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COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN A SEMI-AUTOCRATIC CONTEXT: DISABILITY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In areas of social inequality, the inclusion of non-state actors and citizens in the policy process is important for creating legitimate, responsive and just policies. Frameworks on collaborative governance and participation have been largely developed based on examples from Western, democratic countries. This thesis examines the applicability of these frameworks to analyse mechanisms of participation available to civil society organisations (CSOs) in the non-Western, non-democratic country of Singapore. Two areas are examined: disability and tackling violence against women. The participation of CSOs in policymaking is examined using data from qualitative interviews and secondary research. Mechanisms of participation available to CSOs are found to be extremely limited in influence, although they may boost policy implementation. Existing frameworks on collaborative governance and participation can be applied to autocratic contexts if supplemented with emphasis on analysing areas of power asymmetry, indicated in the broader social political environment, particularly given that collaboration requires power-sharing, which is the antithesis of autocratic governments. Within mechanisms of participation, an analysis is needed of the policy stages in which non-government actors are involved, to ascertain the scope of their influence and the level of control that the government is willing to cede in the process of collaboration.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Problem

> "As a policy officer and as a civil servant, have the servant attitude. Listen to the voices of the people you serve. You are elected by us, the citizens." (R.9)

In many areas of governance, particularly in social inequalities, the inclusion of non-state actors and citizens in the policy process is important for creating legitimate, responsive and just policies (Fung 2015, 513). Inclusion may be necessary because government officials have gaps in knowledge, skills, and resources (Fung 2006, 67). For instance, the lived experiences of marginalised groups such as women, disabled persons and people in poverty give them insight and expertise that government officials do not possess. These groups and the CSOs representing or serving them can provide on-the-ground experiences and insights to build informed policies and services for marginalised groups.

However, groups who suffer systemic inequality are frequently underrepresented in government, excluded from the process of making policies that affect them, and treated as "mere objects of policy"(Lister 2007, 440). This political inequality reflecting an imbalance of power means that policies likely do not serve them well, which could contribute to injustice (Fung 2006, 70).

To facilitate inclusion and to tackle intractable problems, governments around the world have engaged in experiments with collaborative and participatory governance (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015, 9), which stand in contrast with the more dominant top-down and conflictual modes of managerial and adversarial governance (Ansell and Gash 2008, 543). In issues affecting marginalised groups, governments can collaborate with affected individuals,

advocates, activists, community groups and civil society organisations (CSOs). Participation in policymaking is often done through groups and organisations and rarely in isolation (Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker 2006, 288). These groups and organisations can gather the views and concerns of vulnerable groups and individuals and communicate with government agencies to advocate for policy issues.

In Singapore, the government has increased efforts to seek input from citizens and stakeholders from the nonprofit and business sectors in various areas, including in the social policy areas of disability and violence against women. However, there has been limited research and analysis on the inclusion of CSOs and marginalised groups in the policy process in Singapore. There is a need to analyse the mechanisms of participation to uncover the extent to which different voices are included and whether these mechanisms provide genuine influence to CSOs, particularly given the historically top-down mode of governance in a politically repressive environment in Singapore. What are the characteristics and limits of the mechanisms of participation available to CSOs in Singapore? Can CSO participation in this non-western and semi-autocratic country be understood using this concept of collaborative governance and its frameworks, which have been developed by Western researchers largely based on examples from more democratic contexts?

Key Concepts and Definitions

Governments may collaborate and consult with CSOs on specific issues and CSOs may initiate participation in policy and governance matters, although these practices may not qualify as collaborative governance as defined above. In this thesis, the term "participation" will be used broadly to refer to interactions where CSOs engage with government in matters relating to governance and policy. "Collaborative governance" broadly refers to a "mode of policy and service delivery" that involves joint policy decision-making, implementation and accountability

between actors from different sectors, whether public, nonprofit, or business (Voets et al. 2021, 1–2), and will be used in reference to collaboration between government and civil society organisations in this thesis. There is no single definition of public policy, but it encompasses many areas of government action or inaction, and for the topics in this thesis, it includes laws, public expenditure, economic incentives or penalties and service and resource provision whether directly by the government or via NGOs (Cairney 2012, 24–27).

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are used in the broad sense of the term to refer to non-governmental organisations. These include less-independent organisations that receive most of their funding from the Singapore government for providing social services, which are labelled domestically as "Social Service Agencies" (SSAs), which form the majority of CSOs. These are not strictly Government-Organised NGOs (GONGOs) as many were founded as independent charities. However, each SSA has lost their independence from the state over the last few decades as an increasing proportion of their funding comes from the government. Co-optation is rampant, as the state "wields significant direct and indirect power over the charitable sector by way of provision of funding and board composition", leading to an "acute" power asymmetry (Tang 2022, 49, 53).

1.2 Literature and Case Selection

Research suggests that true collaborative and participatory governance is elusive in democratic and autocratic contexts in Asia. In Nepal, attempts to institute participatory governance in managing a community forests, were unsuccessful due to the maintenance of unequal power structures (Ojha 2006, 166). In Indonesia, the process of gender mainstreaming in Yogyakarta City was less collaborative than consultative, also due to an imbalance of power (Hidayahtulloh and Hutami 2019, 178). A Malaysian government agency experimented with collaborative governance by, but problems with trust and legitimacy led to failure (Noh and Yashaiya 2019,

46). In democratic South Korea, the veneer of collaborative governance was misused to legitimise state power (Kim and Han 2024, 729). Other researchers highlighted the barriers to institutionalising collaborative governance in South Korea given the hierarchical style of governance and low trust between civil society and the state (Jung, Mazmanian, and Tang 2009, 5). Rodan (2018, 4) analysed three forms of political participation in three Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, where these political innovations were introduced to manage conflict (Rodan 2018, 164) and fell short of genuine participation and inclusion due to political dynamics. He found that a Singapore national consultation used the illusion of consultative governance for autocratic ends (2018, 10).

How can existing frameworks on collaborative and participatory governance developed in democratic contexts be used to analyse examples in non-democratic and non-Western contexts, where power imbalance and misuse may be prominent? How collaborative is the Singapore government, given the government's increasing emphasis on collaboration in recent years (Tham 2024; Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth 2021)?

Case selection

Singapore is selected as a deviant case of a non-democratic, non-Western country, which can be used to examine the applicability of conceptual frameworks that were developed by researchers from democratic Western countries, to analyse participatory governance.

