

## Article

# The Perceptions of Police-Black Civilian Deadly Encounters in North America among Black Immigrants in a Western Canadian City

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**Abstract:** This study investigates black immigrants' perceptions of police-black civilian deadly encounters in North America. Twenty semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted among black immigrants in Edmonton, western Canada. The respondents perceived racism, police brutality, black criminality, gun violence and police perception of black people as 'violent' as the causal factors in deadly encounters. There was also the perception of criminal injustice and conspiracy among the agents of the criminal justice system (CJS) in the treatment of victims and suspects. This study suggests that personal and media experiences can influence how people de/re/construct deadly encounters and the treatment of victims and suspects by the CJS. Findings also reveal that when members of a racial (immigrant) minority perceive themselves as the target of a discriminatory CJS, they may adopt cautious and cooperative actions rather than aggressive or deviant behaviour to avoid criminalization and victimization. The study concludes that the perception of criminal injustice in police deadly violence against black (minority) civilians could influence: (i) where (black) immigrants locate themselves within the CJS in North America, and (ii) how (black) immigrants perceive and respond to the agents of the CJS, such as the police, when they encounter them.

**Keywords:** black immigrants; North America; perception of criminal (in)justice; police-civilian interaction; police violence; racial minorities; racialization; treatment of (criminal) suspect; treatment of victim

## 1. Introduction

Drawing on the opinions of 20 black immigrants from a western Canadian city, this study investigates the perceptions of police-civilian deadly encounters in North America. One key issue affecting immigrants globally is how they are treated by the criminal justice system (CJS) of their host countries. The type of treatment immigrants receive and their attitudes toward the CJS vary by location and racial identity [1,2]. The disproportionate victimization of black minorities in police-civilian deadly encounters in North America is a major concern among the black immigrants in the region. Cases that have attracted the most attention—Jermaine Carby, Michael Eligon, Michael Brown, and Trayvon Martins—involve white police officers as suspects and black civilians as victims.

Blacks are a minority in North America, but experience a higher rate of victimization in police-involved killings when compared with whites [3–5]. When cases of deadly encounters are taken to court, the police suspects are usually not convicted or accused of any wrongdoings [6,7]. The deadly violence against black civilians by police officers and the non-conviction of police suspects by the court have created a situation whereby black immigrants in North America are concerned about their safety at the hands of police and judges.

Investigating the perception of deadly encounters among (black) immigrants in North America is socially significant. There are scant scholarly literature on how (black) immigrants feel or think about the deadly police violence against racial minorities in North America as well as the impact such violence has on immigrants' interaction with the agents of the CJS. The negative construction of the actions of police officers and judges is a major driver of civil unrests [8], aggressive behaviour, and criminality [9–11]. The higher rates of victimization of black civilians and non-conviction of police suspects in deadly encounters may affect black immigrants' perceptions or attitudes toward agents of the CJS (e.g., police) in North America. For example, perceived injustice in deadly encounters contributed to the emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in North America [12,13]. On the other hand, when people perceive the CJS positively, they are more likely to cooperate with the police [14] (p. 448). In addition, the proper integration of (black) immigrants in North America depends on the perceptions of the fairness and legitimacy of the CJS.

The author approaches Canada and the United States as a microcosm of North America for two reasons. First, Canada and the United States are preferred destinations for (black) immigrants. In 2011, the Canada National Household Survey (NHS) found that one out of five people in Canada (20.6%) is an immigrant—the highest proportion among the G8 countries. Of the visible minorities in Canada, 95% of them lived in urban areas [15], and black immigrants constitute the third largest, after South Asians and Chinese [16]. In 2016, there were 4.2 million black immigrants living in the United States, up from 816,000 in 1980 [17]. Second, most of the reported cases of deadly encounter occur in both countries [18–20].

The study asks three questions: (i) Why do police-black civilian deadly encounters occur in North America? (ii) Was justice served in the legal outcomes of police-black civilian deadly encounters? and (iii) Do police-black civilian deadly encounters influence how racial minority group in Canada perceive and relate to the Canadian CJS? This paper is divided into four sections. The first section reviews the literature on immigrants and racial minorities' perceptions of the CJS in North America, particularly Canada and the United States. The second section explicates the methods used for data collection and analysis. The third section presents and analyzes the narratives of the black immigrants who participated in the study. The fourth section discusses the key findings and draws a conclusion on the implications of the study findings. The study contributes, through a robust engagement with the black immigrants' narratives, to the debates on immigrants and minorities' perceptions of the CJS in North America.

