to you, maybe the mother might dish out some money.”

As the majority of the daughters still live at home with their mothers, they shared that the majority of their communication occurs face-to-face rather than mediated through technology.

“There is no need to call or text, I see them every day. I can talk to you downstairs”

### **Does conflict occur between mothers and daughters?**

There was widespread agreement that conflict occurs a great deal between mothers and daughters. When asked how they deal with conflict, a few different responses were provided.

“Depends, you get everything out at each other for a good like 30 minute and then come back and maybe apologize or something, [and] reason, like, compromise.”

“She’ll always make up for the conflict. She’ll always either cook something or bake something, or make tea.”

## Parenting across cultures

In discussing the conflict between mothers and daughters, the mothers raised the topic of parenting across cultures. What was it like? How did they go about communicating these differences?

“I mean unintentionally you do carry [cultural values]. Yes. You do carry that with you. However liberal you may find yourself, you still carry those inhibitions and those cultural control within you as a mother, towards your daughter.”

“And I think it’s very fortunate. Because then they get the best of both world. They get a bit of us, they get a bit of the new.”

These cultural differences were not something the mothers said were directly spoken about, but rather implicitly understood within their relationships with their daughters.

“Being immigrants, I don’t think we need to tell them. We make sure they know. I think it’s that, we don’t communicate about it. But we just make sure.”

One mother also notes how sometimes cultural divides create conflict.

“Sometimes you know, you have to hear from their mouth, ‘why did you bring us here then?’ Sometimes they also say to you, ‘then why did you bring us here if you’re going to have all those controls on us? So, we live in a different world. So, they also try them. We have to listen to them. And then we have to strike a balance somewhere you know.’”

## How do mothers feel about their daughters dating or marrying a partner of a different culture?

All of the mothers discussed having married within their own culture. When asked about how they felt about their daughters dating or marrying outside of their own culture, all but one mother reported that they had no preference as to the culture of the partner of their daughter.

“Oh, I’m very okay with that because they didn’t have any Turkish boyfriends so far ... But I have no problem. But, as long as he’s a good person and respecting my daughters, I’m very open to any culture.”

“[My daughter married] in the same culture. Yes. That was my preference.”

One of the daughters, who is married, shared her story of marrying into another culture. She shares how it was initially more challenging for her brother than her mother.

“So, I ended up marrying somebody out of my culture and like, my mom loves him. And my brother loves him. [At first] my brother was a little hesitent ... because he didn’t accept me

marrying out of our culture, right? So, it was hard for him to accept it but now, like, they are best friends.”

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to discover more about women’s migration experiences, what and how values and knowledge are transmitted from mothers to daughters, as well as the role of technology in the mother-daughter relationship. Such a study is important to increase a gendered understanding of the migration experience as gender is a key factor in the lived experience of migration. Further, it is important as immigrant mother’s role as transmitters of values and knowledge is often compounded by having to raise their daughters across two differing cultures. Technology and social media are important to examine in this context given the high usage of such technologies amongst young women, which can have a great deal of influence on the knowledge and values that daughters acquire.

From the stories of migration that mothers shared, it is apparent that migration resulted in a variety of challenges, including struggles to get a job, an education, changes in responsibilities, making friends and in finding a place to live. One of the key areas of challenge addressed in the focus group which was not addressed in the survey was the experience of family separation. Participants highlighted that migration often involves separation from one’s extended support network, as well as from immediate family. It is also necessary to consider in the context of transnational families and refugee families who may experience extended periods of separation, between parents and children. These separations between parent and child can have lasting effects, including increased rates of depression and anxiety for children.

Another key area highlighted in the focus group by a mother addressing a challenge her young daughter experienced in the migration process was the cultural change regarding body image. This shift that leads to an increased body focus had a negative impact on her daughter during a formative period of development. Such a finding is important to address given that high prevalence of diet culture and body focus in Canadian and Western culture that is not perpetuated as readily in non-western countries, where the majority of immigrants come from. It brings into question how mothers navigate instilling body appearance values in their daughters and how mothers and daughters can work together to navigate these changing cultural values. It becomes important for immigrant service providers to address because body dissatisfaction places youth at increased risk of eating disorders and other mental health concerns.

In turning to look at the value and knowledge transmission process between mothers and daughters, it is clear that mothers play a key role in this process. Based on the results of the survey, mothers are most comfortable discussing and have discussed topics regarding gender, as it related to womanhood and motherhood, and relationships and are less comfortable and engage in less conversation regarding sexuality-related topics. These findings illustrate a relative openness to these topics even though a portion of the migrant mothers come from cultures in which sexuality, sexual behaviour, gender identity may be more taboo topics.

An important finding is that this information was never provided in a direct conversation, but rather, occurred in organic conversation or when daughters had specific questions. These daughters compared how they received this information to how some of their friends of non-immigrant parents received this information. Their non-immigrant friends often received such information through a specific 'sex talk', whereas as they received it in more a more indirect manner. Thus, it appears such value and knowledge transmission here occurs in organic and open ways that enable daughters to learn both from their mothers and from other sources.

