"So, Now I Speak": NunatuKavut Inuit Voices on Sexual Violence, Justice, and Resilience

By

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A Thesis Submitted to
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Applied Psychology – Forensic Stream.

August 2024, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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Date: August 20th, 2024

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Abstract

This project engaged NunatuKavut Inuit in exploring experiences of sexual violence, justice, and resilience. To date, no qualitative research has focused on experiences of sexual violence among NunatuKavut Inuit or within Labrador. Five NunatuKavut Inuit community members participated in interviews related to police, the justice system, and sexual violence support services. Reflexive thematic analysis uncovered two overarching themes, colonialism and resilience, and eight sub-themes. These community members identified needs related to increasing support services and service providers, improving justice system navigation, and implementing more education for Indigenous survivors. Findings of this project are of interest not only to NunatuKavut Inuit, stakeholders, and survivors, but also to Indigenous Peoples and allies across Labrador, including health and justice service providers. Findings broaden what is known about experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and help inform policies and community-based practices regarding sexual violence, justice and resilience in Labrador.

August 20th, 2024

Acknowledgements

To my supervisor, Dr. Patrick Carolan, thank you for seeing and appreciating the value of working with NunatuKavut communities. Thank you for committing your time and effort to this project and to me as a researcher. As my supervisor, you have given me the direction, confidence, support, and encouragement required to, not only successfully arrive at the finish line of this program, but to move forward in my PhD studies with knowledge and skills you have taught me. Your generosity and willingness to support me in this journey is appreciated more than you know. Thank you for being an inspiring and steady role model.

Dr. Meg Ternes, thank you for consistently having your office door open to listen, answer questions, and offer your valuable insight. I have learned so much from you, whether as my professor throughout the program, a committee member, or as an exceptional individual and researcher in this field. I appreciate the support and encouragement you have given me throughout my master's journey.

Dr. Debbie Martin, thank you for always being just a message away. Thank you for the wisdom and support you have provided me throughout this journey. I have valued every interaction I've had with you through previous gatherings with the NunatuKavut Community Council, and now as a member on my master's committee. I look up to you in more ways than you know and I am hopeful to continue collaborating with you in the future.

To my committee member, Kristy Dyson, thank you for providing me the tools and skills to roll out this project in a meaningful way in our NunatuKavut communities. Your knowledge of our NunatuKavut lands, communities, and Peoples has informed this project. I look forward to continuing working alongside you in the future.

Thank you to my external committee member, Dr. Krista Stelkia, for agreeing to commit your time and effort into my master's thesis. Your expertise, questions, and feedback are appreciated, and it was lovely to virtually meet you!

Thank you, Dr. Veronica Stinson, for contributing to and providing feedback on the design of this project. The direction and input you provided is greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank you for warmly welcoming me into the program; your kindness and dedication to your students does not go unnoticed.

To my family, partner, and friends, it goes without saying that had you all not been a message, phone call, facetime, or rant away, well, I did not give you much of a choice! Thank you for your unwavering support, your words of encouragement, and for knowing when a comfort meal or a visit home to Labrador was needed. Your care and love have given me the drive to get to where I am.

To my cohort, I did not expect to build such a strong connection with you all in this short time. You have played a role in making this experience as rewarding and memorable as it has been. Thank you for offering safe, secure, and reliable spaces to me and each other. I'd like to extend a special shout out to Jordyn Monaghan, a friend I did not realize I needed. Thank you for always being right there with me. I am grateful to know each and every one of you, and I am so excited to see where life takes you!

Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to the NunatuKavut community members who shared their stories with me. Your bravery, strength, and determination to contribute to positive change are remarkable. Your voices are heard. Your voices matter. Your voices make a difference. It is a true privilege to know you and learn from you. Thank you.

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“So, Now I Speak”: NunatuKavut Inuit Voices on Sexual Violence, Justice, and Resilience

Sexual violence is one of the most pressing issues that Canadians are facing today. Sexual violence affects people on an individual level – physically, emotionally, and psychologically – in addition to affecting society at large. The perpetration of sexual violence inflicts both short-term and long-term impacts to overall health. Physical impacts may include injury, unwanted pregnancy, and risk of sexually transmitted infections (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2016). Common emotional and psychological impacts include shame, fear, shock, feelings of isolation, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, anxiety, and depression (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2016). Sexual violence can also lead to economic burden on the victim/survivor when medical expenses and/or time off work is required. The pain and trauma resulting from sexual violence impacts loved ones, schools, workplaces, campuses, and communities as people may feel fear, guilt, self-blame, and anger towards an individual who perpetrated sexual violence (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2016). The perpetration of sexual violence affects society by damaging social constructs of trust, connection, and safety and instead creating a climate of violence, fear, and harm (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2016). Not only does sexual violence impact individuals, families, and communities, but it also leaves health, social, and justice systems a costly burden. For example, in 2009 it was estimated that sexual violence had an annual economic cost of $4.8 billion (Government of Canada, 2022). Moreover, the Government of Canada reports staggering statistics pertaining to sexual violence particularly against women (Government of Canada, 2022). Many of us have heard the 1 in 3 statistic; when three women are in a room together, it is safe to say at least one of them have been or will be sexually assaulted (World Health Organization, 2021). While such statistics aid in our understanding of

how dire the issue of sexual violence is for Canadians, numbers are just the tip of the iceberg to an issue deeply imbedded in our colonized country.

Indigenous Peoples in Canada experience sexual violence at disproportionate rates relative to the general Canadian population. Indigenous Peoples of all genders are subjected to sexual violence, not only physically and emotionally, but systemically through legislations and policies that position Indigenous Peoples as inferior, making them more vulnerable to being placed in positions of exploitation (Cervantes-Altamirano, 2016). Indigenous Peoples' experiences of sexual violence are intersectional and rooted in historical and modern colonialism. Definitions of sexual violence often lack the consideration of the systems which enable sexual violence to thrive. Therefore, it is important that when we consider sexual violence through an Indigenous lens, we understand it to be a symptom of intersecting systems of oppression that result in acts of violence against Indigenous Peoples (Cervantes-Altamirano, 2016). Due to historic and modern atrocities such as residential schools and missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples, Indigenous Peoples experience intergenerational trauma and are exposed to cycles of violence that have become normalized (Hoffart & Jones, 2017). The conflicted relationship between police/the justice system, and Indigenous Peoples play a role in such cycles of violence. For instance, Indigenous Peoples have not often had positive experiences when reporting cases of sexual violence to police or when seeking justice. Indeed, upon initial contact with the police when reporting, many Indigenous survivors are ignored (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2016). For some survivors, their seeking of justice ends here. Others who report the incident of violence are not believed. Those who are believed may proceed through the courts until the perpetrator's charges are either dismissed or the perpetrator is found not guilty –

these are the likely outcomes (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; Scrim, 2010). Research on sexual violence against Indigenous Peoples and their experience with justice is growing, however, there are notable gaps in the existing literature. For example, it is not clear within the existing literature if these experiences with sexual violence and justice are similar across Canada's rural North.

Very little existing literature on sexual violence that has affected Indigenous Peoples has focused on the tremendous resilience that Indigenous Peoples have demonstrated historically, and more specifically in relation to sexual violence. Whether Indigenous Peoples are resilient is without question. Indigenous peoples survived and continue surviving despite having to navigate oppressive, colonial systems. However, because of the historical and ongoing use of Western science and research methodologies in trying to measure resilience, Indigenous perceptions of resilience are not well reflected in the literature. Additionally, researchers often measure from a deficit-based perspective instead of focusing on resilience outcomes (O'Keefe et al., 2022).

What little is known about sexual violence in Labrador, particularly among the approximately 6000 NunatuKavut Inuit people located in south and central Labrador, suggests that it is a pertinent issue. However, there has been almost no research done in this area. The NunatuKavut Community Council is unique because it consists of remote and isolated Inuit communities that do not have the benefit of a settled land claim. Therefore, communities must rely entirely on provincial health services without a requirement for such services to be Indigenized. This research employs a qualitative, semi-structured interview approach to better understand NunatuKavut Inuit experiences with sexual violence, justice, support, and resilience. In gaining a better understanding of these experiences among NunatuKavut Inuit, Indigenous voices can help to inform decision-making and policy within Indigenous Governments, as well

as Provincial and Federal levels of Government. We know that sexual violence is happening in Labrador (Smellie, 2021). We know that sexual violence is causing harm to the people of Labrador. This project is an opportunity for NunatuKavut Inuit to tell their stories, raise awareness, and initiate positive change for the treatment of sexual violence survivors.

NunatuKavut Inuit

NunatuKavut (phonetically, Non - a - too - ha - voot; Clarke et al., 2010, p. 3) is Inuttitut for “our ancient land”. NunatuKavut is the homeland of approximately 6000 Inuit, many of whom reside primarily in south and central Labrador. Southern Labrador is located on the eastern coast of Canada and is made up of communities stretching along the coastline between Quebec’s North shore and the Mealy Mountains of Central Labrador. The southern coast of Labrador is made up of two subregions: the Labrador Straits, encompassing all communities from L’Anse au Clair to Red bay, and Southeastern labrador, encompassing communities from Lodge Bay to Cartwright. Central labrador is home to four communities: Happy Valley-Goose Bay, North West River, Sheshatshiu, and Mud Lake.

Inuit regularly occupied south and central Labrador prior to the 1700s, with evidence demonstrating that the first wave of Inuit settled in southern Labrador by the 1200s, followed by upcoming waves in the 1400 -1500s, and 1900s (Clarke et al., 2010, p. 5). The Inuit of southern Labrador permanently occupied the lands during multiple seasons of the year and were routinely encountered by Europeans. Some evidence suggests there were at least two Inuit populations in Labrador: Inuit of south/central, and northern Labrador (Clarke et al., 2010, p. 6). Moravian missionaries arrived in Labrador in the 1760s and contributed to a divide constructed between southern and northern Inuit (Clarke et al., 2010, p.6). As outlined in the *Unveiling NunatuKavut* report, evidence suggests that the Moravians and the British were motivated to displace Inuit

further north and away from productive fishing grounds (Clarke et al., 2010, p. 6-8). Despite the divide constructed between southern/central and northern Inuit, historical and archival evidence demonstrate the overlap among these Inuit groups (Clarke et al., 2010, p. 6; Martin, 2022, p. 28), and our connection and familial ties to the Inuit of northern Labrador remains today.

Inuit of south and central Labrador primarily concentrated on both trade and harvest, and Inuit of northern Labrador primarily focused on whale harvest. Tools and artifacts associated with the Inuit of Labrador include harpoons, snow knives, ulu, sled parts, dog teams, lamps, and bowls. The Inuit of Labrador maintained year-round relationships with the land and all it has to offer, and believed that the land, waters, and ice of the natural world were equal to human souls (Clarke et al., 2010, p. 25). This belief system persists today among the Inuit of south and central Labrador, who maintain a balanced relationship with the lands of NunatuKavut.

NunatuKavut families continue to hunt, harvest, trap, and fish on the land, water and ice as our ancestors did long before Europeans arrived (Bull & Hudson, 2018). Seal, caribou, cod fish and salmon are some of the animals and marine species that are vital to the NunatuKavut culture and heritage. Until the 1980s, NunatuKavut families were living in seasonal homes in order to follow wildlife. During the spring and summer months, NunatuKavut Inuit lived where we could hunt and fish. In the fall and winter months we lived in sheltered bays to hunt, trap and cut firewood. Permanent settlements restrict the ways in which NunatuKavut Inuit have been able to move with the seasons. However, we continue to carry out our traditions and livelihoods in the same places. Many families continue to bring their children to the same places to teach them the ways of our Inuit ancestors.

Inuttitut (or, *Inuktitut*) is the ancestral language of the Inuit people of southern Labrador. French traders first began compiling lists of Inuttitut words in the early 1700s, and the Moravian

missionaries of the 1760s noted the similarities between it and the language of Kalaallisut Inuit of Greenland (Procter, 2023, p. 3). By the late 1800s, some Inuit from communities in southern Labrador were using English as an additional language, but Inuttitut remained their primary language (pp. 13 - 17). Inuttitut became increasingly uncommon in southern Labrador throughout the 1900s, as English became the language of commerce and modern telecommunication, children were orphaned by parental/elder illnesses, and schooling took the form of boarding and residential schools. By 1996, only 435 of the 10,000 Inuit in Labrador spoke the language, and fewer were able to read or write in it (Clarke et al., 2010, p. 240). However, Inuttitut is still found in placenames throughout the region, and approximately 17 words used by local English speakers for food, medicine, clothing, dog sledding, and trapping (Clarke et al., p. 241; Procter, 2023, pp. 24-25). Additionally, the NunatuKavut Community Council is working to develop school, youth, and adult language programming to help revitalize the language (Procter, 2023, p. 26).

Between 1920 and 1980, hundreds of NunatuKavut Inuit children and children from other areas of Labrador attended residential schools, as the last residential school in Labrador did not close until 1980 in North West River. Each fall the children would leave their villages to spend up to 10 months in institutional boarding schools at Muddy Bay and Lockwood. These *schools* were designed to transform and *improve* children by removing them from their community and culture and were instead taught British and American social values and behaviours. Some children report enjoying their experience, however, many endured physical and sexual abuse and felt stripped of their culture and values (Stories of NunatuKavut, 2024). In turn, many Inuit children were taught to feel ashamed of their Inuit culture and families. Such impacts have been passed down through generations, continuing to affect the lives of NunatuKavut Inuit today.

In 2018 Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister, Carolyn Bennett, was welcomed in Happy Valley-Goose Bay to announce the start of discussions with Canada on the Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination (RIRSD), which is essentially the first step towards a modern land claim agreement with the federal government. In 2019 the NunatuKavut Community Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Canada, which outlined the principles for future discussions in the RIRSD process. This process allows advancement in self-governance on NunatuKavut lands and waters, and within resources, programs, and services. The goal is for NunatuKavut Inuit to have decision-making power over our own lands and resources, as we once did. This will result in an enhanced ability to deliver programming and health and education services that align with NunatuKavut Inuit values. The federal government has been moving away from implementing land claim processes to explore new ways of working with Indigenous communities. This is an effort to follow the 'Recognition and Implementation of Rights Framework' which the Government of Canada announced in 2018. NunatuKavut first filed their land claim decades ago, however, their current engagement falls under this new approach. NunatuKavut is seeking to address Section 35 of their rights and the title-based rights of NunatuKavut Inuit. Two other organizations representing Indigenous Peoples in Labrador, the Innu Nation and the Nunatsiavut Government, have rejected the NunatuKavut Community Council's Section 35 rights assertion, and opposed its Memorandum of Understanding with the Federal Government. However, as of June 2024, the Memorandum of Understanding between Canada and the NunatuKavut Community Council stands. The Federal Court has agreed to continue negotiations with the NunatuKavut Community Council as to the status of their Section 35 Rights Claim (*Innu Nation Inc. v The Attorney General of Canada and NunatuKavut Community Council Inc. and Nunatsiavut Government*, 2024*;* NunatuKavut

Community Council, 2024). Nonetheless, NunatuKavut Inuit are still without a settled land claim, meaning that available resources and services occur provincially, and are not tailored to meet the needs of Indigenous people, much less needs specific to NunatuKavut Inuit. Such restrictions impact the access and availability of health supports and services for NunatuKavut Inuit.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Challenges ranging from unaffordable/inaccessible mental health support services to disproportionate representation of Indigenous Peoples as offenders and victims of violence in our justice system, are just a few components of the intersecting systemic barriers that have been created and reinforced among Indigenous populations. To address the systemic causes of violence and respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #41 – to appoint a public inquiry into the causes of, and remedies for, the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women and girls – the Government of Canada launched its 2016 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The National Inquiry conducted studies and analyses between September 2016 and December 2018 regarding missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The Inquiry sought to gather information from community and institutional hearings, past and current research, and forensic analysis of police records. The Inquiry also collected evidence from more than 1400 witnesses which included survivors of violence, families of victims, and knowledge keepers (Government of Canada, 2022; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; 2016). The NunatuKavut Community Council received approval for official legal standing and funding to participate in the institutional, knowledge-keeper, and expert hearings around the Inquiry. Following participation in the National Inquiry, the NunatuKavut

Community Council submitted a document outlining recommendations that would initiate tangible and positive change for the health and wellbeing of NunatuKavut Inuit. The recommendations were consistent with the 'calls for justice' in the National Inquiry's Final Report and sought immediate action from the Government of Canada in the following areas: Access to First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) programming, education, and infrastructure (NunatuKavut Community Council, 2019).

