



Racialized Lived Experiences of No-knock Raids in Canadian Policing: Supporting the Dissenting Opinion in the Legal Case of *R v Cornell*

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ABSTRACT *A no-knock police raid is a law enforcement tactic where officers enter a private dwelling without prior notice. In Canada, there is a significant lack of comprehensive data, on the frequency and outcomes of no-knock police raids and their unintended damages and consequences. While quantitative studies on police violence have been informative, there is a significant gap in documenting racialized lived experiences with no-knock police raids in Canada. This research addresses the gap by focusing on the lived experiences of four Black and one South Asian individual subjected to no-knock police raids. Qualitative interviews were conducted in 2022 followed with thematic analysis. This exploratory study, though small in sample size, sheds light on the overlooked experiences of individuals subjected to no-knock police raids. It provides data to support the dissenting opinion in the legal case *R v Cornell* which advocates for the regulation of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams including controls on no knock tactics in Canada. The findings contribute to understanding the emotional and psychological toll no-knock police raids have on racialized individuals and communities. Findings contribute to the broader literature and discussions on how to improve policing tactics to mitigate harm by preventing unintended collateral harm and better protect privacy rights.*

KEYWORDS no-knock police raids; policing in Canada; *R v Cornell*; trauma; racialized

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Introduction

This study emerged directly from pressing concerns raised by Amadeusz, a charitable organization in Ontario, Canada that provides educational and support services to youth and young adults impacted by structural inequalities, particularly within the criminal justice system (Amadeusz, 2025). Through close work with individuals affected by no-knock police raids and incarceration, Amadeusz recognized the urgent need to document their experiences, particularly in underserved and racialized communities, to contribute to broader conversations on policing and its impacts on mental health and social wellbeing. The objective was to provide data in the form of lived experiences to compare with the dissenting opinion in the legal case *R v Cornell*, which advocates for the regulation of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams including controls on no knock tactics in Canada. Roziere and Walby (2021) summarize the *R v Cornell* case as follows:

On November 30, 2005, nine members of the Calgary Police Service Tactical Unit, wearing balaclavas, entered a private home in a residential area of Calgary. The officers set upon Robert, a twenty-nine-year-old male with a mental disability who was home alone. Robert was pushed to the ground before his hands were secured behind his back. Exterior and interior doors of the home were destroyed, and locks were pried off a garage door. Robert's mother came home to find her house in shambles. After the Tactical Unit secured the house, a search team entered, uncovering 99.4 grams of cocaine. Jason Cornell, Robert's brother, admitted to possessing the cocaine for purposes of trafficking. Mr. Cornell attempted to have the evidence excluded pursuant to section 8 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, arguing that the search was conducted unreasonably. The case reached the Supreme Court of Canada on appeal, dividing the court. A narrow majority of four justices found no Charter violation and upheld Mr. Cornell's conviction, while three justices in dissent would have not only found a Charter violation but would have excluded the evidence and entered an acquittal due to the police use of a dynamic entry. See *R v Cornell*, 2010 SCC 31 [*R v Cornell SCC*]. (pp. 40-41)

In response to such a complex case and the close divisive ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada justices, Amadeusz reached out to academic partners to collaboratively explore the issue by capturing the racialized lived experiences of individuals with no knock raids who accessed their programs for support. Data collection was a collaborative process led by Amadeusz in partnership with the authors, who are affiliated with two post-secondary research institutions. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were used to allow participants to share their experiences, with Amadeusz playing a vital role in recruitment, outreach, and fostering a safe environment for participants to discuss traumatic experiences related to being subjected to no-knock raids (Woods et al., 2022). This approach ensured greater trust in the process and that community voices and lived experiences remained at the core of the research. By centering community input from the research participants using qualitative interviews, the study adopted a participatory framework that

positioned Amadeusz not only as a stakeholder but as a co-leader of the research process. The partnership between Amadeusz and the academic institutions facilitated a methodologically sound data collection process which established a foundation for future collaborative projects involving justice-involved research participants.

A no-knock police raid is a law enforcement tactic in which officers enter a private dwelling without prior notice. In Canada, there is a significant lack of comprehensive data on the frequency and outcomes of no-knock police raids (Roziere & Walby, 2021; Trinh et al., 2021). There is no centralized database or mandatory reporting mechanism for no-knock warrants, making it difficult to assess their prevalence and impact. While quantitative studies on police violence have been informative, there is a significant gap in the Canadian context regarding lived experiences with no-knock police raids, with a particular focus on racialized experiences in low-income communities. In response, the research documented the lived experiences of five racialized individuals subjected to no-knock police raids: four Black and one South Asian. Qualitative interviews were conducted in 2022. Coding and thematic analysis were undertaken to identify findings. This exploratory study, though small in sample size, sheds light on the unique and overlooked experiences of racialized individuals subjected to no-knock police raids. The findings contribute to understanding the emotional and psychological toll no-knock police raids have on racialized individuals and communities (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2023; Owusu-Bempah & Jones, 2023). Findings contribute to the broader literature and discussions on how to improve policing tactics involving no-knock raids to mitigate harm and collateral damage. This data-driven approach is an essential step toward developing more participatory methods where community agencies such as Amadeusz, alongside academic partners, work collaboratively to guide future research priorities and dissemination strategies to address systemic barriers and advocate for evidence-based reforms.