In discussing value and knowledge transmission we found that at times mothers are not involved at all with the transmission of values and knowledge regarding sex, menstruation, gender, and relationships. This is an important as it highlights that mothers are not the only source, and at time not a source at all for values and knowledge regarding sex, gender, and relationships.

An important finding that comes out of this focus group has to do with the non-verbal communication of the participants. Particularly the body language of the daughters. Oftentimes, when mothers were sharing their thoughts on cultural transmission of values, conflict in the relationships, we saw that the daughters would make faces or role their eyes in ways that that signaled disagreement with their mothers. This is important to note, as the daughters did not often explicitly disagree with their mothers, however, their facial expressions and body language indicated thoughts and opinions that remained unsaid. This suggests that for future research it may be beneficial to conduct a separate focus group for mothers and daughters to increase daughters' comfort in sharing more about their relationships with their mothers.

Survey results indicated a large agreement in being comfortable in discussing the racial background of a daughters partner. To expand upon this, in the focus group mothers were asked about their values surrounding racial background of their daughter's future. The majority of mothers shared an openness for their daughters to dating and marrying outside of their culture. One daughter's story of marrying outside of her culture demonstrated how her mother valued how her daughter was treated more so that the culture of her daughter's partner. Mothers' openness to their daughters' involvement in interracial relationships is important given the rise of interracial couples in Canada as well as the affect that parental reactions can have on the parent-child relationship. An openness on the part of mothers for their daughters to partner with someone outside of their culture demonstrates a shift in their own value system, all the mothers, themselves had married within their culture. It demonstrates to daughters that it is not one's culture that is to be valued, but more so how that person treats you. This finding is alignment with recent research that found that children who married.

Finally, when it comes to social media, it does seem have somewhat of a role or effect in the mother-daughter relationship. Focus group participants highlighted how certain social media sites and other apps, such as WhatsApp are used for communication purposes. However, we also found that the majority of mother-daughter communication occurs in face-to-face interactions, which may be due to daughters being at ages where they still live in the same house as their mothers. A key finding was that daughters appear to get more information regarding sexuality from social

media than their mothers, as the discussion on social media is more open than their mothers are. These findings regarding social media highlight that social media and technology focused workshops for mothers and daughters will offer benefits to both mothers and daughters.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, this study highlighted the complexity of the migration experience and the impacts migration has on the lives of mothers, as well as on their daughters. Mothers are key figures in the value and knowledge transmission process regarding gender, sexuality, and relationships. Thus, it is important that the mother-daughter relationship is strengthened through policies and programs to support this process. Social media and technology are implicated in this process given the high use of these by young daughters.

This study has implications for counsellors working with immigrant mothers and/or daughters, as it enhances the understanding of the complexity of the migration experience, as well as the mothers play in teaching their daughters about gender, sexuality, and relationships.

Finally, this study asserts that increased understanding about beliefs concerning sexuality and gender-related issues among immigrants populations has vital implications for public policy in areas such as mental health and reproductive concerns.

It is our hope that these study contributed to awareness and integration of experiences for the participants as they contribute to others' increased understanding of women's experiences of crossing the land and emotional margins.

To conclude, these results will aid in the next phase of this project involving the creation and launching of workshops for migrant mothers and their young daughters.

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## Appendix A: Flyers

Appendix A contains copies of the two flyers distributed across the Region of Peel to recruit mother and daughter participants for the Gender, Migration, and Identity study.



**ARE YOU A RECENT  
IMMIGRANT? A WOMAN? AND  
SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO SHARE THEIR  
MIGRATION EXPERIENCE?**

**JOIN US FOR OUR FOCUS GROUP:**

**WHEN:** Saturday, August 20th, 2022 from 12pm-2:30pm

**WHERE:** Family Services of Peel, 300 - 5975 Whittle Rd.,  
Mississauga ON, L4Z 3N1

**Transportation will be reimbursed**

**CONTACT:** MARCELLAXAVIER@OUTLOOK.COM OR  
VYSHNAVE7@OUTLOOK.COM

## **Appendix B: Surveys**

Appendix B contains copies of the mother and daughter surveys that were used to collect the data for this study.