Singapore is chosen because of access to potential interviewees, as I am Singaporean. The specific policy areas of violence against women and disability are examined because these are two areas of social inequalities in which the government has formally consulted CSOs and because out of the four United Nations Conventions that Singapore has ratified, two (CEDAW and CRPD) concern the selected areas. This signifies a government commitment to collaborate with CSOs on related policies, as required under these conventions.

1.3 Context

Around the world, disability and gender policy are highly collaborative areas that are marked by the involvement of social movements, activists and non-governmental organisations in advocacy, consultation and joint development of laws and policies. However, when women's rights groups are excluded from the process of policy and service planning, the resulting services may not support gender equality (Krizsán and Roggeband 2023, 11). Even in democracies, disability activists have limited influence on policies, and tokenism is rife, and in less democratic contexts, self-censorship is common (Petri 2025, 4).

The political context in Singapore presents high barriers to the inclusion of affected groups in policymaking. In Singapore, women and disabled people are underrepresented in parliament, there is only one women's rights organisation and most disability CSOs are run by non-disabled people. An individual and medical model of disability is the dominant government and societal paradigm (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2022, 3). The political environment is "overwhelmingly repressive, with serious restrictions on free expression, association, and peaceful assembly" (Human Rights Watch 2025). The same political party has ruled Singapore since independence in 1965 (Freedom House 2024).

1.4 Research Question

Research Question: The concept of collaborative governance, mostly found in consolidated democracies, has been developed largely by Western researchers. How is collaborative governance applicable in a semi-autocratic context outside the Western world, such as Singapore?

- What are the mechanisms and venues used for participation by CSOs in Singapore, in the areas of disability and violence against women? What are their characteristics and how are they distinctive?
- What amendments might be needed to the conceptual frameworks of collaborative governance and participation?

1.5 Methodology

A qualitative method was used with data gathered from interviews, news articles, government websites and academic literature. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in English, Singapore's main working language, via video call in April and May 2025, audio recorded and transcribed. Respondents had current or former affiliations with one or more Singapore CSOs. Most respondents were board members, senior management, and/or staff who supervised teams of ten or more staff. Other respondents were staff whose responsibilities included engagement with the policy process. Most respondents had over 10 years' experience in the relevant sector and half the respondents were had been trained in social work or counselling.

- 9 interviews were conducted with respondents from the violence against women sector and 5 interviews were conducted with respondents from the disability sector.
- 10 interviews had a duration of 45 minutes or more, 3 interviews were 30 minutes long and 1 interview was 20 minutes long.
- Respondents described experiences from their affiliation with 11 different CSOs. These CSOs varied in terms of size, whether government officials were on their board, and the extent to which they receive government funding and the extent of focus on service provision.

Interviews were obtained through a combination of my network, snowball sampling and cold outreach through LinkedIn messaging. A main reason for the higher number of interviews on

VAW is that I have more personal contacts from working in a "Family Service Centre" in Singapore as a social worker for four years, and these centres provide services to a wide range of service users including victims of domestic violence. With only one year of work experience in the disability sector, I had fewer personal contacts in this sector and had to rely more on cold outreach, which was generally unsuccessful. Attempts to contact 5 disability organisations through cold emails did not receive a response. Out of 14 individuals contacted through cold messaging, five replied, from which three interviews were obtained for both the disability and VAW sectors.

Coding was an iterative process with an initial coding scheme developed deductively based on the theoretical framework and subsequently revised based on the empirical data, with reference to theory, using Microsoft Excel.

Research Ethics

The research for this master's thesis was reviewed and approved by the Department of Public Policy's Ethical Research Committee at Central European University prior to interviews being conducted. Interview respondents signed a Consent Form agreeing to the interviews being conducted and audio recorded, attached to a Participant Information Sheet providing information on the research project, measures to protect confidentiality and the potential risks of participating in the research. Please refer to Annex B for the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which detail the steps taken to ensure respondent confidentiality.

All interviews are anonymised because of the potential risks to interview respondents as the government has been known to penalise members of civil society on occasion for expressing dissenting opinions. In a small country like Singapore, the list of organisations involved in disability and violence against women is not a long list and it may be possible to guess at which organisations were interviewed. Hence, there are parts in the written findings that intentionally

keep some details vague to protect respondents' anonymity. These details can include, for example, whether the respondent works in the field of violence against women or disability, the type of policy issue within these fields, and the mechanism or service discussed by the respondent.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Collaborative governance

Collaborative governance is one of many terms that refers to interactions between state and non-state actors in matters of policy and governance, which along with a multitude of related concepts such as network governance and stakeholder governance (Voets et al. 2021, 5), has "gained broad prominence at increasing speed" (Voets et al. 2021, 2). Other common concepts such as "participatory governance" and "deliberative governance" are used only when individual citizens are involved (Sørensen et al. 2020, 532). These terms can be classified under interactive policy processes, which contrast with the more traditional forms of hierarchical governance and market governance (Torfing and Triantafillou 2011, 1; Voets et al. 2021, 14).

The concept of collaborative governance has been used in such a diffuse manner (Batory and Svensson 2019a, 29) that conceptualisations vary greatly in terms of whether non-state actors are included, who initiates and controls the process, whether organisations or citizens participate, the scope and the objective of collaboration. (Batory and Svensson 2019a, 35). For instance, collaborative governance can be conceived broadly as "an umbrella term for myriad cross-boundary, multi-institutional arrangements" (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015, 8), to describe "the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished" (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015, 18). A narrow conceptualisation by Ansell and Gash defines collaborative governance as formal collaborations in public policy and/or public management involving both state and non-state actors engaging in two-way communication, deliberating and coming to a consensus, with all sides holding power and influence in decision-making and

taking responsibility for the final outcome (Ansell and Gash 2008, 544–46). This narrow definition excludes non-state initiated interactions such as "advocacy and lobbying", interactions without state actors and "purely consultative practices" (Batory and Svensson 2019a, 29).

The concept of collaborative governance has become more popular in response to "complex new challenges" that "cannot be tackled by government on its own" (Voets et al. 2021, 2). Many of these are social problems, sometimes known in public policy as "wicked problems" as they are often intensely complex with no straightforward solutions (Rittel and Webber 1973, 160). Addressing these problems requires trust between stakeholders, the ability to evaluate unusual ideas, and "realistic judgment" (Rittel and Webber 1973, 164) which implies the need to include different voices and perspectives to assess and address social issues. Collaborative governance has been proposed to tackle wicked problems (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015, 6) which require cooperation between two or more entities (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015, 7) to develop joint solutions. Collaborative governance gained traction in the 1990s (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015, 17) and is now "high on the agenda for most European governments" (Batory and Svensson 2019a, 28).