## 2. Literature Review

Perception depicts people's interpretation and mental representation of events, whether they are valid or invalid [21]. It is used to measure the levels of trust and legitimacy the public give to the police and court [5,14,22]. Scholars have written about the factors affecting the perceptions and attitudes of immigrants and racial minorities toward the CJS. This study reviews the literature on immigrants' perceptions of the CJS in Canada and the United States. Both constitute the only countries in North America in which immigrants' perceptions of the CJS have been considerably researched.

One of the factors that have been found to relate to CJS perception is racial identity. In the United States, Hagan and Albonetti [23] were among the early scholars who found that the perception of the CJS is influenced by people's racial identities. Their data was drawn from a national survey of different racial groups in the United States. Hagan and Albonetti were particularly interested in how variables such as race and class were related to the perception of injustice. Overall, they found that African-Americans were more likely than white Americans to perceive criminal injustice [23] (p. 343). They also found that poor black Americans were more likely to believe that the United States CJS discriminates against black people and minority groups. The findings by Hagan and Albonetti were spectacular for certain reasons. First, their findings drew greater attention to the meanings and interpretations of different racial groups and classes of people about the actions of the CJS. Second, it exposed the United States CJS to further scrutiny regarding the allegation of systematic (racial)

discrimination. Third, it provided a deeper understanding of why police get differential attitudes from racial groups during contacts. Hagan later collaborated with Payne and Shedd to test the validity of the earlier study he conducted together with Albonetti. In this latter study, Hagan, Payne, and Shedd [24] confirmed that non-white minorities rated the CJS in the United States more negatively than the white majority.

In Canada, there is also a correlation between racial identity and CJS perception. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) [25] found that (black) minorities in Toronto perceived greater injustices in housing, education, employment, arrests, and sentencing. In a similar study conducted among different immigrants and racial minorities in the metropolitan area of Toronto, Wortley and Owusu-Bempah [14] (p. 458) found that black minorities were more likely to perceive police and court discrimination than other racial minorities. They stated that 80% of black respondents believed that the police treated black people worse than white people, compared to 59% of white people and 50% of Chinese. In a more recent study, Wortley and Owusu-Bempah [5] further found that black Canadians were much more likely to perceive police stops as illegitimate than white Canadians. They also found that 60% of black Canadians perceived racial profiling compared to 14% of white Canadians.

Media representation of criminal injustice and misconduct by the police and court has been found to produce negative perception [26]. The media plays a lead role in the production of societal construction of events [1] (p. 212), [27] (p. 10). Barak [28] argued that media contents contributed to the social construction of the ideas of 'otherness' and 'us vs. them' and typify criminals as vengeful, predatory, and members of a racial or ethnic minority (p. 136). Studies have also shown that media organizations in the United States are more likely to allocate more time to covering stories involving black American suspects than white American suspects [29]. Media coverage of police brutality and criminal injustice can cause the racial groups that are being victimized to anticipate future victimization [30]. When media organizations focus disproportionately on crime reports that involve members of specific racial groups, they create the public perception or image that crime is coloured [1,31].

The quality of experience with the police and court has been found to relate to CJS perception [32,33]. It has been argued that part of the reason why black Americans often have a negative perception of the police and court is because they are differentially targeted and punished by the United States CJS [34,35]. Chu and Song [36] examined the attitudes of Chinese immigrants towards the police in Toronto. They found that positive perception of the Canadian CJS in Toronto was related to the frequency of contact and ability of Chinese immigrants to speak English. Their findings showed that the Chinese immigrants who have had previous contacts with the Toronto police rated the police less favourably than those who have had no contacts. Those who did not speak English also expressed more negative views about the Toronto police than those who spoke the language. In addition, Chow [37] argued that positive experience with the police contributed to positive public perception about the police while a negative experience might lead to a poor rating of the police.