### **Gender, Migration, and Identity – Mother Survey**

#### **Pre-Migration**

1. How would you describe the life you led in your country of origin?
  - a. Family
  - b. Community
  - c. Government
  
2. How would you compare the lives of men with the lives of women in your home country?
  - a. Very similar
  - b. Somewhat similar
  - c. Completely different
  
3. Who made the decisions in your family?
  - a. Myself
  - b. My husband
  - c. Others: specify
  
4. How was your identity defined in your country of origin?
  - a. By Ethnic Origin
  - b. By Religion
  - c. By Geography
  - d. By Language
  - e. By Race or Caste
  
5. Did you come to Canada with children?
  - a. Yes if yes how many boys and how many girls
  - b. no

#### **The Journey to Canada**

1. Tell me story of how you immigrated to Canada

Paragraph:

2. Who made the decision to leave?
  - a. Myself
  - b. My husband
  - c. Someone else specify:
3. Did your circumstances lead up to that decision?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. What has changed in your family by immigrating to Canada?
  - a. Life is the same
  - b. Life has changed a little
  - c. Life is completely different
  
5. What was your age at the time of immigrating to Canada?
  - a. <20 year
  - b. between 21-40 years
  - c. > 40 years
  
6. Is Canada your first country of migration?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
7. How was the process of your trip to Canada?
  - a. Difficult
  - b. Somewhat difficult
  - c. Smooth
  
8. Are there any experiences that stand out?
  - a. Short answer

### **Migration**

1. What knowledge did you have about life in Canada when you first arrived?
  - a. No Knowledge
  - b. Some knowledge
  - c. Well informed
  
2. How is life in Canada when you first arrived?
  - a. Very difficult
  - b. Somewhat difficult
  - c. Smooth

3. Do you have children who were born in Canada?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. Is there difference between your life back home and the life you are living now?
  - a. Similar
  - b. Slightly different
  - c. Very different
  
5. Before coming to Canada, were you working?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
6. Have you had any periods of employment since you arrived?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
7. Did immigrating to Canada change your life?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
8. Do you have friends in Canada?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
9. Are your friend from here or originally from your home country?
  - a. From here
  - b. originally from your home country

### **Mother-Daughter Relationship**

1. Has the life made differences between you and your daughter by immigrating to Canada?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
2. Do you feel your life in Canada is integrate and hold values?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
3. Mother tongue
  - a. English
  - b. Other specify

4. How was your mother daughter relationship back home?
  - a. Excellent
  - b. Good
  - c. Fair
  - d. Poor
  
5. Is this relationship different now?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
6. Have differences in your viewpoints affected your relationship with your daughter?
  1. Yes specify
  2. No

**Transformation of gender role and sexuality**

1. Do you find differences in the food you eat?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
2. Do you find differences in clothing?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
3. Are there differences in your daughter's life as compared to your life when you were her age?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. Do you find these changes are better?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
5. Do you have disagreement with your daughter on those differences?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
6. Have you felt pressured by religious or community leaders, elders, or men from your country to keep culturally specific gender roles that you have outgrown or do not reflect the person you have become in Canada?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

## Final Words

If you have some words of wisdom from your experience to relate to your daughter(s) and grandchildren, what would you like to tell them?

## Gender, Migration, and Identity- Daughter Survey

### To daughters

1. Were you born in Canada?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No if no then q2
  
2. If you were born in another country, how old were you when you immigrated to Canada  
Specify
  
3. Did your mother ever share with you the story of her immigration experience?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. Are there any particular events in your mother's migration experience?
  - a. Yes specify
  - b. No
  
5. What is your mother tongue?
  - a. English
  - b. Other specify
  
6. What language do you and your mother use when you converse with each other?
  - a. English
  - b. Other specify
  
7. Do you think your mother's migration experience has influenced or made any difference  
in your life?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
8. Is your mother's life different now then her country of origin?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
9. Would your mother be a different kind of woman if she had not immigrated to Canada?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

10. How would you describe your relationship with your mother?

- a. Very good
- b. Somewhat okay
- c. Not good

11. Does your mother tell you about being a woman? About puberty? About relating to men. About violence in relationships? About marriage? About having children. About being a mother?

- a. Yes specify
- b. no

12. Are the messages about sexuality/gender roles/womanhood that you received at home culturally different from the messages you receive among mainstream Canadian society?

- a. Yes specify
- b. No

13. Do you think people have different beliefs here in Canada about women?

- a. Yes
- b. No

14. Have you ever been abused, sexually or otherwise?

- a. Yes
- b. No

15. If yes, did this happen in your family or with others?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16. Have you discussed this with anyone else?

- a. Yes
- b. No

17. If you are comfortable, please share it

Paragraph

18. Has your mother encouraged you to speak up, speak out and establish equal relationships with men and to share responsibilities equally?

- a. Yes
- b. No

## **Transformation of gender roles and sexuality**

1. Do you find differences in food you eat?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
2. Do you find differences in clothing?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
3. Are there differences in your life as compared to your mother's life, when she was your age?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. Do you find these changes are better?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
5. Do you have disagreement with your mother on these differences?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
6. Have you felt pressured by religious or community leaders, elders or men from your country to keep culturally specific gender roles that you have outgrown or do not reflect the person you have become in Canada?
  - a. Yes
  - b. no

Final word:

Do you have some words of wisdom that you learned from your mother, that you would like to leave as a legacy for your own children and grandchildren?

What do you wish for your mother as she ages?