In 2021 the National Action Plan was launched. The President of the NunatuKavut Community Council released a statement concerning the lack of progress from Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador on the implementation of the immediate and specific action regarding health, education, and infrastructure for NunatuKavut Inuit. The NunatuKavut Community Council has not been directly engaged in the implementation process despite having been approved legal standing and funding (NunatuKavut Community Council, 2021). The needs of NunatuKavut Inuit women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are urgent and the implementation of the 'calls for justice' would aid in the safety and wellbeing of NunatuKavut Inuit who are subjected to violence. The NunatuKavut Community Council emphasizes the importance of NunatuKavut Inuit voices and stories being heard and involved in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples moving forward.

Research in Forensic Psychology has neglected certain populations. Previous researchers have called for expansion on the work we do with Indigenous populations – this research aims to answer this call. The current project serves as an opportunity for NunatuKavut Inuit to voice their experiences with sexual violence and the justice system and highlight their resilience in the

face of perpetual colonialism. The voices of NunatuKavut Inuit will help to demonstrate the need for NunatuKavut's engagement in the National Action Plan moving forward.

Indigenous Peoples of Canada

Indigenous peoples make up approximately five percent of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2022). In Newfoundland and Labrador, the Indigenous groups, First Nations, Metis, and Inuit, make up a reported 8.9% of the population, making Newfoundland and Labrador the Atlantic Province with the most Indigenous peoples per capita (Statistics Canada, 2016). It is difficult to report the percentage of Indigenous Peoples making up the population of Labrador, specifically, as Statistics Canada does not include Labrador communities in their statistics regarding Newfoundland *and* Labrador (Statistics Canada, 2016). However, Labrador has a significant Indigenous population which includes First Nation (Innu) and two Inuit collectives (NunatuKavut and Nunatsiavut). As researchers working with Indigenous populations, we must acknowledge the historical and present-day context in which Indigenous peoples live; in a largely colonial system which has had major implications for the challenges that Indigenous Peoples continue to face.

Historical and Ongoing Colonization

Indigenous Peoples were the founders and first inhabitants of the lands and seas now known as Canada. During the 15th century, the lives of Indigenous Peoples were disrupted and forever changed when European, non-Indigenous settlers appeared and demanded economic and political power over Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous ways of life (Crawford, 2013); a process known as colonization. Colonization in Canada has been described as genocidal – forcibly removing Indigenous Peoples from traditional lands, attempting to eliminate Indigenous culture and language, and enforcing legislative measures to further suppress culture, ceremony, and

economic development (Pearce et al., 2015). One of the most detrimental pieces of legislation to have been executed was the *Gradual Civilization Act* of 1857 which established the Indian Residential School System. From the years 1874 to 1996 more than 150,000 Indigenous children were forced from their families and homes and into residential schools, where they were sexually, physically, and emotionally abused in an attempt to rid Indigenous Peoples of their identity and culture (Pearce et al., 2015). When survivors of Indian Residential Schools returned to their homes, they felt a cultural disconnection due to their traumatic experiences. Also due to trauma, traditional family dynamics and child-rearing were disrupted which led to former survivors inadvertently repeating their experienced traumas within their families and community (Bombay et al., 2013). Additional effects of intergenerational trauma include, addiction, mental health issues, involvement in crime, and violence (Bombay et al., 2013; Hoffart & Jones, 2017; Menzies, 2010). Intergenerational trauma is one of the most long-standing and destructive results of residential schools. For Indigenous people, these experiences and traumas have forced a deep disconnection from land, culture, and identity, a disconnection which continues today across many of our societal domains.

Colonialism was alive and well during the period of the residential school system and while residential schools are no longer actively operating, colonizing acts, laws and policies continue to limit and oppress Indigenous people. One major example of modern colonization is the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples who are victimized through sexual violence and involved with the criminal justice system (Chartrand, 2019).

Sexual Violence in Canada

Sexual violence is a form of gender-based violence, also known as violence against a person based on their gender identity, and gender expression/perceived gender (Statistics

Canada, 2019). Gender-based violence includes many behaviours ranging from those that are not considered criminal (e.g., unwanted sexual attention in public) to those classified as criminal offences (e.g., sexual assault) (Statistics Canada, 2019). An inclusive definition of sexual violence in Canada states that sexual violence describes any act of violence (e.g., sexual, physical, psychological) carried out through a sexual manner or by attacking another person's sexuality (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2022). Sexual violence can be presented through forms such as sexual abuse, sexual assault, rape, incest, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent or sexualized exposure, and cyber harassment (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2022).

Sexual violence can have profound impacts on those who are victimized, which in Canada is approximately 39% of women and 35% of men aged 15 years and older; in other words, more than 11 million Canadians report experiencing at least one physical or sexual assault since age 15 (Statistics Canada, 2019). Most Canadians victimized do not consult victim services such as psychologists, counsellors, social workers, or helplines following the incident (Statistics Canada, 2019). The primary reasons for not using these services are that people believe the incident of sexual violence was 'not severe enough', they did not want or need help, the incident was handled in other ways, the incident was considered a personal matter, they did not want to involve the police because they believed the police could not do anything about it, and because they feared revenge from the person who harmed them (Statistics Canada, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2019; Zinzow et al., 2022).

There are a range of specialized support services available to survivors of sexual violence in Canada, which are primarily provided by healthcare, legal and sexual violence service professionals, and community organizations (Benoit et al., 2015). Effective responses to sexual violence require collaborative efforts between these entities to best support people medically,

legally, emotionally, and therapeutically in both the short- and long-term (Benoit et al., 2015). However, there are existing barriers for those seeking support; some of which include cost, transportation, lack of cultural connectedness, physically accessible buildings, and lack of funding (Bach et al., 2021). Considerations specific to the current study that demonstrate effectiveness when supporting survivors is a trauma-informed approach and the inclusion of diverse groups who experience sexual violence differently (Benoit et al., 2015). It is evident through government reports and academic research that Indigenous populations within Canada experience more sexual violence than others (Dylan, et al., 2008; Statistics Canada, 2022).

Sexual Violence in Indigenous Populations

Largely due to the detrimental impacts of colonialism both historically and in modern day, Indigenous Peoples experience sexual violence in unique ways (Heidinger, 2022). Therefore, the examination of sexual violence against Indigenous Peoples must be situated within the context of colonialism, racism, and sexual discrimination (Lindberg et al., 2012). The enforcement of residential schools by the Canadian federal government has had profound and lasting impacts on the health and well-being of Indigenous people. Within residential schools children were culturally, emotionally, physically, and sexually abused in ways that imposed trauma that would carry through the following decades (Hoffart & Jones, 2017) Prior to colonization, many Indigenous cultures operated on an egalitarian system whereby women and men held roles that were equally valued because they balanced one another. The system of rule that was imposed by colonization was quite different. Through various systems of rule such as government, religion, education, and justice, colonization enforced a system that was patriarchal. This further imposed the values of patriarchy onto an egalitarian, and sometimes, matriarchal system (Hansen & Dim, 2019). For example, male-dominated communities, and high rates of

various forms of violence including sexual and intimate partner violence are some of many consequences of residential schools (Hoffart & Jones, 2017), as well as addiction and low self-esteem (Hansen & Dim, 2019). These factors contribute to violence and crime in Indigenous communities in Canada. Also documented through Indigenous voices and research, it is evident that Canada's Criminal Justice System is a colonial system that continues to oppress the Indigenous population (Cesaroni et al., 2019; Comack, 2018; David & Mitchell, 2021).

Nationally, the violent victimization of Indigenous peoples is multifaceted and complex, reflecting historical (e.g., residential schools) and ongoing (e.g., missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+) violence deeply embedded in Canada's colonial system. More than six in ten (63%) Indigenous women in Canada have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, rates which exceed those of non-Indigenous women (i.e., 34% who have experienced physical violence and 33% who have experienced sexual violence; Statistics Canada, 2022). Indigenous women are nearly six times more likely than non-Indigenous women to have been under legal responsibility of governments, and 81% of Indigenous women who have been under legal responsibility have experienced violent victimization in their lifetime (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Indigenous women are at a significantly higher risk of violent and sexual victimization than non-Indigenous women (Department of Justice Canada, 2019), and are more likely to be assaulted by a parent, guardian, or other relative (Mont et al., 2017). This risk is especially salient for Indigenous women in Canada's Northern regions, such as Labrador, where sexual assault rates are suggested to be more than four times the national average (Smellie, 2021). Indigenous Peoples are some of the most underrepresented groups within social sciences research, while, ironically, being some of the most overrepresented peoples across socially

disrupted constructs within our society, such as violence against marginalized populations (David & Mitchell, 2021). The lack of research in this area is especially apparent in Labrador where sexual assault rates are rising, and services are struggling to meet demand (Kelland & Jugol, 2022).

Labrador: Government Support and Lack Thereof

Happy Valley-Goose Bay (HVGB), located in central Labrador, is the second most populated town in Labrador and has significant Indigenous representation (Statistics Canada, 2020). Happy Valley-Goose Bay is known as the hub where most support services are centered, which are inaccessible to most of Labrador at any given time, not to mention during emergency circumstances. It is important to note that while HVGB offers various services to the people of Labrador, they, too, have concerns. Indeed, many people continue to struggle due to unavailability or inaccessibility to resources tailored to specific issues such as violence (Kelland & Jugol, 2022). Happy Valley-Goose Bay is a developing town where new infrastructure is often being sought out and built. However, there is a gap in what current and future services pose to offer. While HVGB continues to grow and develop, an increasing number of people are finding themselves without a home or a safe space to lay their heads long-term (Kelland & Jugol, 2022). Non-profit organizations in HVGB such as Mokami Status of Women Council, and Libra House are dedicated to keeping women and gender-diverse people safe from abuse in central Labrador. While these types of non-profit organizations are some of the most in-demand resources in HVGB, they are also some of the most under-funded. Libra House was denied federal government funding for affordable housing on two separate occasions. When it appears that there are no other options, whether housing or financial supports for example, people often return to a violent environment (Kelland & Jugol, 2022). These patterns of homelessness, violence, and

returning to violence due to lack of supports which are further due to funding shortages, calls into question where funding is, in fact, being distributed.

Unlike many smaller towns on the coast of Labrador, HVGB has police presence which is relied on by community members for safety and security. However, due to the lack of support services specific to sexual violence (e.g., sexual assault nurse examiners, counsellors and victim support professionals trained in culturally appropriate intervention) and given that the police are the only emergency response service in HVGB, they are often the only first-responders contacted when sexual violence has occurred (Kelland, 2023). While there is a Labrador Grenfell Health mental health crisis intervention service in HVGB, contact must first be made with the police. Upon assessment, if the police determine that mental health intervention is necessary, they accompany the mental health professionals. It is well documented by Indigenous peoples and within the literature that the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and police is often adverse (Hansen & Dim, 2019). The colonization of Canada was largely driven by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), who forced Indigenous children out of their homes and into residential schools (Hansen & Dim, 2019). It is also well documented that ongoing colonialism is apparent in systemic discrimination and the overrepresentation of Indigenous people's involvement in the criminal justice system (Hansen & Dim, 2019). This involvement includes the overincarceration of Indigenous Peoples in Canada (Singh et al., 2019) as well as the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples as victims and survivors of crime (Hansen & Dim, 2019). The historical and present discriminations of the police create a lack of confidence and distrust between Indigenous communities and police (David & Mitchell, 2021). Indeed, Indigenous women are more than twice as likely to report having little or no confidence in the police when compared with non-

Indigenous women (17% compared with 8.2%) (Heidinger, 2022). It has not been captured through research and the literature whether this lack of confidence is consistent in Labrador.

While residents in HVGB rallied for increased policing in the community, as echoed by RCMP's commissioner, issues raised by community members are complex and deeply embedded in a colonial society (Atter, 2022b). Therefore, issues surrounding sexual violence will not be addressed only through increased police enforcement. Instead, increased awareness of existing social service support, increased funding opportunities, and implementation of additional social service support is needed (Atter, 2022b). Research with Indigenous communities in Labrador is timely and necessary to better understand their relationship with the police and the type of social service supports that are needed, particularly for survivors of sexual violence.

Police, (In)Justice, and the Overrepresentation of Indigenous Sexual Victimization

Police uphold the position of ensuring justice in cases of sexual violence by investigating the incident, allegations, and seeking accountability for perpetrators. Given that the police are the first point of contact for those who have been victimized, they have a responsibility to carry out an investigation free of bias, aid in the healing of someone who has been victimized, support and investigate allegations, and provide direction for physical and mental health resources (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2021). However, many Indigenous Peoples have experienced challenges with these processes which leads them to question the protection and dependability of the police.

Whether the result of an overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples who offend, the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples who are victims or survivors of crime, or the high percentage of Indigenous Peoples who lack trust in the police, Canada's Criminal Justice System does not always obtain a strong relationship with Indigenous populations (David & Mitchell, 2021; Dylan et al., 2008; Heidinger, 2022; Singh et al., 2019). In fact, the overrepresentation of

Indigenous peoples within Canada's criminal justice system was deemed a crisis by the Supreme Court of Canada in R v Gladue (1999) and is considered one of Canada's most urgent issues today (David & Mitchell, 2021). Indeed, the poor relationship between Canada's justice system and Indigenous Peoples exist not only for perpetrators of violence, but as victims and survivors as well. The marginalization experienced by many Indigenous groups is often a result of colonial policies. These policies may be contributing to greater police interventions in situations where Indigenous Peoples are vulnerable to consequences of the criminal justice system (David & Mitchell, 2021). Risk factors for criminal activity and victimization such as sexual and physical abuse, substance use, unemployment, and homelessness occur at greater rates among Indigenous populations and therefore Indigenous Peoples are more likely to experience over-policing and come in contact with the criminal justice system (David & Mitchell, 2021).

Over-Policing and Under-Policing

Some Indigenous communities grapple with over-policing and under-policing; understanding these concepts help illustrate Indigenous people's relationship with police. Over-policing is presented as excessive force and/or aggression, discriminatory practices, an increased proportion of police scrutinizing Indigenous populations, and disproportionate arrest rates (Ben-Porat, 2008); while under-policing implies police neglect of the population and their needs and underestimating the severity of situations such as domestic violence and mental health crises (Ben-Porat, 2008). For Indigenous populations, a combination of over-policing and under-policing can contribute to a community living with fear and a false sense of security. For example, in some Labrador communities, over-policing could mean 24/7 patrol of walking trails and bush-cutting where unhoused people often reside. Under-policing could mean not taking a domestic abuse incident seriously because such crimes are perceived as normative in the

community. Together, communities are conflated with fear of the police due to historic wrongdoings, yet the need for protection from disproportionate rates of crime occurring at their doorsteps.

As demonstrated through over-policing, Indigenous Peoples are over-represented as victims/survivors of crime and to add another layer of complexity, the under-policing of Indigenous Peoples often result in Indigenous victims/survivors not receiving adequate assistance from the police. The sheer self-identification as Indigenous is significantly associated with decreased confidence in the police because Indigenous Peoples often view police treatment as unfair and dismissive of the well-being of communities. Furthermore, these negative experiences and attitudes between Indigenous Peoples and the police may influence how Indigenous Peoples choose to interact with the police, including whether to report cases of victimization (David & Mitchell., 2021).

Barriers to Reporting Sexual Violence

Research suggests that such a conflicted relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the police often result in people's lack of trust and confidence, particularly in cases involving survivors of violence (Cesaroni et al., 2019). LaPrairie (1995) reported that 74% of Indigenous respondents who experienced violence do not report being victimized, and for those who do report victimization, there is a higher rate of dismissed charges or not guilty outcomes when the victim/survivor is Indigenous (Scrim, 2010). It is widely known that Indigenous Peoples in Canada experience victimization due to the ongoing oppression and discrimination of colonization (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2021), and for Indigenous women specifically, reporting sexual violence to the police and not being believed is not all that uncommon. As highlighted in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG;

2019), the police have taken inappropriate actions against Indigenous women and girls in addition to completely disregarding their calls for assistance. The NIMMIWG (2019) calls attention to the experiences of family members and friends who recall being dismissed and ignored by the police when attempting to report incidents of physical and sexual victimization.