Studies have shown that immigration status is a predictor of perception of criminal (in)justice. Schmidt [38] explained that immigrants in the United States held more negative views of the United States CJS than those that were American-born. Other studies have also found that perception of (in)justice among immigrants in a country tends to increase with the length of time spent in that country. Wortley and Owusu-Bempah [14] (p. 464) found that more recent Canadian immigrants were less likely to perceive discrimination than Canadian-born and immigrants who had spent a long time in the country. Therefore, racial identity, length of residency, media portrayal of events, class status, quality of experience, and immigration or citizenship status are useful variables for understanding how people, including immigrants and racial minorities, make sense of the actions of the CJS and its agents (such as the police and judges) in deadly police-civilian encounters.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Data Collection

This study is situated within a qualitative framework. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted among selected black immigrants in Edmonton, Canada. The study utilizes interview method of data collection because it provides a nuanced understanding of the perceptions of police-black civilian deadly encounters. The interviews were conducted through face-to-face and phone conversations, depending on the preference of the respondents, between September 2015 and August 2017. The face-to-face interviews were conducted at fast food restaurants, coffee shops, and private homes of respondents.

The city of Edmonton was conveniently selected for this study. Before the study was conceived, the author, through informal conversations, interacted with some black immigrants who expressed their concerns about police-black civilian deadly encounters in North America. Participation in this study was voluntary. The study relied on snowball sampling [39] (p. 25), [40] (p. 4) and personal contacts to recruit respondents. However, those who eventually participated in the study were purposively selected. The author began the process of collecting the data for this study by designing an interview guide and a consent form. The consent form outlined the purpose of the study and assured the respondents of their anonymity through the research process. The knowledge of the media stories of deadly encounters was vital to the sample-selection process. The media plays a lead role in the social construction of events [1,28]. People depend on the media to read, hear, watch or make sense of stories about deadly encounters.

To determine the respondents' level of knowledge of deadly encounters, the author asked them if they had heard, read, or watched media stories of deadly police violence against (black) civilians in North America. The author contacted 25 black immigrants but only 20 of them were recruited. The 20 respondents were those who demonstrated considerable knowledge of deadly encounter cases, which led to the deaths of Jermaine Carby and Michael Eligon in Canada; and Philando Castile, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner in the United States, among others. The above selection process enabled the author to: (i) recruit those that were capable of narrating media stories of deadly encounters, and (ii) improve the quality of the study data. Holstein and Gubrium [41] argued that the quality of any qualitative research is enhanced when researchers recruit respondents that are capable of narrative production. Table 1 summarises the situational characteristics and legal outcomes of some of the deadly encounter cases interrogated.