2.2 Evaluating participation: Three dimensions and broader context

To assess individual cases of participation and collaboration, I will draw from frameworks of collaborative governance and participation, developed by Western researchers, which "take a systems perspective", "identifying (common) structures, functions and processes" (Voets et al. 2021, 5). These frameworks include an evaluation of the internal workings of the collaboration and the external factors. Internally, the mechanisms of collaboration or "what goes on within governance arrangements" can be evaluated in three dimensions – the participants, the process and the effect on policy. Externally, the "broader institutional and systems context" (Voets et

al. 2021, 15) includes the social, political, legal and economic environment in which the collaboration takes place (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012, 5) and the "starting conditions" which are the asymmetries of power, resources and knowledge between actors, their incentives for collaborating and their history of cooperation or conflict (Ansell and Gash 2008, 550–51). Participation may take place in the context of existing formal and informal relationships between agencies and interest groups or organisations (Ansell and Gash 2008, 546).

The first dimension to evaluate mechanisms of participation and collaboration is the type of participants, which can include governmental and non-governmental actors. There are various aspects within this dimension, including how representative the participants are of the "relevant population", whether they possess the necessary knowledge and capacity to participate effectively and "make good judgments", and whether any important viewpoints are excluded (Fung 2006, 67).

The second dimension looks at the process, for instance, how participants communicate with each other. Fung distinguished between modes of communication where participants express their views individually and modes where participants discuss their views and come to a collective opinion (Fung 2006, 68). Other aspects of process include whether inputs are handled in a transparent manner by state actors (Batory and Svensson 2019b, 231).

The third dimension is the extent to which the participants' views have an actual effect on policy (Batory and Svensson 2019b, 231; Ansell and Gash 2008, 544). Fung (2006, 69) outlined a spectrum of influence and authority with five ideal types (Figure 1). At one end of the spectrum is **direct authority** where participants have full collective power over the actions taken, followed by **co-governance**, where participants and officials cooperate at an equal level to make a decision. Towards the other end of the spectrum, participants have no control over the

final decision. Government officials may receive **advice and consult** with participants, or participants may have **communicative influence** when government officials are convinced after listening to their views. At the extreme, participants may have no influence but participate for their **personal benefit** of learning. To increase justice for excluded groups, participant influence should take the form of direct authority or co-governance, as suggestions made in the latter three forms are often ignored (Fung 2006, 72).

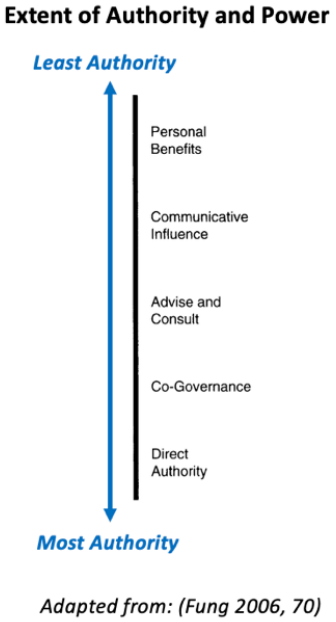

Figure 1. Influence and authority

For the second and third dimensions of communication and influence, it is crucial to know who initiates the interaction and who controls the process (Batory and Svensson 2019a, 35). For example, a government agency may establish a formal workgroup with non-state participants, invite CSOs to a discussion, or informally consult a non-state actor or citizens. A non-state actor may lobby government officials, conduct research, write reports or provide feedback through emails or one-to-one conversations.

The scope of engagement by non-state actors can differ in terms of the stage of the policy cycle they are involved in and the time period of the interaction (Batory and Svensson 2019a, 35). There is abundant debate on the conceptualisation of the policy process and the utility of conceiving it as a cycle with distinct and successive stages. For this thesis, the conceptualisation of the policy cycle with six components as outlined by Paul Cairney will be used (Figure 2) (Cairney 2012, 33). The agenda setting stage involves identifying and defining problems, which includes issue framing. The policy formulation stage is where objectives are decided and solutions are appraised and selected. At the legitimation stage, support is sought for the proposed solution, from relevant stakeholders and the legislative or executive branches. At the implementation stage, an organisation is chosen and equipped to execute the policy. The evaluation stage requires an evaluation of the policy implementation and whether it meets the defined objectives. Finally, the policy maintenance, succession or termination stage is where a decision is made whether to continue, change or terminate the policy.

There can be different levels of collaboration and participation in governance, reflected by variation in the three dimensions of participation. This is illustrated in Fung's "democracy cube" (Figure 3), where any mechanism of participation can be situated along a three-dimensional space delineated by the three dimensions of participation outlined above (Fung 2006, 66).

With policymaking historically top-down and conflictual (Ansell and Gash 2008, 543), collaborative policymaking efforts encounter many barriers. Imbalances in power, time, skills and resources can increase the likelihood of powerful stakeholders manipulating the process (Ansell and Gash 2008, 551) and "participation without redistribution of power risks becoming tokenism or even manipulation" (Batory and Svensson 2019b, 229). Consensus-making may be hindered by distrust and government agencies may "lack real commitment to collaboration" (Ansell and Gash 2008, 561). In many cases, successful collaboration requires "achieving a

virtuous cycle between communication, trust, commitment, understanding, and outcomes" (Ansell and Gash 2008, 559).

CHAPTER THREE: PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION

3.1 Integrating collaborative frameworks with policy stages

Mechanisms of participation are initiated by the Singapore government or CSOs, which can be evaluated along Fung's three dimensions of participation. Along the first dimension, these mechanisms differ in the types of CSOs participating. In the second dimension of process, CSOs usually provide their individual views to the government which are then handled with different levels of transparency. Some taskforces and cross-organisational meetings may be different in having some level of discussion and knowledge about whether the participants' views are considered by leaders. However, in most cases, when CSOs participate through meetings, emails and consultations, they do not know where this information goes, whether their views are considered. Even if there are subsequent policy changes, the government is not responsive as there is no explanation of "how the decision was made and the role of participation within that" (Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker 2006, 289). All of these mechanisms are similar in the third dimension of influence, providing CSOs with no direct control over the final outcome and either no influence or communicative influence over the government decision-makers. Several respondents highlighted that when policy change happens and when communicative influence is possible, it is usually in the areas aligned with government interests or where the government is already planning to make change.

