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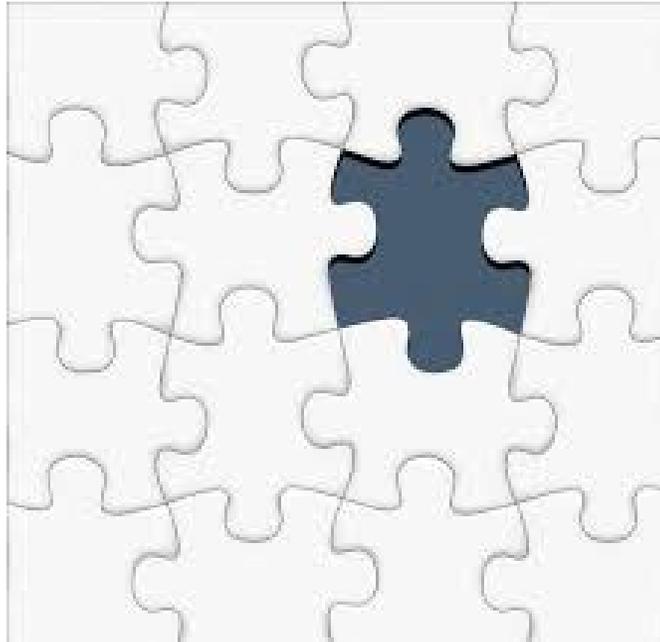
Considering Children's Perspectives on Contact with their Father in the Context of Post-Separation Intimate Partner Violence

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- Children are victims of intimate partner violence.
- They have rights.
 - Protection.
 - Participation.



- The use of intimate partner violence is a parental choice.
- It reflects gaps in parenting skills.

- Professionals tend to favour maintaining father-child contact.
- Most children continue to have contact with their father.

This research aims to better understand the experiences and perspectives of children who are victims of intimate partner violence regarding their relationships with their father in a post-separation context. In particular, it focuses on father-child contact and the reparation process as envisioned by the children.

5 components

- Establishing a working committee with children as co-researchers.
- Secondary data analysis.
- Individual interviews & focus groups.
- Survey.
- Actions for social change / knowledge mobilization.



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Methodology (Individual Interviews)

- Recruitment.
- Data collection – Semi-structured individual interviews.
- Participants:
 - 19 children aged 5 to 17.
 - 12 girls, 5 boys & 2 non-identified gender individuals.
 - Most participants were born in Canada (1 was born in France).
 - Most parents were born in Canada (some were born in Algeria, France, Haiti, Switzerland, Morocco & the United States).
 - Participants spoke French, English, or both.
 - 8 participants did not identify with any religion, 4 identified as Christian, 1 identified as Muslim & 1 identified as Jewish.
- Thematic content analysis.



Fostering child participation



5 essential elements

- Space.
- Voice.
- Hearing.
- Influence.
- Information.

(Lundy, 2007)

Space (1)

Many professionals did not seek children's views.

They [DYP child protection workers] didn't really ask questions about that. [...] the social worker spoke to my father, and my father chose when we would speak to him on Skype. (Bunny, 11 years old)

Many professionals failed to create a safe and comfortable space for children.

At first, they [the police officers] said I couldn't take my teddy bear, because it's my first teddy bear, my comfort teddy, my favourite teddy... [...] but my mother convinced them, and in the end I was able to have it. (Lili, 11 years old)

Space (2)

Some professionals created a space that supported child participation.

I was very happy to find a lawyer like that, because it was really good to be able to talk to her. Then my mother told me that she [the lawyer] had shared what I said and had defended my opinion really well, exactly the way I wanted. So I was very happy. She asked me what made me want to see him and what I wanted afterward. (Mauve, 15 years old)

Voice (1)

Some children found it difficult to share their perspective and were reluctant to do so.

Honestly, that's the part I liked the least, because you had to tell your story. (Léandre, 14 years old)

Voice (2)

Some children found it easier to express their point of view and felt empowered.

With the DYP worker, I explained that the parental alienation wasn't my mother's doing, but my father's. And that it was better for me not to have any contact with him. It was, "You're going to have contact with your father because he's your father." That's when I got angry and said, "I don't understand why you're in my life. I'm doing well. Yes, I have no contact with my father, but forcing a father who is physically violent, a father who sexually assaults his daughter, on her would be inhumane." [...]
It's the same thing for me, except there's nothing physical. It's mental and verbal violence. [...]
(Eve, 17 years old)

The Hearing (1)

Some children were not listened to because of their age, their credibility, etc.

It's called youth protection, but it's already bad enough that they aren't able to really listen to us and take children's decisions into account. [...] They only considered their own point of view, and they didn't really care about us. I told my mother, no, it's stupid that it's called youth protection, because they aren't able to listen to children. (Gérard, 14 years old)

Some professionals tried to convince the children, to make them change their minds.