**Table 1.** The situational characteristics and legal outcomes of selected deadly encounter cases.

Name, Age & Sex of Victims	Date & Place of Deadly Encounters	Name, Age & Sex of Police Suspects	Circumstances of Deadly Encounters	Legal (Court) Outcomes
Jermaine Carby, 33, male	24 September 2014, Brampton, Ontario, Canada	Constable Ryan Reid, (age not known), male	Carby was a mental patient who was seeking treatment in hospital a few days before he was killed. He was in a black Volkswagen Jetta pulled over by two police officers during a routine traffic stop. He was alleged to be holding a knife after a heated argument with the police. He was shot three times for refusing to drop his knife. A video that was displayed in court showed police saying, “drop the knife, drop the knife,” before shots were fired.	The inquest concluded the case as a homicide but the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) cleared Reid of any wrongdoing.
Michael Eligon, 29, male	3 February 2012, Toronto, Canada	Officer Cerqua, 27, male	Eligon was a mentally-ill patient. He escaped from the hospital he was admitted to and wandered the streets in a hospital gown and socks on a cold morning of the day he was killed. He stole two pairs of scissors from a convenience store, and allegedly stabbed the shopkeeper in the hand. He walked around and asked two drivers for their car keys and tried to enter a home. All of these prompted multiple 911 calls to police. He was shot to death by officer Cerqua for refusing to drop the pair of scissors.	Cerqua was exonerated by the SIU of any wrongdoing.
Philando Castile, 32, male	6 July 2017, St. Paul, Minnesota, United States	Jeronimo Yanez, 28, male	Philando was in his car with his girlfriend and her four-year-old daughter. He was pulled over by Yanez and asked to show his licence. While Castile was reaching for his licence, he told Yanez that he had a firearm on him. Yanez said don’t reach for it twice, pointing a gun at Castile. Yanez shot Castile seven times; two of the shots to his heart. Evidence showed that Castile was reaching for his licence and not the gun.	Yanez was charged with second-degree manslaughter and dangerous discharge of a firearm, but was acquitted of all the charges on 16 June 2017.
Michael Brown, 18, male	9 August 2014, Ferguson, Missouri, United States	Darren Wilson, 28, male	Brown was a suspect in a robbery at a convenience store. Officer Wilson received a radio alert that described Brown. An altercation ensued between Brown and Wilson in which it was alleged that Brown tried to take control of Wilson’s gun but later fled with his friend. Wilson pursued Brown and fired many rounds, six of which hit Brown from the front.	The US Department of Justice treated the case as self-defense and acquitted Wilson of any wrongdoing on 4 March 2015.
Eric Garner, 43, male	17 July 2014, Staten Island, New York City, United States	Daniel Pantaleo, 29, male	Some NYPD officers approached Garner on suspicion of selling illegal cigarettes. Garner told the officers that he was tired of being harassed but the officers tried to arrest him. Officer Pantaleo tried to take Garner’s wrist behind his back, Garner pulled his arms away. Pantaleo then put his arm around Garner’s neck and pulled him down in a chokehold while other officers held his hands behind his back. Garner repeated said, “I can’t breathe,” 11 times, but lost consciousness. He was pronounced dead at hospital an hour later.	The medical examiner concluded that Garner’s death was a homicide. NYPD policy prohibits the use of chokeholds, but the Richmond County grand jury did not indict Pantaleo.

Source: [4,20,42–44].

This study explores the perceptions of the cases of deadly encounters that involve white police officers as suspects and black civilians as victims for three reasons: First, the media gives greater coverage to such deadly encounters in both countries. Second, the perceptions of the actions of the CJS in such cases in both countries do have a spillover effect on CJS-civilian interaction [45]. For example, the emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in Canada in 2015 was motivated by the earlier formation of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the United States in 2013 [7]. Third, Canada and the United States are the only countries in North America where the respondents claimed to have heard or read about such deadly encounters. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the respondents. Each interview lasted for an average of 59 min; the shortest was 50 min and the longest was 90 min.

### 3.2. Sample Characteristics

Table 2 describes the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents. Twenty ( $n = 20$ ) black immigrants participated in the study, including 14 males and six females. The youngest among the respondents was 25 years old and the oldest was 50. Thirteen respondents were originally from Africa, six from the Caribbean and one from the United States. Among the respondents from Africa, two were from Ethiopia, one from Ghana, one from Kenya, two from Nigeria, one from Togo, two from Uganda, and four from Somalia. As for the Caribbean respondents, three were from Jamaica, one from the Dominican Republic, and two from Haiti. At the time the interviews were conducted, the respondents had lived in Canada for at least five years, and at most 19 years. All the respondents but one had post-secondary education.

**Table 2.** Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents.

<i>n</i> = 20		
Gender	Male	14
	Female	6
Age	Mean	38.3
	Range	25–50
Place of origin	Africa	13
	Caribbean	6
	United States	1
Years of residence in Canada	Mean	9.4
	Range	5–19
Education	High school	1
	Diploma	5
	College	4
	Bachelor	4
	Graduate	6
Employment status	Part-time	8
	Full-time	12
Previously lived in any other Canadian cities	Yes	12
	No	8
Previously lived in the United States	Yes	4
	No	16
Visited or transited through the United States	Yes	17
	No	3



In terms of employment, eight respondents reported that they were working part-time and 12 full-time. In addition, 12 respondents reported that they had lived in other Canadian cities such as Toronto, Quebec, Vancouver, and Calgary before relocating to Edmonton. Some respondents ( $n = 4$ ) said they had lived in the United States, while most of them ( $n = 17$ ) said they had either visited or transited through the United States.