Existing frameworks on collaborative governance and participation can be elaborated using policy stages to illustrate how a semi-autocratic government can support a multitude of collaborative efforts with CSOs that have concrete outcomes in the policy implementation stage, while retaining full control over the policy formulation stage. For instance, respondents

expressed that that domestic violence working groups promoted collaboration between police, courts and service providers, thus improving victim support, although these groups had little influence on policy formulation and legislative change. In another example, the multiple government taskforces were convened after decisions had already been taken on the broad policies to be formulated, and CSOs' involvement in taskforces served to provide expertise on effectively operationalising and implementing these decisions and to gain support as part of the legitimation stage. Incorporating policy stages in the analysis can also show how the same mechanism of participation, such as closed-door consultations can have more or less impact on policy outcomes, depending on whether these consultations take place early or late in the government-controlled policy formulation stage, or in the legitimation stage. Thus, this conceptual integration can reveal an autocratic strategy of collaboration that maintains government control over the policy process while gaining information to improve policy implementation, in an effort to address wicked problems and increase democratic legitimacy.

3.2 Government-initiated Mechanisms of Participation

Government-initiated participation mechanisms in disability and domestic violence can be classified into four categories, all of which are fully government-controlled in formation, process and outcome:

a) **Taskforces:** Time-limited, topic-focused and cross-boundary with a defined topic and objectives
b) **Working groups:** Long-running and cross-boundary with defined responsibilities
c) **Consultations:** Topic-focused communication seeking views from non-government actors, with one or more CSOs, on one or more issues
d) Cross-organisational meetings convened on an ad-hoc or regular basis attended by more than one CSO

3.2.1 Taskforces

Between 2020 and 2024, in both areas of disability and domestic violence, there were taskforces that were time-limited, topic-focused and cross-boundary, convened by government ministries. Each taskforce produced a report comprising recommendations to address violence or disability in general, or specific problems in these areas. Respondents discussed their perceptions of two taskforces relating to violence and several taskforces relating to disability, either from their own experiences as members or as interested parties.

Participants: Taskforce members were selected by the government and were comprised of representatives from government ministries, government agencies and professionals from civil society organisations. In the area of disability, disabled persons, caregivers and family members were included. In the area of domestic violence, representatives from hospitals and the Courts also participated. In both areas, private sector representatives were included in one or more taskforces (Ministry of Social and Family Development 2022a, 5; Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth 2021). As an example, the Taskforce on Family Violence had official government representatives including senior civil servants from four ministries, public servants from the courts, police and public prosecutor. Non-government members were the heads of Family Violence Specialist Centres Child Protection Specialist Centres, crisis shelters, two women's organisations and medical social work at two public hospitals (Taskforce on Family Violence 2021, 56). There were more civil servants who were not part of the official list of members but who participated in meetings (Taskforce on Family Violence 2021, 31).

Taskforce leadership: Each taskforce had two co-chairs. The two taskforces relating to violence against women were chaired only by ministers or elected parliamentarians. The three taskforces relating to disability were co-chaired by one senior civil or public servant, and in two taskforces, a private sector representative was the other co-chair which signified greater voice

given to the private sector in setting the overall direction for government action for disability and for disability employment. The third disability taskforce was co-chaired by the head of a social service agency.

Formation: In all the taskforces, the government was solely involved in the agenda setting stage, making unilateral decisions on forming a taskforce, the aim and scope of the taskforce, issue framing and the participants to be invited. Taskforces were formed in reaction to urgent problems, such as the Sunlight Action for Alliance to address an increase in online harms, which disproportionately affect women, (Ministry of Digital Development and Information 2022) and the Taskforce on Family Violence to address an increase in the types of violence experienced by victims who filed for personal protection orders (C. Wong 2020). In the area of disability, a taskforce known as a "Steering Committee" has been convened every three to five years since 2007 to create successive iterations of the Enabling Masterplan, the document setting the government's direction on disability policy (M. E. Wong 2025, 37). Two taskforces were then created to explore implementing specific goals mentioned in the latest Enabling Masterplan (Ministry of Social and Family Development 2024).

Influence on the final report: Respondents shared that in some cases, prior to the convening of taskforces, policy formulation had already begun. The government had decided on the broad areas of recommendations to be made and the strategic directions that the recommendations would move towards, which implies delineating the types and extent of changes that the government was willing to consider. CSO members' role was to be consulted and provide information and expertise that could be used to develop these draft recommendations, operational details, gaps, faulty assumptions, how these could be implemented and whether it would be feasible. They could also highlight or suggest areas in which affected groups require more support and raise potential problems with implementing some of the proposed recommendations. All this input may or may not be incorporated in the final report, at the

discretion of the taskforce, and by assumption, with ultimate decisions made by the co-chairs of the taskforce. One respondent felt that this was part of a broader pattern, also seen on other occasions of government engagement, that reflected less of genuine interest in hearing the voices on the ground and more of getting a "rubber-stamp approval" from the direct service agencies that would be implementing policy, meaning that taskforces were located more in the legitimation stage than in the policy formulation stage.

Two respondents believed that although the policy formulation stage excluded CSOs, the government's proposed policies were created based on feedback and consultations gathered from CSOs and the ground (affected individuals and their families) over the years, which could be through other formal or informal mechanisms of participation. Information could have also been gathered from members of parliament, citizens and public opinion and issues and cases that received media attention. Another respondent mentioned an important policy gap in a taskforce report but could only guess why it was omitted and believed that it was because the government had already conducted research and dismissed it based on evidence.

Process: There was insufficient information on the process of discussing and deciding what was included in the final reports, but based on a respondent's experience, government representatives also had control over these processes. Participants described being consulted, and two respondents felt that their views were taken seriously, with one experiencing genuine effort at collaboration and consensus. One respondent from another taskforce had a different experience, feeling that due to the large size of the taskforce meetings and the imbalance of power between CSO participants and the more numerous government representatives, it was difficult to have the CSO's voice heard at times or to have in-depth discussions. In the case of another taskforce, another respondent heard that the process of consultation seemed to be rushed, with a final document produced quickly.

These taskforces also held consultations with disabled persons, caregivers, family members, victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and professionals working in social services, through various ways including focus group discussions and interviews (Taskforce on Family Violence 2021, 6; Ministry of Social and Family Development 2022a, 32).