No-knock Raids and the Use of Force in Canada

Research on no-knock raids in the Canadian context is limited but growing, with studies and legal discussions highlighting various social, psychological, and legal implications of the practice, but mainly “devoted to examining the relationship between the Charter and police powers” (Roziere & Walby, 2021, p. 41). Canada has minimal comprehensive data to track similar patterns or unintended consequences of such raids, a gap that scholars have argued requires advocating for public data-driven transparency and policy reforms. In Canada, police officers can conduct no-knock raids without prior judicial approval (Spratt, 2021; Trinh et al., 2021). Once a search warrant is approved, it is up to the officer’s discretion to determine if there are reasonable grounds to execute a forced entry (Francis, 2020; Spratt, 2021). No-knock raids often

involve dynamic entry tactics (Trinh, 2020; Trinh et al., 2021). These raids typically occur during pre-dawn hours when officers enter residences unannounced with rifles, and in some cases flashbang devices, due to the high-risk nature of the situation or the person of interest being considered very dangerous (Dolan, 2019; Francis, 2020; Greene & Urbanik, 2020; Kraska, 2007; Roziere & Walby, 2021; Spratt, 2021; Trinh et al., 2021). One can argue that in some cases these methods might be necessary, where law enforcement fears destruction of evidence, violent retaliation, or safety of others in the vicinity (Balko, 2021). Yet, there can be unintended consequences and collateral damage that can cause further life-lasting harm (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2014). The use of aggressive raid tactics frequently leaves properties in disorder, causing not only physical damage but also emotional trauma and innocent people being hurt, traumatized, or killed (Dolan, 2019; Eizadirad et al., 2024; Greene & Urbanik, 2020).

It is important to note that no-knock raids in Canada disproportionately impact racialized communities, particularly Black and Indigenous populations, as part of broader patterns of aggressive and militarized policing. Research indicates that racial profiling and systemic discrimination result in higher surveillance and more frequent use of force in these communities (Balko, 2021; Department of Justice Canada, 2022; Eizadirad et al., 2024). Although comprehensive national data on no-knock raids is limited, studies highlight that racialized individuals are more likely to experience intrusive police practices, including dynamic entries and no-knock warrants, compared to white individuals. This disparity aligns with findings from the United States, where similar policing tactics are linked to racial bias and over-policing of marginalized groups (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014; Balko, 2021). The lack of transparent data collection in Canada further obscures the true extent of these practices and their collateral damage, but existing evidence points to a significant and concerning trend of racial inequity in the application of no-knock raids.

The potential long-term effects of no-knock raids on mental health and well-being of the people involved, whether guilty or innocent, creates the need for understanding the extent and nature of these raids. Despite the legal justification for their use, there is little public data on the specific consequences of these raids, particularly for racialized individuals and communities who are at greater risk of being in interactions with the police (The Fifth Estate, 2021). As Trinh (2020) highlights, “nobody’s counting,” which points to a broader issue of lack of transparency in police operations. The present study addresses this gap by sharing qualitative data gathered from racialized individuals who have directly experienced no-knock raids. Their perspectives provide invaluable insights into the personal and community-level impacts of these raids, contributing to the limited body of research on this policing tactic in Canada.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms under Section 8 guarantees protection from unreasonable searches, but this right is not absolute and

interpretations of what constitutes reasonable force during a no-knock raid vary greatly. Despite these protections, there remains a lack of publicly accessible data or comprehensive policing policies to govern the use of force during raids in Canada. No-knock raids can exacerbate trauma, particularly in racialized, low-income communities already vulnerable to police violence and greater surveillance. Racialized communities in Canada are disproportionately affected by aggressive policing practices (Chan et al., 2017; Eizadirad, et al., 2024). Furthermore, the mental health consequences of aggressive police tactics are well-documented. A 2020 study by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH, 2020) found that “of the 461 fatal police encounters in Canada between 2000 and 2017, more than 70% of victims had a mental illness” (p. 8). In response, this article focuses specifically on examining the mental health impacts of no-knock raids on Black and racialized individuals, a topic that has received little attention in Canadian research.

Unlike in the United States, where legal challenges and public scrutiny have brought more transparency to no-knock raids, Canada lacks a centralized database documenting such incidents (Spratt, 2021; Trinh et al., 2021). Once a search warrant is issued, officers have discretion to decide if conditions warrant a no-knock or dynamic entry. This lack of oversight, combined with discretionary power, raises concerns about accountability. While law enforcement agencies are required to submit Use of Force reports for incidents involving firearms, tasers, and other weapons, there is no mandatory reporting on the specific tactics used during no-knock raids (Dubinsky et al., 2021b; Francis, 2020). This regulatory gap leaves much of the harm caused by these raids undocumented, in some cases involving permanent bodily injuries and death of innocent people (Hristova, 2021; O’Toole, 2013; Wakefield, 2020). The absence of a government-run database to track fatalities and injuries resulting from police encounters, including no-knock raids, further complicates efforts to understand the full extent of the harm caused. Table 1 below, as obtained by Dubinsky et al. (2021a) from police departments via access to information requests, outlines the number of no-knock raids conducted in various Canadian cities, highlighting Toronto and Quebec as having the highest number of cases.