Mass media, the academic literature, and inquiries such as the NIMMIWG support claims that Indigenous Peoples are treated unjustly by the police (Alberton et al., 2019; Cervantes-Altamirano, 2016). Such intersecting and oppressive systems affect the ways in which Indigenous Peoples experience sexual violence and the treatment they receive by healthcare and the justice system following incidents (Cervantes-Altamirano, 2016). Indeed, research has identified a gap in examining interacting factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and relationship to community (Alberton et al., 2019). Bridging this gap would advance our knowledge from a structural and intersectionality standpoint, as well as inform criminal justice and social policies to focus on oppressive societal structures as opposed to individual pathologies (Alberton et al., 2019). The current study explores NunatuKavut Inuit relationship with their community, emergency service providers, their experience with the police and justice system, and resources that are lacking and needed in their community.

Sources of Support

In alignment with Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy, the ability of Indigenous Peoples to pull themselves through the trauma of sexual violence must be highlighted before addressing any external sources of support. Indeed, the primary source of support for Indigenous Peoples experiencing sexual violence is their own resilience - their ability to do what they have to do to survive. Survival and resilience could mean fighting back, freezing as a form of self-protection, complying to the perpetrator, leaning on their family, turning to prayer, or their

willingness to share their experiences with researchers in hopes that their message helps other survivors of sexual violence (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2021).

In cases where Indigenous Peoples wish to report and pursue legal action, but the police do not meet the needs of survivors and justice is not achieved in the legal process, survivors may seek support through community resources, family, and mental health professionals. For many Indigenous Peoples who have experienced sexual violence and did not receive fair treatment from the police and justice system, therapists and advocates play a vital role in their healing (Dylan et al., 2008); Indigenous respondents recall the support of therapists being incredibly helpful during their healing process, and the support of advocates being nurturing. Spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental well-being are prioritized by Indigenous people. Spiritual practices (e.g., ceremony, meeting with Elders, spending time in nature) and traditional medicine and healers (e.g., smudging, drumming) are helpful in healing from the impacts of sexual violence (Maranzan et al., 2018). Emotional practices can include building connection with others (e.g., family, friends, mental health professionals) and connection with culture (e.g., attending gatherings, spending time with the land). Physical practices (e.g., sobriety, fasting, going for a sweat, listening to music, exercising, driving), and mental practice practices (e.g., individual and group counselling, learning the effects of violence, survival skills, reading internet resources, self-help books, learning/practicing traditional language) are helpful in Indigenous people's healing following sexual violence (Maranzan et al., 2018). While many of these practices apply to various Indigenous groups, some are more specific to First Nations. For Inuit, common healing strategies include spending time with Elders, speaking in Inuktitut, sewing, and hunting, and preparing traditional foods (Burkhardt, 2004).

Barriers to Accessing Support Services in Labrador

Many communities with a significant Indigenous population have spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental resources readily available and accessible. However, Labrador is uniquely situated on vast tundra and taiga lands which often include rural and isolated geographies. The rural and isolated nature of many communities on the north, west, central, and south coast of Labrador contribute to the inaccessibility and high cost of support services. For example, for those living on the south coast of Labrador, there are limited opportunities to seek counselling or programming. In the majority of communities, there are no counsellors or police, and the nearest are typically hours away. In central and western Labrador in communities such as Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Labrador City, there are women's centres, police, counsellors, and shelters that assist survivors of sexual violence. Northern Labrador is not connected via road to the rest of the Labrador coast. Therefore, resources that are not available in the north, which are many, often cost an unfeasible amount (Smellie, 2023).

People of Labrador encounter unique challenges in accessing support services. However, limited research has been conducted with communities to better understand such experiences in support seeking. Furthermore, it appears that no research has been conducted on community members' experiences in seeking support and/or justice following sexual violence. Given the vulnerability of this research area, it is critical that researchers acknowledge and appreciate people's ability to let their voices be heard. Surely, the mere discussion with an individual about their experience with sexual violence and justice signifies strength and courage in the individual. In western scientific research, this is perceived as one's resilience – using strength and courage as a means of 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity (Smith et al., 2012). However, Indigenous perceptions of resilience are less widely known. To acknowledge community members'

resilience throughout this project, researchers first must understand Indigenous perceptions of resilience.

Shifting the Narrative to Indigenous-Defined Resilience

Early models of resilience across fields of psychology, anthropology, and sociology had primarily focused on an individual's ability to thrive despite adversity (Fraile-Marcos, 2019). Specifically in psychological research, resilience continues to be defined as an individual's ability to adapt 'successfully' to stress, trauma, or adversity while maintaining or regaining psychological well-being (Thomas et al., 2016). Individual assets include skills and qualities such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, stress management, empathy, personal awareness, and a strong racial identity (Jongen et al., 2019). In addition to individual characteristics, our understanding of resilience can include situational and environmental factors, and thus consider numerous promotive and protective assets that strengthen resilience. Environmental resources that contribute to enhanced resilience can include positive peer and family support, and a strong connection with social, cultural groups. Such individual and environmental assets and resources interact with each other to promote or impede resilience (Jongen et al., 2019).

Expanding on Definitions of Resilience

While individual assets and environmental resources are recognized as universally important in promoting resilience, there are critical aspects of resilience that the psychological definition has long not emphasized. While psychology has not highlighted the cultural, community, family, and systemic aspects of resilience, academics and researchers have been shifting toward a definition of resilience that encompasses factors beyond the individual (Fraile-Macros, 2019). Canadian research has started moving beyond the individualistic and western ideas of resilience to examine aspects of resilience that include culture, language, and spirituality

(Pearce et al., 2015). For example, cultural resilience can describe the capacity to which the strength of an individual's cultural support can promote coping (Jongen et al., 2019). Cultural resilience is an important protective factor for Indigenous people, as it has been related to higher emotional competence and a lesser likelihood of being involved in crime (Andersson & Ledogar, 2008). Cultural resilience includes cultural connectedness, a strong cultural identity, connections to community, family, and the environment (Jongen et al., 2019).

It is worth noting that holistic, cultural ideas of resilience did not derive from the academics and researchers who are now shifting their narrative of resilience; Indigenous peoples have long known and practiced resilience in relation to their culture and community which extend individual characteristics. From an Indigenous standpoint, focusing on physical, social, spiritual, and cultural ecologies as they contribute to resilience help to construct a more holistic narrative of what resilience means (Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2010). Indigenous Peoples in Canada have distinct ideas of resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011), yet these distinctions between conventional definitions and Indigenous ideas of resilience have not been well-reflected in the scientific literature (Tousignant & Sioui, 2009). The conventional definitions of resilience and ways of measuring resilience fail to recognize the political, social, economic, environmental, and cultural realities of Indigenous Peoples (Thomas et al., 2015). Therefore, universal conceptualizations and measurements of resilience are ineffective in capturing Indigenous resilience (Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2010). There is no scale or measure that can quantify the loss and adversity experienced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada (Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2010), hence the current study 'measures' resilience by listening – listening to the voices of Indigenous Peoples who have the autonomy to share exactly what resilience looks like for them.

Research involving Indigenous populations often highlight negative outcomes. One explanation for this may be that to initiate change within systems and policies, disparities among Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous populations must be outlined (Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2010). However, the consequence of highlighting negative outcomes is further stigmatizing and discriminating against Indigenous populations, especially when such research is constructed by non-Indigenous researchers or researchers who are not entrenched in an Indigenous way of life (Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2010). Information being broadcasted to the public regarding Indigenous peoples mainly focuses on challenges without also highlighting strengths and action, therefore, Indigenous in comparison to non-Indigenous Peoples are more likely to be perceived in an inferior manner (Kirmayer et al., 2011). To mitigate this, researchers should focus more on resilience and future action in relation to experiencing sexual violence to expand on Indigenous autonomy, on both an individual and societal level (Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2010).

Guiding Principles for Conducting Qualitative Research

Qualitative research employs methods which differ from quantitative methods to contribute new knowledge and perspectives and is gaining traction in the field of Psychology (Gough & Lyons, 2015). While qualitative research incorporates a broad range of methods, interviews and focus groups are among the most popular study methods (Tong et al., 2007). Semi-structured interviews explore participants' experiences and meanings that they ascribe to their experiences (Tong et al., 2007). Through open-ended questions asked by the researcher, participants are invited to discuss their thoughts and experiences related to the research question. The researcher may clarify, re-word, or re-order their questions to further examine points presented by the participant (Tong et al., 2007).

In the context of this study, a semi-structured interview was constructed based on the research question, and in alignment with the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ; Tong et al., 2007). The COREQ is a 32-item checklist which was developed to help researchers report key aspects of the research, their study methods, context of the study, findings, analysis, and interpretation. The COREQ consists of 3 domains: research team and reflexivity (i.e., personal characteristics, and relationship with participants), study design (i.e., theoretical framework, participant selection, setting, and data collection), and analysis and findings (i.e., data analysis, and reporting). A 2021 meta-review examining the uptake of the COREQ checklists in qualitative reviews demonstrated improved reporting quality, thus supporting the effectiveness of COREQ on qualitative research (Jong et al., 2021).

The Present Project

Research conducted with Indigenous peoples is often not carried out by Indigenous researchers, which can be limiting in the relationship and trust built between communities and research groups (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2021). As a NunatuKavut Inuit researcher, I have designed, led, and carried out this research with community members and community stakeholders. Research conducted with Indigenous communities in Labrador pertaining to sexual violence and resilience was seemingly non-existent. Time after time scholars have identified the need for more research on the experiences of sexual violence among Indigenous peoples (McKinley & Knipp, 2021). As outlined by McKinely and Knipp (2021), these experiences are often silenced and understudied, and there are limited qualitative studies that examine the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples who have experienced sexual violence.

Murphy-Oikonen and colleagues (2021) state that to move forward with the calls to action of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and girls, and to optimize the investigation

of sexualized violence, stories of Indigenous peoples and their direct recommendations for change must be heard. Also put forward by Murphy-Oikonen and colleagues (2021) is the importance of listening directly to Indigenous Peoples in influencing justice systems to meet the needs of people who are at higher risk of sexual victimization. The current study aims to answer this call in listening directly to NunatuKavut Inuit to understand their unique experiences and needs pertaining to sexual violence, justice, support, and resilience. A semi-structured interview was developed based on the following research question:

1) What are the experiences of NunatuKavut Inuit who have been subjected to sexual violence?

This research employs the Indigenous guiding principle called, *Etuaptmumk*, also known as *Two-Eyed Seeing* (Martin, 2012; Uprety et al., 2012). Etuaptmumk is a Mi'kmaq framework developed by Elders Murdena and Albert Marshall (Eskasoni First Nation) in collaboration with Dr. Cheryl Bartlett. In research, the principle of welcoming Indigenous and western knowledge systems is becoming more widely received (Walker et al., 2019). Two-Eyed Seeing welcomes both Indigenous and Western knowledge to address social challenges. As highlighted by Bartlett et al (2012), Two-Eyed Seeing uses the strengths of Indigenous knowledge with one eye, and the strengths of western science with the other to create a balance of both ways of knowing for the benefit of all. Regardless of Western scientific concepts of sexual violence among Indigenous populations, we approach this research to privilege Inuit perceptions and experiences of sexual violence and to acknowledge that expertise comes from within communities themselves. This research aims to work *with* Indigenous communities to further understand the experiences and treatment of sexual violence survivors in NunatuKavut.

Positionality

In keeping with Two-Eyed Seeing principles, as the lead researcher of this project, I am a NunatuKavut Inuk who is positioned as both a community member and part of the academy. I am 25 years old and was raised in a small, remote town named St. Lewis on the south coast of Labrador (population of 190 as of the 2021 census). I am enrolled in the Master of Science in Applied/Forensic Psychology program at Saint Mary's University. I am also enrolled in the PhD of Arctic and Subarctic Futures at the Labrador Campus of Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. I hope to work with the individuals in the Labrador Correctional Centre in research and programming capacities. I also aim to become a professor following the completion of my PhD studies. Given my academic and professional interests, it is likely that I will be working regularly with both survivors/victims of sexual violence, as well as people who perpetrate sexual violence.

I have maintained a strong relationship with NunatuKavut communities despite moving away from home for post-secondary studies. I have worked with the NunatuKavut Community Council in various capacities since grade school. My most recent position with the NunatuKavut Community Council was a consultant for a gender-based violence project. However, at the time of data collection, I was not employed by the NunatuKavut Community Council, and community members were ensured that confidentiality would be upheld despite my previous and ongoing work with the NunatuKavut Community Council. I feel grateful and honoured that NunatuKavut Inuit decided to share their stories in hopes of improving the lives of survivors of sexual violence in Labrador.

Indigenous Epistemology

Qualitative researchers are often guided by a particular epistemological approach which is apparent through their method and the participant-researcher relationship. In Western science,

epistemology is known as the theory of knowledge, how one comes to know things (Carter & Little, 2007). Epistemological questions may include: what is true and what is it not true? Where does knowledge come from? How does one know what is true? (Hickey, 2020). Asking epistemological questions to a Western-trained researcher will likely generate answers that are definitive and include specific terminology and definitions. However, asking these questions to an Inuit Elder will likely generate different responses. The standard of proof determined by Western-trained researchers varies from the standard of proof determined by Indigenous Peoples (Hickey, 2020). While I believe the two forms of knowledge – Western ways of knowing and Indigenous ways of knowing – should not be hierarchical, it is worth noting the difference between the two, and emphasizing the 'epistemological' approach of the current project.

Indigenous ways of knowing are based on lived experiences, knowledge and wisdom of the land, and our relationship to the land and our ancestors. Ways of knowing truths to Indigenous Peoples is based on what we have always known to be true. This way of knowing was adopted for the current project, whereby a theory of knowledge was not predetermined and was not identified following the contribution of shared stories by community members. The experiences and knowledge that each community member brought forward in this project are based on their lived experience and truths regarding sexual violence. Cultivating space for Indigenous knowledge without labelling such knowledge as theory creates an Indigenous decolonization research framework. This project welcomed storytelling through semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. Storytelling is an Indigenous research method that builds on trust, respect, and relationships with researchers and Indigenous communities (Hickey, 2020). Practicing an Indigenous decolonization research framework honours the voices of Indigenous

community members and ensures that Indigenous knowledge is upheld throughout each step of the research project.

Method

Decolonizing Research

In conducting research with Indigenous communities, it is fundamental to discuss the importance of using a decolonizing approach. The terms ‘research’ and ‘science’ have been viewed from a westernized standpoint for centuries (Cesaroni et al., 2018), which became one of many efforts to exclude and diminish Indigenous ways of knowing and living. Historically and in the modern day, many researchers conduct studies *to* or *for* Indigenous communities, rather than *with* Indigenous communities. Even fewer research happens *by* Indigenous communities themselves. This is deeply problematic for several reasons, one being that it further prevents or demeans trust between Indigenous Peoples and researchers. In addition to this distrust, Indigenous Peoples are left to receive no benefit for having “provided data” and are unable to collaboratively participate in research in a capacity that is meaningful to them (Cesaroni et al., 2018). Collaborating with Indigenous communities and practicing decolonizing research methods (e.g., storytelling, art expression) reflect Indigenous values of subjective experience and self-knowledge, and knowledge from the land, and are steps in breaking down barriers that exist for Indigenous peoples in academia and research. To ensure that this project aligns with Indigenous knowledge and values, I have worked closely with the NunatuKavut Community Council in designing and carrying out this research. The local Research Advisory Committee of the NunatuKavut Community Council first provided clearance for the project to proceed, after which the Saint Mary’s University Research Ethics Board designated it as minimal risk.

Previous research also indicates a need for a more survivor-centered approach, meaning researchers listen to survivors and directly respond to their needs and priorities (Bach et al., 2021). A survivor-centered approach also means engaging survivors throughout the entire research, development, and evaluation processes (Bach et al., 2021) of a given project. This research methodology is qualitative and encompasses open-ended questions for community members to discuss their experiences to the extent they choose. This provides community members with autonomy and empowerment of their experiences and storytelling. Community members were engaged in each step of this project, whereby community members and I maintained consistent contact before, during, and following interviews, and key themes were shared with each community member who participated to ensure their voices were reflected accurately.

Strengths-Based Research

Research developed with Indigenous populations has often been risk-focused, meaning that the research methodologies and narratives highlight deficits rather than strengths (O'Keefe et al., 2022). A risk-focused approach can bring about harmful consequences through pathologizing narratives which do not reflect individual, Indigenous voices; more broadly, this further perpetuates colonialism and harm (O'Keefe et al., 2022). Emphasizing the *negatives* through Indigenous research implies that Indigenous Peoples are inferior to non-Indigenous people (O'Keefe et al., 2022). This is a form of oppression occurring within academia and research which degrades and displaces Indigenous voices, knowledge, and practices.

