BEHIND THE SCREENS: UNVEILING THE DYNAMICS OF NO TO FAMILY VIOLENCE (N2FV) VIRTUAL GROUPWORK

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INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) in Singapore recognises that family violence (FV) adversely impacts individuals and families experiencing violence. While the prevalence of FV in Singapore is lower compared to international and South-East Asian rates, the number of cases is increasing. In 2021, there were 5,190 police reports on FV, up from 5,134 in 2020, with 1,115 cases referred to Family Service Centres (FSCs) or FV specialist centres (Hamzah, 2022).

The No To Family Violence (N2FV) groupwork was developed as a psychoeducation programme for individuals who experienced FV. All runs of N2FV were conducted virtually via Zoom. A preliminary study was conducted to examine the perceptions of FSC practitioners on what they perceived to be (1) the **barriers** that inhibit clients who experienced FV from attending N2FV; and (2) the **facilitating factors** for participants in building insight and coping skills during N2FV. The current study extends the research by delving into the **experiences of N2FV groupwork participants**.

OBJECTIVES

- To explore the **facilitating factors** and **barriers** that influence participation of clients who experienced FV in N2FV groupwork
- To **evaluate** the use of **Zoom** as a platform for delivery of N2FV groupwork

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What **factors contribute** to participants' development of insight and coping skills during the N2FV groupwork?
- What are the **barriers** that inhibit clients who have experienced FV from attending the N2FV groupwork?
- What are the **advantages** and **disadvantages** of utilizing **Zoom** as the delivery mode for the N2FV groupwork?
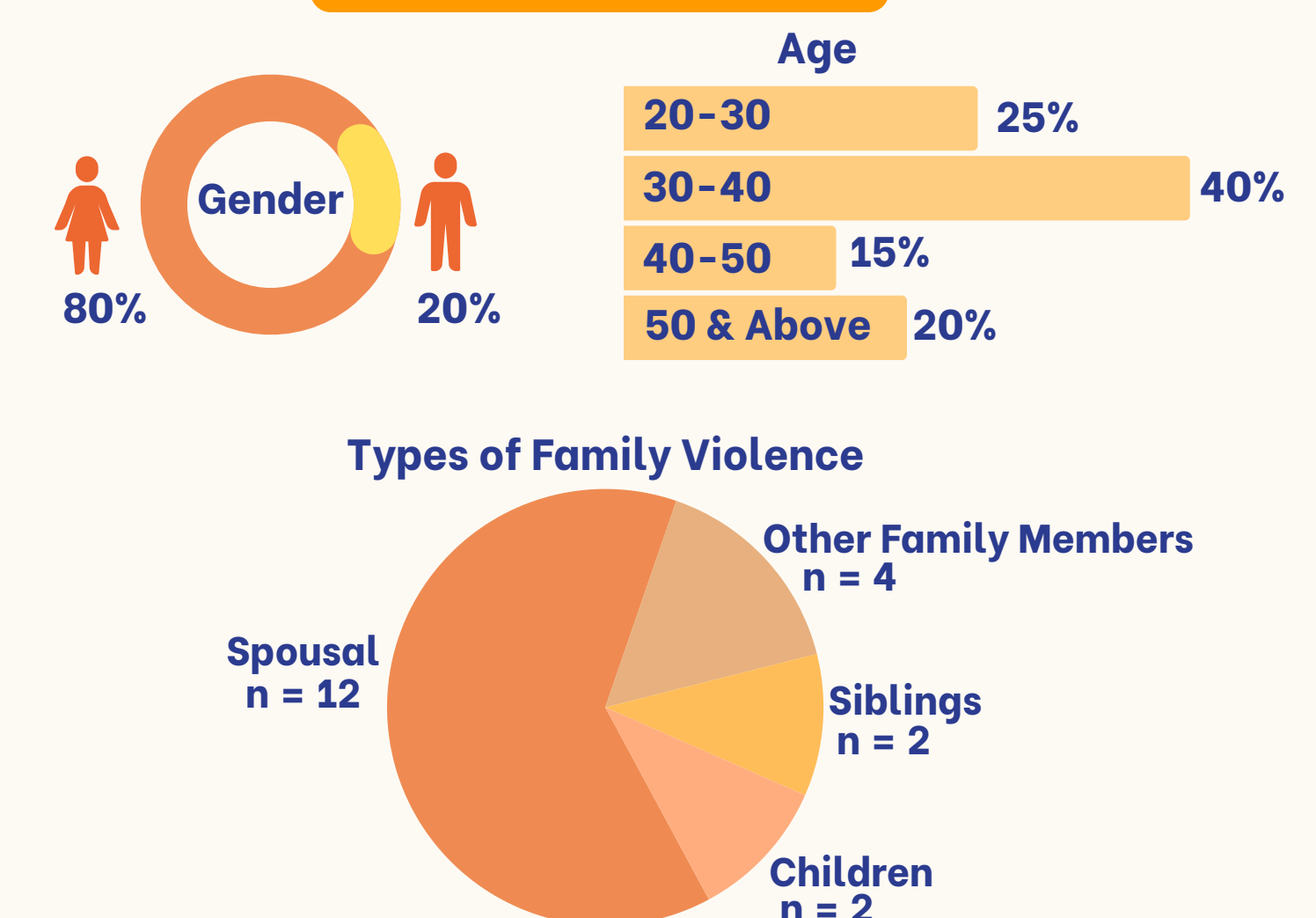
METHODOLOGY