Overall, the use of force within no-knock raids remains largely unexamined in Canadian public policy and academic literature. Therefore, it is important to incorporate key U.S. studies on militarized policing to situate Canadian findings within a broader scholarly landscape. Balko’s (2021) *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America’s Police Forces* and the American Civil Liberties Union (2014) *War Comes Home: The Excessive Militarization of American Policing* emphasize how SWAT-style raids disproportionately impact racialized communities, producing fear, trauma, and community fragmentation similar to cases documented in Canada. These comparisons underscore the gap created by the absence of systematic disaggregated identity-based Canadian data and the urgent need for transparent reporting on no-knock

raids. These raids and their impact deserve to be documented in more detail to identify unintended harms caused and improve policing practices.

Table 1. No-Knock Raids in Canadian Cities: 2019 and 2020

Police Force	2019	2020
Montreal	60	33
Quebec City	156	143
Ottawa	73	59
Ontario Provincial Police	62	85
London	40	18
Calgary	60	54
Vancouver	0	0
Toronto	200	200

Methods and Methodology: Centering Counter-Narratives through Interviews Rooted in Critical Race Theory and Trauma-Informed Perspectives

This study employs a qualitative thematic analysis methodology to explore the lived experiences of five racialized individuals subjected to no-knock police raids in Canada (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Participants were recruited through Amadeusz, a charity supporting incarcerated individuals in Ontario, Canada. Amadeusz (2025) supports people, particularly those involved in the criminal justice system, by providing access to case management, education, resources, and community programs aimed at empowering program participants to make positive life changes and reduce recidivism. Ethics approval to conduct the research was obtained. Participants were identified to be interviewed through purposeful sampling. Amadeusz put out a notice to past participants, now residing in the community, to inquire if they or their family members experienced no-knock police raids and if interested in sharing their stories. At the time of the interviews, none of the participants were enrolled in any Amadeusz program. Participants were provided with an informed consent form outlining the project objectives. Interviews were conducted remotely over the phone and took approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Participants had the option to drop out of the study at any point without any penalties. Participants were provided with a \$50 Visa gift card for their participation.

Integrating evidence on systemic discrimination as a social determinant of health (Colour of Poverty, 2019; Khenti, 2014; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020) deepens understanding of how intersecting factors – race, economic precarity, housing instability – compound vulnerability to physical and psychological harms from no-knock tactics. Therefore, although the sample size is small and consists of five individuals (four Black and one South Asian), such qualitative research allows for a rich exploration of racialized

lived experiences of people who experienced no-knock raids, providing insights that larger quantitative studies may miss. Research by Mosher and Pratt (2020) has demonstrated that even small qualitative studies can reveal critical aspects of systemic racism and its impacts on mental health. The use of a small, purposive sample size facilitates capturing under-researched phenomena and centering marginalized voices surrounding traumatic experiences such as no-knock raids (Mosher & Pratt, 2020). Thematic exploration across the five case studies confirms the robustness of identified themes – trauma, mistrust, and property damage – while laying the groundwork for future mixed-methods and longitudinal research to further expand on such findings.

It is important to acknowledge that a small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, as insights drawn from five individuals may not capture the full diversity of experiences or outcomes across other communities affected by no-knock raids. It also increases the risk of selection bias, since participants recruited through a single community organization may share similar backgrounds or perspectives. Moreover, statistical analysis and hypothesis testing are not possible, constraining the ability to quantify the prevalence or severity of identified themes. Nonetheless, the depth of qualitative data obtained allowed for a rich exploration of under-studied experiences associated with no-knock raids, which in this case supported the dissenting opinion in *R v Cornell* advocating that the police's use of dynamic entry, including the use of balaclavas, was unreasonable and violated Section 8 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is recommended that subsequent studies adopt participatory action research models, engaging community partners as co-researchers to guide study design, data collection and dissemination, thereby strengthening community-university collaboration and advancing evidence-based reforms.

The interviews were analyzed using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework (Delgado, 2013). CRT posits that inequities are deeply ingrained in society's structures and practices, and addressing these issues requires a comprehensive understanding of historical context, power dynamics, and the intersections of race with other social factors (Colour of Poverty, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2011; Eizadirad et al., 2024; Waller, 2019). It is important to listen and value the lived experiences of Black and racialized communities as a counter-narrative that unveils systemic inequities in policing practices and to identify how such practices can be improved through reforms (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2011; Eizadirad et al., 2022). It is important to collect and track data related to no-knock raids to identify systemic barriers and inequities that others may not see or experience directly because of social location, privilege, or occupying dominant positions in society pertaining to interactions with the police or with use of force with law enforcement personnel. Therefore, CRT was supplemented with a trauma-informed theoretical framework to examine racialized lived experiences with structural violence. This approach created the vantage point to comprehensively examine

the intersection of race, trauma, and systemic inequities in policing practices within community settings, particularly for racialized individuals living in low-income communities. The themes identified offer deeper insights into the long-term mental health consequences of police violence, as well as the systemic conditions that perpetuate such harmful practices.