To approach Indigenous research in an appropriate manner, Indigenous people, scholars, and researchers have called for movement towards strengths-based research (Cesaroni et al., 2019). Strengths-based approaches encompass an understanding of historical and present,

intergenerational, social, cultural, political, and environmental contexts which support Indigenous strengths, promote justice, enhance self-determination, resilience, and sovereignty (O'Keefe et al., 2022). This approach does not threaten to perpetuate colonialism by focusing on the deficits experienced by Indigenous peoples. Instead, it builds on Indigenous peoples' strength and resilience by highlighting the presence of Indigenous voices, experiences, and knowledge.

A strengths-based approach is especially valuable in sexual violence and resilience research due to the complex nature of such violence within Indigenous populations. Focusing on strengths and 'resilient thinking' when discussing experiences such as substance use, homelessness, and violence helps Indigenous Peoples expand their self-determination, self-worth, and their belief in their ability to address these challenges (Bryant et al., 2021). The act of a google search generates many statistics on rates of sexual violence, and the staggering percentages of Indigenous Peoples who experience sexual violence in comparison to non-Indigenous people. However, focusing on these aspects may further stigmatize and oppress Indigenous peoples, particularly when the statistics are not accompanied by and situated within historical and ongoing colonialism against Indigenous populations. Researchers should shift their approach in a way that is inclusive, considerate, and sensitive to the unique experiences of sexual violence among Indigenous people, while highlighting the strengths that Indigenous Peoples identify within themselves and their communities.

Trauma-Informed Research

Throughout this research project the impacts of historical and present-day colonialism among Indigenous populations in Canada are emphasized, as colonialism is foundational within the current project. Historical and ongoing colonizing perspectives, behaviours, and acts have imposed trauma on Indigenous groups, significantly impacting their livelihood in ways that are

apparent through overrepresentation in Canada's criminal justice system, substance use, access to healthcare, and mental health support services (Cesaroni et al., 2019; Panofsky et al., 2021). When developing research with Indigenous communities it is important for researchers to be trauma-informed, particularly when discussing experiences related to sexual violence.

A gap identified in sexual violence research is the use of trauma-informed approaches to research and in community practice and policy (Anderson & Overby, 2020). When discussing people's experiences of sexual violence, justice, and resilience it is important to consider the overarching context of their experienced trauma and intergenerational trauma. Researchers working with Indigenous peoples should carefully consider the design of their project, and how research questions will be received. Adopting a trauma-informed approach to research means taking steps to avoid causing re-traumatization for survivors of violence; the current project was designed with this in mind. Community members were not directly asked to discuss their incident(s) of sexual violence. When developing interview questions, I guided myself with the question, "do I *need* to know this?" This meant that if community members could speak to their experiences with sexual violence, the justice system, support, and resilience, without me asking them to go into detail about the traumas brought onto them, then asking potentially re-traumatizing questions was unnecessary. Various culturally appropriate support services were offered following community members' interviews to ensure their needs were met should they experience distress of re-surfacing trauma. In alignment with Indigenous values and research methodologies, the current study worked in balanced collaboration with Indigenous people.

Community Members

For reflexivity and transparency purposes, it is important that I expand on the decision to include NunatuKavut Inuit in the current project, without including the additional Indigenous

groups of Labrador – Nunatsiavut Inuit and the Innu. As a NunatuKavut member, I have experience working with the NunatuKavut Community Council in varying capacities, including as a researcher. While I had not gone through the NunatuKavut Community Council's research ethics process prior to proposing this project, I was familiar with the process and had pre-existing relationships with individuals working in the NunatuKavut Community Council's research department. As a NunatuKavut member, I am also familiar with the difficult political environment existing against the NunatuKavut Community Council by other Labrador Indigenous groups. During the designing and proposal stages of this project, I decided to focus on NunatuKavut Inuit only, to avoid the risk of causing further turmoil between the Indigenous groups of Labrador, and because my attempts to include all Indigenous groups would likely be met with resistance. The uncertain and charged political environment currently persisting in Labrador was inevitably brought forward by community members who participated in this project.

Community members who participated in this project were NunatuKavut Inuit, 19 years or above in age at the time of the interview, who had experienced sexual violence no more recently than 3 months prior to their interview. Originally, to meet eligibility criteria, community members must have currently resided in Labrador. However, after publicly posting recruitment materials, it became evident that this eligibility criterion was a barrier for interested community members who no longer live in Labrador. To help break down this barrier, Saint Mary's Research Ethics Board as well as the NunatuKavut Community Council agreed to remove this criterion, allowing NunatuKavut members outside of Labrador to share their valuable insights. This project explored sexual violence, experiences with the police, the justice system, sources of

support, and resilience among any NunatuKavut Inuit. Therefore, it was initially expected that the gender, education level, and employment status of community members varied.

Community Members and Recruitment

NunatuKavut Inuit were recruited through online social media platforms. Using a social media and snowball recruitment method, five NunatuKavut members who met eligibility criteria participated in this project. As this project focuses on resilience *following* an incident of sexual violence, community members who have experienced sexual violence in the past 3 months did not meet eligibility criteria for this particular study and would have been provided a list of resources. However, this was not a concern for the five community members who participated in the project, as their encounters with sexual violence were perpetrated during childhood or years prior to their interview. All community members who participated in this project identified as female, were 25 and above in age with three being over the age of 50, had some level of post-secondary education, and obtained full-time employment in fields related to education, health, policy, justice, and advocacy. Several community members spoke of having children and grandchildren who play a vital role in their healing journeys. All but one community member currently resides in Labrador. To schedule the interview, community members contacted me via a separate, private email address that was accessible only to myself and my supervisor.

Procedure

In alignment with the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ), this study examined experiences of Indigenous community members that are related to resilience following incidents of sexual violence. I empirically examined factors related to experiences of sexual violence, accessing justice, perceived support, and resilience through a qualitative method of research. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person, and

three semi-structured interviews were conducted online via Zoom which featured both a video and audio component.

Process for Informed Consent

Prior to both in-person and online interviews, community members received an informed consent form (See Appendix A) and demographic survey (See Appendix B) to complete and return to me via the private email address. To ensure comprehensive understanding of the forms, community members had the option to read the forms themselves, complete the forms with me, or go through the forms together upon meeting. Through both written and verbal consent, community members were asked if they consent to the use of their non-identifiable quotes in the final research paper, if they consent to be digitally audio-recorded on a single, secure audio-recording device, and if they consent to being contacted 24-48 hours following their interview for a check-in.

Materials

A demographic survey was given to community members via email or in-person depending on where their interview took place. To discuss factors that promote and impede resilience following an incident of sexual violence, questions were posed regarding their experiences with police, healthcare, and the justice system, perceived support, and future resources that are needed moving forward for sexual violence survivors. The semi-structured interview was comprised of 14 questions (See Appendix C) and interviews took anywhere from 55 minutes to over 2 hours to complete. Upon completion of the interview, community members were provided with a Feedback Form (See Appendix D) which I verbally explained to ensure comprehensive understanding. Community members were invited to ask questions or discuss any

thoughts or concerns they may have had following the interview, as well as during our 24–48-hour check-in.

Data Analysis

Reflexivity

A key characteristic of reflexive thematic analysis is the researcher's ability to practice awareness and transparency in how we approach our work. Practicing reflexivity means to be aware of our individual, philosophical, theoretical, social, and cultural assumptions informing our use of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2019). Reflexivity during the analysis phase of qualitative research includes deeply considering, reflecting on, and questioning the codes we interpret based on our data. Codes are created by the researcher based on the data, our analytic process, and subjectivity. Themes do not emerge from data nor coding but are creative and interpretive stories about the data that are developed based on the researcher's assumptions, analytic strategies, and the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis requires researchers to think, reflect, and engage with data and analysis in a way that is meaningful to the research objectives.

Researchers inevitably carry their own assumptions regarding reality, knowledge, and experience, and in turn, our analysis and knowledge production regarding the information we consume will be subjectively impacted (Braun & Clarke, 2023). To 'own my perspective' (Braun & Clarke, 2023) as a NunatuKavut member and the lead researcher of the current project, I maintained a reflexivity journal prior to, during, and following data collection and analysis. As a NunatuKavut Inuk woman and researcher, I was aware of my positionality, perspective, experiences, and assumptions before even bringing this project into fruition. I am a NunatuKavut member, a woman, and researcher learning about NunatuKavut Inuit experiences with sexual

violence. It has been crucial throughout this research process to keep my thoughts, feelings, experiences, and knowledge in check. To do this, I practiced self-awareness through journaling every decision made regarding the design, development, and delivery of this project.

In the early phases of constructing research materials such as the informed consent form, and again when sitting down with community members, I reminded both myself and community members that I am not a counsellor, nor do I hold the qualifications of a counsellor. Therefore, I am unable to help as such. This was a reminder for community members that I would not be offering therapeutic interventions during or following their interview. It was also a reminder to me to find a balance between being an attentive, active listener, demonstrating compassion and empathy, while maintaining some level of neutrality and objectivity. In addition to maintaining a reflexivity journal and ensuring my positionality was clear, I was fortunate to rely on my supervisor as well as family and colleagues to discuss my thought processes more generally, and to bounce ideas off when I felt unsure of next steps in the research process.

Data Analysis Process

The current project used an inductive approach to reflexive thematic analysis, meaning a priori themes were not identified. This analytic approach follows Braun & Clarke's (2006; 2012) six-phase approach to thematic analysis which include: (1) Familiarizing yourself with the data (2) Generating initial codes (3) Searching for themes (4) Reviewing potential themes (5) Defining and naming themes, and (6) Producing the report. The analysis of the current project is also informed by the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (Tong et al., 2007).

During the first phase of data analysis, I initially became familiarized with community members and their stories by conducting an interview with each community member. I then

listened to interview audio-recordings to manually transcribe each interview verbatim. In doing so, I became more immersed in the stories community members shared and was able to begin taking note of pertinent and common ideas offered by all five community members.

During the second phase of analysis, I read and coded each interview in the order in which the interviews occurred. Interviews were coded individually; thus, coding one interview was not based on codes identified in the previous interview. Codes were authentically identified based on the information being communicated by community members. Because I adopted an inductive approach, I openly coded the data using both semantic and latent codes. Semantic codes are used to identify the explicit and surface meaning of data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For example, when community members said that an incident of sexual violence was hidden or "pushed under the rug", the codes 'hidden' and 'pushed under the rug' were identified. Conversely, latent codes are used when the researcher interprets what the individual said to capture underlying ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For example, when community members described ways in which sexual violence continues to physically and mentally impact them in their current romantic relationships, the code 'trauma response' was identified.

The third phase of analysis involved capturing commonalities shared across community members in order to identify themes. Based on patterns emerging from each community members' interview, and common or similar codes throughout the data, overarching themes were developed. During this phase, codes were either eliminated, revised, or combined with codes that were otherwise redundant. Narrowing down the codes helped me to identify which overarching themes or ideas remained pertinent in the data.

During phase four the overarching ideas and themes constructed in phase three were discussed with my supervisor to eliminate themes that were more akin to codes, revise themes

that did not uphold their intended meaning, and organize the overarching ideas I developed into concise themes. During this process, my supervisor and I recognized that the constructed themes were more clearly interpretive by splitting themes into two overarching themes, followed by four sub-themes within. Navigating this phase with my supervisor also contributed to my reflexivity practices because I was able to verbally discuss the various themes I constructed based on the data, and my supervisor was able to help articulate these themes into slightly revised words and phrases.

The fifth phase involved refining and defining each theme to completion, and carefully developing creative theme names that articulated their true meaning. I continually referred back to the dataset during this phase as I was selecting extracts that reflect each theme, ensuring to highlight each community member's voice. Once themes were finalized and extracts were selected for each theme, the sixth phase of analysis was completed by intertwining the stories of each community member to create a narrative of sexual violence among NunatuKavut Inuit.

Community Engagement

In keeping with principles of Indigenous research sovereignty, this study prioritizes community engagement and encompasses decolonizing research methods. With their consent, 24 to 48 hours after each interview, I emailed each community member to check in with them. I asked the community member how they were doing after they had time to reflect on their interview, and if they would like to clarify, change, or omit anything from their interview. This built on community members' autonomy and empowerment by providing decision-making regarding their interview and stories, as they are the experts of their own experiences. As well, following the completion of data analysis, themes were communicated with each community member to ensure their voices were being reflected clearly in this project.

Findings and Interpretations

This project explored NunatuKavut Inuit experiences of sexual violence, the justice system, support, and resilience. Findings, limitations, implications, and recommendations are interwoven in the following discussion. Through listening to community members share their stories, two key themes were developed: colonialism and resilience, within which a further eight themes were identified. These are summarized and described in Table 1. Given one of the objectives of this project was to better understand NunatuKavut's perceptions and experiences with resilience, it is not surprising that resilience was developed as an overarching theme based on interview questions regarding resilience, and community members' expansion on what resilience means for them. Community members' voices are valued and honoured within this project, therefore the following findings have been informed by community members themselves. Findings of this project reflect deeply imbedded and ongoing colonialism among Indigenous communities of Labrador, as well as the profound resilience that individuals, families, and their communities demonstrate in the face of trauma and colonialism.

Table 1

List of overarching themes and sub-themes including descriptions

Theme name	Description of theme
Overarching theme 1: Colonialism	
Sub-theme 1: Colonialism and sexual violence	Aspects of colonialism that played a role in community members' experiences with sexual violence.
Sub-theme 2: Colonialism insufficient support services/staff	Characteristics of colonialism that contribute to the restriction, inaccessibility, and unaffordability of resources in Labrador.

Sub-theme 3: Colonialism and the justice system	Concerns around reporting sexual violence and poor treatment of survivors within the justice system.
Sub-theme 4: Colonialism and small communities	Challenges related to the intersection of colonialism and small communities.
Overarching theme 2: Resilience	
Sub-theme 5: Resilience and identity	Community members described both a resonance or discordance with the term and concept of resilience.
Sub-theme 6: Resilience and reducing shame through storytelling	Vocalizing rather than internalizing sexual violence has transformed community members' lives for the better.
Sub-theme 7: Resilience and regaining power and justice by ending silence	Breaking the silence and helping others use their voice to speak out about sexual violence.
Sub-theme 8: Resilience and small communities	Community members' relationships with their communities as employees, volunteers, friends, and family members play a vital role in their healing journeys.

Colonialism

Colonialism is generally defined as policies and practices of forcing partial or full political control over another group. In Canada, colonialism is widely known as the forced disconnection between Indigenous people, their land, culture, community, and language (The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2021). Colonialism is often framed as an historical practice, and this is true. However, it is equally true that colonialism continues to persist in modern day, and this was evident in the stories of all NunatuKavut Inuit who took part in this project. The various past and present challenges that each community member faces are directly traced to colonial policy and practice that are enforced today.

Colonialism and sexual violence

A recurring theme described by all community members related to the aspects of colonialism that played a role in their experiences with sexual violence. These aspects of colonialism included witnessing and/or experiencing domestic violence in the home, normalized violence, workplace violence/lack of workplace support, cultural acceptance of sexual violence, rape culture, 'a woman's role' vs. 'a man's role', women as men's property, alcoholism, religion, family relationships, internalized shame, and residential schools. One community member commented:

> *... boys will be boys… and because of the level of sexual violence or dysfunction in the community, like most people were like "ohh well, you know, your mother or whoever, they used to rip the shirts off women, you're only getting touched". That was kind of the mentality… (Community member 1).*

This community member discussed the level of normalized violence and dysfunction within community and family, and how this contributed to the sexual violence they experienced being downplayed because others 'had it worse'. In a study pertaining to women's rape myth acceptance (Peterson & Meuhlenhard, 2004), suggested that women are less likely to identify and label an incident of sexual assault if they accept rape myths, and their experience corresponded to rape myths. In the study, women tended to downplay their experiences of sexual violence under the confines of various rape myths. The community member quoted above identified her experience being downplayed by people she confided in and downplayed by herself.

In a similar vein, another community member emphasized the impact of beliefs and attitudes associated with rape culture:

> *... It was more like a rape culture and it was just like you put yourself in this situation, it's half your fault if not fully your fault that this happened to you… and my generational family, mothers, women,*

were controlled by men. And you had no choices… you had sex with your husband. My husband thought that too… he's like "you can't rape your own wife"… (Community member 3).

… I felt like… I put myself in the situation. I wasn't like walking down the street and someone dragged me into the trees, right… (Community member 3).