Sept-Oct 2022 — Run 3 of N2FV
Nov 2023 — Run 4 of N2FV
Feb-Mar 2024 — Run 5 of N2FV

Jan-Mar 2023 Phase I
- Interviews with **6 Practitioners** who nominated clients for N2FV Run 3, and **1 Facilitator**

Feb-Mar 2024 Phase II
- Administration of Post-Groupwork Evaluation Survey to Participants of N2FV Run 4 ($n = 11$) & Run 5 ($n = 9$)

PARTICIPANTS CHARACTERISTICS

PRACTITIONERS

Practitioner	Position	No.of Years taking MCP Cases	Number of Clients Nominated for N2FV	Clients' Attendance
#1	Senior	10	1	Regular
#2	Senior	5	0	NA
#3	Senior	3	1	Regular
#4	Senior	3	1	Irregular
#5	Junior	0	1	Regular
#6	Senior	1	1	Irregular
#7	Junior	0	1	Regular

N2FV PARTICIPANTS

Gender 80% / 20%

Age
- 20-30: 25%
- 30-40: 40%
- 40-50: 15%
- 50 & Above: 20%

Types of Family Violence
- Spousal n = 12
- Other Family Members n = 4
- Siblings n = 2
- Children n = 2

KEY FINDINGS

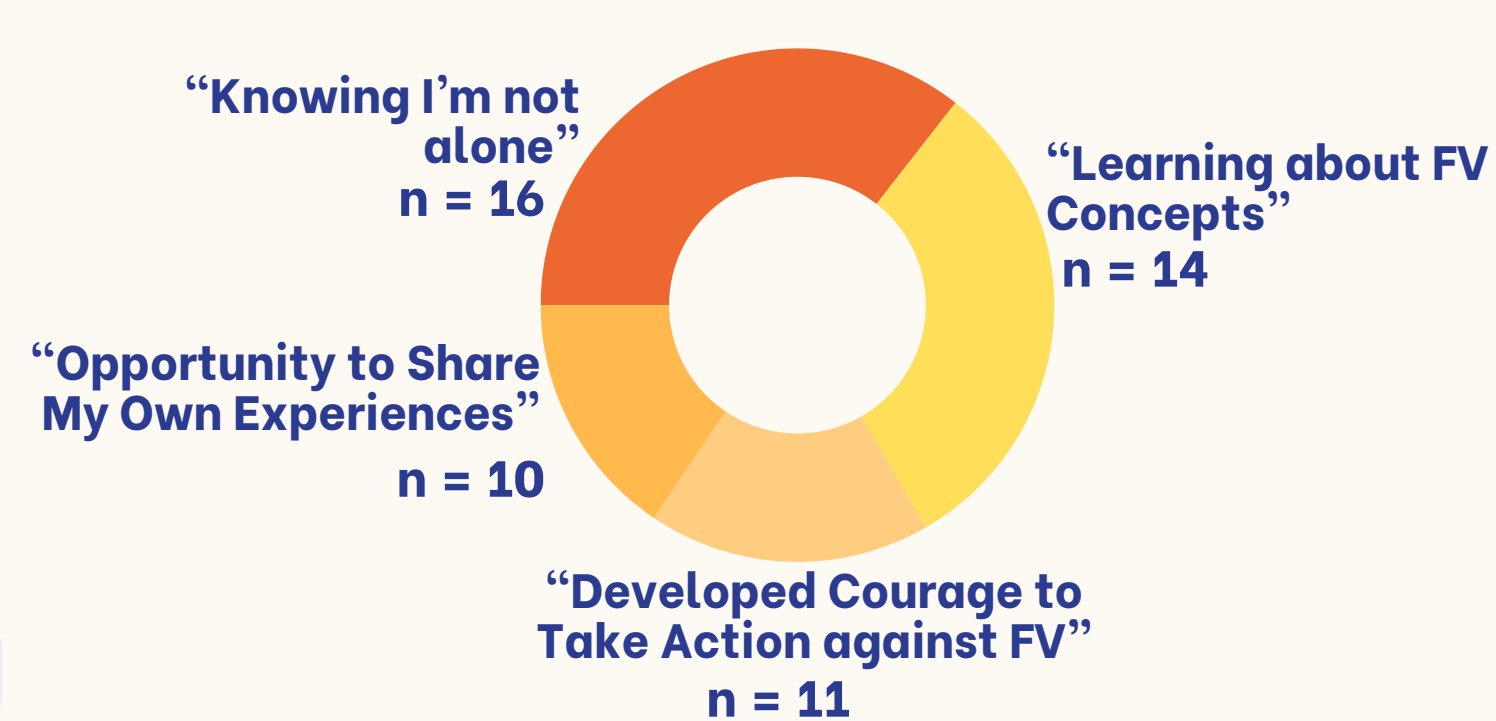### FACILITATING FACTORS & BARRIERS

FACILITATING FACTORS

PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES

Key Themes from Interviews with Practitioners

Participants' Self-Motivation
- "It depends on how open & motivated participants are to do something different for themselves"

Supportive Element of Group-Setting
- "Groupwork has things that casework does not offer - the peer support and network"

Relatibility of Content
- "Hearing each other's story probably also helped them to retain the information"

N2FV PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES

What Participants Liked Most about N2FV Groupwork
- "Knowing I'm not alone" n = 16
- "Learning about FV Concepts" n = 14
- "Opportunity to Share My Own Experiences" n = 10
- "Developed Courage to Take Action against FV" n = 11

BARRIERS

PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES

Key Themes from Interviews with Practitioners

Sensitivity of the Topic of FV
- "… some of them might be triggered or retraumatised during the sharings"