All interviews were audio-recorded and anonymized. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality. Interview responses were transcribed to facilitate coding and analysis of the data to identify emerging themes. Clarke and Braun (2016) operationalize thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data” (p. 297). Codes were identified after the transcription of interviews. Examples of codes were comments about trauma, health issues, and use of force including property damage. This aligns with how Xu and Zammit (2020) envision thematic analysis where it “involves finding repeated meanings across a data set, which is crucial to the interpretation of phenomena,” where the theme “captures some crucial information about the data in relation to the research questions” (p. 2).

Demographics of Research Participants

Table 2 presents demographic and contextual information about the study’s five racialized participants, highlighting factors such as age, education level, housing status, employment, and race. Intersecting factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, and disability significantly increase the likelihood of experiencing police violence, including no-knock raids. Individuals from low-income communities, particularly those residing in subsidized or government housing, are often more heavily policed and subject to aggressive law enforcement tactics (Eizadirad et al., 2024; Khenti, 2014). Additionally, racialized women, young people, and individuals with disabilities face heightened vulnerability due to compounded discrimination and systemic bias within policing practices (Owusu-Bempah & Jones, 2023). These intersecting factors not only increase the frequency of police encounters but also exacerbate the physical, psychological, and social impacts of aggressive interventions like no-knock raids. Addressing these intersecting vulnerabilities requires a more nuanced data-driven approach compared to traditional practices to assess the effectiveness of policy and practice, with consideration for how overlapping identities shape individuals’ experiences with the criminal justice system.

All participants except Maali resided in government housing at the time of their respective raids, a factor that may indicate higher policing levels in socio-economically marginalized communities (Colour of Poverty, 2019; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2023; Owusu-Bempah & Jones, 2023; Waller, 2019). Participants’ ages ranged from 13 to 41, including a minor, Diana, who experienced the raid as a third-grade elementary student. Additionally, while

most participants were employed at the time of the interviews, Gus was on disability, illustrating how socio-economic status and health challenges may intersect with exposure to high-stress policing tactics (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020). This demographic snapshot is crucial for understanding each participant's unique intersectional identity and their associated vulnerabilities, particularly how their social contexts shaped their experience with no-knock police raids (Waller, 2019).

Table 2. Demographics and Contextual Factors about the Research Participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Level of Education	Resided in government housing at the time of the raid	Gender	Employment Status	Race
Maali	41	Post-secondary education	No	Female	Employed	South Asian
Sam	38	College Diploma	Yes	Male	Employed	Black
Gus	29	High School Diploma	Yes	Male	On disability	Black
Diana	13	In grade 7	Yes	Female	Minor in school	Black
Marie	39	College Diploma	Yes	Female	Employed	Black

In Table 3 below, the experiences of each research participant with no-knock raids are shared through storytelling to humanize who they are and what they experienced as counter-narratives (Eizadirad et al., 2022). For each case study, a brief synopsis is provided based on how the participants experienced the raid followed with an analysis of the findings. A separate column outlines themes that emerged from coding the narratives.

As a collective, the narratives of no-knock raids offer a snapshot of the personal and social costs experienced by each participant, helping readers understand not only the nature of the raids but also their profound emotional and psychological impacts.

Table 3. Overview of Each Case Study and Codes Used for Identifying Themes.

Pseudonym	Themes	Context of the Raid
Maali	-Mental health issues -Property damage -Use of a confidential informant -Vulnerable person - child	When 27 years old, Maali was feeding her three-month-old baby when police used dynamic entry to gain entrance to her home. When they entered her bedroom, she was forced on her knees to the floor while holding her baby to the ground. While hovering over her baby, two rifles were pointed to her head as the police searched the two-bedroom apartment. After the police searched the apartment and her vehicle, they found nothing even though the raid was due to information from an informant.
Sam	-Mental health issues -Social isolation -Use of a confidential informant	At the age of 18, Sam experienced a no-knock raid which resulted in the police finding a firearm in his bedroom leading to his arrest and incarceration. His mother was present at home at the time of the raid. Five years later, Sam was sleeping when the police raided his home a second time through dynamic entry. When the police entered his bedroom, he was forced to the floor and two rifles were pointed at his head while the police searched his apartment. After a long search, nothing was found. Sam continues to keep to himself and only leaves the house for work due to fear and paranoia.
Gus	- Mental health issues -Use of tools: wiretap and flashbang grenades	At age 15 Gus got into a fight at school. Three years later, one month after he turned 18, he experienced an early morning no-knock police raid with the use of flashbang grenades. Gus was alone at his mother's apartment when he awoke to the loud noise of the grenade in the living room. He now suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of the incident and lives in constant fear that a simple phone call with his friend who was caught on wiretap can lead to a no-knock police raid.
Diana	-Mental health issues -Property damage -Vulnerable person - child	At the age of six, Diana's home was raided by the police using dynamic entry, but she slept through it. She only remembers the incident as it was explained to her. Two years later, at the age of eight, Diana experienced a second no-knock raid where she was awakened by the loud noise from the door being kicked down. Scared because she thought she would be physically hurt, she hid under her blanket and pretended to sleep. The police came to her room and kicked the door open and proceeded to question her.
Marie	-Mental health issues -Property damage -Vulnerable persons - children -Coordination of existing systems	Marie experienced no-knock police raids on two occasions. In 2015, Marie was scared by a loud bang and ran down the stairs of the community housing townhouse to find officers with rifles running into her home. Upon kicking down the front door, the officers announced themselves and informed Marie that information received from her children's high school resource officer led them to her home. They had a warrant to arrest her two children. Marie was under the impression that if there were an issue at school, the school would communicate with her in advance. She wondered why the school and the police approached the situation in this manner. Again in 2017, Marie experienced another no-knock police raid as part of a larger raid where 129 people from 60 homes in the housing complex she lived in were arrested, including her children.