This highlighted the rape myth that an individual cannot rape their partner, and the rape myth of the 'ideal victim' who is walking alone at night and is attacked by an individual unknown to them (Barnett et al., 2016; Our Resilience, 2021). The community member also spoke about the normalization of violence and control inflicted by men against women as a pattern she witnessed through generations. Intergenerational violence and trauma are powerful consequences of the colonization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and have significantly contributed to the normalization and cultural acceptance of violence against women (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015).

… We were sexually molested by a family member and it was a secret… the first thing we were told when we talked about it was, "don't ever say that again"… I think right then and there I knew… it's a secret. You don't talk about it again… So there's shame. We were children… and for years to come it was our family secret… it's pushed under the carpet… (Community member 5).

… It seems like it's a hidden, it's hidden in our families. And I would think it's only starting to come out, you know, in the last 5 years maybe… (Community member 2).

These community members discussed their experience of childhood sexual violence at the hands of family members, an experience that happens more frequently among Indigenous Peoples than non-Indigenous peoples (Helmus & Kyne, 2023), and one that community members say is more common in our small communities than people are aware of. Regarding the prevalence of Indigenous childhood sexual abuse, a recent study reports substantially higher rates of childhood sexual abuse among Indigenous girls (50%), boys (35%) and trans and gender non-conforming individuals (57%) in a sample of 282 Indigenous peoples in Canada (Helmus &

Kyne, 2023). Studies suggest that experiences of childhood sexual abuse within Indigenous families are often hidden (Chenier et al., 2024; Mcdonald, 2020), or in the words of community members of the current project, “pushed under the carpet”.

According to several community members, religious affiliation and religiosity contribute to the sexual violence perpetrated against Indigenous peoples of Labrador, as well as the inability to discuss this issue openly:

> *… There’s a whole level of what people experience within church communities too, around sex… and church communities have had a history of burying sexual violence too... the inability to talk about it could sometimes be connected to religious views… and those denominations are found along the [Labrador] coast I do believe… (Community member 1).*
>
> *… We were raised [one religious denomination] and he was [another religious denomination]. And all these other things, reasons why you don’t talk about it… (Community member 5).*

These community members highlighted how sexual violence survivors are often silenced due to religious prohibitions around discussing any element of sexuality, including sexual violence. Furthermore, Community member 1 specifically noted how sexual violence can be perpetrated within the context of a religious community/organization, and how these institutions may even take active steps to protect perpetrators. This sentiment is not surprising given the role of the church in residential schools and colonization more broadly (Greenberg, 2020). In a study conducted on religious affiliation and rape myth acceptance, results demonstrated that individuals who identified as Roman Catholic or Protestant endorsed higher levels of rape myth acceptance than individuals who identified as atheist or agnostic (Barnett et al., 2016). Combined with the church’s historical role in attempted Indigenous assimilation, community members’ discussion around particular religious views contributing to their own experiences with sexual

violence aligns with the historical and ongoing concerns around religiosity, sexual violence, and the secrecy between the two.

With respect to secrecy, all but one community member discussed the prevalence of sexual violence - what they considered both micro and macro incidences - in the workplace, as well as the lack of mental health support for survivors in the workplace. Some of these concerns were directly related to the difficult political environment between Indigenous groups in Labrador, demonstrating the severe impacts of Labrador politics on individuals, communities, and workplaces. These acts of violence within workplaces and the hiding of these acts are uniquely interweaved with colonial practices and ongoing dispute between Labrador's Indigenous groups. In a rebuttal *We Have Always Been Here,* Dr. Debbie Martin articulates the ways in which colonialist, racist, and patriarchal state power is perpetuated by the nation state (Canada) as Indigenous groups compete for recognition and resources (Martin, 2022). Two years later following this rebuttal, we see clear depictions of exactly how the violence rooted in failures of the federal government to support the self-determination of Indigenous peoples, causes tension and violence between Indigenous groups who all have the right to resources. One community member commented:

> *… I think there's a lot to do with politics and not wanting to ruffle feathers. Labrador politics are a freaking nightmare… In the most recent workplace incident it was a, 'we can't jeopardize community relationships to deal with that… [This individual was] fired without cause, as of immediately… I don't feel like workplaces care until it's huge, until it's inexcusable… (Community member 4).*

Another community member discussed the lack of mental health support she received when working within the justice system:

> *… I'm quite positive where I was working at that time would not have been supportive of me leaving at 2:00 to go to an appointment and why [counselling]… You shouldn't just have to be strong and suck it up and do things… (Community member 3).*

Community members discussed both personal and anecdotal experiences of others with sexual violence in the workplace and not being supported by their workplace. Approximately three in ten Canadians report being sexually harassed in their workplace, most of those impacted being racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+, and Indigenous women (Angus Reid Institute, 2014). Indeed, 52% of women in Canada have been subjected to sexual harassment in the workplace (Angus Reid Institute, 2018; Canadian Women's Foundation, 2024).

In the first quote, the community member speaks to Labrador politics playing a vital role in the colonialism and violence that an employee was subjected to. A Statistics Canada report (2018) suggests that only 4% of women reported an incident of workplace sexual violence. In this case described by the community member, the individual was one of few people who will report an incident of workplace sexual violence, and it became their burden and consequence to bear.

Another community member described feeling unsupported by a previous workplace in that her mental health was not prioritized, and she was expected to 'suck it up' and continue working. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, Seventy percent of Canadian employees have concerns regarding the psychological health and safety of their workplace, with 14% reporting that they do not believe their workplace is at all healthy or safe (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2022). This community member expressed concerns regarding the psychological health and safety of her previous workplace; this concern was the primary reason for the community member ultimately leaving the workplace in order to take care of her mental and psychological health. This community member also elaborated on the concern of limited

staff, which connects back to the scarce and spread-out resources in Labrador. This community member described how she is now able to commit to counselling without her employment being jeopardized, but she would not have had the time, opportunity, or support to commit to do so while working for her previous employer.

The introduction of the residential school system by the Canadian Government continues to impact Indigenous Peoples and communities via physical and sexual abuse, family violence, and substance dependency – epidemics that were not prevalent in Indigenous populations prior to colonization (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015). A community member also mentioned one of her parents being in a residential school in Labrador, and stated that while her parent did not talk about their experience in the residential school, she learned later in life that her parent suffered from unspoken trauma, which she believes impacted the violence inflicted on her family and children.

> *... My father was actually in a residential school... 'the school', we called it... I don't know what happened there cause he never spoke... never would raise that... the intergenerational trauma of what he, his father had to him, to me... my siblings, and my internalization of fear and depression and standards of how women can be controlled was a whole huge thing that just made us all, not complacent, but it was just, that was just how life was... (Community member 3).*

Domestic and sexual violence later inflicted by individuals who had been forced into Indian Residential Schools, or whose families were forced into residential schools, is not uncommon. Intergenerational violence and trauma put Indigenous peoples at greater risk of experiencing childhood abuse, neglect, and/or household dysfunction such as domestic violence, substance abuse, criminal behaviour, and mental illness (Bombay et al., 2013). One community member spoke directly to her family's struggle with alcoholism and violence within the home:

> *… I guess modernization came and the American [military] bases came, and alcohol was cheap and free flowing... you were living on the land, working on the land, getting to sustain your life, to eat… there wasn't much alcohol I don't think, before the bases came… but then it was all alcohol... and then violence that came from that... and the control… (Community member 3).*

The community member referred to the potential introduction of alcohol to Labrador communities and modernization when American military bases and satellite sites were established throughout Newfoundland and Labrador in the early 1940s, during the Second World War (Atter, 2022a). This introduction to alcohol and increased control and violence was another act of colonization. Indeed, the use of alcohol and other substances as numbing or self-soothing agencies is not uncommon among Indigenous peoples as a result of colonialism (McQuinn, 2017).

> *… But I found out through counselling how I was affected more by having a toxic mother than I was affected by being sexually molested… And when you're a young child you think it's normal to hide in the cupboard until your dad gets home… Intergenerational trauma. Never understood it til' I became an adult and started looking at things through the eyes of a mother, being a mother myself… (Community member 5).*

This community member discussed the impact of having an unhealthy relationship with her mother. She talks about the concept of intergenerational trauma, and how she did not understand what the concept meant, or that she had experienced intergenerational trauma that was carried through her mother. This community member talked about levels of abuse inflicted by her mother being normalized as a child, but later recognizing the harm it caused.

Colonialism and insufficient support services/staff.

Characteristics of colonialism contribute to the restriction, inaccessibility, and unaffordability of resources in Labrador, making it difficult for Indigenous peoples and

organizations to thrive independently on their own grounds of self-determination. All community members shared their experiences, opinions, and hopes for future change regarding the support services in Labrador. The Journey Project, End Sexual Violence Newfoundland and Labrador, Victim Services, Mokami Status of Women Council, and Libra House are just some of the support services available to survivors of sexual violence in Labrador. All community members emphasized the incredible work being accomplished with and for the people of Labrador within these organizations. Community members also provided their thoughts and recommendations on how support services in Labrador could be improved upon, and stressed the need for more staff when offering certain services.

> *… So the services are starting to come out, but they're from the private sector. They're not from the public sector… they're supported by our provincial government and our federal government, but they are not provincial and federal systems. They're not the public services that everyone has access to… and it's not that those services are inaccessible, but* its *people advocating for them, it's community members putting those supports in places that, you know, the provincial government's lacking… (Community member 4).*

This community member discussed the role of Newfoundland and Labrador's Provincial Government and the Canadian Federal Government in the lack of funding generated for sexual violence support services in Labrador. This community member also expressed concerns around community members and survivors having to advocate for themselves because of lack of provincial and federal government funding for public sector services. Therefore, instead of taking the burden away from victims/survivors, the burden is placed onto them to find help for themselves.

The need for provincial and federal funding for sexual violence support services in Labrador has been voiced time and time again (Kelland, 2022). Labrador has complex challenges

associated with rural and isolated communities, a contentious political environment, and sexual assault rates between four to six times the national average as reported by the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC) and RCMP (Smellie, 2021). The RNC and RCMP share policing duties in Labrador, where approximately 27,000 people are spread out over an area that equates to nearly three quarters of Newfoundland and Labrador's land mass. This provides context as to how scarce and scattered resources are throughout Labrador (The Canadian Press, 2023). One community member commented:

> *… Now Journey [The Journey Project] has taken on a lot of that too [supporting victims/survivors in court]. But there's only one person. There's only one person [here in Labrador], you can only do so much… (Community member 3).*
>
> *… I know there are supports and they're wonderful supports but there's just one person in this one area working with Journey [The Journey Project], there's two people at victim services. I don't know if the mental health building is ever going to open… One person covering all of Labrador with the amount of assaults and violence that we have in our communities is not enough. It's not enough… (Community member 3).*

This community member discussed the strain on organizations that are operated entirely by one individual and are expected to serve all of Labrador.

> *… There's definitely a lack in services, counselling, treatment centers… all these things cost money… we have to find the money… we can't have our people just falling through the cracks… [we need] more of what is happening here… I wish we had 10 more women centers… I'm sure we could fill them all… (Community member 5).*
>
> *… I think in Goose Bay there might be a resource there for violence with The Journey Project… I think they serve all of Labrador, unfortunately. So I would love to see hubs in all of our small communities in the south and the north [coasts of Labrador]… (Community member 2).*

These community members discussed the lack of funding and staff for non-profit organizations in Labrador. While individuals upholding these organizations and working tirelessly to receive funding are doing everything they can to support communities, one staff member responsible for all of Labrador can only do so much, and inconsistent funds can only go so far.

… After a report has taken place, the police are supposed to refer the clients to victim services. Victim services staff then reaches out, I believe, my understanding, is by a letter… a physical letter… but yeah victim services is to assist people but after that letter – if they ever get it, or if they ignore it or throw it out, parents throw it out, whatever – … if they don't sign up for it, then that's it… their job is done. So then the day of court happens and people come in… like deer in the headlights… so what is the right way to help a survivor? More than one letter… (Community member 3).

This community member identified ineffective outreach strategies when offering supports to survivors. The community member pondered on the right way to help a survivor of sexual violence and believed that sending a physical letter in the mail that a survivor may or may not receive/avail of, is not enough.

> *… I would think a lot of service providers like mental health workers, healthcare, would know this information [resources for survivors of sexual violence] but most people would not know that information… and when you're going through some kind of, you know, attack or act of violence, you're vulnerable. So trying to find that information might be a harder… (Community member 2).*

Here, a community member discussed how individuals who are not specialized in fields that work directly with sexual violence survivors, are often not aware of the resources that exist, or where they can turn when sexual violence has been perpetrated again themselves or loved ones. This community member also added that when an individual of the general public is subjected to sexual violence, regardless of whether they are aware of available resources, trauma and vulnerability may prevent them from seeking help. The notion that trauma associated with sexual

violence may hinder help-seeking is supported by research (Goetz et al., 2023; Taylor et a., 2012). This community member said that professionals in health-related fields and the general public should use their voices and social media to increase awareness of resources in Labrador.

Colonialism and the police and justice system.

None of the five community members who participated in this project reported their experiences of sexual violence to the police, nor did they have any dealings with the justice system regarding their experiences. As one community member stated, "so, I think that says enough… sometimes, you know, saying nothing says everything" of how police and the justice system are often perceived by Indigenous survivors of sexual violence.

> *… It's that lack of trust in the justice system… you're sticking your neck out. You're putting yourself in a vulnerable position [by reporting sexual violence]… And I think that, you know, it's hard on families, it's hard on communities… you've really got to want to take that on when you make that police report… if you want the opportunity to ever see justice, you really, really got to buckle down and commit to what could be years. And at the end of the day, years and years and years still might not be worth it… so what's the point?... (Community member 4).*

This community member felt strongly about her decision not to report her experiences of sexual violence This community member has witnessed friends attempt to seek justice through reporting and going through the motions of the justice system. However, in the community member's opinion, going through those processes has never been worth it.

> *… It's like the police system, there's so many hoops to jump through it's no wonder that women don't get heard… but at what point does it become bad enough to be worth doing something about?... I'm not sure I'd recommend police as the first people… do they have trauma-informed training?... (Community member 1).*

One community member described seeking help from the police for a male relative who had been sexually assaulted. The report was dismissed, and they feared that the assailant likely went on to perpetrate against others:

> *… We went to the police for him and they really didn't do anything… It's like they didn't believe him... And he's on the docket now for other children. And that was [number of years] ago… how many other children did he attack?... We didn't go to court but we did go to the RCMP and if somebody is hurting a child, it should be taken seriously… (Community member 2).*

Community members question the diligence of police when supporting survivors of sexual violence, while highlighting the potential consequences of further harm by perpetrators when police do not believe or act on survivors' reports of sexual violence.

> *… Not for half a second have I considered reporting and that was before I was part of justice, and since then I've been working in the courts and now I know I would never report it… for me it was like, I chose to do it. I chose to be there. I would never report it. I wouldn't even think of it… I didn't want to raise it. I didn't want to get into it. I didn't want to have to tell anybody. I didn't want to talk to a police officer, I didn't want to end up in court not knowing anything about the court process… (Community member 3).*
>
> *… I now understand that a lot of people don't report, neither did I… but the ones who do and when they end up on the stand, are raked over the coals by the defense. And maybe not prepared for court by the crown and victim services… they pick apart everything to trip up the person to make look not credible when that particular detail has nothing to do with the sexual assault. Nothing to do with their consent. And nothing to do with what happened… poor and downright shameful for how people were treated and questioned on the stand… because a victim or survivor is just a witness to prove the case for the crown. And the defense is there to tear apart the story, to make it seem like they can't be believed… And I'm not sure that people understand that. You are a witness for the crown, not the person being represented by the crown… (Community member 3).*

All community members raised concerns of not reporting partly due to fear of not being believed by the police, fear of being further traumatized by court processes, and the belief that they could accomplish greater healing without involving the police and justice system in their journeys. These beliefs and experiences align with previous research examining the experiences of Indigenous sexual violence survivors in Canada.

> *… I think she was afraid that if she discloses, nobody would believe her because she was kind of living a lifestyle [addiction] whereby… she felt nobody would believe her… (Community member 5).*
>
> *… We had a training with the RCMP… and they as much as told us that… to prepare that victim for court, they have to interview them as though they're lying. They have to. Because when they get into court, they're gonna need to know details… that's exactly how it's gonna make you feel when you get in court. Prove your point, you know… persuade me what you're saying is true, convince me that what you're saying is truth, this is what happened to you… there's gotta be a better way… I would like to see it where the victim doesn't even have to show up in court… (Community member 5).*

Community members had many valuable thoughts and experiences regarding the police and justice system's treatment towards survivors of sexual violence. Community members identified that the police's strategies for interrogating sexual violence survivors often lead survivors to feel as though they are at fault, or that their stories are not believable or credible. Unfortunately, the fear of not being believed and feeling at fault are prevalent emotional strains on survivors of sexual violence (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2022).