### 3.3. Description of the Study Location

Edmonton is a North American city in western Canada with a population of 1,321,426 and an immigrant population of 274,360, according to the 2016 Canada Census. The median age of residents is 35.7 and the median individual income is \$43,900 (as at 2015). The city provides employment for most of its residents in the areas of oil and gas, construction, transportation, retail business, health, technology, and education. It is one of the most racially diverse Canadian cities [46]. There are 363,990 visible minorities, including 57,820 black people in Edmonton. Though the author could not find the precise number of black immigrants in Edmonton, the 2011 Canada Household Survey showed that they were among the largest visible minority groups in the city.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed using Express Scribe, a transcription software, and anonymized to protect the identity of the respondents. All the respondents' names used for the analysis of data are pseudonyms. The interview recordings were securely destroyed after the completion of the data transcription and analysis. The three sets of thematic questions were analyzed, and they include: (i) What are the reasons for deadly encounters in North America? (ii) Was justice served in deadly encounter cases decided by the court? (iii) Do deadly encounters affect how respondents view and relate to the agents of the Canadian CJS? This was followed by the coding and reading of the data into Nvivo, a qualitative research analytical software. Findings were analyzed in themes with a verbatim quotation of salient statements.

This study should be generalized with caution given the limited number of respondents ( $n = 20$ ) that were involved. Only perception of deadly encounter cases in Canada and the United States were investigated. The study also did not involve black immigrants beyond Edmonton in western Canada. In addition, even though some of the participants had lived in the United States and many others had either visited or transited through the United States, none of them was resident in the United States when the interviews were conducted. However, these limitations do not invalidate the findings of the study.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Perceived Causes of Deadly Encounters between Police and Black Civilians

One of the objectives of this research was to investigate what respondents considered the reasons for deadly encounters between police and black civilians were. When the author asked respondents what they thought was responsible for deadly encounters, they identified racism, police brutality, black criminality, gun violence and perception of blacks as violent.

#### 4.1.1. Racism

Majority of the respondents ( $n = 14$ ) believed that one cannot understand deadly encounters between police and black civilians without looking into the history of racism in North America. According to these respondents, the criminal justice systems in Canada and the United States had always been discriminatory towards the black and minorities. They believed that black people were a minority in both Canada and the United States. When the author asked why the respondents feel that the CJS in North America is unfair to the black people, Majik, male, said:

"I think I remember five cases in the United States. The victims were all black Americans . . . I have not heard of any black policeman chasing black person to kill . . . it is just the history and realities of the black race in North America; the way they were treated before when they came as slaves; after slavery was abolished, they are still treated as not equal to others. They are just victims of the history . . . we can see mostly in the United States the Hispanic and Caucasian minorities . . . but . . . why is it that it the black people that are always victimized by the police?"

Another respondent, Helen, female, opined that "I have not heard of any case where a black police officer killed a black person. It is always white police officers killing black people." Majik and Helen's views are very instructive. Most police shootings of blacks in Canada and the United States are carried out or led by white police officers. Since black people are a minority in Canada and the United States, it is expected that there would be very few black police officers in both countries. Thus, the author asked the respondents if they thought that the fewer numbers of black police officers in Canada and the United States contributed to police suspects in deadly encounters usually being white officers? Majority of the respondents ( $n = 14$ ) said they did not think that the fewer number of black police officers was responsible for the rare cases of black police officers killing black civilians in both countries. According to these respondents, there are communities where blacks are the majority in North America, yet deadly encounters rarely occur. It is important to note here that the killing of civilians by black police officers in North America is yet to assume a worrying dimension in police-civilian deadly encounter literature.

One of the respondents provided an interesting perspective of racism in deadly encounters. Suhan, male, viewed racism in deadly encounters as a universal phenomenon between dominant and minority racial groups. He believed that racism often manifests whenever people realized that they were racially and ethnically different from others. He noted that "racism is everywhere. Go back home [Africa], you will see that racism is happening. Though it does not show in the form of colour but . . . tribe." Suhan's opinion portrays racism as a normal practice within the CJS of every nation. Another respondent spoke further on his personal experience to juxtapose the unfair treatment of black people by the agents of the CJS in North America. Cyril, male, attributed the disproportionate victimization of black people in deadly encounters to racial discrimination. He believed that white police officers always suspected black people when they saw them. He narrated his experience with some white police officers at the Chicago airport, United States:

"I was in a queue at the Chicago Airport . . . but a white policeman told me to go to another queue. I obeyed but another white policeman told me to go back to my former queue. I went back, and the policeman pulled me back again. The way the policeman pulled me here and there was very disrespectful. In the end, I missed my flight. I think they don't have respect for black people."