Logistical Challenges
- Groupwork require participants to attend sessions at specific times, which can be difficult for those with busy work schedules or caregiving responsibilities
  - "Even though we did ask them if they were able to have time away from taking care of the children, sometimes when you don't have anyone else, you have no choice…"
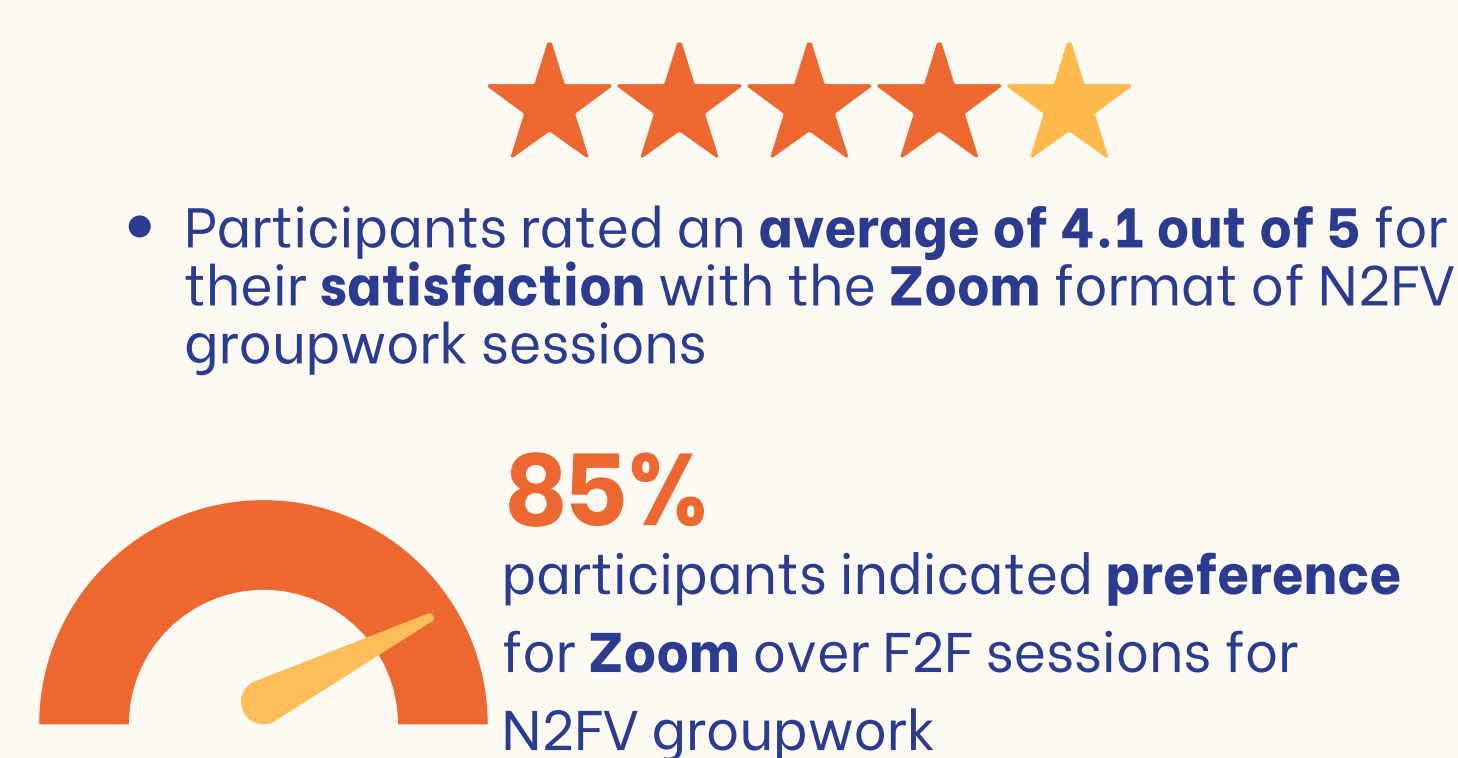
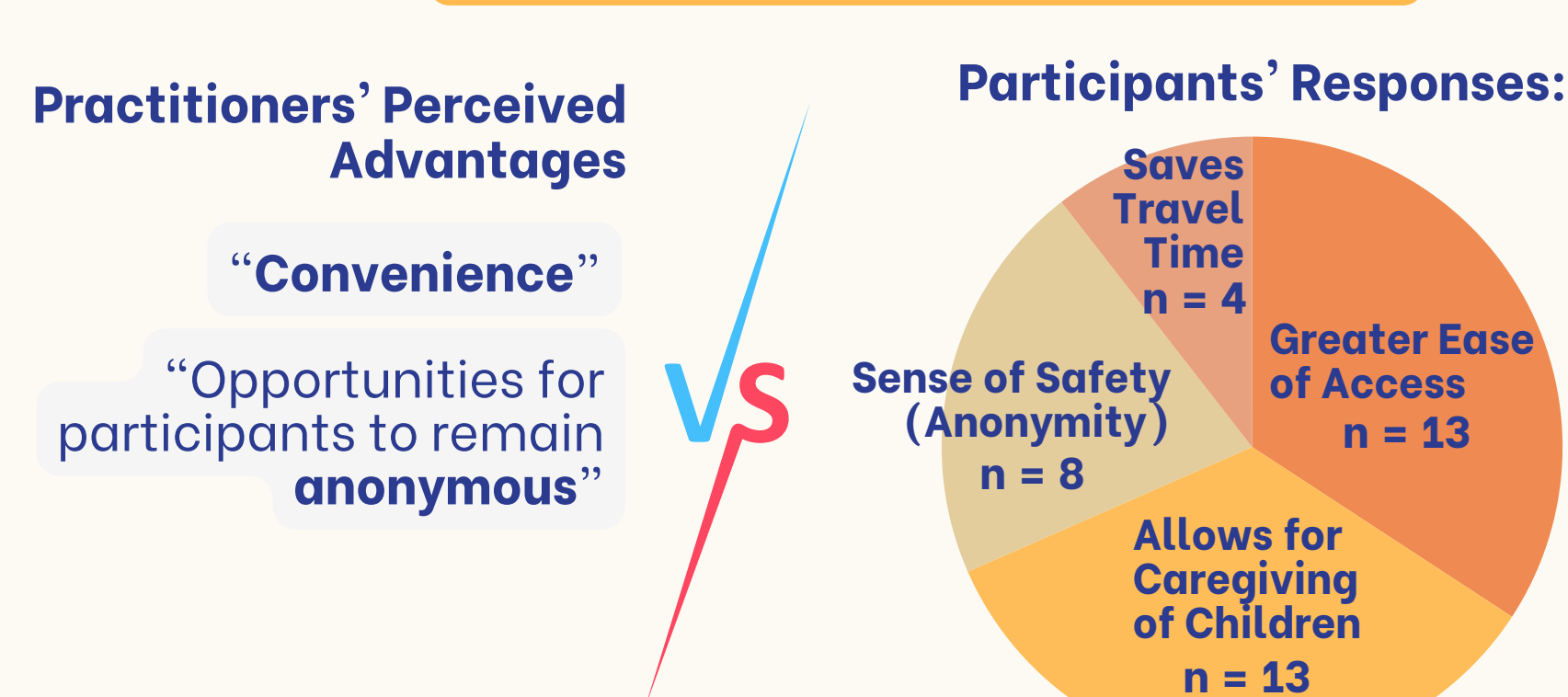**N2FV PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES**