As spoken by Indigenous survivors of sexual violence, and as echoed in relevant literature, race is a determinant in how individuals encounter and experience the Canadian justice system. Indigenous survivors report their first encounter with police following an assault as humiliating (Dylan et al., 2008). They are interrogated on their sexual histories, the clothing they

were wearing at the time of the assault, whether they knew the offender, and whether they were using substances (Dylan et al., 2008).

Another study pertaining to Indigenous people's contact with the police and overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in Canada's Criminal Justice System demonstrate that the outcomes of colonialism –intergenerational trauma, physical and sexual abuse, mental illness, substance use, homelessness, unemployment and lower educational attainment – experienced within Indigenous populations increase their risk for presenting criminogenic needs for criminal activity and victimization (David & Mitchell, 2021).

A recent study by Murphy-Oikonen and colleagues (2022) emphasized the police's dismissal and disbelief towards Indigenous survivors of sexual violence who had reported their assault. In this study, all women who reported their assault to the police did so in hopes of receiving help and justice from the police. However, the women in this study reported negative, retraumatizing experiences with the police following their report. Women in the study self-reported feeling dismissed by the police, not believed by the police, or feeling like the police did not perceive their assault as important (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2022).

These studies, among many others, align with the experiences reported by the community members who participated in the current project. Based on the voices of all five community members, incidents of sexual violence often go unreported. When sexual violence is reported, Indigenous survivors are either dismissed, not believed, or interrogated, questioned, and retraumatized. If a survivor's case goes to court, the survivor is expected to recall each and every – relevant and irrelevant – detail associated with the incident, they are expected to retell and relive their trauma, and their case is unlikely to 'resolve' in a favourable amount of time.

Colonialism and small communities.

All five community members spoke about the smalltown, rural, and close-knit characteristics of NunatuKavut communities in Labrador. Community members identified both challenges and strengths of growing up in a small community. Here, we will discuss the challenges related to the intersection of colonialism and small communities, as we will shine light on small community strengths later. One community member commented:

> *… It's a beautiful part of living in a small community, but it's one of the harder parts, you have to live with these people, potentially for your lifetime. So how do you live next door to someone and learn to be a community when things like these happen?... Feels like in other places you can remove yourself, you can cut off relationships, you can do that. But in a small town, it's more intermingled and it has a much deeper, longer history. So when relationships break down, they have community impacts… (Community member 1).*
>
> *… I even looked at [mental healthcare professionals] through the NunatuKavut Community Council and I'm like, I've known [the mental healthcare professionals] my whole life, I'm not gonna talk to them about stuff… the level of trust, the level of knowing that someone's there who's confidential… trained professionals who aren't too intermingled or closely connected, which is really hard because once you're in that town, you want to make friends and communities… I don't know, like you wanna support other Indigenous members to be brought up to be these kinds of supports [mental healthcare professionals]. But I think when you have the past history and the conflict of being so connected it can be tough… (Community member 1).*

This community member shared her perceptions and discomfort around the small-town nature of people having to live amongst one another, even when conflict, violence, and trauma are intertwined in community and family. She also expressed her concern about knowing some mental health professionals who work with the NunatuKavut Community Council, and who know her. She discussed the potential conflicts that can arise from these small-town connections.

… If I had the support of the community, community driven support… I think that would make a difference too… We've got this rivalry going on with the North and the South. I hardly step out anymore… (Community member 2).

This community member shared how the challenging political environment brewing against the NunatuKavut Community Council has impacted her position within community.

… If the abuse is still happening or the resources are not working, the justice system is failing them, or you know, they're not feeling the community supporting them for whatever reason. I would think that it would be hard. We had a young girl last week who died by suicide… impacts of violence against women, yeah, she was sexually attacked… that happened in the community and it happens quite a bit… (Community member 2).

Here, the community member speaks to the devastating impacts of being subjected to sexual violence all while feeling unsupported by community or failed by the justice system. Nationally, suicide is the leading cause of death among First Nations and Inuit communities, and Labrador's suicide rates are some of the highest in Canada (Willhelm, 2022).

… I think it's too small, too small a town for me to feel comfortable to speak with the counsellors that I could have reached here… too many ties… (Community member 3).

… So it was one of those things where I don't trust it to be dealt with, even though I would've been a minor… they're supposed to cover everything, but yeah, small towns – it's easy to find things out when you want to… that small town mentality of, I don't want everyone to know, I don't want everyone to see that person that way or me that way. I'd rather just, just get rid of it… (Community member 4).

… You don't want anybody judging you in that way… you don't want that being spread around the community… people preach all the time, like you know, nobody's gonna judge you for that… but it's small-town nature [to judge] and I don't think it exists everywhere. I think it's just so prevalent in small towns where it's so hard to separate someone from, you know, from their parents, from what happened to them… It's so hard for people to just exist as individuals… (Community member 4).

With the exception of one community member, all expressed challenges to experiencing sexual violence within, living within, and seeking help within small communities. Community members raised the concern of people finding out about an individual's experience with sexual violence, and thus spreading among families and communities at large. Community members feared judgement from others regarding what happened to them, and discussed the difficulty of trying to co-exist in small communities with the individuals who inflicted sexual violence against them.

One community member discussed how ending relationships and creating distance between the self and others is easier in larger towns or cities than it is in small communities. This community member alluded to the ripple effects that occur when relationships are broken in small communities, as it has impacts on family, friend, and community dynamics. A piece written by Susan Lewis on sexual assault in rural communities expands on the complexities of sexual violence in small, rural communities – an area of research that has not paid particular attention to the needs of sexual violence survivors in these circumstances. Most sexual assaults in Canada are perpetrated by non-strangers, and this is particularly salient in small communities where there is less anonymity and high acquaintance density (Lewis, 2003). Generally, people living in small communities are met with unique challenges and barriers to reporting and support-seeking, primarily due to the 'everybody knowing everybody' nature of small communities – a recurring theme throughout the current project.

Shame and Moving Beyond it

Shame is a recurring and powerful aspect of colonialism deeply rooted in all five community members' experiences, whereby shame appears to be both an outcome of colonialism, and an internalized form of colonialism, where colonialism uses shame to achieve

its goals. While there are various aspects to the shame associated with sexual violence – sexual violence inflicted by family members, sexuality, and voicing experiences – small community characteristics significantly contribute to this shame. Community members described feeling dirty, regretful, angry, depressed, dismissed, and experiencing self-blame. At the root of all these feelings among many others, is shame. Shame is a complex emotional experience that can be characterized by feelings of self-consciousness, unworthiness, inadequacy (Jones et al., 2023), and in the context of the current study, another characteristic of shame is silence. Shame is experienced internally through feelings of self-blame, and externally through the perceptions of others – both significantly impacting the emotional response in individuals who have been subjected to sexual violence (Jones et al., 2023). Shame experienced by survivors of sexual violence can contribute to psychological outcomes like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Jones et al., 2023) – all which community members of the current study reported experiencing in various degrees.

Work conducted by Jones and colleagues (2023), Murphy-Oikonen and colleagues (2022), and Neame and Heenan (2004) examine the properties of shame in individuals, women in particular, who are subjected to sexual violence in rural or remote communities. Due to greater stigma and socio-cultural factors accompanying sexual violence, shame can contribute to an individual maintaining silence, further preventing them from seeking healthcare support or justice. Indeed, shame associated with sexual violence causes the survivor to isolate themselves through creating internalized narratives by downplaying their experience, attempting to forget their experience, convincing themselves they are not worthy of support, or that the sexual violence was their fault (Jones et al., 2023; Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2022). These impacts of

shame on survivors of sexual violence align with the descriptions of shame internalized by community members of the current project.

The concern around confidentiality within small communities was prevalent among the majority of community members. All but one community member felt strongly about not accessing mental health support in their communities, or in Labrador at large. Four out of five community members were concerned about their stories remaining confidential had they sought support from local mental health professionals. Therefore, all but one community member sought counselling and programming outside of their communities, and oftentimes outside of Newfoundland and Labrador. Most community members did not feel comfortable seeking support within Labrador because individuals in support positions were known to them, and vice versa.

One community member shared their opinion on the NunatuKavut Community Council's strategy of employing NunatuKavut members. The community member emphasized the benefit of NunatuKavut creating opportunities for their own people. However, they also expressed concerns regarding NunatuKavut members working for the NunatuKavut Community Council and communities in mental health professional roles given the inevitable connections between these professionals and community members. As highlighted by community members who participated in this project, there are considerable reasons as to why individuals from and/or living in Labrador may choose not to avail of local mental health professionals. It is not that community members simply choose not to access what is available to them; it may be that with a variety of mental health options, specifically those that provide more anonymity, would be more favourable for some community members. Community members acknowledged both the strengths and downfalls of being familiar with mental health professionals within small

communities, and recommended that the downfalls be mediated by hiring both local and non-local mental health professionals.

Resilience

Resilience is a concept that has been studied for quite some time, yet there remains little consensus on a specific definition, conceptualization, and measurement for resilience. While researchers suggest that all ideas of resilience are foundationally rooted in adversity and positive outcomes (Vella & Pai, 2019), the current project demonstrates, in part, otherwise. Resilience is a Latin term which means to 'rebound', 'leap back', or 'bounce back' from what is termed as adversity (Vella & Pai, 2019). However, what is considered adversity to one, may not be considered adversity to another. Similarly, what it means to be resilient to one, is not what it means to another. These disparities were apparent across all five community members of the current study. Community members were read aloud a general definition of resilience (i.e., the capacity to which a person can recover from adversity, or how well they deal with adversity). Community members were asked what resilience means to them, what makes it difficult to be resilient, and what helps them to be resilient. Community members shared valuable insights as to what resilience looks like as survivors of sexual violence.

Resilience and identity

Community members described both a resonance and discordance with the term and concept of resilience. Some community members resonated with the general definition that conceptualizes resilience as overcoming adversity, while others voiced discomfort and uncertainty with the term. Several community members discussed shifting perceptions of resilience, whereby the meaning of resilience changed from one point in their lives to another. One community member noted the difficulty of self-identifying as resilient:

… I feel discomfort with the word [resilience], would be the first thing I would say… I often don't hold myself in a high positive regard, so resilient might not be the word that resonates. I wish it did. It probably should… some days I'm really, I'm really proud of myself for going through… all I went through and still coming out and trying again… there's a level, though, that I feel discouraged cause I thought after all that therapy… after all the work I've done, I still don't feel like I've changed as much as I wanted to or healed as much as I wanted to… some days it just feels tiring to be resilient all the time… (Community member 1).

This community member did not quite identify with the term resilience, and instead discussed how being resilient can become exhausting. Through my involvement in community and Inuit mental health initiatives over the years, I have heard this notion several times – that Inuit should not *have* to keep being so resilient, that there should not be such adversity to be resilient against. This was similar to other community members' experiences with resilience.

… To be able to stand up for myself, to create stronger boundaries. To rest. That would be resilience now. Whereas one time it was working harder, doing better… resilience maybe feels countercultural, a little bit… it's like, maybe acceptance as well… (Community member 1).

… Yeah wouldn't it be awesome if we were all resilient and bounced back after every trauma that we went through? But unfortunately, out brain and our heart doesn't work that way… so when your first experience with that trauma, you know, 5 years old, children are more resilient than adults, unfortunately, that's what got me through it… but as we get older… our resistance is, it's harder on us because we've been through so much more… (Community member 2).

For these community members, resilience does not always mean pushing through and moving forward. Resilience can come in the form of standing up for oneself, and resting.

… So I think [earlier years] I might have said I was resilient because that happened but I'm here going day to day about my life. But I really wasn't because I recognize it now that my depression was really holding me down… and then I finally did reach out and get help… resilience for me was letting

go to finally work through… It [idea of resilience] changed… Resilience to me feels like I should be, oh, strong, you know, stiff back person everything bounces off of. But that's not me. It doesn't just bounce off me. I do internalize things, so… (Community member 3).

… Um, I never ever seen myself as resilient until coming here [workplace]. And doing the trainings and working here. And I can see now that I am resilient. Resilience to me is just getting up every day and getting ready and facing every day and living in the moment… (Community member 5).

Community members talked about the ways in which their understanding of resilience has changed. Over time, resilience may have gone from internalizing experiences and traumas, to voicing their experiences and traumas.

… I'd probably stick with a more standard definition of resilience. I feel like that aligns a lot with my kind of belief systems and how it feels to me… someone who is able to pick up the pieces and keep onwards and upwards… there's also that side to where resilience is, in a lot of ways, vulnerable… you can be resilient and not be vulnerable. But I think one of the strongest forms of resiliency is that ability to be vulnerable… It is those people who have experienced sexual violence and pick up the pieces and move on and don't ever, you know, make it public knowledge or go to the police… that's resilient in and of itself… But there's also the side of resiliency where someone is willing to stick their neck out and willing to say, you know, this person's shit stops here… It's a different type of strength… that isn't covered sometimes… in resiliency... (Community member 4).

… Resilience is feeling your strength. Embracing your strength on the good days and just forgiving yourself for the days where you feel not so strong… These kinds of things that I've been through also make me who I am today and has taught me to be a resilient mother and to be a resilient woman, to break the cycle of abuse… (Community member 5).

Community members perceptions of resilience varied. However, the primary commonality across all five is that each of them is more resilient than they once believed. Being resilient can be exhausting. Resilience can mean resting, letting go, being vulnerable, speaking

out, or not speaking out and healing the self. As echoed by several community members and supported by Indigenous resilience literature, resilience does not always mean 'to bounce back' (Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2010; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Indigenous ideas of resilience often encompass culture, personal identities, and community (Smallwood et al., 2024). In research conducted by Smallwood and colleagues (2024), Indigenous Peoples emphasized the freedom of language, identity, culture, and self-determination in their resilience. Similarly in the current project, the very act of sharing stories, reflecting on one's personal and cultural identity, and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of community is resilient in itself. In the context of this study, Indigenous resilience is using one's voice despite being silenced for so long.

Resilience and reducing shame through storytelling

All five community members shed light on the impact of sharing their stories, and how vocalizing rather than internalizing the sexual violence they were subjected to has transformed their lives for the better. Community members emphasized the power of owning their stories and lives, and thus breaking free from the reigns of shame. For example, one community member commented:

> *… And I realized in that, that I needed to start owning my story and telling my story and healing myself through sharing, and not hiding it… And knowing that it wasn't my fault… I was victimized and not to be ashamed… (Community member 5).*

These community members provided these words of advice to other survivors of sexual violence in Labrador. The current project demonstrates how shame impacts an individual's response to sexual violence. One of the characteristics of shame that was prevalent throughout community members' stories is downplaying themselves, the sexual violence they were subjected to, and/or the sexual violence being downplayed by others. These community members reflect on the

realizations that transpired when they began telling her story. Sharing their stories validated that what happened to them was real, that their responses to it were valid, and that it is okay to speak their truth.

> *… Talk to somebody you trust… Because… if you got it in your head, your mind plays tricks on you and you're struggling with that in your mind all the time. But as soon as you let it out to somebody safe, it's not inside of you anymore. You're able to reach out and talk about it. That's a strength… (Community member 2).*
>
> *… And so it's not easy to bring up the things that pain you, but it does help when you get through the other side of it… It's to talk to someone… You need to get it out… so that stress can come off your shoulders or off your heart … (Community member 3).*

All five community members highlighted the importance of talking to a trusted, safe individual about the sexual violence and trauma they had been subjected to. Community members alluded to a deep sense of shame being a key factor in why they remained silent for years before sharing their stories.

> *… I think the most important thing is to find someone, um, to either sit with you, walk you through it, you know, walk beside you through it or behind you, in front of you, however you need that support… the scariest thing in the world is going through that alone… so at the end of the day, find somebody… (Community member 4).*
>
> *… Reach out, definitely reach out. It's not a secret. You reach out. You tell your story. Let me help, let us help you. Let us support you… (Community member 5).*

Community members highlight that survivors should not try to navigate challenges on their own. They also emphasized the fact that the sexual violence they were subjected to is not a secret, something they have to hide anymore, nor something to be ashamed of because there is empowerment and growth in sharing their stories.

Resilience and regaining power and justice by ending silence.