Findings and Discussion

The interviews conducted in this study reveal consistent themes of trauma, social isolation, and a breakdown of trust in law enforcement for participants and family members subjected to no-knock raids. Although this study does not provide statistically generalizable results, it offers valuable insight into the lived experiences of racialized individuals living in low-income communities whose voices are often absent in empirical literature on policing (Mosher & Pratt, 2020), particularly in relation to experiencing no-knock raids. The findings highlight a critical need for reform in the use of no-knock raids and in the type of supports available for those impacted.

Short and Long-Term Psychological Distress of Experiencing No-Knock Raids

The theme of mental health implications emerged strongly, highlighting the short and long-term psychological distress caused by no-knock raids. Using an open-coding approach, the research team initially reviewed the transcripts line-by-line to identify recurring emotional descriptors, such as “anxiety,” “fear,” “trauma,” and “depression.” These codes were then grouped and refined under broader categories (Clarke & Braun, 2016) related to psychological distress, including “emotional impact,” “social withdrawal,” and “distrust of law enforcement.” A second coder independently reviewed a subset of interviews, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached to enhance reliability. As themes began to emerge, the coding focused on identifying how specific elements of the police raid such as the use of force, unexpected entry, or the extent of aggressiveness correlated with participants’ short and long-term mental health impacts. Through this process, trauma and mental health consequences emerged as recurrent themes with participants frequently citing similar symptoms and emotional responses. The recurrence of these codes across different cases helped establish thematic saturation, validating the findings and strengthening the conclusions drawn.

Participants’ accounts frequently referenced PTSD symptoms including hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, and emotional numbness. Maali, who was raided while holding her infant, recounted, “I was on the floor with two officers pointing rifles at my head. The trauma of that moment has stayed with me for years.” Similarly, Gus who experienced the raid at age 18 explained, “officers ran into my bedroom with two large rifles over my head, and one rifle accidentally hit me in the head. I had a headache and ringing in my ears from the grenade.” In another case, Diana was scared because she thought she would be physically hurt. Therefore, she hid under her blanket and pretended to sleep. She further explained:

When they broke down the door and just started throwing stuff, I thought we were getting robbed or maybe it was an intruder. I never thought it was the police, you know? So I never got out of my bed. I just had it over my head, I didn't know what to do. And then when I heard my mom screaming, and all of that, it literally broke me.

Maali similarly confirmed her fear:

It was really scary because the police came in with no warning and it was a loud bang... they came in with these huge, long guns. Two of them forced me on the floor. I was holding my son in my arms. They had these really long guns to my head, you know, as if they needed to do that, like really?

These accounts align with research indicating that exposure to aggressive policing tactics may have long-term impacts including intrusive thoughts, social withdrawal, and physical symptoms triggered by reminders about the traumatic nature of the raid (CAMH, 2020; Lopez et al., 2018). A 2020 study by CAMH supports, this noting that individuals exposed to high-stress police encounters face an increased risk of developing PTSD and related mental health conditions (CAMH, 2020). The fear of repeated raids led some participants to develop ongoing anxiety and paranoia leading to withdrawal from social interactions. Sam described the impact on his social life by emphasizing, "I don't trust anyone anymore. I keep to myself afraid that another raid could happen at any moment." His account illustrates how traumatic policing interactions can distort perceptions of safety and authority (Eizadirad et al., 2024).

The findings indicate a consistent pattern of long-lasting psychological effects across cases as evidenced by participants' detailed accounts of their struggles with anxiety, hypervigilance, and ongoing feelings of vulnerability, in some cases years after they experienced the raid. These themes were not only relevant across individual cases but also aligned with existing research on trauma responses following high-stress encounters, enhancing the validity of the identified themes. Participants reported symptoms of trauma, anxiety, and depression that persisted long after the raid. Maali, for instance, described her prolonged struggle with trauma and the lasting nature of her distress:

It impacted me very negatively and still today I am traumatized by the raid. As time goes on, you're always traumatized by it, just for the rest of your life. It's not something that heals with time... And it impacted me mentally and emotionally because they burst into your home and that is terrifying. I had a three-month-old baby, and they approached us with big guns. To have those guns over you, over your children, that is terrifying and you never forget it.