Feedback from Participants

"There were parts of the groupwork where those painful experiences regarding family violence were recollected when I want to forget. I suggest we could have this session conducted individually rather than a groupwork over zoom"

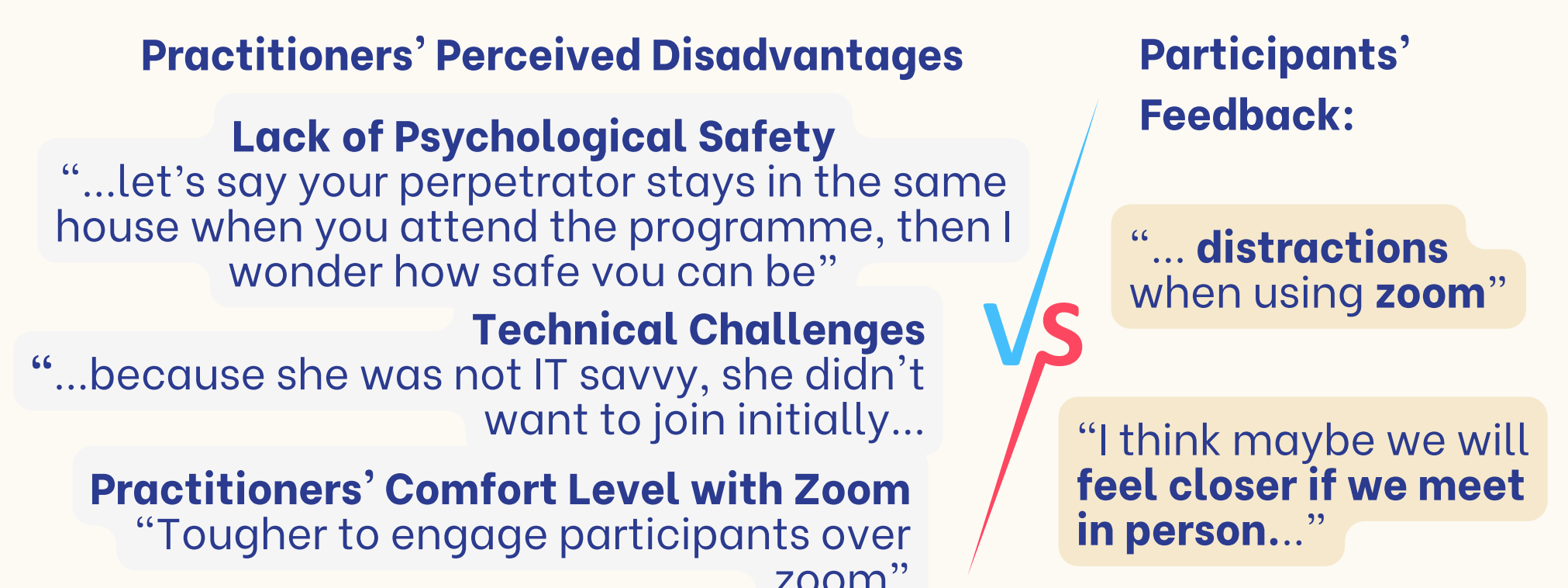### EVALUATING ZOOM AS PLATFORM FOR N2FV GROUPWORK

PARTICIPANTS' PREFERENCES TOWARDS ZOOM

★★★★☆

- Participants rated an **average of 4.1 out of 5** for their **satisfaction** with the **Zoom** format of N2FV groupwork sessions