It is important to state here that there are more black people in the United States than Canada. The author, thus, compared the level of perceived racism in deadly encounters in Canada and the United States. All the respondents were of the view that there was a higher rate of racism in deadly encounters against black people in the United States than in Canada. The reason they gave is that deadly encounters occurred more frequently in the United States than Canada. According to them, most of the reported cases of deadly encounters occurred in the United States. One of the respondents, Suhan, said "in Canada, we have fewer cases of police killing black people . . . like Michael Eligon, Andrew Loku, [and] Jermaine Carby. Toronto is a notorious city for this kind of killings. But I think the United States is worse for the black people. More killings happen in the [United] States." The perception of more killings and racism in the United States is understandable. Even in extant literature, the police in the United States have been reported to have higher rates of fatal encounters with civilians and racial minorities. The author will discuss this further in the subsequent section.



#### 4.1.2. Police Brutality and Perception of Black People as 'Violent'

The respondents believed that there was a strong relationship between police violence, perception of black people as habitually violent, and deadly encounters. Almost all the respondents ( $n = 18$ ) believed that white police officers often used excessive violence against black civilians. They believed most deadly encounters between police and black civilians could be prevented if the police officers behaved professionally towards the black civilians. For example, Tom, male, opined that "like the case of Michael Brown, somebody who is not armed, and you go ahead and kill him, that is not justified, that is deliberate . . . most of the time, the police are excessive." Cyril corroborated the view. He said "I think most of the black guys are innocent. If the police ask someone to stop, and the person is running away, and you just shoot the person with a real gun? I think the police could have used other weapons . . . that are not deadly. I think the police just wanted to kill black people." Few respondents ( $n = 4$ ) also believed that the deadly encounters against black civilians occurred because white police officers often perceived an average black person as violent. Lance, male, said that "white police officers view black persons as aggressive, they see us very violent, so, whenever they are dealing with us they have that thought mind towards us".

#### 4.1.3. Black Criminality and Resistance

Contrary to the view of some of the respondents that police brutality was responsible for deadly encounters, very few respondents ( $n = 2$ ) felt that the involvement of black civilians in criminal and illegal activities contributed to their victimization in deadly encounters. According to these respondents, some black victims of deadly encounters not only engaged in criminal activities but also resisted arrest during encounters with police. These respondents believed that though police violence against black civilians was not justified, cases like that of Michael Brown in the United States could have been avoided if the victim (Michael Brown) was not involved in stealing at a convenience store. Siraj, male, opined that "honestly, some black guys do drugs, and police often suspect them . . . instead of some of them to come out clean, they kind of resisted arrest. If you resist arrest and something bad happened to you accidentally, you can't say you did not play a role."

#### 4.1.4. Gun Violence

Many of the respondents ( $n = 12$ ) attributed deadly encounters to the fallout of gun violence in North America. According to these respondents, this was particularly true for the deadly encounters in the United States. They believed that though black civilians were more likely to be victimized, deadly encounters involving police and civilians were an endemic problem in the United States irrespective of race. Mark, male, believed that there was a connection between deadly encounters and gun violence. He asserted that "in the United States civilians can own . . . and use guns a lot. Police killed civilians, civilians sometimes killed police...there is fear among the police that they might be killed as well." In addition, some respondents believed that as far as the rate of gun ownership among civilians remained high, gun violence would continue to play a lead role in deadly encounters.

### 4.2. Black Immigrants' Perceptions of Legal Outcome of Deadly Encounters

In the second research question, the author wanted to know the opinions of the respondents regarding the legal outcomes of deadly encounters. When they asked the respondents whether they thought justice was served in deadly encounter cases that were decided by the court, all the respondents ( $n = 20$ ) believed that justice was not served by the court in most of the cases. The respondents described the legal outcome in deadly encounters as a form of racial injustice and criminal conspiracy.