Implementation of report's recommendations: After each taskforce produced their report, the government had complete control over which recommendations to accept and when and how to implement them. Many respondents welcomed major changes in domestic violence legislation that were implemented based on a few of the recommendations from the 2021 report by the Taskforce on Family Violence. Two respondents explained that these changes addressed gaps that they had observed several years or over a decade before, citing case examples. One respondent reported that CSOs had been giving feedback for years about some of the gaps which were finally addressed by the changes. Two participants noted that in domestic violence legislation, these were the only significant set of changes made since the last major change in 1997. Two respondents welcomed the government's establishment of a charity, SG Her Empowerment and its support centre for online harms, which was an outcome of a taskforce named the Sunlight Alliance for Action. This taskforce was formed to address online harms which disproportionately affect women. The Sunlight AfA consulted a wide range of stakeholders, including CSOs, teachers, parents, students and young people (Ministry of Digital Development and Information 2022). One respondent in a disability taskforce felt that the views they expressed were reflected in the final report. Pilot programmes were initiated following some of the disability taskforces (Soo Fang 2024). However, the latest Enabling Masterplan published in 2022 has several glaring omissions, with the taskforce choosing not to mention the word "discrimination" in discussing low rates of employment (Ministry of Social and Family

Development 2022a, 84), and the absence of disability rights language despite Singapore having ratified the CRPD in 2013.

3.2.2 Working groups

In the area of domestic violence, there were several long-running and cross-boundary working groups with participating organisations selected by the government. These were generally focused on improving policy implementation, with little to no impact on policy formulation. Although some participants were able to discuss policy problems at the FVDG, this group has been discontinued.

Regional level: Family Violence Working Groups (FVWG)

There were seven regional Family Violence Working Groups, with representatives from the police, family court, healthcare system, schools and social service agencies. Groups were generally chaired by a non-government representative. These working groups were in operation for over 20 years until around 2022-2023. Respondents did not know why the FVWGs were discontinued.

The goal of these groups were to "raise awareness of family violence and seek new ways to support families" (Taskforce on Family Violence 2021, 45). Members were required to create one or two projects every one or two years, with the required goals being to raise public awareness and to build capacity of partners. Groups had some freedom in deciding the project's targeted audience and mode of delivery, which may be based on gaps identified by the respective groups. Most if not all FVWGs were also required to send members to assist with national-level police trainings. For some respondents, the meetings were also opportunities to discuss problems and provide feedback to other organisations.

Views about the utility of these groups were mixed. A respondent who was part of an FVWG over a decade ago had a positive experience of the FVWG being a useful platform for improving victim response, by giving feedback to the police on their response to individual cases, and in creating a successful public awareness project. Two recent members appreciated learning about how the police handle family violence cases, which was helpful in informing their organisation's direct work with victims. They also valued the opportunity to build relationships with key contact persons they could call on from different sectors for help with individual cases, with one lamenting the termination of their FVWG. Two recent respondents felt that it was good that FVWGs were segmented into regional groups as each locality had different community characteristics of domestic violence. However, one respondent felt that the FVWG had no influence on matters of importance as their projects had limited reach and there was no transparency on whether feedback on policy matters were seriously considered by the government. Two recent respondents shared that some individual representatives had little choice in whether to join this group, the project they were involved in, and limited or no voice in the formulation of the project. This led to limited ownership, commitment and interest in the FVWG's projects. Finally, not all the victim support organisations sent representatives to their FVWG, leaving some gaps in the respective regional group's network.

National level: Family Violence Dialogue Group (FVDG)

Twice a year, the chairperson of each of the seven FVWGs would meet management-level staff from MSF, the police, the Family Justice Court and the healthcare sector in a Family Violence Dialogue Group (FVDG). Although there was macro-level discussion on trends and policies, the main focus was on issues and gaps in implementation, including issues in cross-sector coordination, communication, operations and capacity-building. For instance, victim support organisations could provide feedback on problems with first response from police and healthcare workers, based on victims' experiences. The chairpersons could also gather feedback

from their respective FVWGs to share at this meeting. The FVDG's other responsibilities included organising the police trainings which the FVWG representatives assisted with, and organising the NFVNS conference (Ministry of Social and Family Development 2022b). The FVDG was terminated at the same time as the FVWG was discontinued, reportedly because the Taskforce on Family Violence convened in February 2020 overlapped with the FVDG's mandate.

National level: National Family Violence Networking System (NFVNS)

The National Family Violence Networking System (NFVNS) was created in 1996, partly because of and prior to the significant 1997 amendments to domestic violence legislation. It is the umbrella group under which the Family Violence Dialogue Group (FVDG) and the regional Family Violence Working Groups (FVWG) were operating. Its goal is to promote cross-boundary networking and collaboration between government agencies and the first touchpoints that victims encounter, which are the police, hospitals and social service agencies, in order to "provide a tight network of support for families affected by violence" (Taskforce on Family Violence 2021, 11). Every two years, the NFVNS holds a conference to support learning and cross-boundary networking.

3.2.3 Consultation

Consultations took place via email or closed-door sessions. CSOs could be invited based on being a service provider, connections established through networking or previous communication with government about findings from CSOs' research reports.

There were some reports of positive outcomes from these consultations, with one CSO's views being genuinely considered for future government action and another having experiences with government agencies receiving and seeking advice and expertise from some CSOs on practical tips on implementing certain policy or operational decisions at the micro level.

On some occasions, after hearing unsolicited feedback on problems with a specific policy from various CSOs over a length of time, ministries may consider changing this policy and proceed to solicit feedback from selected CSOs. Two respondents had attended closed-door meetings that reflected a genuine effort by ministries to seek CSOs' views. However, one of these respondents shared that another ministry's consultations signified "tokenism" or were meant to seek agreement from CSOs:

> 'I'm not sure whether it is to involve our voice or is it more to prevent too much pushback during implementation, because I feel that they roughly already know what they want, and sometimes they will also convince you to take on or assure you why they are taking on such a stance.' (R.5)

Another respondent had the same impression of the same ministry and shared that like in the taskforce mode of participation, this ministry has on several occasions drafted a document with details of the proposed changes, before sending it to individual organisations for written comments.