Helping others use their voice to speak out about sexual violence was a shared goal among all five community members. All community members occupy careers in which they support others in navigating uncertainty and hardship. All community members express finding joy and healing in supporting survivors in ways that they themselves needed or received support. Community members' lived experiences help to inform their work, how they show up for survivors in need, and how they help survivors navigate health/mental healthcare services and the justice system. All five community members commended the role of counsellors and other mental health service providers in their healing journeys.

> *… This is the first time I've ever gotten to speak my truth, fully, and where it may have an impact for people of Labrador. So that feels, um, I get emotional talking about that but that feels really, really wonderful… (Community member 1).*
>
> *… [Healing looks like] When you're not passing it along to your children or your grandchildren… (Community member 2).*
>
> *… The sharing of it gets that's burden off of you and then you can start working at things to get better and get some joy in life. And get a healthier mindset, get a healthier reaction to your life because you've worked through the things that have been holding you so dark in all those years. All those years… I've broken the cycle of violence… (Community member 3).*

Moving with Indigenous peoples towards non-violent communities starts with breaking silence about the violence (Firowski & Moffitt, 2017); breaking down the culture of violence and silence whereby families and communities no longer 'push it under the carpet'.

> *… I think there will be stigmas to people taking counselling. But the more we just vocalize it… It felt like the whole world would end to identify the things that had happened. And it didn't… (Community member 3).*
>
> *… It was really something I packed up in a neat little box, popped up on the shelf and assumed I'd never look at again… So you don't expect those things to catch back up to you… But it was so*

important to take all those boxes down off the shelf and unpack them bit by bit with a professional… (Community member 2).

… But I will talk about it to try to break the barriers of people feeling they can't talk about these things. I will talk about these things now… (Community member 3).

Community members felt strongly in reducing stigma associated with seeking mental health support, and they now use their voices to normalize help-seeking.

… I hope there's real, concrete things that happen. And I know research and stats are needed, but I want real concrete things to happen and I'm glad you're doing this research. But research is research… there needs to be concrete, real things happen in community for people… change so that my granddaughter's not living through the nightmares that I lived through… (Community member 3).

… It changes your direction in life, it affects you. But it doesn't have to be a death sentence. There's help… I can probably tell my story and I can help other people... I come to work... and I just hope that something I do, something I said, helps somebody. That's my goal. It's like, I lived this shit. I know how it feels. I just hope that I make a difference in somebody's life. That's all I wanna do, help somebody, while taking care of myself… (Community member 5).

… It still makes me, me. But I've come out of it now where I can be supportive to other people… (Community member 3).

The passion in community members to create meaningful change through breaking silence, stigma, and shame was crystal clear. All community members are advocates for improved treatment of Indigenous sexual violence survivors, and all expressed need for not only continued research, but also concrete interventions in the field. Community members acknowledged the struggle in voicing their experiences and demonstrated empathy towards other survivors who share these struggles. They discussed shame, fear of judgement, lack of trust in others, changes in life direction, impact on current relationships as a result of being subjected to sexual violence, and being silenced. These experiences are not uncommon, as research

consistently demonstrates higher rates of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health challenges among Indigenous peoples who are subjected to sexual violence (Maranzan et al., 2018). Then again, community members commended and congratulated themselves on where they stand today.

> *… And I do congratulate myself for doing the work… (Community member 5).*

Some community members spoke of how they have broken the cycle of intergenerational violence and abuse, so that their children and grandchildren can live healthier and happier. They discussed how the difference in their lives is "night and day" after seeking professional help and identifying healing strategies. Community members felt as though the ongoing work, recovery, and healing necessitated by the violence and trauma they were subjected to had aided their ability to support others in similar circumstances, and contributed to positive life changes (e.g., leaving abusive workplaces, leaving abusive partners, committing to therapy).

Resilience and small communities.

As forementioned, community members identified both advantages and disadvantages to being subjected to sexual violence in and/or living in small communities in Labrador. To be inclusive of all perspectives, it is important to note that one community member prefers distance between themselves and the small community in Labrador in which they grew up and where they were subjected to violence.

> *… Working through things is really important to me, which is not how my childhood worked but it is how I like to exist today… Community is what supports one another… And there's some ways that's happened in Labrador and there's some ways that really hasn't happened in Labrador in the town I grew up in. But here, through my education and through where I live now, I've built up a lot of really great friends and been part of communities that really support each other… (Community member 1)*

> *… I think I'd be a really mentally unwell person if I lived at home, which, um, which really breaks my heart because there's a lot I love about home, and there's a lot of people I love there… (Community member 1).*

This community member demonstrated that while living away from their hometown in Labrador can be emotionally conflicting, it has also enhanced their resilience and provided them with helpful resources. This perspective is captured in combination with the advantages of being supported by small, close-knit communities, and how small communities enhance individual resilience. Community members commented:

> *… When I get near the water there's so much healing... And in my mind, every wave that crashes in is like all the weight of the world, and then when it all washes out, it's like letting go of all the things that weigh you down, just let it go… (Community member 5).*
>
> *… I love being outdoors, out on the land and on the sea ice, fishing, and at the cabin… I just love being on the land… Community is very important to me and I'm community driven… the heart is in the community… (Community member 2).*
>
> *… I'm starting to plan every summer. We're gonna go this week to get our salmon, we're gonna go that week to get our codfish… we have to put aside a week for berry picking… It's good therapy… (Community member 5).*

Spending time on and with the land, waters, and sea ice of Labrador is highly valued among community members. Prioritizing cultural practices is compared to therapy for these community members, whether they are fishing, berry picking, or spending time at their cabin and with the land. Deeply woven into Indigenous culture are the healing mechanisms of land, water, and ice. Many Indigenous peoples experience their own resilience as rooted in relationship with the land and changing seasons (Kimmerer, 2013; Redvers, 2020).

The work being produced by the NunatuKavut Community Council was acknowledged on several occasions throughout community interviews. Community members spoke of the NunatuKavut Community Council in relation to its growth in mental health support services, its dedication to providing resources to NunatuKavut Inuit despite temporary funding in mental health services, and its ability to prioritize the health and wellness of NunatuKavut Inuit. One community member noted:

> *… I really wanna thank NunatuKavut in recent years, they've had money for mental health [support]… (Community member 5).*

This community member expressed her gratitude for the NunatuKavut Community Council mental health services, as they have been exceptionally helpful in her healing journey.

Community members' relationships with their communities as employees, volunteers, friends, and family members play a vital role in their healing journeys. Community members talked about relying on close friends and family as confidants. Some members also talked about breaking cycles of violence and therefore playing significant roles in the lives of their children and grandchildren. These descriptions of community were often described in the context of small communities where there is a deep sense of familiarity and belonging.

Voices in Unity

The five NunatuKavut Inuit who took part in this project shared invaluable experience, insight, and recommendations for improved treatment of sexual violence survivors in Labrador. Patterns and commonalities were identified between community members' experiences pertaining to sexual violence, justice, and resilience in NunatuKavut. The eight themes that were developed aim to holistically reflect and capture the in-depth stories shared by community members.

The four themes developed under ‘Colonialism’ include colonialism and sexual violence, colonialism and insufficient support services/staff, colonialism and the justice system, colonialism and small communities. These themes articulate the role of colonialism in sexual violence that Indigenous Peoples are subjected to. Policies and practices of colonialism that were evident in community members’ interviews apprise a complex story involving the legacy of residential schools, intergenerational trauma, modernization, alcoholism, rape culture, an array of violence, lack of support services, shame, and being silenced.

The four themes developed under ‘Resilience’ include resilience and identity, resilience and reducing shame through storytelling, resilience and regaining power and justice by ending silence, and resilience and small communities. The themes articulate the ways in which all five community members have survived, and reached a point in their lives where they are no longer silenced by men, fear, or shame. Community members’ perceptions of resilience varied. While some individuals resonated with the general definition of resilience as overcoming adversity, others described resilience as uncomfortable, or everchanging. For some community members, their participation in this project meant sharing their stories in-depth for the first time beyond counselling or other confidential settings. The stories told by community members embrace vulnerability, bravery, strength, compassion, and resilience.

Limitations & Future Directions

It is important to consider the limitations of the current study in order to understand how these findings relate to the broader research literature, inform our understanding of the community represented by the individuals who shared their stories, and might be used to guide recommendations for policy and practice. My goal was to recruit a minimum of five community members to participate in the project. Community members were recruited via social media

platforms and by a snowball, word of mouth method. While I was able to recruit five community members, it is possible that these recruitment methods did not reach all community members that may have been interested in participating in the project. Future research may consider incorporating farther-reaching recruitment strategies, such as posting recruitment posters in common locations in each community.

As a NunatuKavut community member, I am known to the community members who participated in the project and they are known to me. While the five community members expressed sincere gratitude for this research project and were comfortable sharing their stories with someone they knew, it is possible that other community members refrained from participating due to pre-existing relationships. Future researchers can mitigate this concern by constructing a diverse research team. For example, the research team should include an individual known to the community to help facilitate recruitment, connections, and relationships, as well as an external individual who is not known to the community.

The current project focused on one of three Indigenous groups in Labrador. While the Indigenous sexual violence literature is fairly consistent across Indigenous groups (Cervantes-Altamirano, 2016; Comack, 2018; David & Mitchell, 2021; Hansen & Dim, 2019; Heidinger, 2022; Hoffart & Jones, 2017), it is possible that the experiences of NunatuKavut Inuit differ from those of other Inuit groups, First Nations, and Metis peoples. Future researchers should consider focusing on other Indigenous groups, or designing a project that is inclusive of various Indigenous groups.

In speaking of diverse and inclusive research strategies, it is important to comment on the current political environment between Labrador's Indigenous groups. Concerns around the anonymity and safety of community members due to this political conflict was brought forward

by several community members. The ongoing consequences of the political conflict between Labrador's Indigenous groups was described by one community as 'a nightmare', and has had physical, emotional, and psychological effects on NunatuKavut Inuit. It is possible that there were NunatuKavut Inuit who did not participate in this project due to fear about anonymity, workplace safety, or personal conflicts. In order for researchers to form meaningful relationships and partnerships with Labrador's Indigenous groups, repair and reconciliation are needed.

Recommendations

A recurring theme throughout community interviews is the need for increased education and resources pertaining to sexual violence, justice, and support. We heard from all five community members that there are simply not enough accessible and affordable support services for the people of Labrador, and not enough staff filling the gaps within organizations that do offer support to sexual violence survivors. The responsibility of supporting survivors in Labrador tends to fall into the hands of one or two individuals, who are expected to offer services to all of Labrador. Community members voiced that this is unsustainable for the individuals graciously working in these positions and for the people of Labrador who seek support. We recommend that academics, educators, policymakers, and government funders actively support, recruit, and provide generous incentives to people who are from Labrador as well as those who are not, who wish to pursue an education and career here.

Another powerful and recurring theme throughout this project is the need for federal and provincial government support and funding for sexual violence services in Labrador. Although money talks, it is not only funding that is lacking towards Labrador's resources. In just recent months, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced funding to train educators in identifying and addressing sexual violence. In the amount of $200,000, the Department of

Education is to offer an online training program to teachers, guidance counsellors, and school administrators. Funding for this initiative is provided under the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, which is a four-year agreement that the provincial government has signed with Women and Gender Equality Canada (Government of Canada, 2024). This is excellent news for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, as community members of the current project emphasized the need for education and training in sexual violence prevention. However, this is not the first promise of funding that the provincial and federal governments have provided to 'identify and address' sexual violence in the province. Yet, non-profit organizations located in Labrador have yet to receive increased funds, or any funds at all, from our governments (Kennedy, 2023). The people of Labrador who maintain non-profit organizations to support survivors do not need to further 'identify and address' sexual violence. The organizations in Labrador that are already doing the work beyond 'identifying and addressing' sexual violence, need funding to deliver services and contribute to ongoing change in the treatment of survivors. Therefore, leaders of the provincial and federal governments should prioritize relationship and partnership building with people of Labrador, specifically the Indigenous groups who face unique barriers to accessing support services, and existing service providers.

All but one community member voiced both appreciation and concern for the local services within NunatuKavut. Community members expressed deep appreciation for the mental health professionals working within Labrador and the NunatuKavut Community Council. Local mental health services were described as a saving grace in the life of one community member. Even so, several community members discussed their wariness around seeking support from local mental health providers who are from and/or live in Labrador. This wariness derives from

confidentiality concerns, and the nature of small towns and pre-existing connections and relationships. Many community members sought mental health professionals outside of Labrador, or outside of Newfoundland and Labrador entirely. Community members recognize the value in local service providers hiring their own, however, community members suggested there be alternative options. We recommend that local governments and service providers such as the NunatuKavut Community Council consider hiring additional counsellors and other mental health service providers who are not from and/or living in Labrador (e.g., remote and/or fly-in and out counselling services), while maintaining employment with local individuals who are representative of NunatuKavut communities.

The final recommendation in connection to this research project is for tangible action to be taken following the completion of research. All too often, research is conducted *in* and *for* Indigenous communities, not *with* or *by* Indigenous communities. Therefore, any implications and outcomes determined through such research often does not contribute to the health of Indigenous Peoples and communities. During community interviews for the current project, one individual expressed her gratitude for the work being accomplished in Labrador in support of survivors, including the role of research. However, she voiced the need for research outcomes to go beyond a printed, potentially published, master's thesis. Community members and survivors of sexual violence want to see initiative taken and changes made for the treatment of survivors in Labrador.

Conclusion

Engaging with NunatuKavut communities, and their ways of being, knowing, and doing, have shone light on the scope of sexual violence in Labrador. The current project aimed to listen to NunatuKavut Inuit share their experiences of sexual violence, justice, and resilience. A total of

five NunatuKavut Inuit identified ways in which colonialism continues to impact sexual violence against Indigenous women in Labrador. They identified gaps in the justice system and support services, while making recommendations on how to fill such gaps. Some community members discussed the challenges of being Indigenous women raised in a society rooted in colonialism and rape culture, while applauding themselves for breaking the cycle of violence and teaching their grandchildren how to treat others. They talked about the ways in which sexual violence has changed their direction in life, while feeling gratitude for their hard work and healing. They identified what resilience means to them, and how their resilience has gotten them to where they stand today. They talked about their greatest joys, while planning their seasonal activities out on the lands, waters, and ice of Labrador. They talked. After hiding their experiences, 'stuffing it inside', 'pushing them under the carpet', 'putting them away into neat little boxes on the shelf', these five women now use their voices for themselves, and for the support of other women. Researchers interested in learning from and with Indigenous peoples need to cultivate spaces where Indigenous voices are heard, reflected, and considered in steps moving forward. This project adds to the important literature around Indigenous people's experiences with sexual violence, justice, and resilience, and is a respectable starting point for sexual violence research led by and built with the people of Labrador.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Indigenous Voices on Sexual Violence, Justice, and Resilience

Saint Mary's University REB #24-060

Research Team:

Student Researcher: Abigail Poole

Faculty Researcher: Dr. Patrick Carolan, Department of Psychology

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NunatuKavut Community Council Representative: Kristy Dyson, Department of Health and Community Services, kdyson@nunatukavut.ca

Introduction

We welcome you to participate in our project, which aims to better understand Indigenous people's experiences with sexual violence, justice, and resilience. This project is conducted in completion of the researcher's Master of Science thesis.

Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to provide an opportunity for NunatuKavut Inuit to speak about their experiences with sexual violence, support, justice, and resilience. Based on the voices of Indigenous community members who have experienced sexual violence, the project's outcomes will help to inform policies and procedures pertaining to sexual violence in Indigenous communities. It is important to emphasize that this project is led by a researcher. The researcher is not a counsellor or therapist and is not qualified to assist you as such. Various support services are provided throughout this form should you wish to avail of these services following your contribution in the project.

Who is Eligible?

You are eligible to participate in this project if you meet the following criteria:

1) You are a NunatuKavut member
2) You are 19 years of age or older
3) Experienced an incident of sexual violence prior to 3 months ago
    a. *(For example, if your interview is scheduled for March 2024 and the incident of sexual violence occurred in December 2023, you are not eligible for this particular project but can avail of the resources listed under the section, 'What are the potential risks of this research?' or at the end of this consent form.*

Procedure

If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to discuss a series of questions pertaining to their relationship with community and police. Community members will be asked to discuss where they have and have not received support following an incident of sexual

violence, as well as their perception and practices of resilience. The estimated time commitment to participating in the interview is anywhere from 15 to 60 minutes.