Like, "You always need your father even if he has... I think he's still your father and, you know, you never know, he might change, so you should give him another chance." [...] And I feel like the people who said that were saying it more at the beginning, when I didn't want to see him or wanted to see him less, or when I was trying to figure out what to do and didn't want to have contact with him. (Eden, 15 years old)

The Hearing (2)

Children felt that professionals had listened to them.

She [DYP worker] looked me in the eyes. She gave me her full attention. (Dahlia, 8 years old)

These professionals focused on the children and on their well-being.

She [the psychologist] really let me express myself. She let me say what I wanted. She was just there to listen to me. Sometimes she gave me tips to help with my stress, and documents to help me. To give me small goals. She was very kind. (Léandre, 14 years old)

Even when the decisions were not the ones the children would have preferred.

Even though we tried, it didn't always end the way I wanted, but I know it often made a big difference. And it was positive; her approach made things more positive. (Mauve, 15 years old)

Influence (1)

Some decisions made no difference in the children's lives.

To be honest, I didn't really like her [DYP worker]. I don't think she understood what I was saying. She didn't really understand my point of view. After that, when I told her I didn't want to see my father, that I didn't want to talk to him, and that I didn't want him to talk to me, she didn't respect that choice. So I had to meet with him. (Nessa, 11 years old)

Professionals could have made more of an effort to better understand children's perspectives.

Try to understand me better. Help me and don't force me to see my father, actually. (Nessa, 11 years old)

Professionals could have looked into different options for children.

I think they really could have explored the issue more: why do you think that, or why do you feel that way? And let's try to understand what happened in the past that makes you feel that way, and what the solutions are. [...] Explore different solutions. (Eden, 15 years old)

Influence (2)

Some professionals acted as intermediaries to share children's views with judges.

She [the lawyer] told the judge that [what I wanted]. (Luffy, 11 years old)

Some decisions truly changed children's lives.

The day before we were supposed to go to court, my social worker called me and told me that he had seen how my father was behaving and that it was in my best interest to have no further contact with him. (Eve, 17 years old)

Information (1)

Children often have limited access to information.

For me, my life is a puzzle. [...] A complicated puzzle. I wonder what I know and what I don't know. [...] Things my parents shouldn't tell me,

(Lapine, 8)

I don't know why [it was decided that I would see my mother more often than my father]?
(Simone, 10 years old)

Information (2)

Children want access to information.

We were asking her for the truth. We wanted to know what was going on. (Eve, 17 years old)

Sometimes, mothers provide information to children.

My mother, because she knows that it's sometimes hard for us to be prepared, let us know so that we wouldn't worry about where mom is. (Bunny, 11 years old)



Children's Experiences



Negative Emotions (1)

Fear

Before, I was afraid of him. I never knew what he was going to do. During shared custody, it wasn't great. He humiliated me, yelled at me... Even if he made efforts, organized activities and everything, I was still a bit scared... Scared of what he might do. (Léandre, 14 years old)

Sadness

Sometimes, I go see my father... My heart, it's not... It's broken. When he has an outburst, he starts yelling at me. It makes me sad. (Sophie, 5 years old)

When we weren't being hurt and my mother wasn't being hurt, I felt good. But when my father started hurting my mother, I started to feel sad. (Lyvia, 7 years old)



Negative Emotions (2)

Anger

When he told me, “I’ve changed,” I felt an immense rage rising inside me. Because then he added: “It’s not my fault. I’m a man, you know, men are like that. We’re impulsive.” (Gérard, 14 years old)

When I was still seeing him, what I felt was anger. I could see through his game. I could see how he manipulated things. I felt like I could see through his game more than the others. And it made me so furious to see how he could manipulate everyone and draw them into his game. I felt immense anger. (Eve, 17 years old)



Negative emotions (3)

Anxiety

One time, I even stopped breathing. I was so shaken. And he didn't even notice. I tried to deal with it discreetly, in the back seat of the car. (Léandre, 14 years old)

Sometimes, I feel anxiety even when I'm not with him. But it's worse when I'm with him. It's because of the toxic environment he lives in... and also the way he treats me. (Juliette, 14 years old)

Positive elements

Good memories

I felt good when we were all together and no one was hurt... and before Dad started being mean again. When no one was hurt, and when my mother wasn't hurt, I felt good. But when my father started hurting my mother again, that's when I started to feel sad. (Lyvia, 7 years old)

Loving their father / spending time with their father

I was happy because I told myself, "Oh, maybe this time we'll go into the woods. It's going to be cool." I was excited to see my father. I love him. When my father is in his element, doing what he loves, it's really nice to be with him. But when he wasn't sober, it was a whole different story. (Rose, 14 years old)