A third respondent had similar doubts about the sincerity of the government's consultation efforts, which may mark an improvement but could be an attempt to divert criticism to non-public arenas:

> '…there is this desire to come across as having engaged civil society, and wanting to maintain that channel of communication, so that we will go directly behind closed doors to them if we have any issues, and we don't stand up in opposition to them publicly. Compared to the past when they would shut you out of the door and there is no interest at all in hearing from you, there is this willingness and openness to want to engage, but how real that engagement is, and whether that actually translates to policy change or reform, I'm quite sceptical.' (R.10)

A fourth respondent who participated in closed-door consultations with government representatives and other CSOs on an upcoming policy change had consistently raised the same suggestions for amendments to address gaps, substantiating these with research evidence and first-hand engagement with the affected group, but these were not included in a substantive way in the final policy.

3.2.4 Cross-organisational meetings

MSF holds meetings with senior management from SSAs. This could be a space to voice opinions, which may be seriously considered, particularly if attendees had good relationships with each other and had come to a consensus about some issues to raise before the meeting, as shared by one respondent. However, views expressed during such meetings may also be easily ignored, as another respondent experienced.

There are also large meetings held a few times a year where invited organisations from the same sector have the freedom to choose their attendees, but one respondent expressed frustration that both the ministry and CSOs have no interest in using it as a platform for CSO participation:

> 'There is the FSC networking meeting, which often is a "downloading" meeting rather than an interactive, same-level meeting. How much conversation can you have when it's a whole sector attending? And one clear indication of whether (CSOs) use that platform is that different people attend (each meeting), as if it's a show. So what happens on the ground is, "Who's going for that networking meeting? Seniors, you take turns to go". So where is the consistency in follow-up on issues? And when people go for these networking meetings, very rarely have I seen people internally in the organisation discuss and say, okay, these are the points you want to bring up.' (R.9)

Communication in these meetings is generally one-way, intended for CSO representatives to receive information, while CSOs rarely attempt two-way communication, despite this being one of the few platforms for social workers to interact with government officials. Another respondent from a different sector shared that these cross-organisational meetings could involve discussing best practices and ways forward, but discussions tend to be general with little concrete impact, serving more as "a networking, get-together session". Prior to some of these meetings, the ministry had decided on the actions to be taken after the meeting, and the CSOs are expected to work out ways to implement these actions.

3.3 CSO-initiated participation

3.3.1 Research

Some CSOs engage in research and use their reports to engage government officials, which may lead to opportunities to exercise communicative influence through substantive conversations or invitations to formal mechanisms of participation such as closed-door meetings. However, conducting research requires capacity and some state-funded CSOs are subject to government restrictions on conducting and disseminating their research. While many direct service organisations have case-level data which could be analysed to improve services or make policy recommendations, they may have limited resources, interest and capability for this work.

3.3.2 Direct communication with elected officials and civil servants

> " If you want to make the most effective change, it's the discussions behind closed doors that are the most effective." (R.6)

Senior management from CSOs that provide government-funded social services can contact the ministry that oversees the respective service. This was posited by respondents as one of the key

channels of information used by the government when they decide to change policies or draft recommendations used in new taskforces. Three respondents felt that civil servants were willing to hear feedback, although the actual impact may not be clear, and there was disappointment in one instance when the outcome was significantly different from the goal. A fourth respondent found it possible to reach civil servants higher up on the hierarchy while noting that different departments within the same ministry have different levels of receptiveness to feedback. As a service provider, it was easier to be heard about policy implementation problems such as compliance and the feasibility of some laws, but concrete change takes a long time and it was hard to tell if feedback had an impact on subsequent policy changes. Respondents highlighted that it is not clear if the feedback is seriously considered for subsequent action and if information given survives changes in department leadership.

Each Family Service Centre is formally connected to a MSF Regional Services Team (RST), comprised of civil servants who work in the community. FSCs are encouraged to raise issues to this team, which could include case-level and policy issues. One respondent felt that this team was not proactive in engaging with their FSC, and even for individual cases, they might suggest solutions that do not address the client's problem.

Some CSOs have relationships with more persons of varying levels of influence in government through formal or personal networks, which contributed to some respondents having more access to mechanisms of participation. They had positive experiences of their organisations' views being heard and taken seriously and sometimes having impact on policy. Their initiatives were also more likely to receive government support in the form of resources, public shows of support and gaining connections to other government departments or influential persons.

Respondents emphasised the importance of building trust in these relationships over the long term so that the government is open to hearing their views. Nurturing trust may include regularly updating their government contacts about their work.

> 'Communication is key to everything. Sharing the relevant data, relevant findings, feedback and basically, keeping in close contact.' (R.3)

It also requires being strategic in choosing the content and style of communication, to avoid outright critique and sensitive issues to avoid a defensive reaction from the government.

> "…it's constantly trying to get them to understand, we're coming from a good place." (R.6)

Trust appears to mean that the CSOs will abide by the unspoken rules against harsh public critique and actions that could be perceived as challenging or subversive. This trust requires careful cultivation but is fragile and maintained only as long as the rules of engagement are followed.

Some attempts by CSOs to provide policy recommendations through these relationships had some success in subsequently gaining invitations to closed-door meetings and consultations to give their views in more detail. These meetings were unlikely to result in policy changes, although respondents were hopeful that changes might come in time, after some decision-makers were convinced of the need for future action.

Some CSOs initiate first contact by email, phone or rarely social media, with ministries and ministers responsible for an upcoming policy, or selected members of parliament who may be open to hearing their views. Although no examples were given of successfully impacting law or policy, there was some success in being invited to closed-door meetings or having the matter raised in Parliament, with hope for future change. For some, MPs from the opposition party

were more responsive, although they have no direct impact on policy because the ruling party holds 90% of seats.

3.3.3 New projects

There are instances where CSOs had the capacity to create small-scale programmes to address gaps, which was a resource-intensive way of gaining some autonomy over a programme by first creating, funding and operating them, before convincing government officials to support them. Some CSOs had some financial and employee resources to create new, small-scale programmes, although three respondents acknowledged resourcing constraints in expanding their programmes, and CSOs reported a lack of resources to innovate and implement their ideas. Two respondents received government support for these programmes during or after they were first trialled.. However, two respondents emphasised issues with funding that prevented more therapeutic groupwork programmes being run, which they viewed as essential to support and rehabilitation. One respondent observed that ground-up innovation was more common over a decade ago, when victim services was still nascent and before domestic violence CSOs had to meet more state-determined KPIs in exchange for government funding.