85% participants indicated **preference** for **Zoom** over F2F sessions for N2FV groupwork

PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES OF ZOOM

Practitioners' Perceived Advantages

"Convenience"

"Opportunities for participants to remain **anonymous**"

VS

Participants' Responses:
- Saves Travel Time n = 4
- Greater Ease of Access n = 13
- Sense of Safety (Anonymity) n = 8
- Allows for Caregiving of Children n = 13

CONCERNS ABOUT ZOOM

Practitioners' Perceived Disadvantages

Lack of Psychological Safety
"…let's say your perpetrator stays in the same house when you attend the programme, then I wonder how safe you can be"

Technical Challenges
"…because she was not IT savvy, she didn't want to join initially…"

Practitioners' Comfort Level with Zoom
"Tougher to engage participants over zoom"

VS

Participants' Feedback:

"… **distractions** when using **zoom**"

"I think maybe we will **feel closer if we meet in person**…"

DISCUSSION

Value of Groupwork for Survivors of Family Violence (FV)
- **Groupwork intervention can offer several benefits for survivors of FV, including peer support, validation, and mutual learning.**
  - Group settings can help reduce feelings of isolation and serve as a form of motivating force for survivors of FV to break free from the cycle of violence (Sullivan, 2004; Sweifach & Heft-LaPorte, 2007).
- **Challenges associated with groupwork: Potential for triggering experiences.**
  - The sensitive nature of groupwork meant that the discussion of traumatic experiences can be triggering for some survivors, leading to increased anxiety, distress, or emotional reactivity (Ely & Dulmus, 2007).
- **Need to address the diverse needs and experiences of group members.**
  - Survivors of FV may have **different backgrounds, experiences, and levels of readiness to engage in groupwork**.
  - Prior studies underscore the **importance of careful analysis of the needs and challenges of survivors of FV in ascertaining their suitability for groupwork-based interventions**, including scheduling availability, intensity of symptoms, and access to social support (Crespo et al., 2021).

Strategic Delivery of Groupwork via Virtual Means
- A **strong preference among participants (85%) for virtual groupwork**
  - Advantages cited are consistent with past research, including greater ease of access, convenience, and a sense of anonymity (Finn et al., 2018; Kumar et al., 2020).
- **Participants' engagement via Zoom** emerged as a common concern.
  - A key safety concern highlighted was that of the **presence of perpetrators** at home during sessions.
  - Literature highlighted the importance of addressing **privacy concerns** for vulnerable populations (Smith et al., 2021).
- **Comfort level of practitioners with utilizing virtual platforms** is another **vital consideration as it poses a potential barrier**. This is divergent from participants' preference towards virtual formats.
  - Practitioners who lack familiarity or confidence with technology may experience increased stress and challenges in delivering services virtually (Brown et al., 2019).

REFLECTIONS & IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

ADAPTING CAPACITIES…

…FOR DIVERSE & COMPLEX NEEDS

- **Maintaining a Client-Centered Approach**
  - How attuned are we to the changing profile, preferences, and needs of our clients?
  - Importance of careful assessment of individual needs, as well as ongoing monitoring and adaptation of interventions to meet the diverse needs and preferences of our clients, in this case, the survivors of FV.

…IN A DIGITAL WORLD

- **Enhancing Digital Competencies**
  - To what extent are practitioner's perspectives limited by their comfort with delivering groupwork through a virtual format?
  - Are we, as practitioners, adapting our capacities and leveraging well on digital tools to aid interventions?
  - With the increasing use of technology in social work practice, practitioners need to be digitally literate, comfortable using virtual tools and platforms to engage with clients, deliver interventions, and access resources.
- **Virtual Facilitation Skills**
  - How can we create safe spaces online? How can we bridge the physical distance online?
  - Practitioners need to develop strong facilitation skills to effectively lead virtual group interventions. This includes the ability to manage group dynamics, facilitate discussions, and address conflicts or challenges that may arise in the virtual setting.
  - Training and ongoing groupwork supervision can help practitioners enhance their facilitation skills in virtual environments.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the findings underscore the **potential of virtual groupwork as a viable and empowering intervention for survivors of family violence**. By **harnessing the advantages of digital technology** while **addressing the associated challenges**, social workers can **enhance the accessibility, effectiveness, and inclusivity of their practice**, ultimately fostering resilience within communities impacted by family violence.

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