#### Racial Injustice and Criminal Conspiracy of the Court

Nearly all the respondents ( $n = 18$ ) perceived racism in the legal outcomes of deadly encounters. They opined that there was racial injustice within the CJS corridor in North America; from police

encounters with civilians, court sentences, to imprisonment. According to them, police violence against the black minority is more likely to reflect through the court system; hence, the lack of police convictions. They also said that since the court was dominated by white judges, white police suspects in deadly encounters would most likely be spared of convictions. The emotions of the respondents were captured by Eddie, male, who said “the criminal justice system is freeing, and exonerating the police because the victims are blacks, so, they are the same. Those perceptions about black people as criminal [and] violent will reflect through the court. If the judge is black, the legal outcome might be different.” Some of the respondents ( $n = 2$ ) believed that the judges in deadly encounter cases would most likely not convict a police officer not only because they were white, but also because they were both agents of the CJS. According to Jason, male, “I think I remember the cases of Jermaine Carby, Michael Brown, and Martin Trayvon...the police officers were acquitted. The judges said they [police] were defending themselves...I feel bad because the judges always protect the police.”

#### *4.3. Impacts of Deadly Encounters among Black Immigrants*

Here, the author sought to find out whether the respondents’ understanding of deadly encounters in North America influenced their perceptions and attitudes towards the Canadian CJS. All the respondents believed that the pattern of police-black civilian deadly encounters had impacted their perceptions and attitudes toward the Canadian CJS. Though respondents believed that deadly encounters in Canada were not as pervasive as the United States, they felt that the legal outcomes were the same in both countries. However, the respondents were less wary of the Canadian CJS. They perceived the Canadian CJS as a ‘better evil’ when compared to that of the United States.

#### *We Are Afraid of the CJS in North America but Canada Is a ‘Better Evil’*

Most of the respondents ( $n = 16$ ) were of the view that though disproportionate deadly encounters against black civilians is a problem in North America, the Canadian CJS was a ‘better evil.’ They believed that the lower rate of deadly encounters in Canada when compared with the United States had given them some level of confidence and trust in the Canadian CJS. Majik said that “I think Canada is not like the United States. Even though we have our own problems, the police are not killing (black) people as much as the United States. There is fear ... but not so much.”

However, few other respondents ( $n = 3$ ) were of the view that despite the lower incidents of deadly police violence against civilians in Canada, there was no clear difference between how the criminal justice systems in Canada and the United States treat black people. All the respondents believed that due to the criminal injustice against black people, they had been very careful to avoid victimization. Nick, male, stated that “I feel I need to be much more careful than the white Canadians when dealing with the police. I know in the background they might see me in a different way. I do feel I might be discriminated against at some point ... and that changes my behaviour on how I respond to the police. They have stopped me a couple of times and I obeyed. I don’t want to be like those black [victims].”

### **5. Discussions and Conclusions**

The findings of this study demonstrate that black immigrants in Edmonton hold a rather nuanced understanding of police-black civilian deadly encounters in North America. The study reveals that there is a connection between perception of criminal injustice, racial identity, and police-civilian deadly encounters. The racialized perception of police-black civilian deadly encounters is very instructive. Race relation and identity could influence how and where people locate themselves within the CJS. The perception of racism and criminal injustice in deadly encounters lends support to the literature on the perception of the CJS in Canada and the United States. Studies [5,14,23,24] have found that the criminal justice systems in Canada and the United States are perceived to be discriminatory towards blacks and racial immigrants. Racial identity is, therefore, a useful variable for understanding how people re/de/construct the attitudes and performativity of the CJS.