Such experiences are not uncommon among racialized individuals exposed to aggressive law enforcement tactics. Gus, another participant, shared that he developed hypervigilance and difficulty sleeping. He explained, "I get startled in my sleep very easily. The slightest noise wakes me up and I feel like it's

been that way since the raid. Whenever I hear a loud knock, it shocks me.” Marie also mentioned how the raids caused her to develop anxiety. She goes on to emphasize, “I have anxiety with the door up to this day because of that... When I think about the situations, you know, I get anxiety, fear, and frustrated. The emotional impact is like the anger you feel.” These narratives align with research on how exposure to sudden, high-stress encounters such as police raids can trigger symptoms of PTSD and related conditions (CAMH, 2020; Waller, 2019).

Beyond psychological impacts, the use of flashbangs and other tactical equipment in raids introduces physical risks (Occupational Health and Safety Canada, 2012). Flashbang grenades emit loud explosions and bright flashes to disorient occupants and can cause severe injuries including permanent hearing damage, heart attacks, and even house fires (Dolan, 2019; Francis, 2020; Roziere & Walby, 2021). Gus recalled his experience with a flashbang used during the raid:

I woke up to hearing just a really loud bang. I can tell, that like the front door got bombed or something, and then I heard a lot of screaming. I heard the flash bang and I seen the light coming from underneath my door and in the hallway. I saw the big flash. Then I heard a bunch of commotion, a bunch of screaming, and I wasn't too sure. But I heard screaming like somebody got hurt from the flashbang.

Gus went on to explain the danger of using flashbangs during dynamic entries and how it caused major harm to people in the house. He explained,

This raid, there was multiple people in the raid, even another person I knew. The flashbang hit him on his belly. He was wearing a white t-shirt and you can see the hole in the T-shirt. The shirt was gone. Shit was still burning and smoking.

Research studies also highlight the risks posed to children in environments of violence or distress where they may experience complex trauma that affects their emotional and behavioural development (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024; Peterson, 2018). According to Peterson (2018) children who experience traumatic events, particularly in the early years, often have difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions and may have limited language to describe their feelings. Peterson (2018) goes on to state:

[Children] often internalize and/or externalize stress reactions and as a result may experience significant depression, anxiety, or anger. Their emotional responses may be unpredictable or explosive. A child may react to a reminder of a traumatic event with trembling, anger, sadness, or avoidance. For a child with a complex trauma history, reminders of various traumatic events may be everywhere in the environment. Such a child may react often, react powerfully, and have difficulty calming down when upset. (para.7)

Diana, who was raided as a minor, described her long-lasting anxiety and sense of vulnerability: “they should have handled it differently, especially knowing

I was a child. To this day, loud noises trigger me and I start crying. I worry constantly that if it happens again, I won't be able to handle it." No-knock raids also inflict psychological harm on individuals who are not the raid's target. Marie, who experienced a raid, described the lingering feelings of being criminalized:

Even though they come for somebody in the house, there are other people in the house. The way they do things affects everyone... Sometimes when people ask if I've been arrested, I feel like saying yes because I've had handcuffs on me before.

Such experiences highlight the phenomenon known as "courtesy stigma," where family members are indirectly impacted by the justice system's punitive measures (Comfort, 2003). This stigma affects not only individuals but also their family dynamics, creating an atmosphere of social exclusion and emotional distress for those present during the raid (Condry & Minson, 2020). Sam reflected on how the trauma extended to his mother, who also faced the mental repercussions of the raid: "they came for me, but it affected my mom mentally too. She didn't get detained, but mentally she's detained too." Occupants who experience no-knock raids are subjected to the same processes of regulation as the suspect. It creates a range of negative effects that include feelings of being violated, controlled, and monitored as if they were also guilty (Comfort, 2008; Condry & Minson, 2020). The psychological toll of no-knock raids on children, vulnerable adults, and innocent family members suggests a need for revised police practices that prioritize the safety of all occupants.

Overall, building on Roziere and Walby's (2021) analysis of Canada's dynamic-entry law, the narratives of the research participants offer an expanded examination of the Supreme Court decision in *R v Cornell*, with particular attention to Justice Cromwell's dissent. Whereas the majority of justices (four yes and three no) upheld wide officer discretion to bypass the knock-and-announce rule under exigent circumstances, the dissent called for stricter judicial oversight of SWAT deployments and no-knock tactics. The empirical data – all participants reporting PTSD-like symptoms and property destruction – substantiates the dissent's assertion that these practices risk severe unintended collateral damage and long-term mental health implications.