Activities

I don't feel safe, I don't feel comfortable, I'm not really happy. But sometimes, I'm glad because he lets us play his PlayStation. (Lili, 11 years old)



The conditions

Stopping the pattern of behaviour

What I would really like is for him to stop raising his voice and to stop arguing all the time.
(Simone, 10 years old)

I wish he were a little less strict, less harsh, and that he didn't always look angry. He yells at me over anything and everything. (Lili, 11 years old)

That he doesn't go back to prison and that he's better than before. (Alexandre, 11 years old)



Conditions for safe and positive contact (1)

Being able to choose the time and frequency

Sometimes, I don't feel like it, but sometimes, say on Saturday or on a day when I don't have school, I feel like going to my father's place. So I ask my mother, then we arrange with my father for him to come pick me up. (Alexandre, 11 years old)

But I don't see him much. And then, the activities we do are like at Christmas, we exchange gifts. For Father's Day, I also give him a gift. We celebrate his birthday. (Lili, 11 years old)



Conditions for safe and positive contact (2)

In the presence of others

You know, I'd say I wouldn't feel safe alone with him at all—at all, not at all, not at all. When I was younger, I felt safe with him when there were police officers around. (Eve, 17 years old)

Neutral people—I'd need people who know what he's really like, because he's charming, you see. It's easy to hide that, and he is very narcissistic, so you see, it's easy... I'd need people who know him and who are neutral. [...] I'd need people I'd feel safe with, like bodyguards. (Léandre, 14 years old)



Conditions for safe and positive contact (3)

Being treated with respect

He could stop lying, stop trying to buy our affection. He could accept that we're human beings and that we have feelings, and pay attention to what he does, because it affects us. And stop forcing his ideas on us. (Eden, 15 years old)

Treat me like someone my own age. (Lilli, 11 years old)

Point of no return (1)

There is nothing he can do

Well, I guess what I want is for him to get out of my life... If he could step away from my life, that would already be something. If he could get out of my life, I'd like that. (Joseph, 13 years old)

I don't think I'll ever get there. It's been a long time since I stopped trying to find a way. I'm sorry, I wish I could say something else, but I can't find an answer. (Eve, 17 years old)

Point of no return (2)

I have no expectations/no hope that he will change

Well, I used to have a lot of expectations. I thought that if I saw him less often, he might realize he should change certain things about his behaviour. I already tried talking to him, telling him I'd like those kinds of things to change, but it didn't work and it still doesn't work. So, of course, I'd like him to listen more—to listen to what I have to say instead of defending himself—because my goal isn't to attack him in a discussion. But I've tried so many times that now, well, I don't really have expectations anymore. (Mauve, 15 years old)



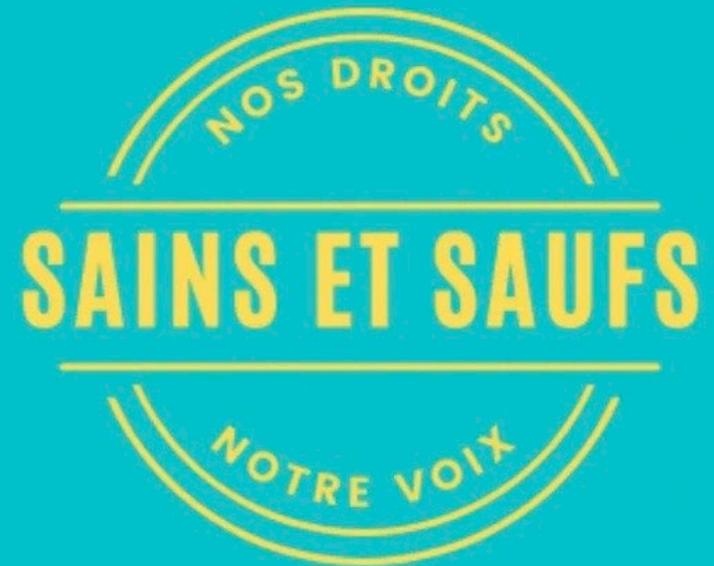
Repair

Repair

Acknowledge, apologize and take responsibility

I think he should admit everything he's done. It may sound cheesy, but I just want him to apologize. Because he has never apologized; he's never acknowledged anything... I just want him to take responsibility for what he's done—to apologize, to look me in the eyes, to explain everything to me, and to take responsibility. (Eve, 17 years old)

Maybe he could apologize by showing that he has changed his behaviour. That he's no longer as angry, that he's no longer so stressful to be around. That he treats us in a way that's appropriate for our age. (Bunny, 11 years old)



Thank You

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