3.4 United Nations Convention national reporting process

While CSOs are expected to participate in the reporting process for UN Conventions such as CEDAW and CRPD, Singapore CSOs face multiple constraints in using this mechanism, as noted by both Committees (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 2024, 5; Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2022, 9):

> ‘The Committee is concerned about the way in which national legislation, and its practical application, infringes upon the freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association of persons with disabilities and their

representative organizations, and about reports of reprisals against and continuing pressure on civil society organizations for their advocacy work on the rights of persons with disabilities.'

UN committees expect to receive shadow reports from civil society on the government's performance on meeting their obligations and these reports are publicly available. However, out of substantiated fear of reprisal by the Singapore government, some shadow reports are filed privately. Some CSOs felt obligated to send their parallel reports to the government for comments ahead of time or did so to minimise the negative impact on their relationship with the government. CSOs retained discretion over their final report but may still face reprisal. Other CSOs were invited by the government to write shadow reports, which may then be more aligned with government perspectives, particularly those by government-funded SSAs.

3.5 Conclusion

While government efforts to promote cross-sector collaboration supports the policy implementation, CSOs are largely excluded from the agenda setting and policy formulation stages. The government lacks genuine engagement with the UN Conventions it has ratified, and CSOs from both sectors face reprisals for public government criticism. An analysis using frameworks of collaborative governance and participation reveal the deep power asymmetry that persists between government and CSOs, and incorporating an analysis of policy stages sheds further light on the true dynamics of collaboration.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANTS AND SYSTEM CONTEXT

To analyse collaborative governance and participation in an autocratic context like Singapore, the system context and starting conditions (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012, 5; Ansell and Gash 2008, 546) take precedence. There is stark inequality in power, resources and access which translate to problems with representativeness even if CSOs are included in the policy process. The relationship between the state and different types of CSOs must be taken into account in such a context where CSOs are not clearly GONGOs but are significantly under government control due to funding structures. Attention must be paid to these factors because they drastically alter the exposure of CSOs and individuals to risk, with consequences for the survival of the organisation or to an individual's job and livelihood, thereby influencing their decisions on whether to participate and which mechanisms to use.

While policymakers may actively engage CSOs in policymaking, CSOs frequently must initiate engagement in order to be included and must weigh several considerations in deciding whether to participate. Policymakers differ in the degree of receptiveness and type of reactions to CSOs' attempts to be involved in the policy process. CSOs may vary in their interest and willingness to engage with policymakers due to structural, organisational and personal factors. One key factor is trust, which is related to their level of vulnerability and exposure to risk from participation (Ansell et al. 2020, 572), which in turn can be affected by the nature and dynamics of the relationship between a CSO and the government, as well as the political climate as a whole. Another important factor is whether the CSO believes that their participation will have a real impact (Ansell and Gash 2008, 552). Other crucial factors are resource, capacity and the level of relationship building (Ansell et al. 2020, 572, 575).

In Singapore, representativeness in mechanisms of participation suffers in several ways, while participants also engage in self-censorship, affecting the responsiveness and justice of policies (Fung 2015, 513). For formal mechanisms like taskforces, the government generally selects CSOs and people they trust, who are aligned with their views and/or who are unlikely to challenge the government's direction. Two respondents used the words "co-opt" and "fawning" to describe the relationship between some CSOs and the government. People with more personal connections or credentials may be prioritised, while one respondent highlighted that large CSOs may have easier access to mechanisms, which reflects a power differential compared to smaller CSOs (Ansell et al. 2020, 573). CSOs are typically represented by their most high-ranking staff, some of whom are not engaged in direct services and who may filter out information received from their ground-level employees. Some CSOs are not fully representative of their service users, for instance in disability CSOs, and intersectional interests such as low-income women are less likely to be represented, as one respondent highlighted that the women's organisations are run by upper-middle-class women. Most domestic violence CSOs are more informed on downstream interventions as they provide services, leaving few CSOs advocating for upstream interventions.

The ability and willingness of each CSO to access participation mechanisms depends on their capacity, resources (Lister 2007, 444) incentives and risk appetite. If CSOs feel that their participation is tokenistic, they are less incentivised to engage (Ansell and Gash 2008, 552, 572). Capacity includes the ability to engage in policy thinking and research:

> "Social workers, we know so much about what goes on the ground, but we don't often use this in a way that can be useful for policy-makers. We don't translate it into language that should feed into other levels, either teaching or policy-making." *Dr Myrna Blake, a prominent Singapore social worker, quoted in 1995 (SWHF 2021)*

One participant highlighted that an understanding of human rights and the ability and willingness to connect individual problems to systemic, structural issues was low in the government and the general population. With critique a risky endeavour, multiple respondents raised the issue of risk appetites influencing the use of mechanisms such as UN Conventions.

Government officials may also lack the capacity for equal collaboration with CSOs, being more familiar with top-down modes of working. Inflexibility also hinders collaboration as there were instances of participants being excluded from closed-door meetings because requests for accommodations were not granted. Multiple respondents described the high level of sensitivity of the government towards critique, which they managed in part by presenting policy recommendations, which not all CSOs have the capacity to formulate, but this led to one respondent's critique being dismissed. Findings reflect that the government sees most CSOs as service contractors, instead of ensuring that "they have routes into decision making" (Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker 2006, 288).

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Existing frameworks on collaborative governance and participation are useful for analysing the dynamics of specific examples in a non-Western, non-democratic context like Singapore. However, they need to be supplemented with more emphasis on analysing the broader social, political, legal and economic environment (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012, 5) and power and resource asymmetries (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012, 5; Ansell and Gash 2008, 546), given that collaboration requires power-sharing, which is the antithesis of autocratic governments. Within mechanisms of participation, an analysis is needed of the policy stages in which non-government actors are involved, in order to ascertain the scope of their influence and the level of control that the government is willing to cede in the process of collaboration. This means that researchers need much more information in order to have a more accurate analysis of collaboration in less democratic contexts, but it is also more difficult to obtain that information given that respondents may fear reprisal.

Regrettably, the mechanisms of participation analysed in this thesis point towards the maintenance of the political status quo instead of progress towards democratic inclusion in Singapore. Multiple respondents cited serious gaps in policy in these areas, with limited outlets for feedback and low hopes for change in the medium term. The exclusion of CSOs in policymaking inevitably has negative impacts on how responsive and just policies are for disabled people, women victims of violence, and other marginalised groups, whose voices and experiences remain unheard in the policy process.