The perception of police brutality in deadly encounters underscores findings of previous studies. For example, studies such as [47–49] identified excessive deployment of lethal force by police as one of the causes of the high rates of police-involved deaths in North America. Though police are largely exonerated in deadly encounters, there were cases such as those leading to the deaths of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and Jermaine Carby among others, where coroner inquests admitted to the inappropriate and excessive deployment of force by the police officers involved [43,50,51]. There seems to be some divergence of opinion on whether black civilians were innocent in deadly encounters. While most of the respondents believed that black victims were innocent in deadly encounters, few other respondents disagreed. Those who disagreed believed that some black victims in deadly encounters contributed to their own victimization by involving in criminal activities. Unnever and Gabbidon [52] have argued that the opinions among members of racial (minority) groups about the CJS depended on the quality of experience each member has had with the agents of the law.

The perceived role of gun violence in deadly encounters is compelling and useful in understanding police-civilian deadly encounters in North America. In his hypothesis, Liska [53] argued that deviance and social control are responses to social threats. Given the high rate of gun ownership and violence among civilians in North America, it is expected that a police officer will likely perceive every encounter with civilians as a potentially threatening situation and will, therefore, not hesitate to take actions to lessen or eliminate any perceived threats. There is a strong evidence to believe that the high rate of gun violence in North America contributes to the phenomenon of police-civilian deadly encounters. The United States has the highest rate of civilian gun ownership, and gun-involved deaths in the world [54]. There were reports that the United States has civilian firearms that are more than the country's total population. In addition, in 2012, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime released a report that described the United States as having the highest rate of homicides, including gun-involved killings.

The CJS in North America is perceived to be colour-laden because it is skewed in favor of the mainstream white population. Such perception underscores the assumption of critical race theorists regarding the subjectivity of the CJS in North America. Perception of racial injustice in deadly encounters is perceived beyond police encounters with civilians to include court sentences. While the police officers are perceived to be colour-minded in their daily encounters with civilians, the judges are seen to be racially discriminatory in the way they treat victims and suspects in deadly encounters. Black immigrants viewed the lack of convictions of police suspects in deadly encounters by the court as a criminal conspiracy within the CJS in North America. This view underscores the findings of studies like Cobbina et al. [1], and Hagan et al. [24]. Critical race theorists like Delgado and Stefancic [55] have argued that the processes of law enactment, law-breaking, law enforcement, and the societal reaction to law-breaking reflect the racial power of the people within the CJS.

In addition, though few of the respondents used their personal experiences with the police to juxtapose the perception of deadly encounters, most them relied on media stories to make sense of deadly encounters. This suggests that the perception of criminal injustice in deadly encounters could be negotiated by personal and media experiences. Cobbina et al. [1], and Weitzer and Tuch [31] have argued that the quality of (media) experience plays a lead role in the production of societal perception of criminal (in)justice. People rely on the media for stories on how the CJS treats suspects and victims. When media organizations create a public image that crime and justice are coloured, members of the (racial) group affected may perceive the CJS as unfair and discriminatory.

Overall, the study demonstrates that perception of criminal injustice in deadly encounters can impact public views and attitudes toward the CJS. Though black immigrants believed that deadly encounters in Canada are not as pervasive as those in the United States, they felt that the legal outcomes are the same; police are usually not convicted when cases are taken to court. The study stresses the need to remove racial profiling and injustices from the everyday administration of justice in North America. While studies such as LaFree [9], Tonry [35], and Tyler [10,11] found that perceived injustice could activate criminal and aggressive behavior among members of the racial group that suffers such injustice, this study, however, found that when members of a racial (immigrant) minority

perceive themselves as target of a discriminatory CJS, they may take positive rather than negative actions to avoid criminalization and victimization. This suggests that when vulnerable groups such as (black) immigrants perceive a threatening situation from state actors, they will take actions to lessen or eliminate such threats [53]. The pattern of deadly encounters in North America has made the black immigrants in Edmonton to adopt cautious and cooperative actions rather than aggressive or deviant behaviour to lessen or eliminate the perceived threats to their safety in the hands of the police.

Therefore, the perception of injustice in police-black civilian deadly encounters could influence where black immigrants in Edmonton locate themselves and how they relate with the CJS. The degree of legitimacy of any CJS is fundamental to effective crime control. The negative perception of police actions and judges' decisions could impact the level of legitimacy black immigrants and other racial minorities give to the CJS in North America. Also, the perception of racism and criminal injustice in deadly encounters can weaken the confidence (black) immigrants have in the CJS in Canada, and by extension, North America.

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