Lack of Trust between the Community and Police: Overreliance on Informants and Property Damage

The theme of mistrust in law enforcement due to overreliance on confidential informants and uncompensated property damage emerged through a rigorous coding process, aimed at capturing both the emotional and unintended impacts of no-knock raids on participants' lives. An open-coding approach was used to identify keywords related to mistrust, such as "informant," "no compensation," "isolation," and "destruction." These codes were then organized into thematic categories including "distrust in police," "fear of surveillance," and "financial

loss from property damage.” Recurring themes of mistrust and frustration were consistently observed across the different cases. The use of confidential informants and lack of recourse for damages emerged as central drivers of participants’ negative perceptions of police, reinforcing the need for more transparent practices and supports for innocent people and family members involved as part of raids.

Participants’ narratives indicate that reliance on confidential informants particularly in cases where no contraband was found intensified feelings of social isolation and distrust in law enforcement. For instance, Maali recounted her frustration upon learning that the raid on her home was based on an informant’s tip about supposed firearms:

I was told that the police raided my home because an informant said I had firearms. It’s disturbing that the system allows someone to make a claim, and the police take it seriously without concrete evidence. After that, I cut everybody out of my life because I just didn’t trust anyone.

Similarly, Sam described his constant worrying and persistent anxiety rooted in the fear that an informant could make an unverified claim that might lead to another raid. Such experiences illustrate how overreliance on informants without adequate corroboration of the information can lead individuals to socially withdraw, fearing future encounters with law enforcement based on false information.

Racialized communities in Canada often face structural inequities that increase their exposure to policing and consequently to health issues linked to traumatic encounters with law enforcement (Colour of Poverty, 2019; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2023; Owusu-Bempah & Jones, 2023). The Public Health Agency of Canada (2020) has identified racism and systemic discrimination as social determinants of health, contributing to both immediate and long-term health issues for racialized individuals. These determinants often manifest through economic hardship, housing instability, and limited access to mental health resources which are compounded by experiences of racial profiling and aggressive policing (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020). These case studies demonstrate how aggressive policing tactics through no-knock raids can contribute to a cycle of trauma, mistrust, and social withdrawal among Black and racialized individuals. The findings align with broader research on the impacts of racialized policing (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2023) adding to the argument that no-knock raids disproportionately harm marginalized groups and communities (Owusu-Bempah & Jones, 2023).

Also, the physical destruction of property during no-knock raids emerged as a theme contributing to participants’ long-term distress and financial burdens. Participants reported extensive property damage with no compensation or support offered afterwards. Marie recounted the damage to her home, describing how the police “tore apart” her furniture in search of weapons: “when they came into the home, they knocked over everything. My sofas were

destroyed, and I didn't even get back one dollar... They were tearing things apart, like they were using scissors... the furniture was all ripped up by the end." Maali shared a similar experience stating, "they tore my home apart. The house was in shambles and the front door was broken." She later learned, years after the incident, that some form of government assistance might be available to help with the damages though she was not informed of this by the police at the time. The lack of clear policies regarding compensation and support deepens the mistrust between communities and law enforcement, particularly for racialized individuals who may already experience a strained relationship with the police and the justice system (Department of Justice Canada, 2022; Owusu-Bempah & Jones, 2023). The absence of support services following no-knock raids further alienates affected families, leaving them with the financial and psychological burden of rebuilding without any official assistance. Dostal (2023) specifies procedural requirements for executing a search, including providing a copy of the warrant and adhering to a single-entry rule, but does not address how residents might seek reparations for damage incurred during raids. This omission highlights a policy gap as there are no standardized guidelines for informing individuals about support resources for property repair or mental health counseling.

The findings from Khenti's (2014) article, "The Canadian War on Drugs: Structural Violence and Unequal Treatment of Black Canadians," offer critical insights that align with the present study's focus on the disproportionate impact of no-knock raids on racialized communities in Canada. Khenti (2014) highlights how Canada's war on drugs has disproportionately targeted Black communities, leading to systemic inequities and structural violence. Despite similar rates of drug use compared to their white counterparts, Black Canadians face significantly higher incarceration rates. This disparity is attributed to targeted policing practices, racial profiling, and over-surveillance in marginalized, low-income Black communities. These findings are pertinent to the current study, as they reinforce the argument that aggressive policing tactics, such as no-knock raids, disproportionately impact Black and racialized communities. This structural violence not only perpetuates racial stigma but also contributes to the long-term trauma and social isolation experienced by those subjected to such policing practices. By highlighting the systemic nature of these disparities, Khenti's (2014) analysis supports the study's assertion that no-knock raids exacerbate social suffering and erode trust in law enforcement, particularly within marginalized groups and communities.

Furthermore, Walby (2022) in "SWAT Everywhere? A Response to Jenkins, Semple, Bennell, and Huey" critically examines the increasing use of SWAT teams in Canadian policing and challenges stakeholders who advocate for more SWAT deployment. Walby (2022) highlights that the growing use of SWAT is not supported by evidence of increased public safety. Instead, Walby (2022) argues that the normalization of militarized policing disproportionately harms marginalized communities, particularly Black and Indigenous peoples, without demonstrable benefits. This critique adds value by contextualizing the

problematic expansion of SWAT use in Canada, supporting the argument that aggressive police tactics such as no-knock raids, lead to significant social and psychological harm especially in racialized communities.

Overall, in the aftermath of no-knock raids, typically minimal resources are provided to the victims to repair the destruction of their property. There are no publicly shared policies in Canada as to where people can go for support. A Canadian lawyer who represented a couple whose house was raided in 2016 states that the victims can sue but that can take years and many cannot afford it. The findings from this study align with previous research on the effects of aggressive policing on predominantly Black and racialized communities where distrust in law enforcement, social isolation, and trauma are prevalent outcomes (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020). By highlighting the role of unreliable informants and the absence of supports after raids or compensation for property damages, this study adds to the body of literature advocating for reforms to increase transparency and accountability in law enforcement practices. The lack of compensation or guidance on accessing support exacerbates the socio-economic and psychological hardships faced by affected families, particularly racialized individuals and communities, pointing to an urgent need for policy reforms that prioritize the well-being and rights of individuals subjected to no-knock raids.

Recommendations

Based on the emerging themes from this study, a series of targeted recommendations can help improve the practice of no-knock raids in Canada and mitigate the harms associated with their execution. These recommendations align with the dissenting opinion in the legal case *R v Cornell*. First, the use of flashbang grenades, which have been shown to cause disorientation, injury, and even structural damage, should be prohibited in all but the highest-risk situations where lives are immediately at stake. These devices, often used in enclosed spaces, pose a serious risk to physical and mental health, particularly for vulnerable individuals in the vicinity. Furthermore, when raids involve homes with children, elderly residents, or other vulnerable individuals, police should employ less invasive tactics that prioritize the safety and well-being of all occupants. Such adjustments would help reduce the lasting trauma associated with aggressive police entries and better protect those least able to cope with high-stress interactions. In addition, police departments must establish protocols for systematically tracking the use and outcomes of no-knock raids, including documenting any damages caused and the number of innocent or uninvolved individuals affected. This data collection would be invaluable in assessing the impact for such practices and in determining whether they disproportionately impact racialized communities and in what ways. Tracking trends in the data compiled could reveal patterns of harm and inform policy changes to make policing more equitable and

accountable. Reforms that reduce the use of excessive force, particularly in racialized, low-income communities, would be a critical step toward improving trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Finally, affected individuals and their families require support services post-raid to help manage the psychological, financial, and social impacts. Community organizations should be funded to provide case management, counseling, and assistance for those affected by these high-stress encounters (Amadeusz, 2025; Youth Association for Academics, Athletics, and Character Education, 2025). Two examples of community agencies that provide such services in Toronto led by people who have lived experiences with incarceration or violence are Amadeusz and YAAACE (Youth Association for Academics, Athletics, and Character Education, 2025). A case management approach might include transformative restorative justice initiatives with law enforcement, support for accessing compensation for damages, system navigation guidance led by people with relevant expertise, and access to tailored trauma-informed mental health counseling. By offering these resources free of cost and within racialized communities, the justice system can mitigate the lasting negative effects of no-knock raids, support individuals and communities in the recovery and healing process, and foster greater trust between law enforcement and the public. These recommendations collectively address the critical need for trauma-informed policing, increased data-driven transparency, and robust support structures, ultimately contributing to a safer and more just system.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This research has provided a qualitative exploration of the lived experiences of five racialized individuals subjected to no-knock police raids in Canada, emphasizing the impacts on them, their families, and innocent bystanders. The findings, though based on a small sample size, reveal significant emotional, psychological, and financial consequences that endure long after the raid. The traumatic mental health effects, compounded by social isolation and loss of trust in law enforcement, underscore the need for policy reforms to address these harms. Importantly, this study addressed a research gap in Canadian literature regarding the specific impacts of no-knock raids, contributing to a broader understanding of how aggressive policing disproportionately affects racialized individuals and communities. The narratives of the research participants support the points raised in the dissenting opinion in the legal case *R v Cornell*, which advocated for stricter judicial oversight and limits on SWAT-style entries to prevent unintended collateral harm.

Furthermore, the study's findings indicate a need for further research across several areas to build on these initial insights. First, a larger quantitative study could provide statistical validation of these themes, examining the prevalence of PTSD, social withdrawal, and distrust with law enforcement among a

broader population affected by no-knock raids. Additionally, longitudinal studies would be valuable to track the long-term psychological and economic impacts on individuals and families post raids, revealing how these experiences may alter life trajectories, particularly among racialized young people and children exposed to such raids. Moreover, comparative research could be conducted between jurisdictions and countries with varying policies on no-knock raids to assess whether alternative policing approaches may reduce trauma and cultivate better community relations. Also, research that evaluates the reliability of information from informants leading to no-knock raids would provide insights into how reliance on unverified sources can be mitigated to prevent unwarranted raids and minimize harm. Lastly, interdisciplinary studies could examine the intersection of public health and policing by evaluating how law enforcement's interaction with vulnerable populations, especially those in government housing, impacts community health outcomes. Future research should expand on these findings, using a mixed-methods approach to generate both statistical and in-depth qualitative insights.

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