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ANNEX A: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could you tell me about some of your main areas of work or responsibilities?
2. Could you tell me a little about your experience participating in the various workgroups or taskforces?
    a. What were some of your areas of input and what were some of your hopes and goals?
    b. How did you feel about the process and outcome?
    c. If the convenor of any of these workgroups asked you for ways to improve these collaborations, would something come to mind? What would it be?
3. If you have participated in any other stakeholder collaboration meetings or initiatives, contribution of ad-hoc feedback, discussions or consultations with policymakers or stakeholders (e.g. other NGOs, police, courts and the medical system, etc.), could you tell me a little about some of these?
    a. Who was involved and what was the topic about?
    b. Who initiated this effort at collaboration?
    c. What was the input or expertise that you provided?
    d. What were some of your hopes and goals?
    e. What were some successes and challenges?
    f. What is your opinion about the outcome?
    g. Do you have any comments on how these engagements or collaborations were conducted?
    h. How do you think these engagements can be improved?
4. Were there other instances of cooperation with policymakers or government agencies that stood out to you?
5. What were some changes in the service or policy landscape for violence against women that you felt was helpful or effective? Did you have the opportunity to give input contributing to these changes?
6. What are some changes you would like to see in the services or policies relating to violence against women? Did you have the opportunity to give feedback about this to the relevant stakeholder?
7. If a donor had provided extra funding, manpower and resources, would there have been a new or existing programme or service you would have liked to develop or boost for the issue of family violence against women, and what might it look like?
8. If you had ten minutes with a policymaker who makes decisions on services or policies tackling violence against women, what would you like to tell them?
9. Is there anything else you would like me to know about this topic?

ANNEX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form

Study: Participatory Governance and Vulnerable Groups in Singapore

Before you decide to take part in this study it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take some time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. The researcher can be contacted if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take some time to decide whether you wish to take part in the research study.

1. Study Title

Participatory Governance and Vulnerable Groups in Singapore

2. Researcher, Affiliation, Duration and Funding

This thesis research project is conducted solely by Yee Suan Poon as part of a master's degree in public policy at Central European University, Austria.

Primary data collection through interviews will take place from April to May 2025. The thesis will be submitted in June 2025.

This research project does not receive funding from any source.

3. What is the purpose of this research?

This research study aims to explore the presence of collaborative and participatory forms of governance in Singapore through the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community agencies and community groups in the policy-making process. In particular, two policy issues are examined, tackling domestic violence against women and supporting the employment of persons with disabilities. The involvement of these stakeholders can include contributing information and expertise to the planning of laws and policies and implementing policies through programmes and service provision.

The literature on collaborative governance suggests that the inclusion of these stakeholders in policy-making is essential to provide on-the-ground experiences and insights to build effective policies and services for marginalised groups. This relationship between inclusion and policy effectiveness will be examined by evaluating the level of inclusion alongside the effectiveness of the relevant policies for these two vulnerable groups. The applicability of the Western collaborative governance framework will be evaluated in the Southeast Asian context of Singapore.

4. Voluntary Participation

Interviews with staff members or associated representatives will be conducted via video call to understand the role of their organisations and groups in forming and implementing policies and services. Interview respondents can decline to answer any of the interview questions.

Participation in the research is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time before or during the interview.

5. Participant Consent, Privacy and Confidentiality

Prior to the interview, participant consent will be obtained by signing the consent form at the end of this Participant Information Sheet. Interviews will be audio recorded.

Privacy and confidentiality will be strictly observed by ensuring that all interview data is securely stored and anonymised in the thesis. The names of interview participants and their organisations or community groups will be kept confidential. Similarly, any audio recordings and transcripts will be accessible only to the researcher Yee Suan. Audio recordings and transcripts will be anonymised and identified only by a code number. Participant names, organisations or affiliations corresponding to each code and the signed consent forms will be kept in a password-locked file that is stored only in a password-secured laptop. The information on participant names and affiliations, consent forms, audio recordings and transcripts will be used only for the purposes of this research and will be destroyed one year after the thesis is graded, by September 2026.

6. Use of Research Results

The interview data will be analysed and submitted as a master's thesis to Central European University, Austria. The data may also be used in future papers. All identifiable information will be excluded to ensure strict anonymity of the interview participants. To support the preservation and circulation of knowledge, master's theses are deposited in the Central European University Electronic Theses and Dissertations Collection, which provides online open access to the theses. Interview respondents will also receive a summary of the key findings with a copy of the thesis available on request. Findings from the research may be shared with other professionals and organisations for their learning.

7. Participation: Potential Risks and Disadvantages

Participation in the interviews may require participants to recall past experiences in their work on addressing violence against women and supporting persons with disabilities searching for employment. This may include negative experiences that may cause some discomfort to participants.

NGOs, community agencies and community groups are often aware of changes or improvements that are needed before these changes are made by policy-makers. These areas of improvement may be analysed in the thesis. Policy-makers may disagree with the opinions or suggestions made by interview respondents and in rare cases may penalise the respondents for sharing these views. Hence, respondents' anonymity will be strictly protected in the thesis. It is important to note that in a small country like Singapore, the list of organisations working on the relevant social issues of violence against women and employment of persons with disabilities is not a long list and it may be possible to guess at which organisations were interviewed. Hence, no information on the respondents' organisations or groups will be included in the thesis, aside from whether their work pertains to domestic violence or supporting persons with disabilities. For instance, any references made to unique programmes or services offered by the organisations will be removed.

8. Participation: Potential Benefits

There is no direct benefit to the interview participants. The potential benefit to others would be to contribute to research that could help organisations which are exploring ways to address social issues at the service or policy level through their valuable direct experience supporting vulnerable groups.

9. Ethical review of the study

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Public Policy's Ethical Research Committee at Central European University.

10. Contact for Further Information

The researcher, Yee Suan Poon can be contacted by email at: Poon_Yee-Suan@student.ceu.edu

CONSENT FORM

	Consent *(delete where necessary)*
I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet.	**Yes / No**
I have had the opportunity to ask questions and had them answered.	**Yes / No**
I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified (except as might be required by law).	**Yes / No**
I agree that data gathered in this study may be stored anonymously and securely.	**Yes / No**
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time until the end of the interview without giving a reason.	**Yes / No**
I agree to take part in this study.	**Yes / No**

Name of Participant	**Signature of Participant**	**Date**
Name of Researcher	**Signature of Researcher**	**Date**