What are the potential risks of this research?
This interview focuses on experiences related to sexual violence and justice. As these topics can be emotional for some, there is a potential of psychological or emotional risk. I want to emphasize the importance of *care* as we proceed with the project. If you do not wish to participate in the interview, you have the option to decline, skip questions you are not comfortable in discussing, or withdraw at any time throughout the interview without negative consequences. Any identifying information will be kept confidential and private. This means that your responses will not be attributable to your identity. The information that you share will be analyzed together with the interviews of other participants, and then shared as a master's thesis, which may be presented and/or published.

Should you experience any negative outcomes as a result of this project, please reach out to myself, Abigail Poole, by phone (709 927-7308) or by email (abigail.poole@smu.ca) or Dr. Patrick Carolan by phone (902-491-6621) or by email (patrick.carolan@smu.ca). If you are in crisis, please call 911, or attend your local emergency department. Found in the 'Disclosure and Reporting' section you can also find local mental health and legal aid resources. Below is a list of additional mental health resources for all participants in the project:

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line 1-855-242-3310	**Crisis Services Canada** 1-833-456-4566	**Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime** 1-877-232-2610 or https://crcvc.ca/

What are the potential benefits of this research?
With the overall goal being to amplify NunatuKavut Inuit voices on their experiences with sexual violence, justice, support, and resilience, community members will have the opportunity to practice autonomy and empowerment over their own experiences. This research will support the NunatuKavut Community Council's engagement in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls National Action Plan. This research aims to add to the psychological, and forensic psychological literature by filling the gap of Indigenous experiences and Indigenous-led research in these disciplines.

What will be done with my information?
If you choose to complete the interview, it will be completed in person or via Zoom or telephone, whichever option you prefer. The data will be stored on a secure password-protected laptop of the student lead researcher, and with the research department of the NunatuKavut Community Council. We plan on keeping the data with the NunatuKavut Community Council at minimum until the lead researcher completes their master's thesis during Summer 2024. Only members of the research team will have access to the data, but upon approval from the NunatuKavut Community Council, we may share the findings with the wider research community through research publications, conferences, presentations, and academic papers that are beneficial to Labrador communities and NunatuKavut Inuit. For the privacy of all community members who participate, only overall research themes, not the individual results, will be disclosed. If you

would like additional information, have questions, or have any concerns, please reach out to the research team via the emails listed above.

Limits of Confidentiality
Your confidentiality is very important to us, so we want to ensure that you are aware of the limitations of your confidentiality and any situations where we would be legally obligated to report information that you share with us. If you provide us with specific information regarding your intent to harm yourself or others, we will be obligated to notify the authorities. During the interview, you should not discuss details of current and ongoing sexual violence against a child. We will do our best to stop you if we feel that you are leading to discussing anything related to the above. However, if you do state anything related to the above, we are both legally and ethically obligated to break the confidential nature of this interview and report the information in question to the designated authorities.

Compensation
Community members who participate will be compensated with a $30.00 honorarium or their choice of local goods (i.e., cod fish, salmon, or partridge berries).

Can I withdraw from this study?
If you do not wish to participate in our study, you have the option to decline, skip questions you are not comfortable discussing, or withdraw without negative consequences. To do so, tell the researcher and the question will be skipped. The Feedback Form at the end of the interview will provide you with information and resources that you may need. If you choose to withdraw from this project, we will remove your data during the 24-48-hour check-in period following your interview, when the researcher follows up with you. Following the 24–48-hour check-in period, data will be analyzed and you will no longer be able to withdraw from the project.

Participant's Rights and Protections
This research has been reviewed and cleared by NunatuKavut's Research Ethics Board as well as Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters you may contact NunatuKavut's Research Ethics Board at research@nunatukavut.ca or Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board at ethics@smu.ca or (902) 420-5728.

Potential Conflict of Interest
The student investigator is NunatuKavut Inuit and has worked with the NunatuKavut Community Council in various positions, one of which was related to gender-based violence and community wellness in NunatuKavut. This research is separate from any previous work with the NunatuKavut Community Council.

Need More Information?
If you would like to hear more about this research study prior to participating, you may reach out to one of the main researchers for more information:

Resilience@smu.ca
Abigail Poole: abigail.poole@smu.ca

Dr. Patrick Carolan: patrick.carolan@smu.ca

Participant Agreement:

- I understand what this study is about, appreciate the risks and benefits, and that by verbally consenting I agree to take part in this research project and do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation in the project at any time without consequences.
- I have had adequate time to think about the research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Participant Consent (please respond by placing a (✓) next to the option that corresponds with your response:

- I agree and consent to participate in the project
- I do not consent to participate in the project

If you are participating in the project, please respond to the following by placing a (✓) in the box that corresponds to your response:

	Yes	No
I consent to have the interview digitally audio recorded. (*If no, the researcher will take written notes*).		
I consent to be anonymously quoted in the research study.		
I consent to being contacted by the researcher 24-48 hours following my interview for a check-in. (*If yes, please specify your preference to be contacted via phone or email*)		

Signature **Date**

Primary Researcher

Disclosure and Reporting

Due to the personal nature of experiences survivors will be discussing throughout this study, the distinction between disclosing and reporting information must be established. Based on the Saint Mary's University's Sexual Violence Support Centre guidelines, an individual discloses information when they tell someone about an incident of sexual or gender-based violence. By disclosing, the individual can receive support if they need or want it. Disclosing information can be talking about or recording an experience. An individual reports the incident when they want to

take legal action against the person who has harmed them. To receive further support or to report an incident of sexual violence, please contact any of the following services listed below:

Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador:

- 45 Grenfell Street, Happy Valley-Goose Bay; https://publiclegalinfo.com/contact-us/; labrador@publiclegalinfo.com; (709) 896-5235

The Journey Project:

- 45 Grenfell Street, Happy Valley-Goose Bay; publiclegalinfo.com; info@publiclegalinfo.com; (709) 217-6824-5235; toll-free: 1-888-660-7788

Victim Services:

- 222 Kelland Drive, Happy Valley-Goose Bay; https://www.gov.nl.ca/victimservices/victim-services-offices/; (709) 896-0446/896-3251/896-3825

Mokami Status of Women Council:

- 43 Grenfell Street, Happy Valley-Goose Bay https://www.mokamiwomen.ca/home/; (709) 896-3484 ext. 209

Libra House:

- (709) 896-3014; 24-hour crisis line: 896-3014

End Sexual Violence Newfoundland and Labrador:

- 1-800-726-2743

Labrador-Grenfell Health Mental Health Crisis Line:

- 1-888-737-4668 or 709-737-4668

Labrador Grenfell Health Sexual Assault Crisis Line:

- 1-800-726-2743 or 709-726-1411

Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (Labrador West/Churchill Falls):

- 2 Price Lane, Churchill Falls; (709) 925-3524; 911

Royal Canadian Mounted Police:

- 147-149 Hamilton River Road, Happy Valley-Goose Bay; https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/detach/en/d/738; (709) 896-3383; 911.

Appendix B: Demographic Survey

Please answer the following questions about yourself. Demographic information will be used to describe participant population.

1) Are you a member of the NunatuKavut Community Council?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. If no, you are not eligible to participate in the current research project

2) Do you currently reside in Labrador?
    a. Yes
    b. No

3) If you do not currently reside in Labrador:
    a. How long have you lived outside of Labrador? _____
        i. I prefer not to answer

4) What were your reasons for leaving Labrador? _____
        i. I prefer not to answer

5) Do you plan on returning to living in Labrador? _____
        i. I prefer not to answer

6) Please choose your age group:
    a. 19 – 25
    b. 26 – 35
    c. 36 – 45
    d. 46 – 55
    e. 56 – 65
    f. Over 65

7) How would you describe your gender?
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Non-binary or other gender _____
    d. I prefer not to answer

8) Highest level of education completed:
    a. Below grade 10
    b. High school
    c. Some college or university
    d. College or specialized diploma
    e. Bachelor's degree
    f. Some graduate studies
    g. Graduate Studies

h. I prefer not to answer

9) Employment:
   a. Full-time
   b. Part-time
   c. Unemployed
   d. I prefer not to answer

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Sexual violence is an all-encompassing, non-legal term that refers to any form of unwanted sexual contact. Sexual violence is any act or attempt to obtain a sexual act by violence or coercion, regardless of the relationship to the survivor. ***For the purpose of this research project pertaining to sexual violence, justice, and resilience, sexual violence is defined as any act of sexual violence that involves unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature (e.g., sexual assault, touching someone without consent, rape) or emotional & mental harm (e.g., sexual harassment, unwanted sexual comments and behaviour).***

1. Could you tell me about one activity you find joy and comfort in?

2. What would others say is a strength of yours?

3. How would you describe your relationship with your community?

4. How would you describe your interactions with the following emergency services?
    a. The healthcare system?
    b. The police?

5. If you reported your experiences of sexual violence to the police, could you tell me more about your experience of reporting?

6. If you did not report your experiences of sexual violence to the police, could you tell me more about why you did not report?

7. If you had other experience with the police regarding sexual violence, could you tell me about this experience?

8. If you had experience with the justice system (e.g., criminal, civil, or family justice system) regarding sexual violence, could you tell me about that experience?

9. What sources of support have been helpful for you following your experience with sexual violence?
    a. Family
    b. Friends
    c. Environmental factors
    d. Cultural factors
    e. Healthcare professionals
    f. Women's Centre
    g. Mental health professionals
    h. Others?

10. What support services do you think are lacking for survivors of sexual violence in Labrador?

11. If anything were possible, what resource(s) would you bring to Labrador for survivors of sexual violence?

12. The general definition of resilience is the capacity to which a person can recover from adversity, or how well they deal with adversity. However, there are various definitions and ideas of what resilience means. What does resilience mean to you?
    a. What makes it difficult to be resilient?
    b. What helps you to be resilient?

13. If you could offer survivors of sexual violence in Labrador one piece of advice, what would it be?

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences, thoughts, or concerns related to your experience with sexual violence?

Appendix D: Feedback Form

Indigenous Voices on Sexual Violence, Justice, and Resilience

Saint Mary's University REB #24-060
Research Team:
Student Researcher: Abigail Poole
Faculty Researcher: Dr. Patrick Carolan, Department of Psychology
Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie Street, Halifax, NS B3H 3C3
Abigail.poole@smu.ca; patrick.carolan@smu.ca
NunatuKavut Community Council Representative: Kristy Dyson, Department of Health and Community Services, kdyson@nunatukavut.ca

We would like to thank you for your participation in this project. As a reminder, the purpose of this project is to build a stronger understanding of the experiences that NunatuKavut Inuit in Labrador face when it comes to sexual violence, justice, and resilience. This research will support the NunatuKavut Community Council's engagement in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls National Action Plan, and aims to add to the psychological, and forensic psychological literature by filling the gap of Indigenous experiences and Indigenous-led research in these disciplines. This project is conducted in completion of the researcher's Master of Science thesis. If you have consented to being contacted by the researcher, you will hear from them via phone or email 24-48 hours following your interview.

Your Data

Please note that your individual data will be stored on a secure password-protected laptop of the student lead researcher, and with the research department of the NunatuKavut Community Council. Only members of the research team will have access to the data. We plan on keeping the data with the NunatuKavut Community Council at minimum until the lead researcher completes their master's thesis during Summer 2024. However, audio-recordings will be destroyed after interviews have been transcribed. Once all data are collected, they will be analyzed, and themes will be shared with community members who participated to ensure voices were reflected clearly and accurately. Your responses to the interview questions will not be attributable to your identity. Research themes will be included in the researcher's final paper as well as in academic journals and presentations upon approval from the NunatuKavut Community Council.

Compensation

Community members who participate in the project will be compensated with a $30.00 honorarium or their choice of local goods (i.e., cod fish, salmon, or partridge berries).

Questions, Concerns, Inquiries, etc.

Once the data is collected and analyzed, we aim to share the final research themes through the wider research community, research publications, conferences, and workshops that are beneficial to Labrador communities and NunatuKavut Inuit. For the privacy of all community members who participate, only overall research themes, not the individual results, will be disclosed. If you would like additional information, have questions, or have any concerns, please reach out to the research team via the emails listed above. If you are interested in receiving more information

regarding the results of this project, you will find a summary of the results by December 1st, 2024 here:
https://www.smu.ca/fgsr/summaries-of-completed-research.html

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your treatment as a community member who participated in this project, please feel free to contact the NunatuKavut Research Ethics Board at research@nunatukavut.ca or the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board at (902) 420-5728 or ethics@smu.ca

Adverse Impacts
We understand that these topics may have been difficult to think about and discuss. We would like to repeat the importance of seeking additional support if needed. **It is important to emphasize that this project was led by a researcher. The researcher is not a counsellor or therapist and is not qualified to assist you as such. The following support information is provided:**

Centre for Suicide Prevention
1-833-456-4566

Crisis Services Canada
1833-456-4566

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line
1-855-242-3310

Canadian Resource Centre for for Victims of Crime
1-877-232-2610 or https://crcvc.ca/

Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador:

- 45 Grenfell Street, Happy Valley-Goose Bay; https://publiclegalinfo.com/contact-us/; labrador@publiclegalinfo.com; (709) 896-5235

The Journey Project:

- 45 Grenfell Street, Happy Valley-Goose Bay; publiclegalinfo.com; info@publiclegalinfo.com; (709) 217-6824; toll-free: 1-888-660-7788

Victim Services:

- 222 Kelland Drive, Happy Valley-Goose Bay; https://www.gov.nl.ca/victimservices/victim-services-offices/; (709) 896-0446/896-3251/896-3825

Mokami Status of Women Council:

- 43 Grenfell Street, Happy Valley-Goose Bay

https://www.mokamiwomen.ca/home/; (709) 896-3484 ext. 209

Libra House:

- (709) 896-3014; 24-hour crisis line: 896-3014

End Sexual Violence Newfoundland and Labrador:

- 1-800-726-2743

Labrador-Grenfell Health Mental Health Crisis Line:

- 1-888-737-4668 or 709-737-4668

Labrador Grenfell Health Sexual Assault Crisis Line:

- 1-800-726-2743 or 709-726-1411

Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (Labrador West/Churchill Falls):

- 2 Price Lane, Churchill Falls; (709) 925-3524; 911

Royal Canadian Mounted Police:

- 147-149 Hamilton River Road, Happy Valley-Goose Bay; https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/detach/en/d/738; (709) 896-3383; 911.

Thank you for your valuable insight and participation in this project.

Appendix E: Recruitment Advertisements

Email Script:

Hi there,

My name is Abigail Poole and I am a Master of Applied/Forensic Psychology student at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I am reaching to you today to discuss my master's thesis project with you, which I welcome you to share with others in hopes that they may wish to share their valuable insights. This project is titled, 'Indigenous Voices on Sexual Violence, Justice, and Resilience' and aims to shine light on NunatuKavut Inuit voices and perspectives on their experiences with sexual violence, justice and support, and what impacts their resilience.

Labrador has sexual assault rates exceeding four times the national average according to data supplied to the Canadian Press by the royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the RCMP. Research continues to demonstrate the disproportionate rates of sexual violence perpetration and victimization among Indigenous populations (Statistics Canada, 2022). Research also emphasizes the lack of support and poor treatment from governments and law enforcement for Indigenous survivors of sexual violence in Canada (Ben-Porat, 2008). In Labrador where there are geographical, political, and economical barriers to accessing support services, little is known about where survivors of sexual violence turn during crisis. I am aiming to listen to the experiences of NunatuKavut members residing in Labrador in hopes of shining light on the need for improved supports and services that address the complex challenges arising from sexual violence victimization. The project will ask NunatuKavut Inuit to answer a semi-structured interview.

For those interested in participating in an interview, please get in touch with me at resilience@smu.ca to set up a time to chat. After confirming a time, community members will be asked to sign an informed consent form before we meet in-person, via telephone, or online via Zoom for anywhere from 15 to 60 minutes, depending on how much they wish to share. This research is entirely voluntary, and community members can end their participation at any time before, during, or following the interview. If community members choose to participate, their information is kept confidential and anonymous.

To be eligible to participate in the project, community members will meet the following criteria:

- Are a NunatuKavut member
- Currently residing in Labrador
- 19 years or above in age
- Have experienced an incident of sexual violence no earlier than 3 months prior to the interview

Please pass this information along to anyone that may be interested or knows someone that may be interested in participating. If you have any questions or concerns, please email me (Abigail Poole) at resilience@smu.ca

I appreciate your time and all the incredible work your team is doing in our Labrador communities.

Thank you for your consideration,
Abby

Recruitment poster distributed via social media platforms: