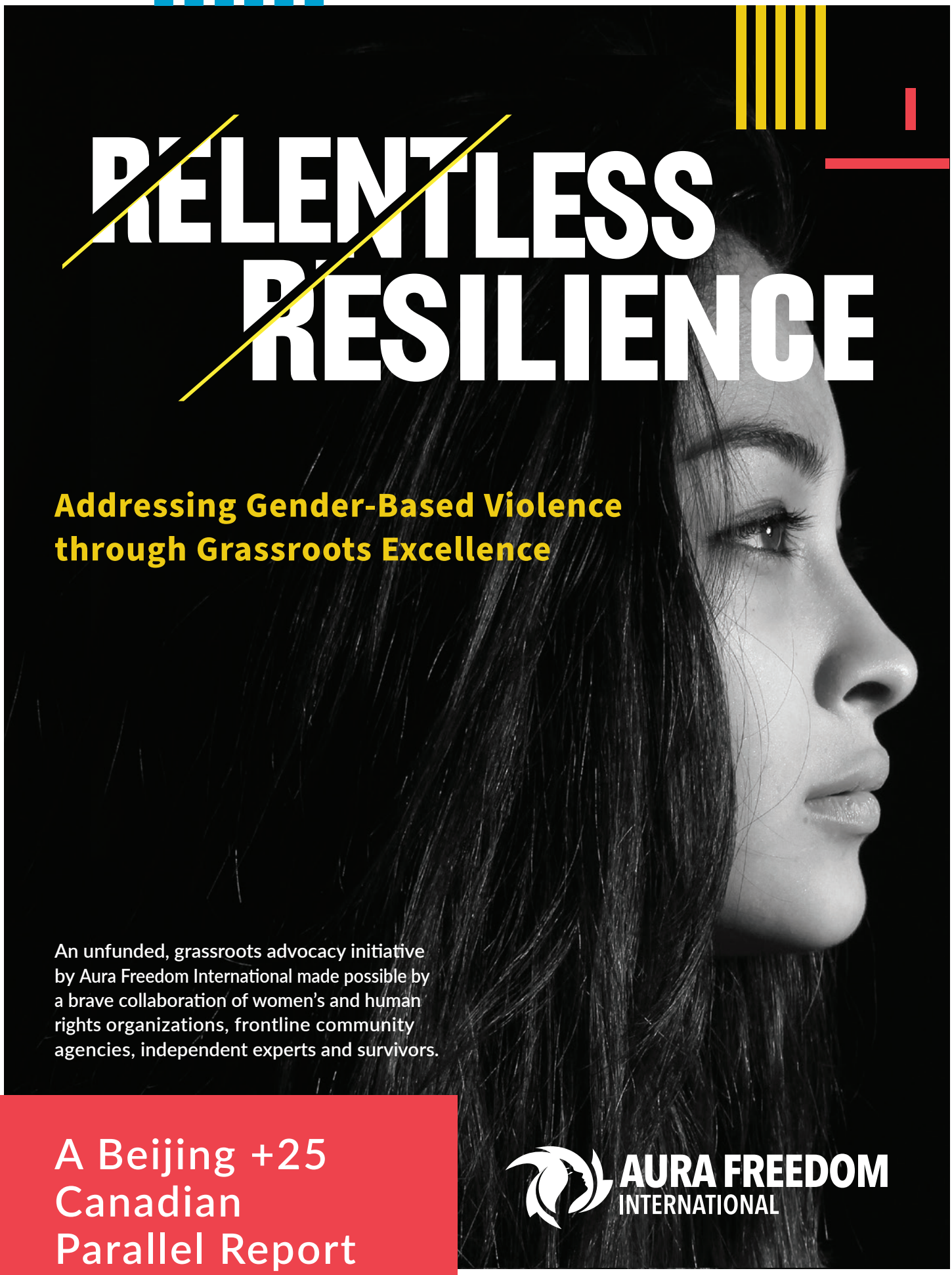
RELENTLESS RESILIENCE

Addressing Gender-Based Violence through Grassroots Excellence



An unfunded, grassroots advocacy initiative by Aura Freedom International made possible by a brave collaboration of women's and human rights organizations, frontline community agencies, independent experts and survivors.

A Beijing +25 Canadian Parallel Report

AURA FREEDOM INTERNATIONAL

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Freedom from violence for women and girls

AURA FREEDOM IS A GRASSROOTS, INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST ORGANIZATION WORKING IN CANADA AND INTERNATIONALLY TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THROUGH ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION.

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A Beijing +25 Canadian Parallel Report

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Aura Freedom would like to acknowledge the land upon which we work, which are the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, the Anishinabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, "Tkaronto" (Toronto) is still home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island. Aura Freedom is thankful for the opportunity to work toward the empowerment of women and girls on this territory.

DEDICATED TO THE GRASSROOTS, BRAVE AND RESILIENT AS ALWAYS.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge all of the frontline workers, grassroots organizers, activists, and survivors who contributed to this report with brilliant and passionate interviews. We respectfully and gratefully acknowledge all of your beautiful work to support women, girls and gender diverse people in Canada.

Relentless Resilience is by no means a complete look at every grassroots organization in Canada working tirelessly to end gender-based violence. On the contrary, this is the tip of the iceberg.

We would like to recognize all those organizations and individuals that wanted to contribute to our interviews but were unable to due to workloads and a lack of staff. This too, is part of the problem.

A special acknowledgement goes to Silmy Abdullah from the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario who developed a Special Addendum entitled "Racialized women, immigration and gender-based violence – A Beijing+25 Snapshot", which was specifically developed for Aura Freedom's Relentless Resilience Beijing +25 Parallel Report. This Special Addendum can be found at the end of this report.

THANK YOU

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Contents

pg 5
Foreword, Considerations, Methodology

pg 6
Introduction

pg 8
Section 1
Intimate Partner Violence

pg 16
Section 2
Femicide

pg 20
Section 3
Sexual Violence

pg 28
Section 4
Human Trafficking for the Purposes of Sexual Exploitation

pg 38
Section 5
Forced Marriage/ Child Marriage

pg 42
Section 6
Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting

pg 44
Section 7
Indigenous Women and Girls

pg 52
Section 8
Immigrant, Refugee and Non-Status women and Girls

pg 58
Section 9
Women Migrant Workers

pg 62
Section 10
Women in Conflict With the Law

pg 68
Section 11
Trans Women and Gender Non-Binary Folk

pg 74
Section 12
Women and Girls Living with Disabilities

pg 76
Section 13
Survivors of Wartime Sexual Violence Living in Canada

pg 78
Conclusion

pg 81
Gender-Based Violence In Canada Across The Sustainable Development Goals

pg 84
Works Cited

pg 94
Special Addendum:
Racialized women, immigration and gender-based violence – A Beijing+25 Snapshot - by the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)

FOREWORD

Relentless Resilience is a Beijing +25 Parallel Report that calls for holistic change to address the root causes of gender-based violence (gender inequity, systemic racism, colonialism, ableism, trans/homophobia, capitalism, etc.) and societal power imbalances that uphold the status quo.

Through interviews with frontline social workers and survivor stories from grassroots organizations in the City of Toronto, Canada, this report will demonstrate how gender-based violence is impacting all 12 Areas of Critical Concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and hindering the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Relentless Resilience can be considered a point of reference for advocacy efforts that call for the eradication of gender-based violence throughout the entire year of Beijing +25, including CSW64 and the Generation Equality Forum taking place in Mexico and France in 2020 and beyond.

Our guiding framework is rooted in human rights activism, grassroots excellence, trauma and, of course, resilience. This report aims to highlight the most marginalized women and girls in Canada and the resiliency of them in response to violence, oppression, and indifference.

CONSIDERATIONS

Relentless Resilience is by no means a complete picture of every organization or grassroots group addressing gender-based violence in Canada, but a snapshot of our area of the country – Toronto – and some of the groups and people working here. As a non-funded project undertaken by Aura Freedom, we agreed to limit our area of interest to Toronto, while recognizing the increased struggles of women, girls, and gender diverse people living in rural and remote areas of Ontario and Canada. Relentless Resilience represents diverse views and opinions of women's rights and human rights organizations in Canada and all contributors participated of their own free will.

We recognize that not all forms of gender-based violence, nor all marginalized groups of women, are analyzed in this report due to the absence of funding and the limitations in staff. We have strived and will continue to strive to include as many voices as our capacity permits. For example, violence against the Girl Child and against elderly women are not focuses of this report. These and other important topics require more attention, integrity, and time than what we were able to provide at this time and in this time frame.

METHODOLOGY

Relentless Resilience is a combination of literature review, expert testimony and frontline accounts from survivors of gender-based violence and support workers. It is a mix of activism, academia, art, and storytelling with a focus on grassroots organizations. Our partners and contributors from across Toronto have indulged us with data, written contributions, art, and passionate conversations that paint a picture of how gender-based violence is affecting every single aspect of Canadian life.

We also conducted statistical data collection, policy reviews, and quantitative data mining from numerous reputable resources. Often, our attempts at data mining reminded us of a stark reality: a lack of research into gender-based violence and resiliency-building strategies to support survivors.

And while data collection was conducted to support the expert testimonies and lived experience of our partners, it remains a secondary part of the report. Our primary indicator of the status of women and girls in Canada are the accounts of grassroots women's organizations. It is only through listening to the ones with their 'noses to the ground' that we can see the full picture.

If anything is to be taken away from this report, it is the voice of The Grassroots.

Content Warning

The following report contains subject matter that some readers may find distressing, including descriptions of gender-based violence and descriptive experiences of sexism, racism, and transphobia. Take care of yourself when reading. Self-care, love, bravery, and resiliency to all.

While Aura Freedom prefers the term survivor when referencing women who have experienced violence, the word victim can be found in this report when referencing data or police activity.

INTRODUCTION

Cheyenne Santana Marie Fox, 20, was found dead at the bottom of a Toronto high-rise on April 25, 2013, having plunged from the 24th floor. She was the mother of a young son. In the hours preceding her death, there were three 911 calls to the police (CBC, 2017). Despite these calls and other evidence from the day's events, Toronto police initially found there was no evidence of criminal activity in her death. Cheyenne's father, John Fox Sr., strongly believes she was murdered. Her case remains open.

On January 22nd, 2020, Eustachio Gallese brutally murdered 22-year-old Marylène Levesque, a Canadian sex worker, in a Quebec City hotel room. Gallese, who had been on day parole since March 2019, had been allowed to meet women "only for the purpose of responding to [his] sexual needs." In 2006, Gallese had been sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole for 15 years for the second-degree murder of his partner Chantale Deschênes. According to police documents, he struck her on the head with a hammer and stabbed her repeatedly in response to her decision to leave him. Back in 1997, Gallese had also been convicted for assault against a previous partner.



Let's recap:

An Indigenous woman falls 24 stories from a Toronto high-rise following several calls to 911 and the Police initially determine there was no evidence of criminal activity in her death.

A violent man convicted of assault and murder was granted day parole to satisfy his 'sexual needs' by parole board members, putting his need for sex before the safety and the human rights of the women in the local community. He then murdered another innocent woman.

This is Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

This is femicide.

This is gender-based violence in Canada.

I never intended to start our report in this way, but there is no gentle way to introduce the topic of gender-based violence because, well, it is not gentle.

We can't wait any longer.

Gender-based violence is impacting families, communities and entire countries. While heads of state convene to discuss struggling economies, migration, poverty, disease, and climate change, we The Grassroots know that the eradication of gender-based violence and the empowerment of women and girls can bring increased wealth, health, peace and climate justice to our communities.

We have known this for a long time.

We have said it many times.

We are saying it again now, as we ring in Beijing +25.

We have heard Canadian leaders and decision-makers say that empowering women can change Canada, and the world, for the better.

This is true.

But it's important to recognize that to truly and fully empower all women, we must first eradicate the violence against them.

Indigenous women and girls, women and girls of colour, newcomer and immigrant women, disabled women, trans women, women living in poverty, women in rural areas, and other women at the intersections of gender, race, class, and ability are the most at risk and the most in need of support.

In 2017, the Government of Canada released its Gender-based Violence Strategy, It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence, followed by a GBV Knowledge Centre in 2018. The Strategy is currently a work-in-progress with many initiatives yet to be announced. We applaud these and other efforts, including a gender-balanced federal cabinet and the transformation of the Status of Women Canada into an official government department overseen by the Minister for Women and Gender Equality.

Indeed, efforts have been and continue to be made in Canada regarding the well-being of women and girls, both in our own country and around the world.

What's missing, however, is a sense of urgency.

A concrete plan of action.

We can't wait any longer.

Yes, it's time.

Natural devastation, disease, and war continue to consume the focus of international governments and the media, but we The Grassroots know that there is an ongoing State of Emergency in Canada and worldwide: gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is fracturing families and communities. It is disrupting education. It is creating intergenerational trauma and addiction. It is limiting economic empowerment and perpetuating poverty. It is destroying the planet.

And, sadly, it is robbing us all of infinite talent, opportunity, and love.

Through interviews with frontline social workers and survivor stories from grassroots organizations in the City of Toronto, Canada, this report will demonstrate how gender-based violence is impacting all 12 Areas of Critical Concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and hindering the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Our interviewees are not the usual suspects. On the contrary, many of them are unlikely community activists and organizations quietly doing their work, out of the spotlight and under the radar. Many of them, like Aura Freedom, are unfunded. All of them are overworked, understaffed and facing difficult times in the feminist movement.

Yet, every day, these grassroots groups show up and deliver programming through Relentless Resilience and foster that same Relentless Resilience in those they support. This report will highlight some of those programs and individuals that are filling the gaps left behind by government policies, a lack of funding and, if we are completely honest, indifference.

And we are honest.

Because we have to be.

Through grassroots accounts rooted in activism, it will become plain to see that if women and girls continue to experience violence, our world will never flourish. It ultimately won't matter how much you invest in improving the economy, infrastructure or climate change because they are all connected to women.

- The murders and disappearances of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people in Canada have amounted to genocide.
- On any given night in Canada, more than 6000 women and children sleep in shelters because it isn't safe at home.
- 80% of Canadians believe the next generation of women is just as or more likely to experience sexual assault

This, 25 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was created.

I didn't enjoy every minute of writing this report. Certainly, there were many moments of solidarity and joy, but there were many others of exhaustion, anger, and hopelessness.

Any person working to address gender-based violence has fallen to their knees at some point and asked, "Is anything changing?" "Why do I bother?"

But then, they get back up.

Relentless Resilience.

The only way forward is to go back to the beginning.

To how we got here.

To the root causes of violence and exploitation: patriarchy, gender inequality, systemic racism, colonialism, homo/transphobia, ableism, classism, capitalism.

When you break a woman down, you break down her family and entire community.

The only way forward is for all of us, in Canada and around the world, to invest in the way each child is treated, taught, protected and valued equally from day one.

Equality is everything.

01 intimate partner violence (IPV)

"It is not the bruises on the body that hurt.
It is the wounds of the heart and the scars on the mind."
– Aisha Mirza

THE SITUATION

If you spend a day in a women's shelter anywhere in Canada, you will instantly see just how urgent the matter of intimate partner violence is.

Yes, change is happening.

But, it isn't happening fast enough.

In fact, on any given night in Canada, about 300 women and children are turned away because shelters are already full (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2016).

According to the Government of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018: 2),

- There were 99,000+ victims of IPV violence aged 15 - 89 in 2018, representing about 30% of all victims of police-reported violent crime.
- 79% of IPV were women.
- Women in rural areas were twice as likely to experience IPV compared to their urban counterparts.

IPV comes in many forms - it ranges from verbal and/or emotional abuse, such as name-calling, to repeated physical or sexual assaults and femicide. IPV often happens gradually, with violence escalating and becoming more frequent over time. A full definition, from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) in the United States, is as follows:

"Intimate partner violence is one of the most common forms of violence against women and includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and controlling behaviours by an intimate partner. Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs in all settings and among all socio-economic, religious and cultural groups. The overwhelming global burden of IPV is borne by women. Although women can be violent in relationships with men, often in self-defence, and violence sometimes occurs in same-sex partnerships, the most common perpetrators of violence against women are male intimate partners or ex-partners." (CDCP, 2018).

IPV is a public health issue, but is rarely addressed in a holistic manner within the health sector itself. IPV leads to significantly poorer general health, mental health, and quality of life. Women with both recent IPV and IPV experience over 12 months ago have the poorest health (Wathen, MacGregor, MacQuarrie, 2018). 64% of women who have experienced IPV exhibit symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Perez, Johnson, Vaile Wright, 2012). Despite this, survivors and frontline workers have continuously expressed concern over a lack of awareness of IPV among healthcare professionals and a lack of trauma-informed service providers. In the context of trauma and resilience, one can see that it has far-reaching consequences on not only the victim, but also on families, communities, and society at large.

The Beijing Declaration states the urgency to combat violence against women repeatedly, and the importance education plays in doing so - "gender-sensitive training to public officials, including police officers, medical personnel, social workers, migrant worker advocates, etc." (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995: 96)

As the frontline interviews below will outline, police sensitivity and training is lacking in Canada, resulting in fatal consequences for women and their children.

Education aimed at preventing intimate partner violence remains an enormous gap in Canada. NGOs focused on advocating and educating people on violence remain underfunded and over-worked in Canada. Oftentimes, awareness, education, and activism are at the bottom of the list, as services for survivors take funding precedence. While survivors rightfully require support, continuing on this way will only see Canada chasing its tail while doing 'damage control' as opposed to preventing violence in the first place.

The Canadian Federal Gender-based Violence Strategy committed over $80 million in 2017-2018 to more than 80 projects aiming to prevent gender-based violence and support survivors and their families (Government of Canada, 2019: 4). Although a commendable effort, the amount of funding suggests that it is not enough for all of Canada, and not enough to address the root causes of IPV in order to prevent it. Adequate measures to prevent IPV would mean a complete overhaul of the Canadian education system and school curricula, and $80 million just isn't enough.

Housing and Paid Domestic Leave

For an analysis of Canada's 2017 National Housing Strategy in relation to gender-based violence and a look at paid domestic leave in Canada, please see a Special Addendum attached to this report from our partners at the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO) entitled: "Racialized women, immigration and gender-based violence – A Beijing+25 Snapshot", which was specifically developed for Aura Freedom's Relentless Resilience Beijing +25 Parallel Report.



Initmate Partner Violence (IPV)

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01

intimate partner violence

THE RESILIENCE

Women's Habitat

I sat down with nine shelter staff members of Women's Habitat, a Toronto women's shelter offering safe emergency housing for women and their children as well as counselling and support groups. They preferred their names not to be shared.

Of all the interviews conducted for this report, this room was the most unapologetic. When we started discussing the systemic issues facing the women and children in the shelter, the anger in the air was palpable.

And they were honest. Many days, they told me, they are just trying to keep their heads above water. Finding time for innovative programs and activism is challenging. They love their jobs and they are passionate, but they are…tired.

But, they are also Relentlessly Resilient.

This is what keeps them going.

"Women are dying," says one of the staff members.

We all nod in agreement.

"And so are their children," says another. "The people who make the decisions need to realize that children are used as a pawn and a lot of the times. They're used as a pawn and killed by their fathers just to get back at Mom, and I think that needs to be believed. I think that needs to be looked at. Children are murdered."

Everyone's shoulders slump.

Children are murdered.

The rage quickly turns to sadness. It doesn't matter how long you do this work.

"And, it's thought about for the first couple of days afterward and then there's never any talk about why or how it is impacted by the legal system or any of the other systems and that part frustrates the hell out of me. … They just don't want to admit it because then you'd have to say we're part of this, right? Yeah, we're part of not changing the legal system. And the court forced her to meet him. This doesn't just happen once, this happens multiple times."

Another staff member adds a disturbing detail, "And the women say it. They will tell the police: 'He's going to hurt my child. My child doesn't want to go there.' But no. We have to follow the rules. And then how does that mother ever forgive herself for sending her child to see him? She won't."

"And then the courts won't talk about why she was forced to let him see that child," adds her colleague. "But that's exactly why it happened."

They discuss a woman currently staying at the shelter whose child does not want to visit their father because he is violent; but if she doesn't send him, she will be held in contempt of court.

Who is protecting this mother and child? Because the system sure as hell isn't.

Then we see the Amber Alerts.

To them, the main issues are gender inequality, patriarchy, a lack of training and education in the justice system and a lack of affordable housing for women in Toronto.

This is the first of many mentions of the lack of affordable housing in Toronto in this report. Surely, we know that this isn't only an issue in Toronto. Grassroots groups around the world have witnessed women bear the brunt of unstable housing and poverty for a long time.

"I mean, you have a length of stay in the emergency shelter and generally there is no way you are going to secure any type of safe housing within that time frame. So I believe that is a huge gap for future stability," says one of the staff members.

They explain that the Portable Housing Benefit doesn't work for women in Toronto, who are facing some of the highest rent costs in Canada. The Portable Housing Benefit for the Special Priority Program Housing Category "is a financial benefit payable to the applicant to help pay rent," according to the City of Toronto website. To apply, survivors must have been approved for the Survivors of Domestic Abuse or Human Trafficking Special Priority Housing Category by Housing Connections.

"We said no to that. We, as a sector, were brought to the table with Housing from the Province (of Ontario) and said that Portable Housing was a bad idea … And they pushed it forward. And it's like, you're asking us for our opinions and expertise and then you ignore it."

"Because for our women (the benefit) is not enough, it's not sustainable. It's not enough in Toronto and (if they take the benefit), they are kicked off the central list for subsidized housing, which is more sustainable for them."

When writing applications to the Special Priority Housing Program, which provides housing in Toronto to survivors of intimate partner violence and human trafficking on a priority basis, survivors are requested to obtain letters of support from frontline agencies. These applications require the abuse to be documented and 'the story' explained.

"We have to add so many details; sometimes a woman in that stage of her life doesn't want to share it all with us…what actually happened," says one Women's Habitat staff member. "Which makes it difficult for us to write a very convincing advocacy letter and then (the application) could be refused."

I've been there. It seems that the more horrible the story, the better a chance a survivor has in obtaining support. This is one example of many in the justice system that perpetuates a very patriarchal (and problematic) 'victim narrative'. 'How scared were you? How damaging was the violence? If it were so bad, then why does he have intimate photos of you on his phone?' Intimate partner violence is always damaging and survivors deal with their trauma in very different ways. Moreover, sometimes they just aren't ready to tell you everything when it is required of them.

"And because women don't have affordable housing, a lot of them get into bad relationships. So they are in a cycle. 'Oh this guy is offering me a place to stay, I'd rather take that than live in my car'. Women (have to make) desperate choices. To survive."

One staff member makes another connection, "There is also the pressure on us because then we're being told by our Ministry that we need to move women on. We're also having calls from women whose lives are in danger (and) we have to say no to them because we have women staying longer than they need to - because they have nowhere to go! So women are still out there, whose lives are in immediate danger. We are put in this position where we have to move women on when we know she is not going to the best place. So, she is going to a homeless shelter because we need to free up space and then that puts us in the position of the oppressor."

"Setting them up for sexual exploitation."

"Absolutely."

What kind of message can we,The Grassroots, possibly decipher from this?

Women just don't matter enough.

They're just not that into us.

If women mattered enough, then gender-based violence would be seen as the National Emergency that it is, making the women and children fleeing the violence 'IDPs' (Internally Displaced Persons). It is essentially the same thing. When women and their children are fleeing violence, they are, by definition, being displaced internally in their own countries. So, where is the emergency housing?

"And then it causes all of us … to have really crappy feelings. No one got into this work to do any of this. So then we become the problem."

The conversation turns to frontline worker burnout.

"And sometimes you feel like your hands are tied because it's not just us who can make the change. Even though we do a lot and we are proud of what we do, there is a need for systemic change for our job to not be as challenging."

This work is hard. Nobody does it unless they give a damn.

Yet, frontline workers are rarely compensated enough or even recognized for the work they do. While CEOs of tech companies are applauded for their innovations and millionaires are seen as role models, the brilliant individuals working tirelessly and relentlessly for human rights have low salaries or are expected to work as volunteers.

How many times are non-profit organizations told that we cannot include salaries as expenses on grant proposals?

Almost every single time.

Who do they think keeps these organizations afloat? Who does the advocacy? Who counsels the girl who was just raped? Who drives the trafficking survivor to change her sim card? Are they not worthy of at least a mention in a budget?

We have it all wrong.

The group calls for faster trials for intimate partner violence cases, citing that women and children are forced to spend 2 or 3 years of their lives focused on these very traumatic events and it's affecting their mental health. Victim blaming, they say, is still a cornerstone of the justice system, which is why they call for more women-identifying judges on cases of violence against women and training for police, Crown attorneys, judges and everyone else involved.

"We make our volunteers go through more training than them!" exclaimed one of the women.

She's right. We do.

01

intimate partner violence

Yet, in the justice system, we continue to hear questions like: 'Why did this happen?' 'What did you do to provoke him?' 'It says here that you hit him, too.'

The group starts to discuss a disturbing pattern of violent men calling the police before the woman does to escape being charged or to jeopardize her future, or women calling the police to report domestic violence, only to end up being arrested themselves because they fought back.

"He'll rip his shirt, scratch himself and call the police; they walk in and she's arrested and charged," said one staff member.

Adding insult to her injury.

Another interesting observation the group made was how gender-based violence in marriage or common-law relationships was considered less severe than gender-based violence outside of intimate relationships, pointing to that same patriarchal view of women. We all nod in agreement as we had all seen this happen and there is research proving so.

"There's a very different way that those cases are handled," says one staff member. "There will be different outcomes in those cases. And most of the time the cases that are not domestic are looking at double digits for sentencing. For domestic, you would be lucky to get a conviction."

Apparently, marriage legitimizes violence.

"The real systemic issue is how we are not valued. Women, racialized women, transgender folks…we are not valued, and that's the truth. It's a systemic issue."

Yes, it is.

When asked about the resilience of the women they support, the room perked up.

It was beautiful to see.

"I'm going to talk about a lawyer who came here to meet a client," says one staff member. "A family lawyer. She said she was here (in the shelter) when she was a child and hated the fact that she was forced to go visit with her father, who was the abuser. And she (said) 'When I grow up, I'm going to be a lawyer so no other child should be put into this position'. She had a really bad experience in the court system and that's what made her choose to be a lawyer eventually. She's worked with a lot of our clients."

"Another woman here had been trafficked (and) was forced into trafficking other women. She is great now. She even came back to see us and we were like, 'That's right there why we do what we do!' That's pure resilience in the face of the worst adversity."

What was different in her case?

"You know, the CAS (Children's Aid Society) worker had a big impact. Because this situation could have gone the other way; she could have said 'You're not good enough' and taken the child from her. But the CAS worker supported her even after she moved out of the shelter. She would even take her grocery shopping. So I think CAS workers could have a big impact on a woman making it or not."

Listen to The Grassroots.

Someone in the group then makes a suggestion and it's not the first time I've heard (or thought) about it.

"When there is domestic violence and there are children, the police are called and CAS is called, right? CAS would say you either leave or we'll take your child."

All nod in agreement.

"Why does the woman have to leave her home with her children and go to a shelter while he is allowed to enjoy the home that they built together. Why is that? Why don't you remove him and make sure he doesn't come back to the home?"

There is not a lot of available research on the impact of this type of policy, but some countries have seen success. In 1994, the Federal Government of Austria developed a clear mandate to 'protect victims of violence' by permitting the survivors to remain in the home and forcing the perpetrators to leave, instead. The Austrian Protection Against Violence Bill, Article 8.2 also permitted public authorities to interfere with the privacy of family 'if the freedom, health or life of a person is threatened'. The law is said to protect women as they are more likely to experience violence but bars anyone who is a perpetrator of violence from entering the home. The Austrian model has been recognized as a "good practice in combating and eliminating violence against women" and Iceland has since adopted the same policy.

As I sat at Women's Habitat, I couldn't help but think back to the time I spent in the shelter system as a child with my mother and brother. I remember having to be back at a certain time, or they would have given our beds away - a policy that no longer exists today. I remember the smell of the kitchen. It didn't smell like our cooking. It was not a happy time. Lots of confusion. All I knew was that my mother was our umbrella during that 'storm' and I needed to be anywhere that she was. And now, I wonder how things would have been different if we had been allowed to stay in our home with my mother, sleep in our own beds and keep attending the same school. Maybe the trauma that we experienced from being displaced wouldn't have affected our lives so much.

The Women's Habitat team's final calls to action are intersectional education and awareness that address the systemic issues of violence against women and girls and prevent violence for future generations. They also call upon perpetrators of violence to be held accountable and for non-violent men to do their part in being part of the change.

"The perpetrators of violence are overwhelmingly men. And until men stop abusing women, we are always going to have a job. And that's unfortunate," says one of the workers.

"There's the education piece too," says another. "Our organization is now realizing we have to take some responsibility for how young boys learn about relationships. So, there's a Boys' Group starting and I think that's a huge shift that has to happen across this sector."

I have mixed feelings about this.

Of course, we must engage with men and boys to eradicate gender-based violence; it is a crucial part of any plan or strategy. Indeed, Aura Freedom's youth team facilitates workshops that engage young men and boys regularly and we have launched campaigns targeting men to step up as allies.

However.

Gender-based violence is everyone's issue. It's a men's issue, too, seeing as most of the perpetrators of gender-based violence are men. So, why are women's organizations, who are already stretched for funding and experiencing staff burnout, taking on this responsibility without being compensated and supported for it?

Why is that happening and how is it sustainable?

Women's and human rights organizations require funding and dedicated staff members to implement these activities to ensure that the services they offer to survivors are not impacted.

We need a collective effort to end the violence, and therefore we need more organizations like White Ribbon stepping up to do this work and engage men alongside women's and human rights organizations. We also need institutions – health, justice, education, etc. - implementing these activities into their own strategies. It is the only way forward.

We'll hear from White Ribbon later in this report.

"All I knew was that my mother was our umbrella during that 'storm' and I needed to be anywhere that she was. And now, I wonder how things would have been different if we had been allowed to stay in our home with my mother, sleep in our own beds and keep attending the same school. Maybe the trauma that we experienced from being displaced wouldn't have affected our lives so much."

Marissa, Aura Freedom



Find Help/211

If you live in the province of Ontario, at some point you might have dialled 211 for information on community services. Find Help/211 provides 'public access to information about community and social services' through helplines, web directories, and other tools." Find Help and Aura Freedom have collaborated on several initiatives addressing gender-based violence and human trafficking in Toronto. They are a true community partner and have even granted Aura Freedom free access to training space on many occasions.

Madhu Bector is a Community Resource Specialist at Find Help and has worked in social services for over 35 years, including decades in domestic violence shelters. She sees a definite increase in the number of women coming forward to report abuse and get support, crediting education and awareness. She also says that Canada has come a long way and the women's shelter system is easier to navigate these days. Workers also have more education and training then they did in the 1980s. However, things are far from perfect.

"I mean, things are getting better, but it's still a long way off," says Madhu.

Madhu has a calm and confident energy that only comes with years of experience. As someone who refers women experiencing violence to social services every day, the gaps are constantly staring in her face.

Counselling for survivors.

Financial support for survivors.

Patriarchy.

Racism.

Housing.

"The waitlist (for housing) is up to 20 years in some cases. What am I going to tell a woman who calls me with four kids? That she's going to be homeless on the streets? Her kids will be all grown up and moved out before that she gets the house."

Not to mention the lack of hope one must feel when hearing a wait time as long as 20 years. Yet, women are still asked, "Why did you go back?"

For counselling, Madhu says wait times can be anywhere from three weeks to six months or more, and the effects of the unaddressed trauma are devastating to women and their families.

Carrie Moody is the Director of Strategic Solutions at Find Help and highlights the connection between gender-based violence and poverty, stating that the violence is perpetuating poverty and creating cycles. Carrie is always looking for ways to highlight the most marginalized women; those most in need of support.

Both Madhu and Carrie share how race is impacting the way services are delivered and who has access to them, including government benefits like the ODSP and OW. They say that staff often have to "fight to make people understand" the gravity of certain cases and advocate more for racialized women to receive support than those who are not racialized.

Daily activism.

Madhu and Carrie both agree that education and awareness are needed to eradicate the violence, with a focus on gender inequality, patriarchy, and systemic racism. They also identified a need for increased police training on anti-oppression, gender-based violence, and trauma when addressing gender-based violence. Calling the police is complicated enough for survivors of gender-based violence, let alone women and gender non-binary individuals living at the intersections of gender, race, religion, class, and ability.

"Also, when people come from other countries and are newcomers, they're really scared of the police because they've come from states where the police were brutal. … They don't trust the police and people have to get that."

It's up to Toronto and Canada to prove to its residents, citizens and even non-status individuals that the police exist to serve and protect them when needed.

In 2018 and 2019, Aura Freedom International surveyed 1000 youth from different communities in Toronto through our Peer Prevention Project, an educational program for youth that works to prevent gender-based violence and human trafficking in the city. Virtually half of the young people surveyed, 44% to be exact, said that they were unsure or did not believe the police existed to help them.

It would be safe to assume then, that 44% of these youth would not call the police if they experienced violence.

We can, and must, do better than this.

If unaddressed, the emotional and psychological effects of gender-based violence can hinder women and their families from living healthy and vibrant lives. In one way or another, Canada will eventually pay for that 20-year housing waiting list.

According to a Justice Canada study, 'Canadians collectively spend $7.4 billion (annually) to deal with the aftermath of spousal violence alone' (Zhang et al. 2013).

I find it horrible that we have to put a price tag on gender-based violence. The feminist movement has done this quite a lot in recent years in an attempt to entice world leaders to invest in the empowerment of women and girls.

"Educate girls and increase your GDP by X percent."

"Provide access to safe abortion and save X amount of dollars on healthcare and unemployment."

I resent that we have to do this.

But, we're all out of tricks.

Gender-based violence is everyone's issue. It's a men's issue, too, seeing as most of the perpetrators of gender-based violence are men. So, why are women's organizations, who are already stretched for funding and experiencing staff burnout, taking on this responsibility without being compensated and supported for it?



02 femicide

"Men are afraid that women will laugh at them.
Women are afraid that men will kill them." – **Margaret Atwood**

THE SITUATION

In Canada, Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be murdered than any other women in Canada. For a look at Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), see Section 7.

The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability's (CFOJA) recent report titled, #CallItFemicide (2019) states that:

- A total of 118 women and girls were killed by violence in Canada in 2019. On average, every three days one woman or girl is killed in Canada (CFOJA, 2019: 7).
- Where victim-accused relationships are known, 57% of primary victims shared current or former relationships with the accused – referred to as intimate partner femicide (Ibid.). Focusing on the primary accused, 87% were male.
- Women and girls continue to be in the greatest danger in their home as more than half (55%) are killed in their own home or the home they shared with the accused (CFOJA, 2019: 8).
- Nine out of every ten women killed had at least one child (CFOJA, 2019: 8).
- When examining the rate at which women and girls are killed in Canada, it is higher than in other countries including Australia, Austria, Finland, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (UNODC, 2018: 14).

On April 23, 2018, a then 25-year-old Alex Minassian drove a rented van along Toronto's busy Yonge Street in North York's business district, deliberately targeting and running over women pedestrians, ultimately killing 10 people and injuring 16, some critically.

Just before the murders took place, Minassian's Facebook page featured a post praising the so-called "incel" movement and California mass-killer and misogynist, Elliot Rodger.

Incel, or "involuntarily celibate," is a misogynist online culture of men who are unable to find romantic or sexual partners and believe sex to be a basic human right. They blame women for their celibacy and sometimes advocate rape. Following what is now known to Torontonians as The Van Attack, members of the incel community praised Alex's carnage, calling for similar action and saying "it's now or never."

The CFOJA is currently the only Canadian initiative responding to the UN call to establish femicide observatories to more comprehensively document gender-related killings of women and girls, or 'femicide' - a term that recognizes the fact that women and girls continue to be victimized and killed because of their gender in Canada, and globally (CFOJA, 2019).

The CFOJA has detailed five gender-related motives/indicators for femicide: misogyny, sexual violence, coercive-controlling behaviours, separation, and over-kill. Women and girls worldwide face the greatest danger in their homes and from men with whom they share intimate or familial relationships - a fact highlighted by a 2018 report released by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime on gender-related killings of women and girls (UNODC, 2018).

In Canada, a woman or girl is killed by a male relative or partner every five days (Dawson et al., 2019).

It is extremely important to recognize the gender-related aspects of killings of women and girls and to highlight the stark differences in their characteristics and contexts compared to the killings of men and boys (CFOJA, 2019).

In the context of sexual femicide, a significant proportion of women and girls (42%) are killed by perpetrators with whom they shared distant or no relationships at all (CFOJA, 2019: 11). These deaths

Femicide is real. It's happening in Canada. Ignoring this does more harm than good.



were often brutal, sexualized violence, and demonstrated misogynist attitudes and behaviours - degradation, humiliation, public exposure of sexual nature, the abandonment of bodies, etc. (Ibid.).

Femicide is the most violent manifestation of misogyny against women and girls - it is the ultimate control of women's and girls' bodies, to control their fate and, ultimately, their death. These murders are not the result of the actions of "madmen"; many of them are calculated acts of misogyny deeply rooted in patriarchy and gender inequality.

Enacting policies and legislation that not only recognize femicide as a crime but work towards eliminating the root causes of femicide, such as misogyny and patriarchy, is extremely important in eradicating different forms of gender-based violence. Global findings show that women and girls continue to bear the largest burden of sex- and gender-based violence and lethal victimization (UNODC, 2018). This is directly attributed to the historical and ongoing impact of patriarchal social structures, entrenched gender stereotypes and related inequalities (UNODC, 2018).

With regards to the Canadian government's view, it is clearly stated in their National Report for Beijing+25 (2019) in an easily overlooked footnote and the fact that they continuously use the term 'female homicide' to hint at femicide:

"[The term] femicide is not used in Canada as this is not a concept recognized by Canadian criminal law and there is no offence of "femicide" in the Criminal Code. Creating a specific category of murder based on the targeted gender of the victim would be highly problematic as there is often no evidence of the motive and it is generally not relevant to criminal liability" (71).

Disconnecting misogyny from the murders of women and girls is problematic and troubling. Recognition of this extreme form of gender-based violence is the first step forward to addressing it.

Femicide is real.

It's happening in Canada.

Ignoring this does more harm than good.



Painting by **Pru Girme** - Toronto Queer artist and photographer

02

femicide

THE RESILIENCE

Deborah Sinclair

Deborah Sinclair is a social worker in independent practice in Toronto. Throughout her career in human rights, public health prevention, and social justice work, Deborah has worked as a clinician, writer, speaker, trainer, researcher, policy advisor, and expert witness. She currently has a clinical practice in Toronto, specializing in work with trauma survivors and their families, as well as professionals and advocates who suffer the effects of complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Vicarious Trauma and Burnout.

In January 2003, she was appointed to the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRC), an expert advisory committee of the Ontario Chief Coroner's office. The DVDRC is Canada's first death review committee and has served as a model for other provinces to encourage the development of a national strategy to end intimate femicide. She has served as an expert witness in more than fifty court cases.

I think her career could be made into a documentary film.

But I am not sure how many would have the stomach to watch it.

I asked Deborah to give her current view of the situation for women and girls in Canada concerning femicide. Things don't look good.

"Since 2003, the DVDRC of the Chief Coroner's office in Ontario has reviewed 311 cases of intimate partner violence involving 445 deaths. There is no question in my mind that intimate femicide is a gendered crime. More than 90+% of the victims murdered were female and 90+ % of the perpetrators who did the killing were male. When children were killed in this context, it was often as a retaliation or punishment towards the mother. The worst and deepest way to hurt a mother is to harm her child. Most intimate murders of women and children are both predictable and preventable. In more than 70% of the cases we reviewed, there were a minimum of seven risk factors."

My heart sinks.

This issue seems larger than life, even for those of us who work within the gender-based violence realm. Yet, Deborah's call to action is actually quite simple and sums up the feelings of most of the interviewees in this report.

"Until we can get at the drivers that create and sustain structural and systemic violence, we are only putting out fires," says Deborah.

Root causes.

She says that the justice system and child welfare system still have a long way to go when it comes to believing and supporting survivors to prevent femicide, stating, "I have come to believe that the Rule of Law will never work for us!"

"Saying and documenting the truth of women's and children's lives is sometimes all we can do," she says. "This is what your report is doing. Document, document, document. Context is everything."

And then, in the same breath, "I am not daunted by this— this is my life's work. I will keep at it."

"More recently, I have heard the term "slow femicide" being used," says Deborah. "I think it is a wonderful term because it captures all of the harms done to women that result in a slow death - while they are still living! It makes life unbearable and it is happening across the globe."

Slow femicide.

"This includes abused women being forced into homelessness, precarious employment, poverty, suicidal ideation and self-harm, and so many other social risks that come from the results of male violence against women and children. Racialized women, immigrant, and refugee women, trafficked women and girls, disabled and elderly women have it even that much harder than White, middle-class, able-bodied women."

It's hard to describe Deborah as anything other than kind and compassionate. Her 'good' energy is almost other-worldly. As someone who has witnessed so much pain, she is still joyful and positive. So when she said the following words, I didn't know what to do with them.

"What I would say in summary is that things are not getting better for women and children across the globe."

In the introduction of this report, I spoke about brutal honesty.

And here we are.

This is a woman who started this work in the 70s and continues to break ground today. And here she is telling me, a 'rookie' in comparison, that things are not getting better. Women are still being killed.

I actually thought about not putting that comment in the report and I was ashamed for thinking it, especially since I hadn't done that for any other interview, but I felt that it would be too negative. That it might somehow kill the hope many of us still have.

But, human beings like Deborah *are* our hope. As one of many tireless individuals who has been at this for decades and still gets up every day to continue, Deborah and all others like her, are the ones who have paved the way and made our journey to women's empowerment that much easier.

Relentless Resilience.

You see, collectively, we are ALL the resilience.

And so, yes.

Let's admit when things are bad.

Let's recognize the pain that we see, every day.

But then, let's find that joy and that strength in solidarity and keep marching.

As Buffy Sainte Marie said, "You have to sniff out joy. Keep your nose to the joy trail."

White Ribbon

White Ribbon is an organization founded in 1991 by a group of pro-feminist men in Ontario in response to the Montreal Massacre. Aura Freedom has worked with White Ribbon on several projects and we are often on the same page when it comes to how to end the violence for good.

David Garzon is a Community Engagement Manager at White Ribbon. To him, the massive gap is education that addresses the current needs of our society.

"In a way, the Montreal Massacre repeated itself just a year and a half ago, with the Toronto Van Attack," says David. "We saw two young men seeking revenge for their frustrations by blaming and targeting women. And although these two events were 29 years apart from each other, it seems there are still a lot of similarities between the beliefs and the culture that enabled this violence. It would be wrong to think about these two incidents as isolated events. We know that, although these are probably the most extreme forms of gender-based violence, there is a set of narratives and a cultural base there that manifests through everyday interactions such as verbal sexism, physical and sexual violence, intimate partner violence, homophobia, transphobia, and so on."

Moreover, Canada has yet to officially adopt the term "femicide". If we cannot even name it, and recognize that it is fueled by gender inequality, then how can we address it as a country?

David was also quick to highlight the use of social media as a means of organizing for misogynists and abusers.

"A lot of misinformed knowledge is being passed and transferred online, through digital resources and platforms; a lot of violence is taking new shapes. Folks who have similar attitudes towards women are now able to organize in ways that we might not be aware of. If this were 1990 and I hated and resented women, it would be very unlikely to organize with other men and create a community from these sentiments. Right now, you can say anything online and you can look for folks who have the same dangerous ideas as you and engage in conversations that sustain violence and toxic attitudes."

We, The Grassroots, have been saying these things for a long time.

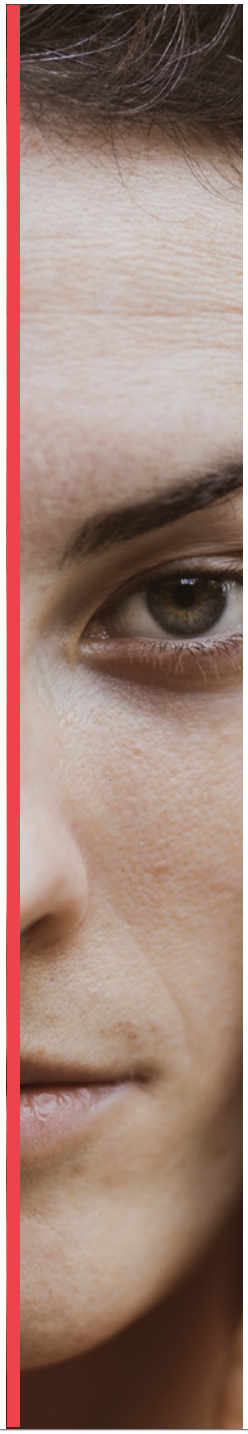
We, The Grassroots, have been linking gender-based violence and femicide to misogyny and patriarchy for years, and now, we have social platforms to propel these misogynistic 'movements' even further.

Yet, we still see reactive responses being employed to address the violence. Yes, a lot of work has been done. But, I wonder, if education and awareness that address the root causes of violence had been made a priority in Canada 25 years ago, when the Beijing Declaration was signed, would we still be here today?

"You have to sniff out joy. Keep your nose to the joy trail." Buffy Sainte Marie

03 sexual violence

"I am not free while any woman is unfree,
even when her shackles are very different from my own."
– **Audre Lorde**



THE SITUATION

Sexual assault, sexual harassment, and general unwanted sexual behaviour continue to be experienced by Canadian women. According to Statistics Canada's 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces regarding sexual violence and unwanted sexual behaviour, women and girls are more likely than men to experience sexual harassment and sexual abuse in the form of rape, child sexual abuse, intimate partner sexual violence, incest, drug-facilitated sexual assault (date rape drugs), stalking, and sexual exploitation (Cotter and Savage, 2019).

More findings from the survey show that in Canada:

- More than 4 in 10 women, or 44%, who experienced sexual violence were victimized by a friend or acquaintance. 31% of those who were assaulted by a friend or acquaintance felt blame for their victimization.
- 1 in 3 women has experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in public.
- Not only were women more likely to experience these behaviours, but the impact of them was also greater. Women were more likely than men to have changed their routines or behaviours and to have experienced negative emotional consequences.
- Women were more likely than men to have experienced multiple incidents in the past 12 months and to have experienced unwanted sexual behaviour or violence while on the street as opposed to another public place.
- Besides gender, being younger, having experienced harsh parenting, having been physically or sexually abused by an adult during childhood, and being single all play a role in experiencing sexual violence.
- Girls were over-represented as victims of family-related sexual offences, with a rate nearly five times higher than that among boys.

The #MeToo movement resulted in a global surge in women and girls speaking out about experiences of sexual violence, including Canadian women, demonstrating the effectiveness of awareness, education, and solidarity. In 2018, women in Canada were more likely than men to have talked to somebody about their experience following an incident of unwanted behaviour or assault (Ibid.).

Canada operates from a broad definition of sexual assault. It includes all unwanted sexual activity, such as kissing, fondling, unwanted sexual grabbing, and rape. Consent is defined in Canada's Criminal Code in s. 273 (1) as the voluntary agreement to engage in the sexual

activity in question - it focuses on what the person was thinking and feeling at the time of the sexual activity. The age of consent to sexual activity is 16 - unless there is an unequal power dynamic, or a relationship of trust, authority, or dependency (Department of Justice, 2017).

Sexual harassment, which also falls under Canada's broad definition of sexual assault, includes unwelcome sexual advances, unwanted touch, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal and physical forms of harassment. The Canadian Criminal Code defines sexual harassment as any conduct, comment, gesture, or contact of a sexual nature that is likely to cause offence or humiliation to any employee.

Women and girls are subjected to sexual assault and harassment daily – on public transit, at school or work, in the 'safety' of their own homes, in doctor's offices, everywhere. Women's and girls' agency over their bodies is under constant threat and their consent, or lack thereof, is constantly being violated and ignored.

According to the Beijing Declaration (1995), girls are more vulnerable to violence, specifically sexual violence (111). As such, the Beijing declaration stipulates that educational institutions should use programs and integrated services to raise awareness of girls' and boys' awareness of their responsibilities for sexual safety (31). It calls for effective measures and actions to enforce legislation to protect women and girls from violence at work and to take measures to eliminate sexual harassment of girls in all institutions, including training, procedures, and support programmes (49, 117).

The Declaration also calls for programmes and procedures to eliminate all forms of violence against women in all institutions (54). The fear of violence limits women's mobility and their access to activities and resources (49); the declaration calls for laws to be enacted and enforced and measures implemented to provide access to justice, prohibit discrimination on grounds of sex, and legal protection against sexual harassment (76). It recognizes a need for improved gender-disaggregated and age-specific data on perpetrators and victims of violence (88) and a change in the internal structures of institutions to advance women and eliminate sexual harassment (119).

We are not there yet.

Ontario's sexual education curriculum has been in a state of controversy since 2015. The Provincial government at the time updated the 20-year-old curriculum to teach children consent, agency, and acceptance and included updates to the material on sexual development and diversity, sections on bullying and 'sexting'. These updates were met with a backlash of parents and even teachers who felt their religious or traditional values were being threatened.

Advocates and feminist organizations have criticized the old sex-ed curriculum from the 1990s for being inadequate in many regards, but especially concerning consent, which is key to preventing sexual violence. Nonetheless, when the Provincial government took office in 2018, they immediately retracted the 2015 updated curriculum and reinstated the old one. This repeal was also accompanied by a 'snitch line' with which to report teachers who (courageously) continued teaching consent in their classrooms.

Education on harmful gender norms and gender expectations is also missing from Canadian school curricula, which is arguably the most important piece of the puzzle concerning the prevention of gender-based violence. Advocates, scholars, and professionals working with survivors of sexual violence have consistently deemed unhealthy and rigid gender norms as key drivers of violence against women. Gender norms are defined as "standards and expectations to which women and men generally conform, within a range that defines a particular society, culture, and community at that point in time" [European Institute for Gender Equality]. In other terms, gender norms are ideas about how women and men should be and act – these ideas are taught and internalized early in life, and establish a life cycle of gender socialization and stereotyping.

Gender norms are limited to only two genders and therefore further marginalize gender diverse persons. Moreover, gender norms do not exist in a silo – class, socioeconomic conditions, and race affect them. Gender norms are responsible for normalizing unhealthy behaviours such as women downplaying their brilliance and men validating their masculinity with violence. Gender expectations not only normalize the violence experienced by women and girls but also move the responsibility of safety from the perpetrator to the survivor.

A key component that must be highlighted within gender norms is toxic masculinity. It is the opposite of healthy masculinity, or positive masculinity, and aligns itself strongly with violence. Toxic masculinity is a cornerstone of rape culture and the negative hyper-sexualization of women, especially racialized women. It supports rape culture, nurtures violence within men, and refuses to acknowledge their humanity and compassion. Toxic masculinity is the strict adherence to hegemonic masculine norms – misogyny, aggression, bullying, harassment, homo/transphobia, and promotion of violence, including sexual violence. Toxic masculinity not only causes trauma in men and boys as it hinders them from exploring healthy masculinity and their full potential, but it has been directly linked to violence against women and girls time and time again.

Rape culture, the phenomenon where the pervasiveness of rape is normalized through societal checks of survivors, is strong in a multitude of levels in Canadian society. In a 2018-2019 survey conducted with over 1000 youth in Toronto by Aura Freedom, 62% of participants believed Canadian society promotes rape culture. Recently, during the Ghomeshi trials in Toronto, survivors were victim-blamed and their experiences were invalidated – all because they had contacted the accused after their assault. If the legal system in Canada were trauma-informed and had more education on gender equality, the courts would have been able to identify how cycles of abuse work and instead focus on the actions of the accused.

The Canadian Beijing +25 National Report dictates the commitment of the government to ending sexual violence and sexual harassment (Government of Canada, 2019: 22). The Federal government amended the Canada Labour Code and the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act to protect federal workplaces (Ibid.). The government also allocated funding in the 2018 Budget for development, hiring and training of a special investigatory, and to develop educational material (Ibid.).

These, and the launch of the Federal Gender-based Violence Strategy, are indeed positive steps to addressing sexual violence. A lot of good work has been done. Yet, there is still no comprehensive action plan to address the violence.

On the ground, things don't look great.



03

sexual violence

THE RESILIENCE

Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape (TRCCMWAR)

The TRCCMWAR has been collaborating with Aura Freedom for almost four years, providing trauma counselling and case management for survivors identified through Aura Freedom's awareness and outreach. They are one of the last organizations in Toronto that operates as a non-hierarchical feminist collective that employs a consensus decision-making process.

Deb Singh is a counsellor at the TRCCMWAR and also the Chair of the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC). I asked Deb what she wanted to see in the movement to end gender-based violence and what specific calls to action she wanted to share.

"That's a question I'm asking myself every day," says Deb. "As a counsellor at the TRCCMWAR, it is about us being a part of a larger movement to not only provide frontline supports and programs to survivors gender-based violence but also our mandate and mission to eradicate violence."

Deb says the TRCCMWAR's work towards eliminating the violence incorporates three practices. The first is to decolonize their work and examine how colonization has affected communities and contributed to the violence.

"What does it mean for us as a community of people who are supporting survivors of violence to decolonize our practice and recognize what it means to be colonization-informed, not just trauma-informed," says Deb. "To understand who is experiencing the highest levels of violence across Canada and what we can attend to with our supports that we provide after the violence has already happened."

The second practice is to lift up and highlight trans and non-binary community members as a huge part of the fabric of the women's movement and the movement to end gender-based violence.

"I think right now one of the biggest conversations we're having as a rape crisis coalition or a movement of people who do the work that we do at the TRCCMWAR and across the province (of Ontario), is what does it mean to talk about gender? It doesn't mean merely including non-binary and trans voices, but centralizing those voices as they are the ones experiencing, with trans women of color, for example, the highest levels of sexualized violence."

Deb adds, "It would only enrich our movement to include people of all genders across the spectrum."

Thirdly, the TRCCMWAR aims to work with men to end violence.

"While we know that men also experience sexual violence, it's important to engage those who are perpetrating harm and connect with ally-organizations to support us in changing violent behaviors," says Deb. "This can be a challenge as an organization when we barely receive enough funds to provide the frontline programs survivors need."

TRCC and other sexual assault centres across the province are chronically underfunded, to say the least.

"We constantly have to worry about money and it de-focuses us from providing programming. It has meant that when survivors approach us to access programs and services that are specific to their needs, they are met with waiting lists. We need to garner public support but moreover, governments in power need to make commitments to sustainable, free, high-quality programs

and supports to survivors through Sexual Assault Centres (SACs). We have an opportunity to really shift the public discourse on sexual violence right now, by supporting SACs who have been doing the work of supporting survivors."

TRCC provides face-to-face counselling, court support and support groups for survivors of sexual violence. They also run a 24-hour crisis line for survivors of sexual violence, a life-saving service to say the least. I have provided the phone number to folks many times myself.

The line is run entirely by volunteers.

Another example of Relentless Resilience.

The volunteers, many survivors of sexual violence themselves, complete a training program provided by TRCCMWAR and then go on to take calls. Aura Freedom has provided the crisis line volunteers with frontline training on human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The room is always packed.

Deb says that what makes the TRCC unique is that many people describe the centre as a kind of 'home'. If you have ever been to the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre, it does have a 'homey' feel and there is always food to be shared. She says survivors require their basic needs to be met before they can start their healing journeys, and the TRCCMWAR provides that for them, whether in the form of food, bus tokens, child care or other things.

"What I think this means for me and my work, working here for 13 years, is that we've created a community," Deb shares. "And there are many intersections to feeling like we belong to a community: we need to have our basic needs attended to; we need to be able to feel like we have a routine; we need a safe place to visit; we need supports around us; we need healthy food; we need people who are like-minded and who provide social supports that are meaningful to us."

Deb says the TRCCMWAR approaches the people who access their services not as clients, but as honoured and critical members of their community and many other communities, who are probably bringing the issues of gender-based violence to their own homes, dinner tables and workplaces.

This is grassroots excellence.

"A lot of people will leave the centre and then come back and volunteer and support other people who've gone through what they've gone through. So many of our volunteers are either former service users or, of course, survivors themselves. And so we're building the community we want to see and I really feel like the TRCC is more of a microcosm of the world we all want to live in, especially around ending gender-based violence and being free of it."

Being free of it.

Something we all want.

"We are not free of oppression," admits Deb. "We do stuff, but we work really, really hard to check ourselves with love and compassion; to be very aware of our behaviours," says Deb. "And when we make mistakes -cause we will and we have- how do we change that? How do we support each other and how do we role model that kindness, self-compassion, and love to our community while understanding the interlocking places of oppression around the multitudes of identities, whether it's race, class, gender, ability and many more of those pieces."

Deb adds, "I mean it is a life. Working there...it's a life choice. It's certainly not just a job for me. But hopefully, everything I've gotten from the humans that I've worked with at the centre, I'm giving back out to the survivors and the community members and the people that come through the doors and in doing that we can create a better world together."



03

sexual violence

In April 2019, the Province of Ontario announced they would be closing the Criminal Injuries and Compensation Board (CICB) on October 1st.

Just like that.

The CICB provided financial compensation to victims of violent crime, including sexual violence and human trafficking. While it is true that the Board was notorious for taking sometimes up to three years to compensate victims, the amounts that survivors were eligible to receive were substantial.

Over the years, I've worked with several survivors who had received compensation from CICB. The amounts were enough to make a positive impact on their lives, despite the wait. But perhaps the most important characteristic of the CICB application was that it did not require applicants to officially report their abuse - a perfect feature for many human trafficking survivors who will never report their exploiters for fear of retribution.

The Province's 'enhanced' VQRP+ system, which replaced the CICB, promises shorter processing times, but applicants must report the crime to a 'victim service agency' within six months of the crime or within six months of disclosing that crime to authorities.

This is problematic.

According to the OCRCC, Canadian research has shown that only 33 out of 1000 sexual assaults are reported to the police. Moreover, if survivors do report to a social service agency, it's not always within six months. Furthermore, what about survivors of historical sexual abuse? Do they not qualify for compensation?

In other words, if the intention is to support survivors of sexual violence, then the reporting requirement is actually one way to ensure that they *don't* apply for compensation. Which begs the question: what is the intention of the new program?

Furthermore, the VQRP+ model does not appear to provide the same amount of compensation as its predecessor. In fact, it's hard to tell exactly how much one is eligible to receive. As a result, some frontline women's organizations, including TRCCMWAR, organized last-minute pro-bono legal clinics to get their applications in by the deadline of September 30th, proving again how The Grassroots consistently shows up for survivors. On the day of the deadline, the fax machines were jammed and it was impossible to get through on the phone.

Why does it always seem that we are racing, scrambling and battling to get support for survivors? Survivors and frontline workers deserve better.

Lauriann Wade, Registrar of the Transitional Year Program at the University of Toronto

Lauriann (L.A.) Wade is the Registrar of the Transitional Year Programme at the University of Toronto. The program 'is a full-time, eight-month access-to-University program intended for adults who do not have the formal qualifications for university admission.' Most students have grown up in marginalized communities, including Indigenous communities, African-Canadian communities, and LGBTQ2S+ communities. The program has its roots in the Black community in Toronto, having emerged out of two community summer programs in 1969 and 1970.

L.A. sees the long-lasting impact of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, every day. Many of the young women and transgender students who attend the program have experienced sexual violence at a young age, which affected their ability to complete secondary school and move on to college or university. Many of them, she says, are still at risk of sexual exploitation due to unresolved trauma.

"I see them suffering. I was working with a student who had to write a rape impact statement. That is not something that I would think the majority of Registrars are doing in the University. They're not sitting down with students that look like them, that have a similar story as them, and helping them write a rape impact statement for the court. And she couldn't write one word on that paper. And we were panicking because it's tied to her being able to take care of her child. It's tied to compensation."

It's also retraumatizing and one of the most difficult moments for survivors of rape navigating the justice system.

L.A. speaks from the perspective of a Black Canadian woman and survivor of many forms of sexual violence. In our interview, she highlighted the ways in which Black girls are hyper-sexualized from a young age, which perpetuates sexual violence.

"We're hyper-sexualized even as children, so I often hear things like, 'My mom was jealous of me with her boyfriend,' or 'My mom didn't say anything when my dad was touching me'".

"They believe that they're invisible. It trickles down not only into their education, but also their relationships. It destroys how they see themselves." L.A. Wade, Transitional Year Programme at U of T

L.A. is a moving speaker who is great at bringing you into her own lived experience. She is quite open about her own story of sexual violence at a young age.

"For myself, my mother was very much a part of labeling me promiscuous when I was just a child. I was less than 11 years old. So when these labels are placed on someone, self-fulfilling prophecy or not, developmentally these women are often so young that they formulate their sense of identity and what is possible for them based on this feedback from not only their family but also society. And it perpetuates itself through patriarchy and misogyny and urban music culture, hip-hop culture, R&B culture. They're all contributing to one's sense of self and how people interact."

L.A. has over 10 years of experience working with women of colour in the Transitional Year Programme. Some students, as she points out, are not even part of the program but come to her because they identify with her.

"I often give the analogy that myself and these women are going through life as if we're in a funhouse and all of the mirrors are distorted images reflecting who we are back to us. And we can't get a clear picture. And so I'm often hearing that they don't believe that they deserve better. They believe that they're invisible. It trickles down not only into their education but also their relationships. It destroys how they see themselves."

It also validates the violence against them in their minds and the minds of society.

"I work with 65 to 75 students in any given academic year. However, those students that are successful will go on into the University. And so I have students not only in my current program but at various levels of their academic journey - from their first year to their PHDs. They all keep coming back to the program to get that kind of support."

Actually, they're coming back for L.A.

Grassroots excellence.

We also discuss how her own trauma affects her ability to uplift others, and she is not alone. It is something I hear all too often doing this work. So many of us, working in this space, have had our own experiences with violence. For many women, it is the answer to the question, "How did you start doing this work?" And although our own lived experiences can give us great insight and compassion, they can also be triggering as hell.

"How about we start with me? How it affects my ability to keep a job. I mean, yes, I've been employed for a long time. But to be completely transparent, I struggle with the transference of trauma in conjunction with my own trauma from my personal experience with sexual violence as a woman of colour. So I'm already traumatized as it is, and then I go to work every day in an environment where I'm speaking to women that look like me and that describe aspects of their own trauma that seem very familiar."

She says that the University of Toronto does a good job of ensuring supports are available for the students, but many students of colour don't trust the system and require culturally specific supports. She speaks about 'losing' many of the students in the program for many different reasons.

"I've had people who I've lost in the program because they needed to turn tricks for their tuition because OSAP isn't enough. Other times, I don't know why they disappear. They just disappear. I try to email them. I try to call them. And it's very difficult sometimes because I'm afraid for people's lives."

Her fears are justified as she shares with me that one of her students committed suicide.

Which brought our conversation to Relentless Resiliency.

How resilient can one person be?

How resilient can women be?

How resilient can Black women be?

How resilient can Indigenous women be?

The list goes on.

L.A. then makes a brilliant reference to Michael Ungar of the Resiliency Research Centre: "At what point does someone's ability to be resilient become a social issue rather than a psychological one?"

And, at what point do all of us, including the government, take responsibility?

L.A.'s calls to action are innovative and culturally specific ways to educate people on gender-based violence, away from capitalist and colonial systems. She also calls for institutions and agencies to employ people that reflect the demographics of those they are serving. She suggests that the perpetrators of violence can also be supported to understand themselves in relation to the violence they have committed, although she added that this might not be possible in all situations.

Last, but not least, she mentions the need for trauma-informed systems and institutions. She shares that although the Transitional Year Programme has worked with students from marginalized communities who have experienced trauma for over 50 years, they have only recently implemented trauma-informed training for its staff.

Yes, you read that correctly.

At the end of our conversation, L.A. and I discuss the importance of intersectionality within feminism. We discuss how 'white feminism' misses the mark and fails to truly bring about equality for all. As a woman of Italian and Greek descent, I am aware of my privilege and I strive to use the right words. It's important to me and I am deliberate about it, as always. Perhaps L.A. can sense this, so I'm not sure whether she said the next thing to make me feel better, but it is still something all of us can take away.

"And there are some people, and we need to recognize and celebrate those people, that can work together in spite of the intersections. Because they understand that the problem is greater than who we all are as individual persons."

> **"We know that while not all men are violent, most violence comes from men and that this violence is enabled by unchallenged sexist attitudes. It's men's role to change these attitudes."**
>
> David, White Ribbon

03 sexual violence

White Ribbon

David Garzon, whom we met in Section 2, is a Community Engagement Manager at White Ribbon, a Canadian organization that engages with men and boys to end violence against women and girls through awareness campaigns and education. He says that a major issue is a lack of interaction with men and boys when addressing gender-based violence, specifically sexual violence.

"Although a lot of work has been done in the last decades - feminist organizations and feminist leaders have worked endlessly to end to gender-based violence – we have not been able to have enough conversations with men about what they can do to end gender-based violence. Because oftentimes (they) think it's enough to just not be violent. But we know that while not all men are violent, most violence comes from men and that this violence is enabled by unchallenged sexist attitudes. It's men's role to change these attitudes. "

To David, men and boys need to know there is something they can do to stop sexual violence.

"As an organization, we understand (that) gender-based violence is a product of unequal gender roles or gender relationships. We understand that many of our societies are built upon patriarchal structures in which male-identifying folks enjoy certain privileges that women and gender divergent folks don't. We know that perpetrators of gender-based violence tend to be men and victims tend to be women and members of the LGBTQ2S+ communities. We do believe that socialization and culture play a massive role in enabling or disabling gender-based violence. That's why we put a lot of emphasis on education."

To tackle the aspect of male allyship when addressing sexual violence on post-secondary school campuses, White Ribbon teamed up with Draw The Line, a campaign initiated by the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) and Action Ontarienne Contre le Violence Faite Aux Femmes to raise awareness of sexual violence and initiate dialogue.

"I have been running the White Ribbon / Draw The Line project for two years now. It's a project to end sexual violence across the post-secondary sector in Ontario by speaking to male-identified students and deconstructing toxic masculinity and rape culture."

The project includes speaking engagements, social marketing campaigns and a website with resources that focus on bystander interventions using different scenarios and posing the question, 'What would you do?'

"Why is (sexual violence) so normalized that someone could witness a sexual assault and not do anything? What are the structures and cultures that enable that?"

Where do I begin?

When asked about backlash or resistance, David said that some students might interpret sexual violence prevention workshops as someone coming to restrain their freedoms

"But what we are trying to do is ensure that they have fantastic, healthy relationships with whomever they want, as long as there is consent and mutual respect. That is going to make their lives a lot better, as well as the lives of those around them. Our work focuses on preventing violence. Something that most people would agree is a valuable goal."

When it comes to catcalling and other forms of sexual harassment, David says that bystanders have a role to play in changing the culture.

"We know that the bystander intervention works and we do know that it is something that people apply to their everyday lives. When they witness a situation that they identify as violent, they intervene, right? If someone is being beaten up, if someone is being attacked in an obvious way, they intervene. But, a lot of people don't have the awareness or knowledge of the different types of violence. A lot of times they think that catcalling or making homophobic comments is not violence, therefore they will not intervene. So it's about putting that label on things and raising awareness that violence can be experienced psychologically, physically and emotionally, in both public and private spheres. That's really the base of what we do. Put that awareness out there and let people know that they can do something."

Someone once told me I should be happy to get catcalled, as it shows that someone thought I was attractive.

As if my worth depended on the remarks of a random stranger.

These types of attitudes and beliefs were learned at some point.

And therefore, they can be unlearned.

David's call to action to the Government of Canada is to increase education and to make sure everyone is on board. Straightforward and simple.

Uber

While it is true that sexual harassment happens on all forms of public transport (taxis, buses, the subway, trains, etc.), I know I'm not alone when I say that I have felt especially vulnerable when using Uber.

Remarks about my outfit and questions about my marital status from drivers, unsolicited stories of sexual encounters from co-riders, the list goes on. One Uber driver asked me what I did for a living, and when I told him, he responded by playing R-Kelly and laughing. These situations, and other more extreme forms of sexual violence, have happened and continue to happen on ride-sharing platforms in cities across Canada. Moreover, those working with human trafficking survivors know how exploiters use Uber to move their victims to different places and Uber's GPS tracking is the perfect way to ensure that they don't escape.

In 2019, Uber Canada recognized the harms being done and embarked on a consultation process with Canadian organizations serving survivors of sexual violence. Aura Freedom, along with other feminist and frontline organizations, consulted on how to make their ride-sharing App and services safer for women and girls. We provided insight on how Uber could address gender-based violence that we all know is happening on the platform. We brought survivor accounts and evidence to the table and presented recommendations to the Uber team.

They provided us with lunch, coffee, and juice.

Towards the end of that meeting, I highlighted the fact that all of the activists and frontline workers in that room were doing all of this wonderful work for Uber at no cost. I mentioned, in a diplomatic way of course, that consultations of that nature in the for-profit world usually come with a handsome fee. I added, respectfully, that time and again, women's organizations are asked to come up with solutions to the problems that misogyny and capitalism create and we are asked to do it for free. Many in the room nodded in agreement.

I was politely brushed off.

We all moved on.

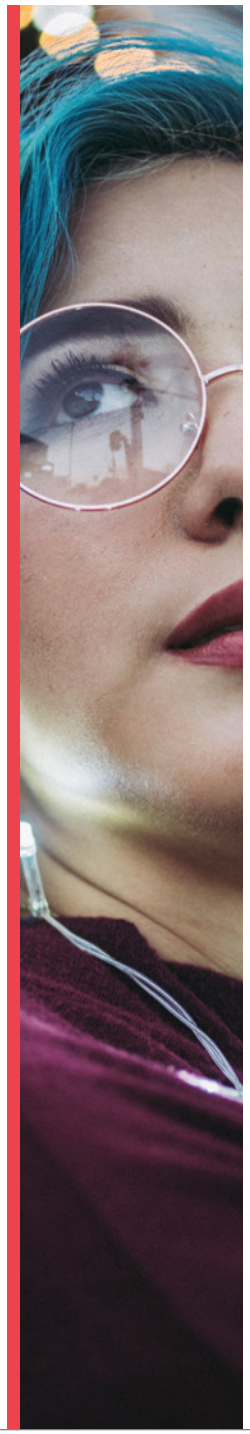
We're used to it, you see?

Later that same year, Uber released a call for proposals for a new Community Impact Initiative. After a formal grant writing process, Aura Freedom was selected as one of Uber's new partners along with other Canadian organizations. Through this grant, we can provide Uber rides to survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking and increase access to training opportunities for members of our youth team. So far, we have used the grant to provide rides for survivors to hospitals, rape crisis centres, training workshops, community organizing meetings, pre-natal check-ups, and even a ride for one survivor to the hospital to give birth.

I have to say, this is one way to recognize that your services are contributing to human rights abuses, and then putting your money where your mouth is when addressing it. We have yet to see the impact of some of the new safety features put into place by Uber, but the conversation has at least started.



04 human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation



IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- Aura Freedom recognizes that human trafficking does not only happen in the sex industry, but in many others, including the service industry, farming industry and in domestic labour. Forced marriage, forced crime and organ trafficking are other forms of human trafficking. This section will focus on human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation as a form of gender-based violence.

A brief look at Labour Trafficking is mentioned in Section 9.

A look at the trafficking of Indigenous women/girls/youth can be found in Section 7.

Forced Marriage can be found in Section 5.

- Aura Freedom welcomes the distinction between consensual adult sex work and human trafficking. Indeed, we work with women who have engaged, or still engage in consensual sex work for various reasons. Yet, we urge readers to refute claims that human trafficking is rare within the sex trade in Toronto and beyond. On the contrary, our experience with survivors has shown that human trafficking is prevalent in Canada and there is considerable work to be done in order to address and prevent it.

Violence Experienced by Migrant Sex Workers can be found in Section 9.

- Aura Freedom recognizes the continuous debate within the feminist movement as to whether all forms of work in the sex trade (sex work, pornography, body rub parlour work, exotic dancing, etc.) are exploitative. It is a polarizing and volatile subject in many feminist circles, which only hinders us from truly addressing what we all agree on: forced prostitution and child exploitation are wrong.

  Through this report, we hope to inspire solidarity in the simple fact that both 'sides' wish to live in a world where women, girls and gender diverse people can live healthy and vibrant lives free from violence, coercion, exploitation, inequality and stigma. Let's continue to be brave. Moreover, let's be willing to feel uncomfortable and listen to opinions that are different from our own. The only way forward is to be open and inclusive of all those affected by gender-based violence.

  Aura Freedom has and will continue to work with a diverse group of partners who may have differing opinions on the sex trade and human trafficking. We believe the way to support all women and all survivor experiences is to give space to differing arguments so that we can broaden our understanding of sexual exploitation and human trafficking and support those affected.

- Aura Freedom does not engage in 'rescue industry' activities. Our own counter trafficking work stresses the importance of empowering youth to make safe and healthy decisions in their lives and reach out for support when they need it. Our work aims to prevent human trafficking by advancing equity.

THE SITUATION

According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS):

- 95% of identified trafficking victims between 2009 and 2016 were women and girls.
- 70% of trafficked women and girls are under the age of 25. 26% of all victims were girls under the age of 18.
- CCJS analyzed police-reported incidents of trafficking in Canada and found that Ontario accounted for more than two-thirds of reported incidents between 2009 and 2016
- According to Statistics Canada (2018), members of vulnerable or marginalized groups are at greater risk of victimization in Canada.

Human trafficking is highly underreported due to its hidden nature. Many of the survivors Aura Freedom has worked with have and never will report their trafficker to police for fear of retribution and many of our partners have indicated similar patterns. Therefore, any statistics that have ever been reported with regards to this crime will never bring a complete picture, but only highlight police activity.

Tip of the iceberg.

It is important to dispel the myths about human trafficking – what it looks like, who is trafficked, and how it is done. Many Canadians still think that human trafficking involves crossing international borders, kidnapping and organized crime, but it's not always the case. The 'face' of Canadian human trafficking can look very different. Right now, Aura Freedom and other Toronto grassroots groups are seeing 16 and 17 year old boys trafficking their classmates for money, notoriety and as a way to validate their masculinity. We are also seeing young women getting involved in the recruitment of those trafficked into the sex trade, even if oftentimes they are being exploited themselves.

Don't think Hollywood.

During the luring and grooming stage, a trafficking situation can start out looking a lot like a romantic relationship or a friendship before the exploitation begins.

To understand human trafficking in a more simplistic manner, we need to first understand it as exploitation and a form of gender-based violence. Our own work at Aura Freedom and that of our partners has highlighted that this extreme form of exploitation and violence manifests as intense interpersonal trauma for the women and girls that survive trafficking. By viewing human trafficking through a lens of exploitation and trauma, the constant calls of holistic wrap-around services for trafficked persons may actually be heard and (finally) implemented. It's about more than convicting traffickers.Human trafficking is indeed a crime, but more importantly, it is a human rights abuse.

As an extreme form of violence against women and girls, a strong, intersectional gender lens must be used when addressing sexual exploitation. Ultimately, the existence of sexual exploitation is due to the long-standing societal norm of gender inequality, which has given rise to the hyper-sexualization, dehumanization, and commodification of girls and women. Traffickers prey on the growing insecurities of adolescent girls, which are fed by the deeply sexist nature of the media and entertainment industry, resulting in extreme physical and psychological trauma.

The unrealistic expectations of women and girls in both the media and real life cannot be denied. This is in addition to the increasing need for popularity on social media. Moreover, young men are living in their own gender boxes and many feel pressure to prove their manhood in violent ways, leading to toxic masculinity and rape culture. When mixed with poverty and the inability to recognize unhealthy relationships and what true consent means, girls are left vulnerable and boys are unable to express their need for help or support. Youth who identify as transgender or gender non-binary face even more discrimination and often lack social supports, leaving them vulnerable to violence, homelessness, addiction, and human trafficking.

Social media is increasingly used to target, recruit and groom young women and girls and ultimately exploit them. Indeed, many of the youth Aura Freedom has supported who were exploited in the sex trade were targeted and groomed online. Traffickers exploit vulnerabilities created by sexism, racism, poverty, gender inequality and toxic norms, lack of education, social supports, employment opportunities – and loneliness. Social media is a tool for traffickers looking to exploit these vulnerabilities in young women and girls through grooming practices, such as befriending them and giving them attention, stability, and gifts that young women and girls are usually unable to access in their day-to-day lives. They get a glimpse of a "dream life" before the rug is ripped out and the exploitation begins. In a 2018-2019 survey conducted with over 1000 youths in Toronto by Aura Freedom, 38% of them answered that they feel unsafe online and 73% said they have had online interactions with someone they didn't know well, identifying a gap in internet safety awareness (Aura Freedom, 2019).

Although anyone can be trafficked, marginalized groups are the most targeted. Indigenous youth are the most at risk. Indigenous women make up only 4% of Canada's population, yet nearly 50% of human trafficking survivors (Roudometkina and Wakeford, MWAC, 2018). For a deeper examination of human trafficking of Indigenous women and girls, see Section 7.

In societies across the globe, women and girls face inequality, discrimination, violence and control. Marginalized and racialized women and girls experience added layers of discrimination and barriers to support, as well as youth in care and youth with mental health issues. Colonialism and systemic racism have created intergenerationally marginalized communities that are targeted by exploiters. Indigenous, Black, and other racialized women and girls often lack social supports, leaving room for exploitation under the guise of love, community and a better life.

04

human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation

The situation that racialized youth face is perhaps best explained in this key history fact in the current wave of interest in human trafficking:

The roots of the current concept of human trafficking started in the early 1900s with the 1904 International Agreement for the suppression of White Slave Traffic – the morality of protecting white women and girls has always been at the centre of this movement, and racialized women and girls have always been left to the side. The concept of "white slavery" also raises the obvious question - who is seen as a victim and who is seen as a criminal? It is common for victims to experience criminalization, but one must wonder, who is it that experiences criminalization the most? The answer is easy, as stereotypes of criminalized, racialized communities and marginalized groups of women and girls exist in almost every society.

There are two branches of Canadian legislation that deal with human trafficking in Canada. They are the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) which applies to cases of international trafficking; and the Criminal Code of Canada (CCC). Trafficking, as defined by these organizations, is either

a) using abduction, fraud, deception, threat of force, or coercion to accrue, transport, receive, or harbour persons into Canada (IRPA) or

b) recruiting, transporting, receiving, holding, concealing, harbouring, exercising control, direction, or influence over the movements of a person for the purpose of exploiting them - making them feel that their lives or the lives or safety of others are in danger (CCC).

Sexual exploitation is the act of non-consensual abuse of another person's sexuality for financial gain. It occurs when another person (or persons) abuses or exploits a person's sexuality without their consent - such as forcing a woman or girl into the sex trade. This makes consent the centre of this issue and an important one to explore when dealing with any form of sexual violence. Youth under the age of 18 cannot legally consent to sex work in Canada.

The media has labelled Toronto as a 'hub' for sex trafficking in Canada (CBC News, 2014) with victims being moved up and down the 401 corridor. Toronto Police Services have investigated 370+ cases of sex trafficking since 2013. Since 2013, the City of Toronto and its End Trafficking T.O. initiative has taken several actions to address the issue of human trafficking by collaborating with a diverse group of community partners, consulting with persons with lived-experience, and engaging with other orders of government to identify ways to strengthen the protection of residents and communities from human traffickers and determine opportunities to improve City services for survivors.

In 2018, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking was formed. The APPG includes members from the Liberal, Conservative, and NDP parties as well as the Independent Senators Group. The activities of the APPG are supported by a partnership with the Allard School of Law's International Justice and Human Rights Clinic at UBC. The APPG says it will meet periodically to study, develop and advance policies to combat human trafficking. Their first annual report documents that particular attention will be paid to researching sex trafficking in Indigenous communities through the International Justice and Human Rights Clinic.

For advocates, the APPG is a step in the right direction since human trafficking, like other forms of gender-based violence, is often strangely seen as a partisan issue in Canada as opposed to a human rights abuse.

Senator Julie Miville-Dechêne, a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, submitted a proposed bill on February 5, 2020 to the Canadian Senate (Dryden, Feb 2020). The bill, which is based on the work done by Member of Parliament John McKay in the previous Parliamentary session, demands that Canadian companies report on their supply chains - and disclose the use of forced labour anywhere along the production process (Ibid.). The act will also allow the Minister of Public Safety to investigate companies who do not comply with the reporting process; change customs tariffs to forbid goods produced by forced and child labour to enter the country; and includes a $250,000 fine for the companies who do not comply with reporting or attempt to interfere or obstruct with the investigation (Ibid.). This seems like an interesting proposal, but one must question, what is the impact of a $250,000 fine on a multi-billion dollar company? The United Kingdom has a similar company requirements under their 2015 Modern Slavery Act - businesses are required to release a statement that is easily accessible on their website about what they will do to address human trafficking, in addition to an unlimited fine for non-compliance. Unfortunately, there have been reports that many companies are not complying due to the lack of enforcement (Lally, Apr 2019), which is something Canada can learn from.

The new Canadian National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking 2019-2024 is supported by an investment of $75 million over six years (Public Safety Canada, 2019: 6). The National Strategy states that human trafficking is considered one of the worst forms of gender-based violence and complements the current federal Gender-based Violence Strategy, which is still in the development stage. The National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking has been guided by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementing Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and has been organized around four broad pillars (4Ps): the prevention of trafficking; the protection of victims; the prosecution of offenders; and working in partnership with others.

The Canadian government has also stated that this strategy will be responsive to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report and have added a fifth pillar of action in addition to the four P's (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership) of anti-trafficking efforts. This addition is 'empowerment' through "supporting victims and survivors to regain control and independence and encouraging action by industry partners [and] providing increased funding for community-led empowerment programs" (Public Safety Canada, 2019: 6).

The Government of Canada has identified a lack of access to and availability of supports and services for trafficked women and girls as the most common obstacle to address human trafficking effectively in Canada (Public Safety Canada, 2019). The government has identified a great need for sustainable and core funding dedicated to grassroots and community-level organizations. Further sensitivity and awareness training for the public, especially targeted to the most vulnerable populations, would also be a step towards addressing trafficking through an Empowerment and Prevention approach.

The National Strategy seems like a good base, and advocates have accepted it gladly. However, when mentioning goals under each pillar, concrete action plans and deadlines are noticeably missing. For example, addressing the root causes of human trafficking are mentioned, but how exactly will that be done and what is the timeline? How will gender inequality (including rape culture and toxic masculinity), systemic racism, colonialism, capitalism, ableism and homophobia be addressed in order to truly prevent human trafficking in Canada? These drivers were identified over and over again in the nation-wide consultations undertaken by Public Safety Canada in 2018 which Aura Freedom attended.

These root causes are contributing to young Canadians who are prime targets for traffickers and exploiters and therefore must be addressed to end human trafficking for good. Youth themselves know this. In Toronto, 62% of 1000 youth surveyed by Aura Freedom said that gender inequality stemming from harmful gender norms was a root cause of human trafficking. 67% believed that achieving gender equality will help end human trafficking and gender-based violence and 90% believed that awareness of human trafficking and its root causes can help eliminate it (Aura Freedom, 2019).



04

human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation



THE RESILIENCE

Caroline Pugh-Roberts, Cornerstone Outreach

Caroline is a survivor of human trafficking and support worker at the Salvation Army in London, Ontario. She works with both sex workers and women who are being trafficked in Toronto, London and other cities in Ontario. She is also a facilitator and speaker at the 'John School' in London, but we'll get into that later.

Caroline is happy about the new National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, which she consulted on. I also consulted on this strategy, which is where we met.

"Well, I can tell you - they're doing right (by) addressing it. But what I'm seeing is that the information is not filtering down to the street - to the women. Okay? They're still unaware of their rights!"

Caroline is a ball of energy with lightening-speed speech. If you're not careful, you might miss something.

Two of the biggest gaps she sees when supporting survivors of human trafficking are a lack of housing and the lack of trauma-informed service providers and other stakeholders in the human trafficking sphere. She calls for more training and education for all those involved.

"I was doing an interview once on the subject human trafficking and the guy asked me if I ever enjoyed it. That was not trauma informed."

No, it was not.

It was idiotic.

"So I took a breath and said, 'Rape is never fun'...which shut him down."

Caroline is concerned about the availability of violent pornography and the lack of regulation in the industry, which she believes is contributing to the normalization of violence against women and an increase in the demand for sex workers, which consequently increases human trafficking. She works with forensic nurses and other healthcare professionals who are seeing the same rise in violence.

"The 'thing' now is to strangle them," says Caroline. "One of the girls I work with was found naked on the street in December because the (sex buyer) strangled her into unconsciousness and chucked her out of the car. ... Strangulation is the big thing right now and it's coming directly from porn. It's all the rage. So men who are purchasing sex are looking to strangle. I see it with the girls I work with. They tell me."

Two other frontline workers who work with human trafficking survivors or women in the sex trade have recently told me similar he same thing. It's a worrying and disturbing trend.

She also references how amateur pornography makers are trafficking girls themselves in order to produce the content.

"So, he's not actually selling her body to other men. What he's doing is having sex with her regularly and filming it, without her knowing it, and then selling the videos. She is being sold without her consent and without receiving any money. These girls are getting no help, no



justice, no nothing. The one girl I'm working with … (her videos) have been sold in Japan, Korea all over the world. All over. And I've been to the police over and over and over. They said it's not human trafficking, it's sexual assault. Yes, it is human trafficking!"

Damn right it is.

The program Caroline helps run is called Cornerstone Outreach or Cornerstone Dignity. A little over two years old, the program is for women who have been, are being, or are at high risk of being trafficked, or those who identify as independent sex workers.

They offer trauma informed support, counselling, animal therapy, yoga, life skill training and more. The fridge is always full of food and there is a nurse practitioner available who is versed in health issues particular to women in the sex trade. They also offer self defense for confined spaces, like the front seat of a car, for those still working in the sex trade.

"Many of the women have known nothing else but the 'Life', as their Granny, Mother, Auntie and sister were all working in it," says Caroline. "We take them on camping trips to a log cabin for a few days, put them in an environment where they do not need to worry about their things being stolen, an environment where no one wants anything from them."

Survivors always know what women need.

"… I was trying to start on my own and I got this place given to me, but I couldn't get it insured because I wasn't a charity. And then the Salvation Army offered me a space."

Caroline now works for the Salvation Army, but the program is her 'baby'. And you can see it.

"Since Cornerstone's inception, 19 women have managed to exit situations of exploitation, 5 are in school and 3 have full time jobs," she beams. "With this program, we have formed a movement and a community which has bonded the women."

It's hard not to feel her emotion.

This is survivor-led, grassroots excellence.

"It's been profound," says Caroline proudly. "It is not enough to help someone exit. If they are not supported afterwards, they are going to go back. After all, they have to survive."

There are varying opinions on John Schools and their efficacy. Some sex worker advocates criticize the program, saying it socially constructs all sex work as exploitative. On the other hand, I have yet to meet a survivor of human trafficking who doesn't think they can be useful in at least one way.

The Sex Buyer Accountability Program (or John School) in London, Ontario is a community-based diversion program run in partnership between the Salvation Army Correctional and Justice Services, the Crown and the London Police Service. The program is for first offenders who have committed the offense of 'communicating for the purpose of prostitution'. There in an intake assessment and a charge for the course, which goes back into the Cornerstone Outreach program to support survivors of trafficking and sex workers.

"Johns pay a fee of $300 for the privilege of spending the entire day with us," says Caroline.

She describes what a typical day in John school looks like: "The Crown comes in and speaks to the ramifications of a second offence and the health unit comes in to talk about STI's since most of them want sex without condoms and many pimps force the girls and women to comply with their requests. The police come in too and we show videos on how their purchasing fuels human trafficking. I tell my own story of human trafficking. I ask them if they would drop their own daughter off to work in the Life. That's when they get offended; they say they do it because they are helping her buy food and diapers. So I respond with, 'Oh! So you care about her?' And they say they do. So then I ask, 'Then why don't you just give her the food and diapers? Why does she have to provide you with sex? The truth is, they are there to buy sex. Period."

"I have been doing the John School for roughly 10 years and without fail, every time, I get at least one teary-eyed man coming up to me afterwards saying, 'I'm sorry I did not know.' And this is the problem. They should know."

Like so many others, Caroline's biggest call to action is education on gender equality from a young age in order to prevent the violence from happening in the first place.

"That is THE gap!" she exclaims.

She also calls upon men to step up as allies when it comes to gender-based violence and education on healthy relationships and sexuality without coercion and violence.

"Any form of silence is complicity. … We need men to stop protecting other men."

In terms of supporting survivors in sensitive, trauma informed ways, Caroline says it's simple.

"The most profound thing anyone has ever said to me was that they believed in me. … Because most of society doesn't. You chose it. It's your fault. When somebody believes in you, nothing is impossible. Nothing. And I've seen it."

04

human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation

Aura Freedom's Human Trafficking Peer Prevention Project

There is a tendency in Canada, and other countries for that matter, to frame gender-based violence as It would be strange to not include Aura Freedom's own human trafficking prevention project in this section of the report.

When addressing sexual exploitation and human trafficking, Aura Freedom's Peer Prevention Project goes deep to the root of the issue: inequality. Patriarchy, gender inequality, systemic racism, colonialism, homo/transphobia, ableism, classism, and capitalism are all actively contributing to human trafficking.

Aura Freedom, we know and understand these root causes.

We also know that it is very difficult to traffic an empowered person.

With support from the City of Toronto, Aura Freedom launched the Human Trafficking Peer Prevention Project in 2018 and had enough funding to run it for a year. The project continues today, even though it is currently unfunded.

Through this project, Aura Freedom trained, mentored and coached a team of young women from different marginalized communities to facilitate human trafficking prevention workshops in schools, shelters, and other youth spaces in the city. These youth facilitators come from diverse backgrounds and some have various lived experience including human trafficking and violence, which gives them unique insight to address human trafficking in their communities.

Anyone who knows me knows how much I value the young women on this team. Every day, they blow me away. Sure, there have been some growing pains to get the project on its feet and keep it there, but few things bring me more joy than seeing their success.

Asha Dahir is one of the project's Youth Facilitators and also the Project Coordinator. "Being a young, Black Muslim woman and being in a position to educate young folks has been truly life-changing. My main mission is to highlight to youth that when we are empowered, we can do anything."

Youth who are ready to contribute to society must be empowered to do so. It is crucial to provide them with the opportunity to make a difference. Not only does it benefit them and their families, but programs for youth are much more powerful when delivered by youth themselves. Viewing young people as agents of change can shift the course of an entire nation.

By entering youth spaces and providing education developed "for youth by youth", Aura Freedom's youth team creates an environment where students learn from people who look like them and sometimes, when our facilitators feel comfortable, might even hear stories of personal experience, ensuring the greatest possible impact. In a word: prevention.

Almost the entire first half of the project's first year was dedicated to training, with a total of 17 sessions and workshops attended by the youth team, including anti-oppression, trauma informed training, public speaking, presentation skills, anti-Black racism awareness, Indigenous cultural competency training, cyber safety training, and more.

Their resumes now boast more training than some professionals who have been working in the anti-human trafficking sphere for years.

Due to the powerful nature of the Peer Prevention Project's awareness, the different lived experiences of the facilitators and the unique safe space created, we often have disclosure of sexual violence and human trafficking from youth, who are provided with immediate access to crucial services. The youth team travels with a trained trauma counsellor who is there to receive disclosures and provide the appropriate support. We have partnered with the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre and other freelance counsellors to provide this service, which has proved to be essential to the project. The counsellors are also there to support the project staff themselves.

In only its first year, the HTPPP operated in over 36 youth spaces across Toronto with 2,000+ participants. From those 36 presentations, 19 survivors of sexual exploitation, human trafficking and sexual violence came forward and were referred to crucial services.

Grassroots, youth power.

The project's disclosure rate shows the prevalence of the problem and the power of youth-led programming that focuses on addressing the root causes of violence, as opposed to focusing on the crime of human trafficking itself.

More importantly, human trafficking is prevented through empowerment, increased self-esteem, and increased knowledge of equality, colonization, racism, consent, and healthy relationships. This impact cannot fully be measured as these changes are internal, but the result in time will be a massive generational shift.

Let us not forget about the impact the project has had on our youth facilitators, who increased their knowledge and capabilities, while changing the trajectory of their lives. Some used their lived experience, things which normally stigmatized them, to become true agents of change; while all of them improved their skill sets, increased their self-worth, and empowered their communities.

"The Peer Prevention Project has opened even my eyes to just how many girls are affected by human trafficking," says Marlena Hendry, one of the project's Youth Facilitators. "Working on this team and empowering younger girls makes me feel more empowered, too. And it helps to know that, as a survivor of human trafficking myself, what happened to me wasn't my fault."

The ripple effects of this work will be seen for years to come. When women and girls know their worth, they are empowered to make their own decisions. When youth are able to recognize what a healthy relationship is, they understand what their own relationship may be lacking. When young men understand the meaning of consent, they act more responsibly. When Indigenous youth understand how their ancestors' history has impacted them today, they demand better. When LGBTQ2S+ youth feel a sense of community, they can lead vibrant lives free from violence.



Nikki Dube – Social Worker, Trauma and Crisis Counsellor, Human Trafficking Advocate

Nikki Dube is a trauma counsellor, rape crisis counsellor, social worker, and case worker for human trafficking survivors with 10+ years of experience working in community agencies across the Greater Toronto Area. She is also a former Crown Ward and knows the child welfare system well. She calls for funding for holistic approaches to supporting survivors of gender-based violence, wrap-around services and an allowance for overlap in age groups so that youth don't fall through the cracks while they are shipped off to another agency. She says that many times, the agency may want to support the youth, but their funding says they can't. But above all else, she calls for systemic change through education on gender equity, racism and trauma, including for health care professionals and service providers.

Nikki is one of the most tireless social workers and trauma counsellors I know. She never says no to supporting a survivor, even if she has to work evenings and weekends to do it. Her phone is always on, and it's never a 'bad time' to call her.

"What about survivors of human trafficking who are navigating supports for mental health, addiction and rehab? What if you want to get treatment, but you're not there yet? It's either you get sober for 24 hours or 48 hours before you even enter the facility, or nothing," says Nikki. "We need spaces where we could prep survivors before rehab so that they can feel supported and ready. I've seen a lot of girls and young women feel shunned or judged because they try to go to rehab and get kicked out because they're just not ready. It's not that simple. It's all of the trauma, which is why you are using in the first place. So, you can't just treat the addiction; you have to recognize the trauma connected to it. I think about that a lot. I don't think we're there yet. A lot of medical facilities still see addiction as solely a medical thing."

She's right. And then we see survivors start using again and it hurts.

"And I still think about the judgement against women and girls because our society says we're supposed to be the caretakers, we're supposed to be nurturing, we're supposed to be mothers. And so, we're shunned if we have an addiction. Especially if we have children because that's not allowed! There's no room for addiction if you're a mother. So, there's another layer of stigma on top of being a survivor of human trafficking."

What an interesting dot to connect.

Society is indeed very quick to judge mothers who use drugs, but less so of fathers.

The work of gender norms.

Nikki is also passionate about the lack of adequate support for children in care and leaving care and how that directly relates to human trafficking. Having been a Crown Ward herself for 18 years, she knows what she is talking about.

"When you think of today's generation, how many kids still live at home or leave and come back because they can't afford it? You don't have that option as a kid in care. So when you leave care, that's it. You're on your own. Which is why we see so much addiction, homelessness, sexual exploitation. Moreover, a lot of kids in care suffer from mental health (issues) because of childhood trauma or prenatal exposure to drugs and alcohol. And then they turn 16 and they're told, 'You're an adult now, bye.'"

Like drawing a target on their back.

04

human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation

Nikki says that there are some bursaries and funds available for youth leaving care, but they may not even know about them and if they don't have a good social worker, they may have a hard time accessing the funds.

"I think that there could be more emphasis on supporting youth when they're leaving care", she says. "Because in the end, you're going to be paying for them if they end up in jail or in the hospital or on the streets, whatever. And that's it."

Another thing we discussed is how trafficking survivors are not only left with physical and emotional trauma, but in many cases, criminal records.

"The pimps will make sure to put everything in her name. They'll get her a credit card so she can sign for the Airbnb, and then they'll jack up the credit cards, write fake cheques and ruin her credit. And the courts don't recognize that as part of the exploitation. They say, 'You stole'. So now they have a criminal record and it stops them from doing all kinds of things. And now she wants to get a job or go to school and she can't get OSAP because she has bad credit."

One of the survivors I've worked with had to carry her exploiter's weapon around in her bag. She ended up in detention because of it and is still dealing with the consequences. What the justice system failed (or refused) to recognize is that she had absolutely no choice in the matter. She had to carry that weapon or face the consequences.

Now, how are these women supposed to obtain a higher education and get a better job with criminal records? Here's your "Women and Poverty", "Women and the Economy", the list goes on.

Elizabeth Fry Toronto

Elizabeth Fry Toronto supports women in conflict with the law, or at risk of being so. Through Aura Freedom's work, I have collaborated with Elizabeth Fry Toronto on various initiatives supporting women in the city. One of those initiatives was the creation of a counselling guide for service providers supporting human trafficking survivors.

As Caroline, Nikki and countless others have pointed out, there is a lack of a trauma-informed approach when working with individuals who have experienced gender-based violence. And if you work with survivors of human trafficking, you will know that they have very specific mental health needs combined with extreme forms of trauma.

Through some funding from the City of Toronto, Elizabeth Fry Toronto put together a procedural manual to address the challenging and often complex mental health needs of women trafficked in the sex trade. The Supporting Survivors of Human Trafficking Counselling Guide, launched in 2019, was created through focus group discussions with survivors and consultations with community stakeholders. They are also providing training to counsellors who wish to use learn more.

This is the power of The Grassroots that I know and love and it's what works.

A need is recognized.

Stakeholders and survivors are consulted.

A solution is created together.

In 2017, Elizabeth Fry Toronto launched the Exit Doors Here program for women wishing to leave the sex trade, including human trafficking survivors. The program provides a 'personalized suite of wraparound services and time-based interventions to ensure successful exiting' and is also open to trans women.

Exit Doors Here uses a new evidence-based case management model of Critical Time Intervention (CTI). The CTI model is employed to support the transitioning of people from precarious and sensitive situations to stability. Above all else, the Exit Doors Here team provides emotional and practical support without stigma and strengthens the women's long-term ties to services, family, friends, and the community.

I've spent time with some of the women in this program through Aura Freedom's work. The impact of human trafficking on their lives was evident. Every single aspect of their lives was affected, from health and education to financial status and decision-making skills. In just this one small room, in one neighbourhood, in one city, in one country of the world, I could clearly see how gender-based violence is impacting global development.

But as Maya Angelou so beautifully said, "But still, like dust, they'll rise."

The Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network (TCHTN)

The TCHTN is a grassroots community network composed of various organizations and individuals within the Toronto area, reflecting the racial and cultural diversity of Toronto's communities. Coordinated by the FCJ Refugee Centre, membership is open to any organizations and individuals with knowledge, expertise or interests related to human trafficking. The Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network works towards the elimination of human trafficking in Canada and abroad, and to address the plight of trafficked persons through a holistic, human rights-based approach, focused on the needs of trafficked persons as opposed to the crime of human trafficking itself.

Members of the Network have collaborated on numerous occasions to address human trafficking in Toronto and beyond. We have met with Municipal, Provincial and Federal government officials, hosted awareness events, consulted on strategies at all levels of government and assisted countless survivors. We have designed a human trafficking response model for Toronto and consulted on the development of a data collection tool with Find Help/211 to collect data on the prevalence of trafficking in the city.

Personally speaking, being a part of the Network has been an extremely positive experience. As an unfunded, feminist grassroots group, the collaboration, solidarity and support that the Network offers has proved to be invaluable to Aura Freedom.

As a long standing member of the Network, I have seen how powerful this community can be. Between the most active members, we take turns hosting meetings, write letters of support for each other's grant proposals, provide each other with free training and always strive to amplify one other's work.

A true, grassroots family.

Do No Harm Initiative

As outlined at the beginning of this section, there are differing opinions when it comes to sex work and human trafficking. Do No Harm is an initiative of the Collaborative Network to End Exploitation (a project of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto) which was started to address this divide. It was born when two members of the network – Varka Kalaydzhieva and Leah Watkiss - attended an anti-human trafficking conference that triggered some trafficking survivors in the audience and alienated the very women they set out to support, including women who voluntarily worked in the sex trade.

Painting by **RAIESA** - Toronto painter, poet, musician



I was actually invited to speak at that conference.

I'm glad I didn't go.

I have been to conferences like these and it is brutal. They all seem to work in the same way and revolve around graphic survivor stories.

Tell your story.

Stress the most horrible parts.

Go home with your trauma.

And the more horrible your story, the more you are asked to tell it.

This is exactly why Aura Freedom's Peer Prevention Project (mentioned above) doesn't require its youth facilitators -some of whom are survivors of trafficking- to disclose their stories during presentations. Facilitators are there as youth leaders and their sole job is to empower their peers with knowledge and education. Sometimes, if they feel safe and inspired, they might share an aspect of their own story in order to explain the grooming process or means of control, but it is ultimately their decision. Their lived experience is not exploited for a more sensational presentation, but utilized as a powerful tool to help identify youth who may be struggling. The team takes care of each other; if any self-serving or oppressive questions come up from the audience, they are quickly addressed.

It is so important to be anti-oppressive, trauma informed and extremely sensitive to a wide range of needs when planning human trafficking events. One of my colleagues once attended a human trafficking conference that had survivors stay in a hotel that was a known holding spot for girls and women being trafficked.

The purpose of Do No Harm is twofold - to highlight how some anti-trafficking work can cause harm to both consenting sex workers and trafficking survivors and to outline best practices to reduce those harms. The initiative will culminate in a webinar series that will bring forth different and oftentimes silenced voices from women's organizations, anti-trafficking groups and sex worker rights organizations. Aura Freedom is one of the members.

It's not easy work. There are many opposing views during the planning meetings and a lot of self-reflection afterwards. Which is a good thing.

"Many religious groups have, either intentionally or unintentionally, done a lot of harm to women involved in sex work," says Varka. "So this initiative was also part of rebranding and reframing ourselves. Sex worker rights groups didn't want to come to the table and engage with us and we wanted to change that."

They even changed their name from the Faith Alliance to End Human Trafficking to the Collaborative Network to End Exploitation.

"The word "faith" was problematic," says Leah.

It's a gutsy move. Not only within the anti-trafficking space, but also for a religious organization with pressures to maintain a certain public 'face'.

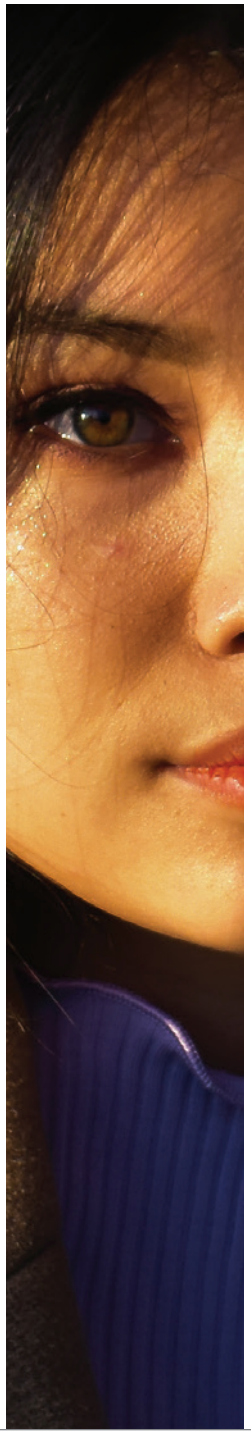
Varka clarifies, "We are not here to change anybody's mind or opinion about sex work. Our hope with this webinar series is that people come with an open mind and check their blind spots when they are providing training or working with survivors or whatever they are doing within the anti-human trafficking area."

Checking our blind spots is always a good thing.

The project is new and we have yet to see its impact, but we are hopeful.

05 forced marriage/ child marriage

"Girls are like horses, if you don't give them away when they are young, they lose their luck" – **Italian proverb**



THE SITUATION

Forced marriage was criminalized under Canada's Criminal Code in 2015 and became punishable by up to 5 years in prison for those who "celebrate, aid, or participate in a marriage rite or ceremony knowing that one of the persons is marrying against their will". It is also recognized as a form of human trafficking in Canada and internationally. Many forced marriages of Canadians met the criterion for the definition of human trafficking even before the act became explicitly criminalized.

According to a 2013 report published by the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO), 219 forced marriage cases were reported by 30 agencies in Ontario and Quebec between 2010 and 2012. Of those affected, 92% of were female, 6% male and 1% were transgender and 1% were unknown, although SALCO does note that numbers may be skewed due to a lack of outreach to male clients. The report revealed that 35% of those married were under the age of 18, which would, according to the UN, constitute not only forced marriage but child marriage.

According to the United Nations and Girls Not Brides, a global partnership working towards the eradication of child marriage (of which Aura Freedom is a member), child marriage is the marriage of anyone under the age of 18. The reasons for this age limit are many. Child brides are not ready to become wives and mothers, neither physically nor emotionally. Moreover, young girls are higher at risk for complications in pregnancy and childbirth, experiencing domestic violence and contracting HIV/AIDS. Decision-making and negotiating safe sex is diminished, as well as the opportunity to interact with other community members and develop a healthy social support network. Many young girls are pulled out of school to get married, and thus child marriage also affects economic opportunities, resulting in them and their families living in poverty (Girls Not Brides, 2019).

Those working in international development are very familiar with Canada's advocacy to end child marriage. Canada has been and continues to be one of the top funders of international projects and UN initiatives to address child marriage in the Global South. In fact, Canada's Global Affairs funded two of Aura Freedom's projects which addressed child marriage in post-earthquake Nepal. In 2016, Aura Freedom was invited to speak on behalf of the Girls Not Brides Partnership at Canada's Global Affairs in Ottawa at a Canadian event to raise awareness of child marriage overseas.

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy addresses child marriage and its negative impacts on page 4, saying, "An estimated 15 million girls under the age of 18 are forced into marriage every year—that's 39,000 every day.13 Every year, 16 million children are born to adolescent girls (age 15 to 19), accounting for just over one out of every 10 births worldwide. For girls in developing countries, this makes it harder to stay in school and harder to work—perpetuating the cycle of intergenerational poverty. A recent study in Nigeria estimated that the gender gap in education could be cut in half if child marriage and early pregnancies were eliminated."

Indeed, Canada is a leader in the movement to end child marriage globally.

So when we turn and look inwards, it is strange to see that child marriage is, in fact, legal in Canada.

Canada's federal Civil Marriage Act sets the minimum age for marriage at 16. Provinces, which administer the licensing, require parental consent or a court order for people younger than 18.

Alissa Koski researches child marriage in Canada at McGill University's Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health. According to her research, Canadian provinces have issued 3,382 marriage licenses to children over the last 18 years, with Ontario accounting for 1,353 of them. Koski says that these numbers exclude common-law marriages and cases where children have been taken out of the country for forced/child marriages and returned to Canada. The vast majority of the children are girls, who marry at younger ages than boys and marry substantially older men.

On the Girls Not Brides website, there is "no data" under Canada regarding child marriages.

This strange discrepancy between Canada's international and domestic responses to child marriage must be addressed. Reluctance to raise the age to 18 has been attributed to concerns over religious freedoms.

But, if Canada can advocate raising the age of marriage to 18 to benefit children in other countries, why would it differ for children living here?



Photo by **Jermaine Ulinwa**

Many forced marriages of Canadians met the criterion for the definition of human trafficking even before the act became explicitly criminalized.

According to a 2013 report published by SALCO, 219 forced marriages were reported in Ontario and Quebec between 2010 and 2012



05

forced marriage/
child marriage

THE RESILIENCE

South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)

SALCO works with a lot of clients who are facing forced marriage in Canada and has been a leader on this issue. Their extensive work with clients led to the launch of their Forced Marriage Project and their critical report on forced marriage in Canada which was released in 2013. In 2015, amendments were made to the Criminal Code of Canada which, according to survivors and SALCO, has made it more difficult for forced marriage victims to seek support.

SALCO's 2013 report on forced marriage in Canada outlines recommendations that are based on interactions and experience with hundreds of forced marriage survivors, who have repeatedly expressed concern about criminalizing family members and wanting to protect their families regardless of their own victimization. Given these victims' understanding of and relationship with their families, the criminalization of a family member would further harm the victim and their loved ones. Forced marriage survivors have indicated that they would be hesitant to seek any outside assistance if this would result in criminal and subsequent immigration consequences for family members. According to SALCO, the government's focus on the criminalization of forced marriage instead of support for survivors through education, housing, employment or healthcare will only further alienate and harm those facing forced marriage and gender-based violence.

For more information on SALCO's actions to address forced/child marriage, please see a Special Addendum entitled: "Racialized women, immigration and gender-based violence – A Beijing+25 Snapshot", which was specifically developed for Aura Freedom's Relentless Resilience Beijing +25 Parallel Report.

The I Do! Project

The I Do! Project is an organization in Toronto working primarily on the issue of forced marriage. They support women in Canada who are escaping or attempting to avoid a forced marriage, as well as assist those who have been taken abroad for a forced marriage to return safely to Canada. Survivors are supported through programming that is centred on them and have the opportunity to educate service providers and advise on content for resources, including frontline training for healthcare professionals, teachers, law enforcement, CBSA officers, legal professionals, government employees, and decision-makers.

Shirley Gillett, the founder of the Project, is a tireless activist and feminist with a huge heart. She is also one of the most dedicated frontline workers I know. According to participants of the Forced Marriage Survivors' Group, one of the Project's initiatives, there needs to be more awareness about how to recognize and intervene safely and effectively in cases of forced marriage.

"A lack of awareness and understanding is destroying the futures of women and girls," says Shirley.



A number of survivors stated that they had their safety compromised or their lives put in danger by service providers who did not understand how to handle situations involving forced marriage. This is corroborated by feedback from service providers who received training from The I Do! Project and admitted that before the training they could think of instances where they had acted in ways they now understood to be dangerous, simply from a lack of understanding of the situation and how best to respond.

"Stereotypes about who is forced to marry need to be dispelled," she adds. "Service providers and the general public, especially those involved in government agencies and law enforcement, need to understand the variety and scope of the communities in which forced marriage occurs and not make assumptions based on someone's race, religion, cultural background and economic status as to whether or not they might be at risk."

As one survivor stated regarding her small, Christian sect whose members are mostly of European background and whose leaders are wealthy men living in exclusive neighbourhoods in the GTA, "Police and social workers need to intervene in these religious communities and bring education to misinformed congregations. I have a group of people who still think the religion owns my vagina."

Her forced marriage occurred with her being taken to the United Kingdom to live in a mansion. Obviously, these details do not fit with most people's stereotypes of the communities in which forced marriage occurs. As a result, many of those at risk are not even on the radar.

Racism combined with sexism in Canadian government agencies, including the Children's Aid Society (CAS), is also putting survivors' safety at risk. Often, young survivors who managed to escape a forced marriage were told by CAS workers that they will be returned to their homes "because that is part of your culture." This is backed up by accounts of shelter workers and other service providers who have tried to help survivors and received similar responses from CAS workers.

As one survivor noted, "CAS would pressure victims to return back home and make efforts to not upset communities. They would sometimes refer victims to professional supports from the community members they are escaping from. For instance, I was only provided counsellors who had affiliations with my community. They allowed them to have so much influence over the decision-making."

Even when she begged them to help her escape, they refused. They only accepted the interpretation of her culture and religion that was made by the most powerful men within those communities. One survivor noted that this is blatant racism, this assumption that her culture and religion condones horrific abuse against women and girls, and it is completely sexist when only the men with power in the community or religion get to interpret it to meet their own needs for control.

Financial support is crucial to provide services specifically targeted to survivors of forced marriage. According to Shirley, this comes up repeatedly. Although survivors of forced marriage, or those at risk, have used shelters and services targeted at youth or women escaping violence, most have found that they do not fully meet their specific needs.

As a result of the advocacy and activism by organizations such as The South Asian Women's Centre, The South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, and The I Do! Project, forced marriage is becoming better recognized as a form of human trafficking and thus survivors are getting access to services, shelter spaces, and resources that in the past they would have been denied.

Having said that, this form of gender-based violence and human trafficking is often overlooked by police. A recent case that came to us at Aura Freedom viewed a survivor's experience through a lens of intimate partner violence, as opposed to forced marriage. As a result, the survivor was unable to access any services for human trafficking survivors, including the Special Priority Program for housing. This points to an issue in the Program itself, as the need for a police report confirming forced marriage is very hard to obtain, especially when many survivors refuse to speak out.

Shirley's final point is that survivors' connecting with other survivors is powerful. The Forced Marriage Survivors' Group, and classes and programming specifically created for survivors, are powerful tools for strengthening all participants and having a place where, as one young woman put it, "You don't have to explain everything; they already understand." And since the Forced Marriage Survivors' Group includes women from European, African, Middle Eastern and South Asian backgrounds and those of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, and Atheist belief systems, they also learn that "this is patriarchal violence and we have to work together. We have more in common than we thought."

The sisterhood heals.

06 female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C)

"It is what my grandmother called the three feminine sorrows:
the day of circumcision, the wedding night and the birth of a baby."
– The Three Feminine Sorrows - a Somali poem

THE SITUATION

According to the World Health Organization (2020):

- FGM includes procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.
- The procedure has no health benefits for girls and women and can cause severe bleeding and problems urinating, and later cysts, infections, as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of newborn deaths.
- More than 200 million girls and women alive today have been cut.
- FGM is mostly carried out on young girls between infancy and age 15.
- FGM is a violation of the human rights of girls and women.

The word 'mutilation' has not always been accepted by all. In fact, the term 'female genital cutting' was introduced in the late 1990s as a response to certain communities feeling that 'mutilation' was demeaning and indicated that parents performed the act with mal intent, which is just not the case.

What everyone seems to agree on is that 'female circumcision' is a problematic term. For starters, it likens the procedure to male circumcision. However, they are not the same thing. The health risks and implications of FGM/C are far more severe. According to the UNFPA, the term 'female circumcision' "obscures the serious physical and psychological effects of genital cutting on women."

Moreover, male circumcision is not performed to control men's bodies or sexuality.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is still the term used by most human rights organizations, survivors and UN agencies, with many having added the word 'cutting' – FGM/C.

According to many survivors, FGM/C can lead to extremely painful sexual relations and childbirths, which is referenced in a Somali poem called 'The Three Feminine Sorrows'.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission Policy on Female Genital Mutilation says, "FGM is a gender-specific violation of the rights of girls and women to physical integrity. This traditional practice is conducted in many cultures and many countries. FGM has become recognized not only as a health hazard and a form of violence against women and girls but also as a human rights issue under international law."

According to the Policy, community groups in Toronto estimate that approximately 80,000 immigrants and refugees living in the City are from countries where FGM/C is practiced. However, due to its taboo nature, there are no reliable statistics on the true prevalence of FGM/C in Canada. Based on discussions with some of the communities at risk, "...there is some evidence to indicate that FGM is practised in Ontario and across Canada. There is also evidence that suggests that in some cases, families from those communities send their daughters out of Canada to have the operation performed."

In 1997, the Federal government amended the Criminal Code to include the performance of FGM as aggravated assault under section 268(3). For parents who do not perform the act themselves, they can still be convicted as a party to the offence. Currently, Canada does not have a National Action Plan on FGM/C and there has been virtually no investigation whatsoever into the nature of FGM/C in Canada.

End FGM/C Canada Network

Farzana Doctor is the co-founder of the End FGM/C Canada Network; a network of organizations and individuals working to end female genital mutilation and cutting in Canada and abroad. A fairly new initiative, they are currently working to recruit network members and increase awareness of FGM/C through various petitions and events.

When asked about the gaps, Farzana highlighted the lack of FGM/C awareness for service providers, the lack of frontline services for survivors, and the lack of prevention initiatives for young girls and women at risk of FGM in Canada.

The Federal Government of Canada recently announced funding for organizations



Painting by **Pru Girme** - Toronto Queer artist and photographer

THE RESILIENCE

Farzana and I spoke about a recent case in Detroit, Michigan that saw people from the Bohra community coming forward to speak out against a local doctor who was performing FGM/C.

"You know, there's a large Bohra community there, but there's an even larger Bohra community in the Greater Toronto Area," says Farzana. "So if a doctor is doing it there, then a doctor is doing it here. And people don't want to talk about it. They don't want to get involved, so it's all whispers at this point."

One also thinks about how close the Canadian city of Windsor is to Detroit.

Farzana is most surprised at the lack of education in the healthcare sector on FGM/C. She says that many healthcare providers cannot recognize all of the different forms of FGM/C, save the most extreme ones, and are not equipped to support survivors.

Surprisingly, even those in the medical field who are gynecological "experts" cannot identify some less severe forms of FGM/C. And as Farzana so eloquently pointed out, the physical scars may not always be overly obvious, but the emotional scars are still there.

Her call to action is the creation of a National Action Plan and comprehensive, trauma-informed education to build awareness and understanding of FGM/C to reduce stigma, support survivors and prevent future cases.

Farzana also believes that white feminist activists or white policymakers should not shy away from FGM/C for fear of being labelled racist.

"Often (FGM/C) erroneously gets labelled as a "cultural" or "religious" issue and this is the myth that scares people into silence; "good" people aren't supposed to have an opinion about other people's cultures or religions," says Farzana. "But we needn't remain silent; all of us, regardless of race, have a role to play in countering these and other myths that surround FGM/C."

If FGM/C is tied to any culture, she suggests, it is tied to a global culture of patriarchy and gender inequality.

These comments were a way to respond to the City of Regina, Canada denying an application from the End FGM/C Canada Network for an International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation proclamation, stating they couldn't take sides on the issue.

As a survivor herself, Farzana said she was lucky to have had access to education on FGM/C which supported her own healing journey. However, she says many others are not that fortunate.

So what happens if you're told, 'Don't talk about it. Nothing happened to you.' You're left with this confusion. So, you're not going to the doctor and saying I think this weird thing happened to me."

Kandaka International for Women's Rights

Elham Bakri is the Co-Founder of Kandaka International for Women's Rights. The women's group provides informal support to Sudanese survivors of gender-based violence, including wartime sexual violence and FGM/C, who are currently living in Toronto, Canada.

It is always a pleasure speaking with Elham. We both get so excited and passionate about things that we veer off in a million different directions before coming back to the matter at hand.

Neither of us seems to mind.

Elham mentions the same gaps in the healthcare sector as Farzana did and outlines the importance of education and awareness of gender-based violence for healthcare professionals. She spoke to survivors of FGM/C living in Toronto who shared that their experiences with doctors were most often traumatic.

They say that most doctors are not familiar with the practice, and if they are, they are not trauma-informed. Some of them explained how doctors examining them looked shocked and surprised, which embarrassed them. Others said that their FGM/C was treated as an abnormality, as opposed to a procedure that was done to them, which humiliated them even more.

I am not sure how many times I can write "the importance of being trauma-informed" in one report.

Nevertheless, I just did it again.

"They (the survivors) felt scared, they felt shy because they were not sure if they would be treated properly. This is number one," says Elham.

When it comes to the implications of FGM/C in childbirth, some of the women shared stories of excruciating pain and doctors not equipped to deal with FGM/C. Others said they were "lucky" to have delivered their babies with midwives, as they felt the midwives knew more and were more sensitive to their situation.

"Yes and they have a recommendation," says Elham. "They said that reproductive healthcare providers must be trained to spot and address FGM."

At the very least, I would add.

Many of the survivors also said they were interested in reconstruction surgery, which is also missing from conversations on reproductive health in Canada.

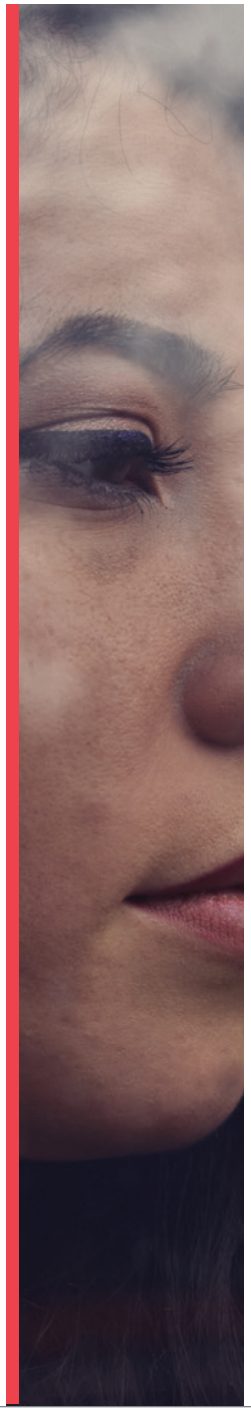
We don't even subsidize menstrual hygiene items, let alone reconstructive surgery for FGM/C.

Elham said that for many of the survivors, it's a matter of integrity. As one survivor put it, "... I need to feel I'm a woman - a complete woman again."

07 Indigenous women and girls

"Reconciliation means not having to say sorry a second time" – **Cindy Blackstock**

"But even in sleep, her ghosts all hunt her down, wanting her to look at them, remember them." – **Katherena Vermette, The Break**



THE SITUATION

This section is not a complete analysis of all statistics, data and policy regarding all Indigenous, Métis and Inuit women, girls, and two-spirit people, but a brief snapshot of of the dire situation of Indigenous women and girls in Canada and accounts from Toronto frontline workers and survivors.

On June 22, 2011, Cindy Gladue, mother of three children, was found in the bathtub of an Edmonton hotel room where she had met with Bradley Barton, an Ontario trucker. She had bled to death as a result of a wound to her vagina. On March 18, 2015, a jury found Barton not guilty of first-degree murder. In June 2017, the Alberta Court of Appeal overturned Barton's acquittal and ordered a new trial, citing flaws in the way the jury was instructed to consider sexual assault offences and the laws relating to consent. The case triggered a public outcry over the lack of justice for Indigenous women who experience violence and the prejudice they experience within the criminal justice system. In 2019, it was decided that Barton would face a new trial - for manslaughter.

In Canada, no women experience violence at the rate and in the way that Indigenous women do.

This is Canada's shame.

- Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be murdered than any other women in Canada. Despite this, those who commit crimes against an Indigenous woman are usually punished less severely (or not at all) compared to those who commit crimes against white women (MMIWG, 2019) much like the accused in the case of Cindy Gladue and countless others.
- The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has concluded that violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people in Canada amounts to genocide (MMIWG, 2019: 5-22).
- There is no exact number of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada as thousands of deaths and disappearances have gone unrecorded over the decades (Ibid.).
- Although Métis women and girls experience more violence than non-Indigenous women and girls, issues facing Métis women and two-spirit people are under-researched (Ibid.).
- Indigenous women experience spousal violence three times higher than non-Indigenous women and double that of Indigenous men (Department of Justice, 2017; RCMP, 2019).
- Indigenous identity is a risk factor for the victimization of Indigenous females, even when various risk factors are controlled (Department of Justice, 2017).

Canadian society has a history of disregarding issues facing Indigenous communities and washing our hands of the role colonialism has played in the violence Indigenous women and girls experience.

Thanks to the work of Indigenous rights activists and their allies, it's getting increasingly more difficult to continue this disregard.

The world is watching.

Violence experienced by Indigenous women is unique to them alone due to the layers of historic and current systemic oppression, discriminatory policies, and indifference. Canada can no longer ignore the traumatic intergenerational effects of the Residential School System, which lasted from the 1800s to 1996, and the 60s Scoop - both examples of state-sponsored child abuse - that helped set the stage for the current crisis of violence that Indigenous women and girls face.

Many activists and frontline workers that work with Indigenous women have described violence that is especially brutal, degrading and horrific.

Canada's Federal Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence lacks any concrete action plan to address violence against Indigenous women and girls. The Strategy mentions supporting the needs of gender-based survivors, including Indigenous women, addressing gaps in services (Government of Canada, 2018: 10), exploring partnerships with Indigenous research and data organizations to establish a plan to collect and reserve GBV data (Government of Canada, 2018: 16), as well as various other initiatives taken by outside entities (Government of Canada, 2018: 11).

In terms of an action plan to address violence against Indigenous women with measurable outcomes on behalf of the Strategy itself, there isn't one.

The only document that contains any tangible recommendations is the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). These calls for justice include focusing on substantive equality and human and Indigenous rights, using a decolonizing approach, including families and survivors, self-determined and Indigenous-led solutions and services, recognizing distinctions, cultural safety, and using a trauma-informed approach (MMIWG, 2019: 55-59).

While all Indigenous Nations vary from one to another, they all share a connection to the land. This is important to note, however briefly, that there seems to be a correlation between the exploitation of land and the violence and exploitation that Indigenous women's and girls' bodies experience. Land is culturally significant and tied to resilience for Indigenous women and this must be considered and respected.

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)

In 2015, the Government of Canada announced a national inquiry into the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, independent from the federal government. This was a landmark move for Indigenous rights and for justice for all the survivors, families, and loved ones that have passed or still missing. It is an example of the Government of Canada participating in an active listening process by realizing their role in producing violence against Indigenous women and girls and taking a proactive step to rectify it with the power that they hold.

Centering the stories of survivors and families, the inquiry started their Truth Gathering Process with Community Hearings and Statement Gathering Processes (MMIWG, 2019). From August 2016 to December 2018, data, information, and stories were gathered for the report. In the end, the National Inquiry produced a Final Report over 1000 pages long. In addition, the inquiry also produced a separate report that summarized robust recommendations for the government's next steps.

By expanding on the types of violence Indigenous women, girls and LGBTQ2S+ experience, such as child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, bullying and harassment, suicide and self-harm, and human trafficking, the National Inquiry demonstrated how everything was interconnected. The public devaluation of Indigenous women and girls and society's misperceptions built on harmful colonial stereotypes were also focused upon and understood as important root causes to address.

In Canada, no women experience violence at the rate and in the way that Indigenous women do.
This is Canada's shame.

Photo by **Kathleen** - Human Trafficking Survivor



> **"There's a huge lack of understanding of what Indigenous communities have survived, but more importantly, there's a lack of empathy and an influx in ignorance from non-Indigenous people."** Melissa Compton, Social Worker and Indigenous Educator

07

Indigenous women and girls

Genocide

The final report validated what grassroots organizations and survivors have been saying - persistent and intentional human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses are the root cause behind the staggering rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls and LGBTQ2S+ people in Canada (MMIWG, 2019). The National Inquiry not only recognized past genocide of Indigenous peoples, but concluded that an ongoing genocide occurs to this day - especially against Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ2S+ people. This charge of genocide is to underline the clear fact that the systemic racism, colonialism, poverty, and violence that is faced by Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ2S+ are all connected and all amount to a calculated and systematic destruction of Indigenous peoples' lives, culture, and way of life.

Indigenous rights activists are calling for the intervention of the United Nations to ensure Canada complies with the recommendations of the National Inquiry, given the state's full participation in the oppression and genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

The MMIWG report is often portrayed as Canada's first step towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples - even though not everyone feels the same way.

Coerced and/or Forced Sterilization

In 2019, a proposed class-action lawsuit in Saskatchewan alleging the coerced sterilization of Indigenous women in Canada has turned up reports from more than 100 women who say it happened to them (Zingel, Apr 2019). These reports have been coming in from the Northwest Territories, Yukon, Manitoba, Alberta, British Columbia, Québec, and Ontario (Ibid.).

Coerced or forced sterilization refers to the practice of sterilizing women without their proper or informed consent (Ibid.).

Another act of genocide committed against Indigenous women in Canada.

This class-action lawsuit has cited that this practice has been ongoing in Canada since at least the 1930s (Ibid.). This case brings to light the issue of coerced and forced sterilization and is but one example of the systemic, institutionalized, and racist forms of violence against Indigenous women in Canada. The sterilizations of Indigenous women are clear examples of abuse of power and racial profiling, a violation of multiple Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, cruel treatment, sexual battery, and negligence (Soloducha, 2017).

Indigenous Women in Conflict with the Law

More than one in three women in federal custody are Indigenous. (Pate, 2018). Indigenous women's experience with regards to incarceration can be summed up in one word: hyper-responsibility. This is a phenomenon where the legal system has designated certain vulnerable groups to take more responsibility than others (Ibid.).

The federal Corrections and Conditional Release Act provided avenues for de-carcerating Indigenous prisoners and those with mental health issues, such as sections 81 and 84, that allow communities to apply to have Indigenous individuals serve their sentences or be paroled into their communities (Pate, 2018: 2). These provisions have not been utilized to their full extent as incarceration rates of Indigenous women has actually increased since they were created in 1992 (Ibid.).

Trafficking of Indigenous Women and Girls for the Purposes of Sexual Exploitation

The ongoing colonial sexualization and dehumanization of Indigenous women's bodies where Western ideology positions Indigenous women as inherently "violable and less valuable" than non-Indigenous women (Roudometkina and Wakeford, NWAC, 2018: 3) is but one small factor that has led to the higher

risk Indigenous women and girls experience regarding human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Testimony from the National Inquiry into MMIWG (2019) has highlighted the fact that human trafficking is strongly linked to the disproportionately high rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls. The extent of human trafficking and victimization of Indigenous women is grossly under-reported (Public Safety Canada, 2019).

Indigenous women and girls are overrepresented in those who have been sexually exploited in Canada (ONWA, 2017: 4). According to a report by the Ontario Native Women's Association (2017), each community is affected in different ways; communities in the western part of Ontario have seen a major increase of trafficked young women due to mining and forestry camps. Traffickers use different tactics, such as gifting money, drugs, and alcohol, to form a trusting relationship where they can coerce women working low wage jobs as cleaners or cooks in the mining camps to lure them into exploitative situations. Promises of more money in one night than they would make in a month are made only if the women stay after their shifts and "party" with the men (ONWA, 2017: 7). Some women were kidnapped, raped, and many are propositioned for sex. Women and girls have been found in snowbanks, barely clothed, near the mining camps - while others have disappeared (Ibid.). In response to the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women, some industry camps set up security measures, such as wire fences, security cameras, and so on, but the men in the camps find ways around them (Ibid.). Some workers have reported that managers are involved in the trafficking or tolerate it (Ibid.).

Eastern Ontario communities face trafficking and exploitation for basic needs, including rides to larger cities for medical appointments, while Inuit women from Northern communities are groomed and lured to more Southern cities, most often Ottawa, to escape poverty and other issues. Whether they are trafficked or travel to Ottawa by their own choice, Inuit women face language barriers and a lack of community and are at a high risk of trafficking (Ibid.)

Statistics from a 2016 NWAC report show that while Indigenous women represented only four percent of the total Canadian population, they comprised nearly 50 percent of victims of human trafficking - and nearly one-quarter of them were under the age of 18 (Roudometkina and Wakeford, NWAC, 2018). The National Inquiry into MMIWG heard several stories about women and girls in the sex industry who experienced sexual exploitation, violence, and human trafficking - many spoke about daughters, mothers, and sisters who were murdered as a result of trafficking (MMIWG, 2019).

When genocide, intergenerational trauma, racism, sexism, poverty, insecure housing, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice and child welfare systems are combined with a lack of comprehensive culturally-sensitive social supports and barriers to accessing education, employment, health care, and cultural healing avenues, one cannot be surprised that the trafficking of Indigenous women and girls is happening at such a crisis-level rate in Canada.

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is an international instrument adopted by the United Nations in 2007 to enshrine (according to Article 43) the rights that "constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world." Article 22.2 specifically names the protection of women and children, saying, "States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination."

Canada's status with regards to ratifying UNDRIP is somewhat confusing. For almost a decade, Canada had not shown great interest in ratifying UNDRIP. In 2016, under new federal leadership, Canada changed its official stance and adopted the Declaration, but it remains unratified. The issue with ratifying UNDRIP had been, and arguably still is, a clause that calls for "free, prior and informed consent" of Indigenous communities in matters that impact them, such as pipeline projects (Abedi, Nov 2019).

In 2019, British Columbia became the first province in Canada to formally enshrine UNDRIP into law, a landmark moment that was followed by praise from Indigenous leaders and provincial celebrations.

According to the British Columbia Government's website, the new legislation "will see B.C. laws brought in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is a historic time for everyone in B.C. It brings Indigenous peoples to the table for the decisions that affect them, their families and their territories. It provides a way forward on reconciliation with a plan that will work for everyone in B.C."



THE RESILIENCE

07

Indigenous women and girls

Melissa Compton - Social Worker, Trauma and Crisis Counsellor, Indigenous Educator

Melissa Compton is a support worker and counsellor to Indigenous women and youth who are survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking. She is also an Indigenous educator and provides Indigenous cultural sensitivity training to agencies and individuals across Ontario. Melissa has worked with numerous Indigenous youth and women who have experienced extreme forms of violence.

Melissa could talk for hours and not even scratch the surface of the harms and oppression of Indigenous women and girls in Canada. She is a walking encyclopedia (or Google search) of knowledge and history. For our interview, she focused on how colonization has contributed to the gender-based violence and sexual exploitation facing Indigenous women in Canada.

To Melissa, the biggest gap comes down to a lack of education on the historical impacts of pre-contact, colonization and the residential school system on Indigenous communities, and how it trickled down to violence against women.

“Those who did survive (residential school) came out with immense trauma and received no help or support, while still being racialized and oppressed. And then you’re being pushed onto a reserve - a reserve that you no longer fit into because now you speak English and you have a different world view. So then you go back to the city, but you don’t fit in there, either. With no support for residential school survivors, particularly for Indigenous men, some began to abuse our women. There is a lack of representation of healthy Indigenous men.”

Melissa says that while education to non-Indigenous people on the impact of colonization is important, it is also integral to the Indigenous communities facing these impacts.

“Indigenous people themselves are struggling with Indigenous perspectives, but it’s because of colonization; because of how they were raised. Maybe they were adopted into a different community and they weren’t connected with the culture. Or, if I use myself as an example, I’m Mi’kmaq from the East Coast but I was born and raised in Toronto. And so the teachings that I received when I started coming into the culture where Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Cree. This is fine because I need to learn the culture so I can support the people that I work with and honour the lands that I’m on, but I’m still missing that part of myself. Indigeneity is not just one big culture. Like any other culture, it has different nations, cultures, customs, languages, etc. People forget that. It’s ridiculous to me.”

Melissa once told me how the Greeks and Italians she knows are always the ones who know the most about their heritage, and some of them even go slightly overboard. We laughed because I am of both Greek and Italian heritage and I know what she is talking about. Right down to the Italian flag on my Nonna’s car.

But, she brings up an important point. The power of knowing where you ‘come from’ is not to be underestimated. If you experience violence, knowing your culture can be a very grounding aspect of your healing. Many of us take it for granted, but it’s a privilege.

“There’s a huge lack of understanding of what Indigenous communities have survived, but more importantly, there’s a lack of empathy and an influx in ignorance from non-Indigenous people. Whether that be ignorance in the fact that they just don’t know or willful ignorance. So, when you have an entire society feeding into the Indigenous stereotypes, it then translates into the Indigenous community itself. You start believing the stereotypes, you start fulfilling that oppressed role.”

Melissa discusses the young women she works with and the challenges they face.

“I’ve been working in the community for probably about 15 years now and there is this constant pattern of, ‘I can’t do that because I’m Indigenous’ or ‘I shouldn’t do that because this is who I am.’ And so when you hear those pieces, it shows you that Indigenous youth are limited in what they feel they can do or achieve.”

Which was part of the plan all along.

In terms of gender, Melissa highlights how Indigenous women were never regarded as the property of men in Indigenous communities until colonization came along.

"The fact that Indigenous women have survived human trafficking is remarkable. We need to get rid of the whole victimization of exploited persons because we're not victims. If we were victims, we'd be dead."

Bridget Perrier,
Human Trafficking Survivor and Advocate

"With colonization and the implementation of religious doctrines, Indigenous women became the property of not only the men, but they also became the property of the government. The property of the State. And it wasn't just land and resources that were taken from Indigenous communities. It wasn't just lumber, etc. The women and children were also taken."

And they are still taken today, in the form of human trafficking and femicide.

"You look at stories like Pocahontas and see how Disney has misrepresented it. Pocahontas was a child, but according to Disney, it's a love story. It's the savage princess who needed to be saved by the White man. The savage who needed to be domesticated, who needed to be taught a lesson. And so you've got these long-standing oppressive ideologies that transcend - translate into what we're still seeing today."

Melissa is outspoken about the types of violence that Indigenous women experience more often than non-Indigenous women.

"To this day, I hear men say things like, 'I'm just going to go with an Indigenous woman because they like to be beaten and I want to get my anger out.' I've heard both Indigenous and non-Indigenous men say things like this. And that just brings us right back to all of these pieces. These are Indigenous communities believing the stereotypes that they've been fed their whole lives."

These are communities fractured by colonization.

"In terms of human trafficking, there's pretty much a 'catalog' of girls that you get to choose from and that's the description of the Indigenous woman. You can be with them because they like to be beaten, you can abuse them. Or they like to be choked and like to do these types of things. And so that's how this long-standing, misrepresented imagery bleeds into society and communities. And it happens for so long, that you begin to believe it."

Melissa discusses the added layers of oppression, racialization, and trauma that Indigenous survivors of violence experience in comparison to non-Indigenous women.

"When we look at some of our traditional teachings, we believe that we walk with the past seven generations. And so you're not only carrying those that are living - you're carrying the trauma from the past seven generations."

And then she adds, "But that's also seven generations of resiliency. "

Yes.

"You're still here and they're still here," says Melissa. "They're still walking with you."

Melissa says that oftentimes, before anything else, she works on humanizing the women and youth she works with.

"A lot of the time I have to pull back and focus on just humanizing them in the moment. I tell them they are as resilient as those seven generations that they are holding onto. Sometimes I have to go right into the (Indigenous) teachings and have them honour and recognize what they walk with and who they walk with, rather than focusing on the trauma that they're carrying right now."

"I've gone back to Ryerson (University) to do guest lectures or talks with students in the Child and Youth Care program and the first thing I say to them is, 'Everything that you've learned in this class and learned about Indigenous people across the program will be thrown out the window.' A lot of what you're being taught in the mainstream is not going to work for Indigenous communities. Also, if you walk in wearing a suit, high heels, and holding a clipboard, community members are not going to respond. Youth in general, Indigenous or not, are not going to respond."

The conversation then shifts to the poverty experienced by Indigenous communities and its impact.

"You can't do any trauma work and you can't support survivors if their basic needs haven't been met. And as staff in helping professions, we're always so exhausted and burned out that we forget to care for ourselves or take care of our own basic needs. So then we forget to do that for our community members. It can mean everything. Today, I lugged in two huge bags of shoes and winter boots so that I can have them under my desk for someone who needs them."

The Grassroots knows how to support survivors.

"We're seeing an increase in survival sex in our communities, meaning having sex with somebody for basic needs, especially on reserve or when community members just leave their reserves to come to the city for the first time. So, you might have family members who are trafficking you because they're trying to feed the family. But, if you were to provide these families with support and money in the first place, this would not be happening. So, poverty is a large systemic issue."

Yes, and the root of that poverty is colonization.

Melissa identifies the gaps in services that she is seeing in her work with Indigenous gender-based violence survivors.

"A lack of affordable housing is an issue. Government financial support is an issue. ID reinstatement is an issue. Taxes have been an issue. Who is coming out of a trafficking situation and has the money to pay to get their taxes done? Nobody."

And who is coming out of a trafficking situation with ID? Not very many people

07

Indigenous women and girls

Melissa shares how one of the hardest parts of her work is supporting human trafficking survivors who had their ID taken away while being trafficked and are now trying to navigate social service systems, including housing. I have also been there and it's a nightmare trying to get services while someone waits for their birth certificate to arrive.

We discuss the City of Toronto's Special Priority Housing category for trafficking victims and the fact that neither of us has had success.

Melissa asks, "Has anyone had success there?"

Finally, she points to a lack of trauma-informed healthcare providers.

"Human trafficking survivors often need pelvic floor therapy. But, they require trauma-informed and victim-centered pelvic therapists. It's important to be gentle when examining patients, and they should be allowed to bring someone with them, regardless of whether they are family or not, if that is what they need to feel safe and supported. And if the therapist is male-identified, it's not going to work most of the time."

These things are important. If they are not considered, survivors face the risk of being traumatized all over again.

In keeping with the theme of being trauma-informed, Melissa mentions the importance of having 24-hour access to services. Indeed, trauma and crisis don't only exist between the hours of 9-5.

"For the sake of the staff's sanity, support workers hours are usually kept from 9-5. But, just to have the option of a couple of staff members who can work in the off hours would be really helpful. This is also where partnerships are so important. Having connections with so many different organizations is paramount. Of course, most of the main casework, healthcare, and other work is being done during the day, but we need to have people there at night. I think of the survivors who have nightmares at night because they used to work at night, or they were being shipped around at night. They need support."

Melissa says that is why peer support programs are important pieces of the healing journey for survivors of violence, especially Indigenous ones.

"We crave social connection in human stories. And because Indigenous people come from an oral storytelling perspective, we heal by sharing each other's stories. Peer support programs are huge because you're giving them a platform to utilize their story and process their story, but also to flip that. To use it as a tool to support someone else. And so it's not just a negative experience; it can be a positive one."

Melissa tells me about her own experience as a peer support worker when she was a student.

"I was a peer support worker at Ryerson (University) and it was significant for me because I got to work through my story and I learned how to process my story and then eventually learned how to share my story. As I continued to share it, more pieces would start coming out which meant I was healing from those pieces. That allowed me to then come into my professional life and not be triggered by those pieces but use them professionally."

Melissa adds that you have to be in a place and at a level where sharing your story is not going to trigger you or break you down while you are supporting someone else. However, Melissa feels that showing emotion with survivors is not always a bad thing and I can't help but agree. If it's safe to do so, it can be quite powerful to bring the wall down and sit in a moment with someone, as long as you have the tools to stay in control of the situation and it's safe for the other person.

"So many people and so many professionals are afraid to cry with their community members. And for Indigenous communities, we cry amongst ourselves for many different things -whether we're happy, sad, angry, whatever. And I think that's important. As a professional, you're obviously not going to break down and have your clients worry about you, but if it's done naturally and you can collect yourself afterward, then you're actually showing a healthy way to manage emotion."

She continues, "If you look at the inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, it was a strong group of women. Whether they were survivors or whether they had lost somebody or somebody was still missing, these were people that had experienced something. And even though many were still going through the trauma, they came together with all of their stories and helped heal each other."

Resilience

I asked Melissa what she would do to end violence against Indigenous women if she had an endless pot of money. She answered with education.

For every single person in Canada.

"In terms of Indigenous perspectives and world view, I want to see everyone get it, not just helping professions. I want to see politicians get it. I want to see government officials get it. I want to see doctors get it. I want to see the police get it. I want to see security guards get it. It should be mandatory in all post-secondary programs and most definitely for all frontline staff and those associated with frontline agencies ."

The grassroots is telling us what we need.

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto – Bekaadendang ("being peaceful") Program

The Bekaadendang Program (or anti-human trafficking program) was developed in response to the increase in the human trafficking of Indigenous community members. Bekaadendang supports the development of healthy relationships and provides specialized care to community members currently being trafficked or community members at high risk of being exploited. The team helps youth and women move through the system and begin their healing journey and provide healing circles, outreach and other programming.

Aura Freedom has collaborated on various initiatives within the Bekaadendang Program, including awareness events, training to frontline staff and collaborations between Aura Freedom's youth team and Native Child's youth groups to provide youth outreach. Through these collaborations, survivors of exploitation have come forward to seek services and supports from Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. Moreover, frontline workers in various agencies have received and continue to receive training on how to recognize and support survivors of human trafficking.

Bridget Perrier, Human Trafficking Survivor and Advocate

Bridget Perrier is a First Nations survivor of human trafficking. She has spoken as a First Nations human trafficking survivor at the UN Commission on the Status of Women and gave an official statement to Canada's National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls during their 'truth-gathering' process. She is the co-founder of SexTrade101, a coalition of survivors of the sex trade.

Bridget believes the sex trade places Indigenous women at risk. I have worked with Bridget on various initiatives to prevent or address human trafficking in Ontario. She knows that Aura Freedom interacts and collaborates with groups who have different views on the sex trade. It's something she and I have discussed a lot over the years. What we always agree on is that we both want to see women and girls flourish and thrive.

Bridget's lived experience gives her an edge that is difficult to describe. She can walk into a room, scan it, and know exactly who she is dealing with. Because of her insight and experience, she has supported numerous women (and girls) in leaving their traffickers and pimps safely.

According to Bridget, a lack of affordable housing forces many marginalized women, First Nations women, to remain in exploitative situations. Moreover, those looking to escape situations of human trafficking require shelters and safe houses tailored to their specific needs. Many of us in the human trafficking sphere have been calling for these safe houses and shelters for years. There are some, but not enough of them exist in Toronto, or anywhere else for that matter.

"Domestic violence shelters are not fit for persons who have been sex trafficked. Youth shelters are not a good fit for youth who have been sex trafficked," says Bridget. "You put an 18-year-old girl who's been sex trafficked in a family domestic violence shelter and that Mom with the 15-year-old, who's never experienced anything like that (and) who's very angry at Mom for leaving that comfy living situation, is now very vulnerable. And now that 18-year-old girl's having that 'I wanna go back to my pimp' feeling and knows that she has to bring him something. That 15-year-old girl is extremely vulnerable."

This is insight that only a survivor could provide.

Bridget also spoke about how some safe houses run by religious organizations ask survivors to pray and others require survivors to be sober for long periods, which is difficult for women experiencing the type of trauma that comes with human trafficking. The result? Women and youth going back to their exploiters.

"Some organizations aren't working from an anti-oppression framework. We need more than to be 'prayed for'. And we can't require survivors to be 31 days clean before entering a safe house; it can't work like that. A lot of these organizations don't have people that are trauma-informed working for them."

Bridget says another issue is when problematic service providers 'shop for victims' to speak at their events, especially when it comes to Indigenous survivors of gender-based violence and trafficking.

"I've been there," she says. "I've been the Token Hooker."

"I think we need to have land-based healing centres – especially for First Nations women and girls. And we need to not have to wait five weeks to get a phone call for the intake process. We need to not refer our women to food banks, we need to be able to feed them. We need to empower them to go back to work and to get a job. We need job developers and recruiters that will work with (survivors)."

Then she says what many of us have been saying for a while.

"I think that more funding needs to go to grassroots agencies."

Thank you.

Her final call to action? Education on gender-based violence and "how to treat each other", with specific attention to the way men and boys treat women and girls.

Education.

Again.

As we wrap up, Bridget shares one more thought regarding stigma.

"The fact that Indigenous women have survived human trafficking is remarkable. We need to get rid of the whole victimization of exploited persons because we're not victims. If we were victims, we'd be dead."

08 immigrant, refugee and non-status women and girls

"And here you are, living despite it all."– **Rupi Kaur**

THE SITUATION

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, immigrant women may be more vulnerable to domestic violence due to economic dependence, language barriers, and a lack of knowledge about community resources. Newcomers who arrive in Canada traumatized by war or oppressive governments are much less likely to report physical or sexual violence to the authorities, for fear of further victimization or even deportation. (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2016: 7).

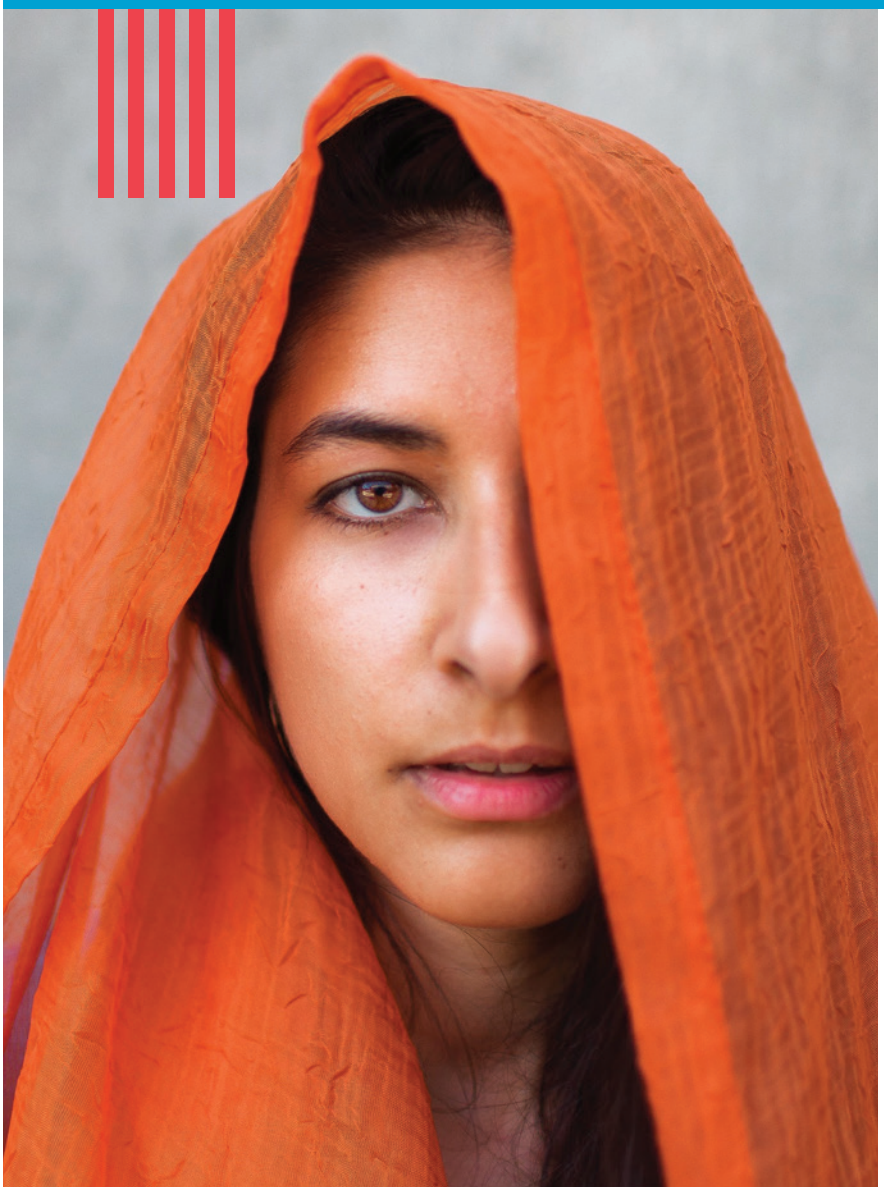
It is difficult to quantify the violence experienced by immigrant, refugee and non-status women and girls as there are many barriers and challenges they face to disclosing and reporting abuse, accessing supports and services, and navigating intersecting legal processes and social support systems (Han, 2009). These barriers are compounded by discrimination, systemic racism gender inequality.

For a complete overview of the laws and policies in place that affect immigrant and refugee women as well as women with precarious status in Toronto/Ontario, please see a Special Addendum attached to this report from our partners at the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO) entitled: "Racialized women, immigration and gender-based violence – A Beijing+25 Snapshot", which was specifically developed for Aura Freedom's Relentless Resilience Beijing +25 Parallel Report.

Information on Women Migrant Workers can be found in Section 9.



Photo by **Mandy Glinsbockel,** on assignment for Aura Freedom



Immigrant, Refugee and Non-Status Women and Girls

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, immigrant women may be more vulnerable to domestic violence due to economic dependence, language barriers, and a lack of knowledge about community resources.

When women and girls are put first and when their experiences are honoured, they can begin to heal. And then they can begin to piece their lives back together and contribute to society in the meaningful ways that every human being can.

"We at the grassroots level don't see illegal immigrants. We see people living in precarious situations who need help. We are not focused on crime. We are focused on human rights."

Luis, FCJ Refugee Centre

08 THE RESILIENCE

immigrant, refugee and non-status women and girls

FCJ Refugee Centre

The FCJ Refugee Centre has been working with immigrant, refugee, and non-status women for 28 years in the City of Toronto. Their slogan is "Walking with uprooted people."

I've always loved that line.

To them, the Canadian government needs to integrate a gender lens in the development and implementation of immigration policies to emulate the realities on the ground. FCJ emphasizes the importance of government agencies working collaboratively among departments, rather than in siloes, as doing so can harm communities.

They say that while grassroots organizations and community agencies have a social justice lens, the government views immigration through the lens of legality.

Should you be here? Are you 'legal'?

They say grassroots organizations know how to support immigrant, refugee and non-status women, and work to find solutions based on their specific needs. The government, on the other hand, gives sole discretionary power to an immigration officer and this can often narrow understanding. This is why it is important that immigration officers receive ongoing training but also establish relationships with communities to work collaboratively in understanding the realities that women face every day.

"At the end of the day, it's still at the discretion of immigration officers," says Jaitra Sathyandran, a caseworker at FCJ. "We are working within a system which is entirely bureaucratic and colonial, and there is not enough training and cultural safety".

"But we at the grassroots level don't see illegal immigrants," says Luis Alberto Mata, who coordinates different programs at the centre, including a mobile project for migrant workers. "We see people living in precarious situations who need help. We are not focused on crime. We are focused on human rights."

Human rights.

What a concept.

One of the main challenges FCJ faces when supporting survivors of gender-based violence is with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), despite the agency's efforts to incorporate a strong gender lens to their work. To them, the issue is a lack of training and education paired with systemic discrimination at all levels. They say that many women who risked everything to go to the police regarding a violent experience were reported to the Canadian Border Service Agency (CBSA); some were even deported.

Loly Rico, the co-director of FCJ Refugee Centre, is a passionate woman. Her eyes grow wide when she speaks and it's fun to listen to her.

"This morning I met a woman and I'm wondering why this is happening in Canada. She is separated from her abusive husband back home. She is also a victim of human trafficking. She is here as a permanent resident and now she wants to bring her kids here. She went to the Canadian consulate and the

consulate said no because she needs her husband's permission. She told them that he was a very dangerous man, but she is still forced to go back to her country to negotiate with him to bring her kids here. I think we are putting this woman at risk. Actually, Canada is."

Canada is better than this.

Or, at least, that is what we tell ourselves.

Loly says a positive shift was when people in Canada could apply for permanent residency based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds if they were facing gender-based violence. A definite step in the right direction for migrant women with precarious immigration status who are experiencing violence. However, the burden of proof continues to lie upon the shoulders of the survivor. Historically, we know that women have had a hard time "proving" domestic violence. But for women with precarious immigration status, it's a whole other story.

As Natasha Rollings from FCJ explains, "Yes, women can apply for compassionate grounds acceptance, but there is still a burden of proof. And if you are dealing with an immigration officer that is not aware of intersectionality and aware of these issues, proving abuse will be 'How many pictures of bruises do you have?' because that is the only proof they are going to take. How many hospital visits would you have if your partner has been threatening you with your immigration status? And you don't feel comfortable going to the hospital, whether you have the right to or not."

Furthermore, I might add, for those who have ever supported someone navigating the refugee claim process, you'll know how many times they are asked to retell their story and relive their trauma, and what effects this has on their mental health.

"I feel like our government and our agencies have a hierarchy in which the presence of a body here without immigration status is viewed as a greater issue than being the victim of abuse," concludes Natasha.

Non-Status Women

In Toronto, the Access to City Services for Undocumented Torontonians (Access T.O.) aims to improve access to city services for non-status residents. On paper, it's a great policy and I have seen it work.

However, it's not foolproof.

FCJ Refugee Centre was funded by the City of Toronto to evaluate whether the policy is actually working. The result was: not always. Many food banks, clothing banks, libraries, health clinics, and community centres still ask for ID or proof of address.

But according to FCJ, where the policy fails most often is with the police in cases of violence against women.

"How are you supposed to properly address any issue of intimate partner violence if you cannot involve the police?" asks Jaitra. "You feel that your life is at risk, but you also feel that your (immigration) status is going to be in jeopardy because you have called the police. The police are calling CBSA and making reports, even though they are not obligated to do it. We have seen the reports."

While all four FCJ staff members agreed that access to services for non-status people could be improved in Toronto, they also agreed that Toronto was probably the best place to be in Canada as a non-status person.

"It's a disaster here. Imagine if you are a non-status woman living in Lucan, Ontario and you are experiencing violence. You have no hope whatsoever," says Natasha.

Nothing should stand in the way of a survivor of gender-based violence and the services they need.

Not their immigration status.

Not their socioeconomic condition.

Not their race or religion.

Nothing.

When women and girls are put first and when their experiences are honoured, they can begin to heal. And then they can begin to piece their lives back together and contribute to society in the meaningful ways that every human being can.

This is how a society advances.

Like so many of us, more than anything, FCJ calls for education on social and gender norms that address the root causes of gender-based violence. They also cite access to housing and education as integral to the advancement of human rights.

Photo by **Mandy Glinsbockel,** on assignment for Aura Freedom



08

immigrant, refugee and non-status women and girls

To fill the gaps, the FCJ Refugee Centre runs different programs aimed at increasing awareness for immigration officers and other stakeholders to increase sensitivity and assist survivors of gender-based violence to obtain or keep their immigration status. They also provide housing to women-identifying survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking in Toronto, no matter what their immigration status is.

Natasha runs a program for youth and also provides access to education.

"One of the youth in our group was living in a pretty toxic environment. The whole family is without status. She disclosed to me that her Mom's boyfriend was sexually abusing her. Of course, without status, she cannot work legally, so she can't have any form of steady employment. We were able to secure her a low-rent apartment where she can now live alone. There are a lot of issues that are not yet resolved, and we had to fight for her to get counselling, but just the ability to have a safer place to go at night was everything."

Grassroots power.

Last year, I worked with FCJ to support a young woman without status who was also a survivor of human trafficking. She didn't have a single family member or friend in Canada. At the time we met, she was living in a shelter and met members of Aura Freedom's youth team who were running a human trafficking awareness workshop there. Through our collaboration, she was eventually able to access a room in one of FCJ's women's homes and it changed her life. She has since completed a training course and is slowly starting her journey to healing.

Let The Grassroots lead.

Our interview ends with a very powerful point made by Jaitra. "We in the West are the ones who are driving migration, so when people decide to come here or are forced to come here, we must be reflective as to our role in perpetuating that type of violence, right?"

Right.

The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)

There is a tendency in Canada, and other countries for that matter, to frame gender-based violence as a crime as opposed to a systemic issue caused by inequities and exacerbated by intersecting identities. This is damaging as it does nothing to address the root causes of gender-based violence. It also creates additional barriers for immigrant and refugee survivors who have historically had negative experiences with police or the court system in Canada or abroad.

I don't know anyone who would go to the police if there was a risk to their family's immigration status or if they might be separated from their children.

The need for resources to address gender-based violence in immigrant and refugee communities is what prompted OCASI to create their toolkit, A Future Without Gender-Based Violence: Building Newcomers' Resilience through Community Education. As the Toolkit outlines, the criminalization of gender-based violence has many negative effects on immigrant and newcomer communities.

Witta Nicoyishakiye, the Bilingual Project Coordinator at OCASI, describes the toolkit as a resource "created for service providers to address gender-based violence within newcomer communities and be mindful of different types of intersectional identities and environments, all the while maintaining a trauma-informed scope." It's also available in both English and French.

The Toolkit, which highlights existing programs and resources as opposed to creating new ones, is a follow-up to a graphic novel created a few years back which used storytelling to share examples of resilience while addressing gender-based violence in different newcomer communities. The novel has been adapted and printed in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Armenian, Simplified Chinese, Punjabi, Somali, Tamil, and Urdu.

Grassroots excellence.

Witta believes the most powerful and impactful work that she has seen to address gender-based violence has been from grassroots organizations.

I don't disagree.

"I would say that the majority of the work being done to raise awareness of gender-based violence is conducted by grassroots organizations. They are the ones disseminating the information."

Her call to action is education and she calls on the government to be proactive in preventing gender-based violence, as opposed to simply reacting to it.

"My call to action is for Canada to support education and research on gender-based violence. To take this topic seriously, since it affects not only the survivors but the community that surrounds them as well. And to further support the work being done by grassroots organizations that continue to do the work to prevent these forms of violence from happening in the future."

The Women's Program at Central Neighbourhood House

Safia Hirsi runs the Women's Program at Central Neighbourhood House - a division of The Neighbourhood Group in Toronto - which serves newcomer, immigrant and refugee communities in the Regent Park, St. James Town and Moss Park neighbourhoods. The program runs workshops on immigration issues, parenting, violence against women, gang violence and understanding the Canadian school system. Yoga, Tai Chi, informal counselling, and advocacy are also provided, as well as referrals to services for survivors of gender-based violence. Most importantly, the workshops are free and available in Bengali, Tamil, Somali, Swahili, and Mandarin.

Women being able to support other women in their native tongues is so important.

Safia mentions cultural taboos as barriers to starting conversations about gender-based violence and harmful gender norms as contributors to the violence.

And the silence.

She calls for education on gender-based violence and gender inequality at all levels of government and cultural sensitization for local police divisions, Children's Aid Society (CAS) workers and other community service providers who are involved in cases of gender-based violence in immigrant and refugee communities.

"CAS workers are often young, white women. Hiring someone who looks like the community would be beneficial. They're very nice and very helpful, but sometimes it's better to see someone who looks like you. Someone you can trust."

Makes total sense.

What the Women's Program has done is quite brilliant. They have managed to bridge the gap between the communities and Children's Aid Society (CAS) workers, which Safia says was a huge deterrent to seeking gender-based violence services. She said that some women were not calling the police because they believed their children would be taken away by CAS.

So, Safia brought the Children's Aid workers into the Women's program.

Grassroots excellence.

"So we brought in Children's Aid to say 'We are here to support you. If you experience abuse, call the police because we will help you, not him.' Children's Aid getting involved as soon as the police are called is a barrier, so we did education on that, as well. We had them come in and we also told the women we would support them if they called us. I do a lot of individual support."

She also mentions the trauma caused by men dragging their ex-partners through Family Court.

"There must be a limit to how long they drag custody cases on for. Especially in cases of domestic violence," says Safia.

She says that men use the court proceedings as another way to terrorize and control their ex-partners, all the while creating life-lasting trauma for the mother and children.

I have also witnessed this type of violence and it's heartbreaking.

Language barriers with medical professionals was another gap identified by The Neighbourhood Group. Women are being misdiagnosed because they can't properly express their symptoms. As a result, cases of violence are going undocumented.

This is a public health issue and therefore must be addressed within the health sector itself.

Or, are we to add 'translating services for healthcare professionals' to the list of responsibilities of women's organizations?

Just asking, for a friend.

Safia's loudest call to action, however, was regarding housing.

"You can go to a shelter, but, to be honest with you, it's really difficult to find a place to live. If you are not working or if you are on social assistance, no one can really afford rent in Toronto. It's harder to get housing now than ever before. It used to be easier to get social housing. Wait times were better 20-30 years ago."

Apparently, we're in a time machine.

"A lot of women will stay with their abuser because of that," says Safia. "She might go to a shelter, but she will be there for a long time."

Safia leaves us with a chilling story that paints a picture of just how crucial housing is for women experiencing violence.

"There was a case here – a woman who desperately needed housing. I said, 'I'll help you, I'll come with you.' I wanted her to know that she had the support and that we would try and help her. She never came back. And then a couple of weeks later I saw her face on TV. She was missing from her neighbourhood. I was shocked. And I know exactly what he was doing to her."



09 women migrant workers

"You only leave home when home won't let you stay."
– Warsan Shire

THE SITUATION

Migrant worker women are often missing from conversations on gender-based violence, despite being some of the most marginalized and vulnerable women to violence in Canada. Migrant workers are vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and other forms of abuse due to a multitude of barriers, such as lack of support and language differences, that interconnect to create personalized layers of difficulties (Public Safety Canada, 2019: 16).

From farms to mansions, migrant workers remain invisible and often experience sexual harassment, violence, and exploitation at the hands of their employers, co-workers, government agencies and even the police. Others experience actual labour trafficking and are held in deplorable conditions.

There is a lack of data to accurately depict the violence experienced by migrant workers. According to Statistics Canada and their survey on Canadian residential facilities for victims of abuse (2017/2018: 9):

- Immigrants tend to experience more discrimination at their place of work or when applying for jobs.
- Shelters often have an overrepresentation of non-permanent residents who come to escape abusive relationships or exploitation.
- Migrant workers are less likely to rely on thepolice for support due to victimization.

The legal status of migrant workers is dependent on employers, which makes for the perfect conditions for exploitation and violence. This is mainly due to a lack of awareness of their rights as a migrant and employee, paired with systemic issues like racism, xenophobia and gender inequality.

The Canadian National Review submitted for Beijing+25 (2019) notes that skills belonging to migrant individuals tend to be diminished in comparison to those who studied domestically as their education is undermined from the mere fact of having studied elsewhere. At times, language barriers can create miscommunications and limit the scope of expression. This leads to higher rates of unemployment, even if technically more qualified.

A legal avenue to becoming citizens or at least to permanent residence has been underlined by activists and survivors as a key component to the recovery journey.

For a complete overview of the laws and policies in place that affect immigrant and refugee women as well as women with precarious status in Toronto/Ontario, please see a Special Addendum attached to this report from our partners at the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO) entitled: "Racialized women, immigration and gender-based violence – A Beijing+25 Snapshot", which was specifically developed for Aura Freedom's Relentless Resilience Beijing +25 Parallel Report.

Photo by **Mandy Glinsbockel,** on assignment for Aura Freedom





Women Migrant Workers

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The legal status of migrant workers is dependent on employers, which makes for the perfect conditions for exploitation and violence. This is mainly due to a lack of awareness of their rights as a migrant and employee, paired with systemic issues like racism, xenophobia and gender inequality.

"The men wanted to have a party, so in order for the women to keep their jobs, they needed to go to the party and 'entertain' the men." Luis, FCJ Refugee Centre



Photo by **Pru Girme** - Toronto Queer artist and photographer

09

women migrant worksers

THE RESILIENCE

FCJ Refugee Centre

Luis Alberto Mata from FCJ Refugee Centre runs the Migrant Workers Mobile Program. The program was launched as a response to the increase in human trafficking cases involving migrant workers and the lack of services for survivors or those at risk of exploitation, as well as a lack of awareness among frontline agencies.

The main goals of the program are to create awareness and prevent instances of labour exploitation by informing migrant workers around labour and immigration laws, policies and available community supports; to identify at-risk or potential labour exploitation cases (with the support of peers if possible) and offer holistic case management support services; and to collect information about the extent of labour exploitation as well as the complex experiences of migrant workers.

Luis shared an example of just how common violence against migrant workers is, not to mention how powerful outreach programs like theirs can be.

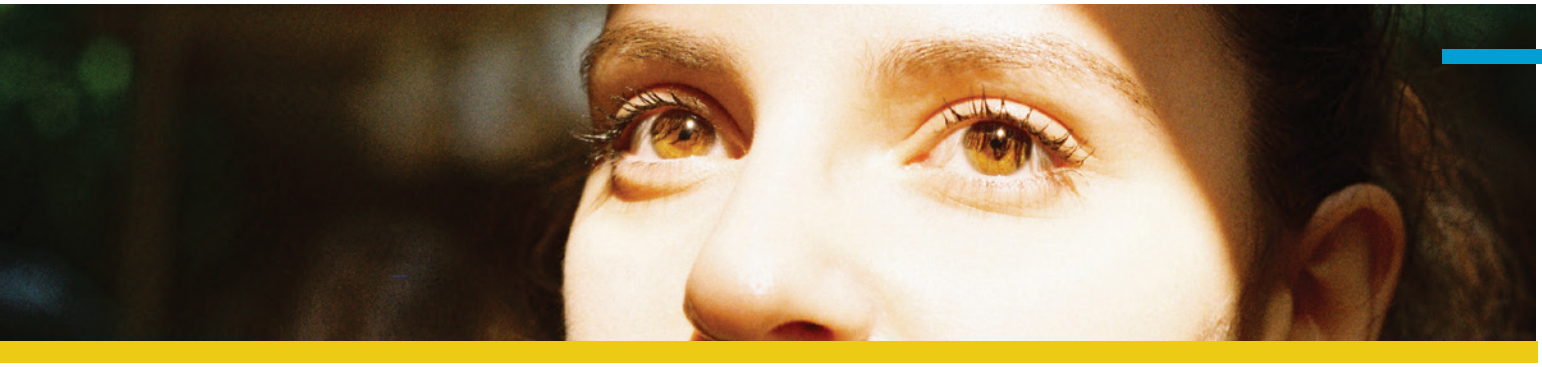
"We were in Ajax providing an info session to Guatemalan migrant workers, more than half of them women, where we talked about the various abuses the migrants were facing from their employers. However, when one of the workers came to our office and we talked more in-depth, we discovered that the abuses were not only perpetrated by the employers, but also by their male co-workers. And there were absolutely no policies or regulations in place. Instead, the administrator knew about it and was also taking part, giving certain 'privileges' to the men. The men wanted to have a party, so in order for the women to keep their jobs, they needed to go to the party and 'entertain' the men. When we tried to help her she said, 'Forget it.' and went back to her country."

A large labour trafficking bust in Simcoe County, Ontario in 2019 brought the issue of labour trafficking and the FCJ Refugee Centre to the evening news.

Sabrina and Maria (names changed) are a couple from Mexico. Although same-sex marriage is legal in Mexico, they still faced constant discrimination and decided to move abroad for a better life. They responded to an ad on Facebook that promised education opportunities, work visas and permanent residency status from what seemed like a reputable employment agency. The couple, along with 41 other Mexican nationals, paid a large sum of money to traffickers who told them they were entering Canada legally.

Once in Canada, they were made to live in terrible conditions and forced to work for a cleaning company in Simcoe County, about an hour car ride north of Toronto, sometimes left with less than $50 a month. Many of the workers experienced harassment and violence. Some of the women were forced to sleep in the same room as the men, with only sheets dividing their 'living quarters'. In February of 2019, the Ontario Provincial Police, with the assistance of FCJ Refugee Centre and its Migrant Workers Mobile Program, was able to intervene and liberate all 43 workers, including Sabrina and Maria. It was a shining example of how collaborating with grassroots organizations can lead to success. Those working in the anti-human trafficking sphere celebrated.

The Grassroots knows how to intervene safely.



I met Sabrina at the National Human Trafficking Forum held by the Canadian Council of Refugees that same year. She was outspoken and passionate about the need for supports and services for migrant workers, especially those without status who have been trafficked.

"I am pretty sure we are not the only Mexicans working here in Canada," said Sabrina. "We only want to work and get a better life. That's all."

Butterfly – Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Network

Butterfly is an organization that provides support to Asian and migrant sex workers in the City of Toronto. Butterfly has published numerous reports on the violence experienced by migrant and immigrant sex workers. The following information and accounts are taken directly from these reports with guidance from Elene Lam, the organization's founder, and contain the lived experiences of migrant sex workers.

For migrant and immigrant women, finding work can be a very difficult aspect of their lives. For some women, language barriers, difficulty accessing services, racism, discrimination, lack of education, invalid professional credentials, and economic insecurity forces them into sex work (Butterfly 3, 2018: 5,9). For others, it is the preferable pay, flexible hours, and social benefits that can lead to a viable and lucrative alternative to employment (Butterfly 4, 2019: 6, 22).

The women that Butterfly works with have not been forced into sex work through trafficking or debt bondage. One woman who Butterfly supports, Cookie, feels more in control of her life while another, Ding Ding, says that language barriers and a lack of education have left her with limited employment opportunities and she is focused on survival. (Butterfly 6, 2019).

For immigrant and migrant workers, stigma, marginalization, and widespread hatred makes repression go unnoticed and unchecked, leading to increased vulnerability of violence, exploitation, inequality, and precarious working conditions. Racial profiling and discrimination keep workers from receiving and accessing labour and employment protections as well as legal services, resulting again in increased vulnerability and dangerous working conditions, endangering their human rights and physical safety (Butterfly 5, 2018: 2,3)

According to Butterfly, the most common issue facing immigrant and newcomer sex workers in Toronto are discriminatory police and bylaw enforcement officers. Butterfly has found that most sex workers have had negative experiences with the police and are fearful of disclosing their immigration status and occupation, despite Toronto's Access to City Services for Undocumented Torontonians (Access T.O.) policy (2013) which mandated migrants receive essential services without law enforcement contacting deportation authorities. 65.5% of those surveyed by Butterfly fear inspections and raids by law enforcement, while 44.8% fear being fined or charged. (Butterfly 3, 2018)

When engaging with the police, many migrant and immigrant sex workers are distrustful and hesitant to report violence due to fear of deportations, surveillance, punishment, violence, and harassment from law enforcement officers. One of Butterfly's participants, Niki, was almost raped at her place of work. When she left the parlour to get help, she was 'improperly dressed', so the police issued her a ticket. Meanwhile, the man who tried to rape her was released from custody the next day (Butterfly 6, 2019: 4).

Sadly, this is not unbelievable.

Another woman, Cookie, called the police after the parlour she worked in was robbed. When the officer got there, he put his gun on the table and asked her to provide services for free. Another woman, a holistic practitioner, was asked by bylaw enforcement to show them her underwear (Butterfly 5, 2018) When another migrant worker called the police because her place of work was robbed, the police arrested her and handed her over to immigration authorities instead of investigating the robbery (Butterfly 6, 2019).

Instances like these deter migrant sex workers from reporting acts of violence to the police as 37.8% of Butterfly's surveyed participants felt they were treated like criminals and 13.3% felt unjustly punished by authorities. Only 6.9% of participants would report violence to the police due to fear of discrimination (42.9%), and unreliable (25%), negative (60%) and abusive (53.6%) impressions of the police. A third of the migrant sex workers surveyed had experienced abuse or harassment by the police or bylaw enforcement officers and 12% had been physically or sexually assaulted by bylaw enforcement (Butterfly 3, 2018). These are practices that are perceived to be a result of racial profiling and discrimination (Ibid.).

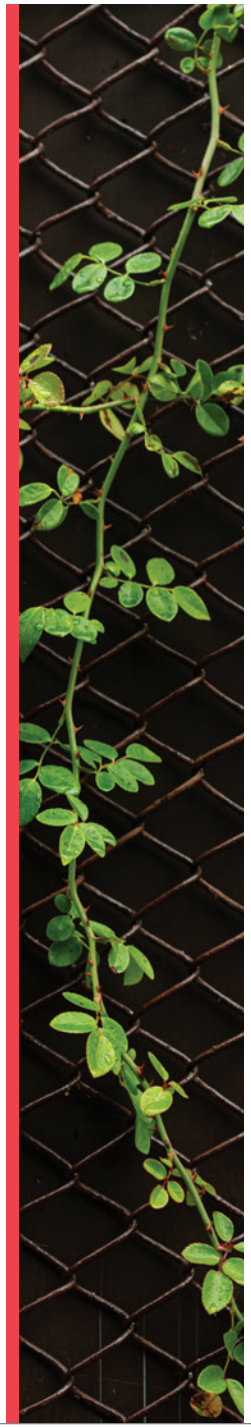
Butterfly's call to action is to end oppressive policies, excessive and discriminatory inspections and prosecutions of practitioners and holistic centres, and to stop the excessive surveillance and racial profiling of migrant sex workers.

Moreover, Butterfly calls for investigations into complaints against law enforcement by migrant sex workers with guarantees practitioners will not be punished, and a comprehensive review of current policies and bylaws with participation from migrant and immigrant sex workers. Butterfly has also recognized that some anti-trafficking initiatives can be oppressive, and calls for a review of certain programs and activities.

Finally, Butterfly calls for a prioritization of health and safety, accessible community, legal and social supports, training for city by-law employees, and the full application of Toronto's "Access Without Fear" policy for non-status persons.

10 women in conflict with the law

"We must open the doors and we must see to it they remain open, so that others can pass through." – **Rosemary Brown**



THE SITUATION

According to a Policy Briefing Note by Senator Kim Pate, former Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, women represent one in every five offenders, and only 5.4% of the incarcerated population.

It is no coincidence that 87% percent of women and 91% of Indigenous women in federal prisons in Canada have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. Most also live with disabling mental health issues resulting from the trauma of these experiences. In fact, 82% of women in prison are jailed as a result of behaviour related to attempts to cope with poverty, histories of abuse, and addiction and mental health issues that commonly arise from these experiences (Pate, 2018).

The fastest-growing prison population in Canada is racialized women, particularly Indigenous women. More than one in three women in federal custody are Indigenous. The number of South Asian women and African Canadian women in custody is also increasing (Ibid.).

Studies involving self-reporting by individuals suggest that most people commit an act for which they could be criminalized before they reach the age of majority (Ibid.). Not everyone experiences the Canadian justice system the same way - while the justice system may protect some, it also criminalizes, marginalizes, and traumatizes many others. Women who suffer from criminalization at the hands of the Canadian justice system all have varied experiences due to intersecting identities. Certain groups of women are deputized and suffer from a phenomenon hyper-responsibility more than other groups of women, and even more so than men.

Racialized women, especially Indigenous women, "are made responsible for their own safety from victimization and for those whom they care" (Ibid.). They are immediately deputized due to inefficient policing - when police are called and fail to offer protection, the prevention of victimization often falls on Indigenous women and their families and/or communities (Ibid.).

Children with incarcerated parents are statistically more likely to come into conflict with the law, more so than any other group - this is due to the stress and trauma caused by having an incarcerated parent and other challenges these children experience such as poverty, unstable homes, and family members who may have mental health and addiction issues or be experiencing homelessness (EFRY Greater Vancouver, 2018). Children whose mothers come into conflict with the law often suffer more significant disruptions in their lives - the majority of women in prison are mothers and a majority of them are sole providers for their children (Ibid.). Parental incarceration happens, and without proper supports put in place, the impact of this type of trauma on a child is even greater than the death of a parent (Ibid.).

Violence against women and girls is affecting their abilities to lead vibrant and healthy lives and is increasing their risk of being in conflict with the law, creating intergenerational trauma and cycles of violence and conflict for their children.



Women in Conflict With the Law

Violence against women and girls is affecting their abilities to lead vibrant and healthy lives and is increasing their risk of being in conflict with the law.

"We're just seeing them as criminals or dangerous people in our society, but not recognizing what trauma they have been through as children or women." Sarah, Elizabeth Fry

It is no coincidence that 87% percent of women and 91% of Indigenous women in federal prisons in Canada have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse.

"Why is it that virtually every single woman who has been charged with an offence has some kind of history of violence, abuse, and trauma?"

Sarah Ferland, Elizabeth Fry Toronto

10 THE RESILIENCE

women in conflict with the law

Elizabeth Fry Toronto, as mentioned in Section 4 on Human Trafficking, offers programming and support to women in conflict with the law, including incarcerated women, and women at risk of being involved in the criminal justice system.

I sat down with Iren Tajbakhsh and Sarah Ferland from Elizabeth Fry Toronto to discuss this especially marginalized group of women in relation to gender-based violence. I knew they would have a lot to share.

This interview was a passionate one. It was like a bold and energetic women's march, only in an interview format. Iren and Sarah are both brilliant and have so much to teach. Summarizing this interview was an immense task; there was almost too much information to organize. When supporting women involved in the criminal justice system, there are so many nuances and layers to consider.

Both Iren and Sarah say that gender-based violence directly affects the way their clients live their lives, contribute to society and interact with others. They were quick to share that most of the women who come through Elizabeth Fry Toronto's doors have had experiences with violence and that those experiences completely changed the trajectory of their lives.

When discussing the gaps, Iren and Sarah say that the issue with services is not that they don't exist, but that many of them are not trauma-informed and don't address the root causes of violence, which can lead to more violence.

"A lot of the services provided to incarcerated women or women in the criminal justice system are really surface level," says Iren, who is the Manager of Counselling and Court Services. "They don't go deep down to truly understand what is happening in our society and what the root causes of the violence and the trauma are. It's very impactful when you hear from a woman - who has been through hell and back – that there is no political will to make things better for her."

Sarah is a TREM counsellor at E-Fry Toronto and says a lack of trauma-informed programming is affecting the lives of incarcerated women, and society in turn.

"We talk about Canada as having a criminal justice system that is rehabilitating, but there are only a few programs where rehabilitating is happening in prisons. There is a lot of faith-based programming, things like AA and 12 Steps, which are very helpful for some people. However, there's not a lot of research showing that those programs are effective in creating long-term change, and sometimes those programs can be judgmental, shaming, and blaming on the individual. These programs also miss the populations of people who aren't faith-based or who don't practice that particular faith, the Christian faith."

Sarah and Iren say that the criminal justice system does not take gender-based violence and trauma into account when dealing with women in conflict with the law. Instead, the system still employs victim-blaming as a result of not being trauma-informed."

"Why is it", Sarah asks, "that virtually every single woman who has been charged with an offence has some kind of history of violence, abuse, and trauma? Why is that? We're just seeing them as criminals or dangerous people in our society, but not recognizing what trauma they have been through as children or women."

The Grassroots knows how to get to the bottom of this.

The Grassroots knows how to address these root causes.

The Grassroots can be entrusted and funded, to do so.

Every single Canadian would benefit from it.

"The statistics tell us that women are more often charged with property crimes and drug crimes. So we're looking at things like theft and fraud; we're looking at things like substance use, which we know is a coping mechanism from trauma. Statistics also show that the most stolen items are things like clothing, makeup, perfume, baby clothes, formula, food. So, who is stealing? We're really looking at mothers and women trying to survive and support themselves and their children."

Then they are criminalized, which changes their lives forever. And the lives of everyone around them.

"And then you add layers of discrimination for Indigenous women, racialized women, trans women. Intergenerational trauma and community trauma, they might live in a housing complex infested with bugs or have no access to a good quality job, and then…"

And then they experience violence.

"I'm a trauma counsellor so I can't separate trauma from anything here," says Sarah. "When we see that one in two women in Canada before the age of 16 has experienced trauma and that their brains were still developing when the trauma was experienced, how does that transfer into the behaviours of half of the women in Canada for the rest of their lives?"

Of course, we must then add on the violence and trauma experienced after the age of 16.

"Then they are institutionalized; if it's not criminal institutions, it's psychiatric institutions because of different factors, or if they develop an eating disorder due to trauma then they're going to another type of institution. So these women start to develop an inability to manage their own autonomy because they've been institutionalized. Then, when they're given freedoms, they don't know how to manage that and I see that in the prison system when women are restricted from simple things like pencil crayons. They might only have access to basic colours, so if you bring a different colour one day, the impulse to take that pencil crayon is sometimes uncontrollable for them. We're talking about women who would probably not be so impulsive outside of that situation. So think about when they go back into the world and they are now managing their own freedom. What happens now? Are they going to be led back into risky situations because they don't have the tools to manage their own behaviours?"

Iren and Sarah say the methods that work best are those that manage to support the women to understand how they got to where they got while building their autonomy at the same time.

"Something that really helps me personally as a counsellor is the notion that 'You are doing this for yourself, not somebody else'," says Sarah. "I find that that helps women build that resilience for themselves again."

Iren agrees, "Yes, I think what works is when we're working holistically and affirming to them that they have had this resiliency and these skills to survive up to this point, and we are just there to give them that final little push to get over that difficult time. Then, they are in a position where they can help themselves."

Sarah also mentions that it's important to level the playing field and eliminate any power imbalances between the frontline workers and the women they are supporting.

"We have to take away any power dynamics and hold that so that women are again empowered to determine their own rights and build their own boundaries around different people and learn how to do that. So many times, women do not have any emotional boundaries or the ability to say no to others; that is huge."

When talking to women about how they got to where they are, Iren and Sarah say it's important that they can speak to women about gender inequality and harmful gender norms, systemic racism, the dehumanization of women and Indigenous women, white supremacy, women in the media, and other root causes of violence.



10

women in conflict with the law

"All of those structures that have been built by white men and patriarchy, all of these things that reflected onto women what they should be and then looking at how family beliefs and gender norms have also shaped what we believe about ourselves, and so taking that and separating it from them is important. If they have been criminalized, they can't live in the blame and shame forever," Sarah says.

Iren and Sarah then discuss the same trend that Women's Habitat pointed out, which is women getting arrested when reporting intimate partner violence.

Sarah explains, "We have had multiple cases of women who were being attacked or strangled by their partner and scratched or injured them back as a way to defend themselves. Even if they (the women) are the ones who called the police, she is arrested and charged because she might not have any marks on her, but he will have scratches or whatever and that's that."

How will these women ever trust the system again? How can we expect women to reach out for help when she is criminalized for trying to do just that?

Sarah continues, "I am (supporting) a woman in my group who is being stalked and will not call the police. I have another woman who had a threat to her life, phone calls saying she's going to be killed, and still, she will not call."

She must be tired of being arrested.

I digress.

"How is that even equal to the harm that she's endured? Maybe she's been abused all her life in this relationship and this time she tried to protect herself," says Iren. "This is what happens and now we are again teaching her through our system, which is supposed to be one of the better systems out there, that you can't trust the police and you have nowhere to go. So keep your mouth shut and be abused."

We all cringe.

Sarah then discusses the importance of police training and the training of correctional officers, and I agree. I have seen how instrumental police officers can be in carrying our justice for women when they have had proper training on gender-based violence and trauma. It makes all the difference.

"I went to the police myself when I was experiencing harassment," Sarah shares. "The way that I was treated was that it was my fault; I was told to just change my number. And I'm an educated person working in this field, so imagine what it's like for someone who is coming off the streets or who is racialized or doesn't speak the language. What is their experience going to be like?"

Elizabeth Fry runs various programs for women in conflict with the law or those at risk of conflicting with the law.

PAR Program

The Partner Assault Response (PAR) program is a Domestic Violence Court initiative that delivers a specialized community-based group education and counselling program to offenders who have been mandated by the court to attend the PAR program in response to a criminal charge involving domestic violence. The 12-session program is a court-ordered sanction that provides offenders with an opportunity to examine their beliefs and attitudes towards domestic abuse, and to learn non-abusive ways of resolving conflict.

Elizabeth Fry then works together as a team to change the curriculum and make PAR more trauma-informed and less 'blaming' on the women, especially since some of the women were arrested while they were experiencing violence themselves.

"Our PAR program is one of the rarest ones in Ontario," says Iren. We obtained permission to make the program a feminist and trauma-informed practice. So we look at the trauma that women experience, through a feminist lens, and then work with her from there to avoid future incidences rather than blame her for the violence.

"We do this as much as we can while still following the rules of the courts", says Sarah.

Yet another example of grassroots excellence.

As PAR is a court-mandated program, the women must attend. However, by adapting the program to be trauma-informed and consider the women's past experiences of violence, Elizabeth Fry has created a program that is empowering and educating, as opposed to being viewed as a sort of punishment.

Brilliant.

TREM Program

The Trauma Recovery and Empowerment Model (TREM) was developed 20 years ago in the USA and draws upon cognitive restructuring, psychoeducational and skills training techniques. TREM's content and structure are informed by the role of gender in the ways women experience and cope with trauma. It addresses both short-term and long-term consequences of violent victimization, including mental health symptoms, such as PTSD, depression, and substance use. TREM recognizes the complexity of long-term adaptation to trauma and addresses a range of difficulties common among survivors of sexual and physical abuse.

Like the PAR program, Elizabeth Fry Toronto has taken the TREM program and are adapting it for the women they work with; women in the criminal justice system. After receiving training by the people who developed TREM, they are now in the process of changing the curriculum and updating language and activities to reflect current times. They hope to create a model to be used by other agencies who work with survivors of gender-based violence.

I've been asked by Elizabeth Fry, along with other community partners, to consult and serve on the project's partnership committee to ensure the project is responsive, inclusive, informed, follows best practices, and integrates on-going learning.

TREM is a 25-session program and Elizabeth Fry Toronto runs the first 8 weeks of it in the Vanier Correctional Centre for Women. This first part of TREM focuses on empowerment, building women up and beginning to link experiences of trauma to non-functioning behaviours.

My Start-Up

E-Fry Toronto has recently started an entrepreneurship program, My Start-Up, where their clients, women in conflict with the law, complete a program that teaches them how to start their own small business, complete with seed funding in the last phase. They have only recently finished their first round but have already seen benefits.

"I have a client who's just graduated recently from this round and is going into the last phase where they receive the funds for their business," says Sarah. "I have witnessed her experience some very positive changes in her motivation and optimism towards life because of her ability to complete and accomplish something and see it moving forward. When we're talking about women who live in poverty or who have different mental health concerns that present challenges to holding a 'regular' type of job, running their own small business without having to conflict with people at work who maybe won't understand their situation or having to explain why they have different requirements, is very empowering."

As we come to the end of our interview, we discuss the current women's movement in all of its difficulty and glory. We discuss the good, the bad, and the ugly. To Iren, who was part of the women's movement in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, she says she has actually seen a regression in the power and effectiveness of feminism.

"All these conferences – enough is enough! Canada needs to take action now. Yeah, there was real progress in the 70s, 80s, 90s, which we know was because of the feminist uprising that happened in Canada. There was education for service providers and the police on family violence, gender-based violence, anti-oppression, gender equality, so they were quite aware. But then, things stopped moving forward in the 2000s. Suddenly, things are getting more difficult and there seems to be a backlash because men feel targeted. It's like there was a shift."

As I've mentioned previously in this report, multiple frontline workers have made similar observations, and they all happen to be women who have been working in this sector for 30 years or more. They all agree that in terms of supports for survivors of gender-based violence, things were better in the 80s and 90s. I can't say I notice the same thing because I was very young at the time, but I find it so interesting and I want to know more.

Perhaps in the next report.

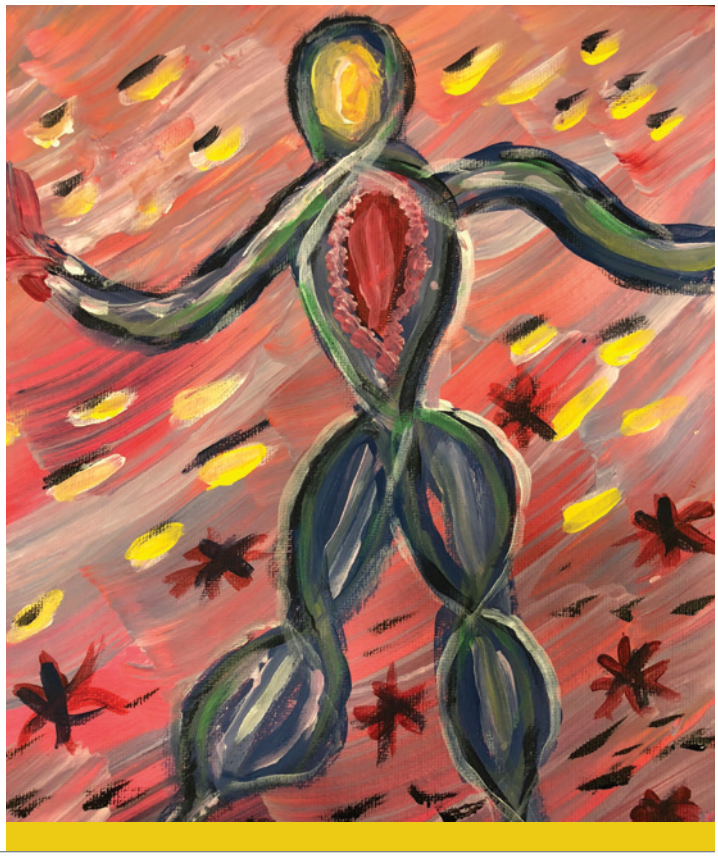
Iren says that the Women and Gender Equality office is doing some positive work, and I agree. Yet, she says, funding is not getting to The Ggrassroots and those working in the gender-based violence sphere need to be paid better and recognized for their contributions to society.

Sarah agrees, "Social work is mostly made up of women and we're doing work that is transformative to our society. Yet, we're barely paid enough to survive on our own."

Their final calls to action are education that addresses gender inequality and other root causes of violence, trauma-informed service providers and funding to grassroots organizations.

I think I see a pattern here.

Painting by **RAIESA** - Toronto painter, poet, musician



11 trans women and gender non-binary folk

"My wish for you is that you continue. Continue to be who and how you are, to astonish a mean world with your acts of kindness."

– **Maya Angelou**

THE SITUATION

On December 22nd, 2019, prominent trans rights activist and community organizer Julie Berman was brutally murdered. She was found in a Toronto residence, having suffered from head injuries. Ms. Berman had been an active member of the LGBTQ2S community in Toronto for decades and promoted love and acceptance of trans people. Her friends described her as a loving and positive person, despite the many hardships she faced as a trans woman.

For trans women and non-binary individuals, the recognition and validation of gender identity and expression are important to their livelihood, safety, and resiliency. Quantitative data on violence experienced by trans women and non-binary folk is sparse due to several factors - including the fact that transgender and non-binary people have never been recognized in official statistics. In 2019, the Canadian Census updated the questions on sex at birth and gender to be more inclusive (Statistics Canada).

Bill C-16 was a human rights landmark in Canadian history. This bill was a proposal to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to include "gender identity or expression" as a listed grounds of discrimination - this bill represents access to justice for those where it was previously inaccessible. On June 19, 2017, the bill passed and trans and non-binary rights were finally coded into law.

Nevertheless, gender diversity continues to be ignored or denied by many Canadians, including University of Toronto psychology professor Jordan Peterson, who has refused to use non-gender-specific pronouns when addressing students. Peterson has used social media and YouTube to publish videos that argue that banning discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression is a form of political correctness.

Jordan Peterson has also said, "The idea that women were oppressed throughout history is an appalling theory."

Ontario Human Rights Code, under the Freedom from Discrimination, sections 1-7, outlines that every person has a right to access services, goods, and facilities and to occupy accommodations without discrimination and harassment because of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. The Ontario Shelter Standards goes a step further by stating that all shelters must have a policy detailing how services are provided to LGBTQ2S clients with safety and dignity. Unfortunately, the reality is quite different from what Ontario Shelter Standards has outlined. Community spaces are needed where trans women and non-binary folk can feel accepted, loved, and safe. It's a matter of human rights.

- According to the Trans PULSE Project, 20% of all trans people in Ontario have been assaulted, either sexually or physically, on account of being trans while another 34% experienced verbal threats (Bauer and Scheim, 2015: 4).
- Many trans people do not report to the police as 24% have been harassed by the police (Ibid.: 5).
- Sexual and domestic/intimate partner violence response services "under-recognize" those who are not cisgender, resulting in under reporting of LGBTQ2S violence (Egale, 2016: 6).
- Transgender people are about two times as likely to report domestic/intimate violence compared to cisgender people (Canadian Labour Congress, 2014: 6).



The 519

The 519 is a City of Toronto agency, a community centre and a registered charity committed to the health, happiness and full participation of the LGBTQ2S community in Toronto and beyond.

Community spaces are needed where trans women and non-binary folks can feel accepted, loved, and safe It's a matter of human rights.

Aura Freedom uses the acronym LGBTQ2S, as is used by The 519 in Toronto.



11

trans women and gender non-binary folk

THE RESILIENCE

The 519 is a City of Toronto agency, a community centre and a registered charity committed to the health, happiness and full participation of the LGBTQ2S community in Toronto and beyond. The 519 has an innovative model of Service, Space, and Leadership, with programs, direct services, and advocacy initiatives that aim to make a real difference in people's lives and promote inclusion, understanding, and respect. The 519 has been a prominent hub for LGBTQ2S communities in Canada since 1975.

Yasmeen Persad is an Education and Training Specialist and Coordinator of the Trans People of Colour Project at The 519. Yasmeen has been a trans-inclusion advocate, researcher, and trainer for more than 15 years with a wide range of experience and expertise.

Yasmeen, along with the Education and Training team at The 519, provides training to frontline service providers in shelters, crisis centres, drop-in programs, detox services and other health and social service providers, to make community spaces more accessible to trans people. She says that although positive changes can be seen, trans women still don't feel comfortable accessing many of the services for a variety of reasons.

Yasmeen highlights that although shelters in Toronto have been mandated to accept trans women for a long time, they are still not accessing the spaces when they are in need due to ongoing experiences of violence, stigma, and discrimination by both shelter staff and others.

Yasmeen spoke about the high rates of violence that is perpetrated against trans women of colour, and that although she is not a frontline support worker, she often finds herself in that position because of the prevalence of the violence.

The 519 is located directly beside Barbara Hall Park on Toronto's Church Street, known as the LGBTQ2S Village, where, at any given time of the day, you can see folks hanging out or sleeping. Some are there because they might have nowhere else to go, and the park in many ways is their place of residence in the absence of a fixed address.

"There are a number of young trans women just hanging out in the park and in front of The (519) building," says Yasmeen. "It's been a year now that I'm seeing the same faces and it's really sad. I'm trying to figure out how to address that, to talk about it. We do so much training for shelter workers and all these different service providers to create accessibility for trans people, but I still see all these trans people not being able to access shelters and services for various reasons and barriers."

Based on her lived experience and years of work in communities, Yasmeen recognizes that most community spaces are still not sufficiently prepared or knowledgeable to support trans women. She also says most trans women won't call the police if they experience intimate partner violence for fear of discrimination or being arrested themselves.

Roza Nozari is the Coordinator of Anti-Violence Initiatives at The 519. She walks with LGBTQ2S survivors of violence in various capacities, including group programming, counselling, case management and systems navigation.



Roza confirms that the people she works with are hesitant to access services, call rape crisis lines and go to shelters because they are not meaningfully included, and do not feel supported. She also mentions the same troubling issue that other support workers have mentioned in this report, where the person who is experiencing the violence calls the police but ends up getting arrested as opposed to being supported. She says this is more often the case with trans people of colour, queer people of colour, non-binary folks of colour and Indigenous persons.

Roza also adds an interesting piece of information to the issue of trans women still not being accepted in community spaces.

"Personally, I'm tired of marginalized communities being scapegoated as the reason why it's not happening," says Roza. "How many times do people say, 'What if a Muslim woman has to share a room with a trans person? What would that mean?' They're actually being used as a reason to exclude trans folks. In reality, Muslim communities are not monolithic. Our communities are diverse. There are allies within them. There are queer and trans folks within them. And many of us are not okay being used as scapegoats to deny the rights of others."

Yasmeen says it's more than a simple rainbow on your website or office door, or merely checking a training box. She recommends service providers explicitly write and implement their own policies regarding their acceptance of trans individuals and the standards of practice they are accountable to as a result; just as many organizations have done in order to address racism. She also says it is important to know that trans people have a pinnacle role to play in the development of these policies and should be appropriately resourced/compensated for the experience they bring to this work through their invaluable lived experience.

Yasmeen runs a food-focused drop-in program on Tuesdays for trans people of colour, led by four trans women who have been trained by The 519 as peer leaders. The majority of people accessing the program right now are trans women of colour, including newcomer trans women. When I ask Yasmeen about the program, her eyes light up.

"We cook and we talk about all kinds of stuff. We do talks on sexual health, violence, and housing; you know, education on all these different pieces that they're struggling with. A lot of them are newcomers, so their experiences and the way they talk about violence is very, very different. A lot of them are dealing with PTSD, language barriers and other issues. So they have found (the group) to be a home for them, which has been great."

Grassroots power.

I asked Yasmeen what the women she works with would want to tell us, and her answer paints a painfully simple picture of what is really needed.

"First, to have their identity recognized, and then to have more access to services."

Recognizing people's existence in the way they choose to be recognized, and then granting people access to services that they have every right to access.

Seems simple enough.

Jacq Hixson Vulpe is the Senior Consultant at The 519. Jacq's work focuses on driving internal and structural change through such avenues as policy development and facilitation. They are also completing their PhD, which explores the representation of LGBTQ2S children and youth in public education.

To Jacq, the implementation of the policies under the Ontario Human Rights Code is important, as well as data collection to truly grasp the prevalence and scope of all forms of gender-based violence, including systemic ones that are not as obvious to everyone. They call for better research to include all voices and experiences of people who identify as trans, two-spirit, and gender non-binary, referencing how the Canadian census is only now adding another option beyond male and female when it comes to gender identity. As a community of people who are appealing to researchers, Jacq says research must be driven by (and as often as possible developed and implemented by) LGBTQ2S communities.

"Wonderfully, in some ways, our human rights legislation has changed across Canada in provinces and territories, yet this is not being taken up in any meaningful way by any province or territory to my knowledge," says Jacq. "Of course, there are members of legislation and members of parliament who are doing amazing work and are pushing these things, but writ large, something's not happening."

Again, Jacq stresses the importance of data.

"And so the lack of data collection, for me, is the big thing because it pretty much ensures that our communities are never going to be represented. So no one is going to have the numbers conversation because we don't exist according to those numbers."

Jacq feels that although some decent efforts are being made in terms of education and sensitization, the actual social narratives

"First, to have their identity recognized, and then to have more access to services." Yasmeen, The 519

11

trans women and gender non-binary folk

and the behaviours that stem from them are not changing. They also bring up the fact that some Canadians want to completely ignore the existence of trans and gender non-binary folks altogether.

"When it comes to the on-the-ground work, things aren't actually changing; people aren't actually deconstructing what it means to think of who is a woman and who is a man and that everyone needs to fit into these boxes, and so we just see the replication of systemic violence constantly happening even though folks are taking this training."

I can't help but think of the many international conferences I've attended over the years and the many global activists I have had conversations with. Time and time again, Canada is described by some of my colleagues from the Global South as a sort of human rights paradise, with everyone living in perfect harmony, free from violence and oppression. But, in many ways, we're not 'there' yet.

Through interactions with my fellow Canadian activists and feminists throughout the years, I have noticed that many of us share this same sense of 'guilt' when we publicly recognize the failures of the Canadian system, especially when we know that 12 countries globally still allow rapists to go free if they marry their victims.

I just did it again.

However, if we are to truly look at the lives of the most marginalized in Canada, we will see that they are indeed struggling to survive. Folks aren't thriving; they aren't contributing to the world what they could if there were equitable support and access. Many are homeless, others are self-medicating, some are dying. And we are all losing out because of it. It's not about being happy with the rights we have, it's about being able to exercise those rights.

So, no, we are not 'there' yet.

Jacq concurs, saying that although "Canada is at the table, we are not leading the conversations around changing gender categories and breaking down stereotypes."

As Roza's role entails, she often walks with survivors after they have had experiences with violence. However, she says that she also walks with survivors as they are experiencing systemic violence, whether it be moving through the court system or accessing shelter space or other services.

She says one of the issues is that many service providers come to The 519 with the understanding that they must learn and do the work perfectly. They must take the training, learn the language, remember the laws and get it all right, all of the time. Whereas capacity building is a critical part of the change, it cannot deliver results in isolation.

"A very important part of the work is, how well do you listen to folks when they're asking for something that they need? How often do you ask folks for what they need? What happens when their needs aren't met and harm is done in your group or your space? How are you going to repair that? What does accountability look like? The questions are far-reaching and personal. They have to flow through each and every person in your organization. You have to know who you are hiring to be in that space. And so I find that this focus on just the workshops is not enough."

The 519's workshops are, in fact, great. Aura Freedom's youth team attended one in 2019 and it was rated one of their favourite training sessions of the year. A lot was learned.

When discussing collaboration with other women's groups or human rights groups, everyone is ready and willing. This was wonderful to hear.

"More connections," says Yasmeen. "There are many people doing great work. We know a lot of people who are striving to do good work, but we still don't have that connection."

Roza agrees.

"Part of being mindful of how we do this work is how much space we give to staff to build collaboration and connection into their work; walking over to (another organization) and saying, "Hey, this is who I am, I want to know the kind of work you're doing because I heard it's amazing.' "

We then discuss the importance of survivor-centred approaches to addressing gender-based violence, as well as being trauma-informed. Roza is quick to point out how even trauma-informed practices are not foolproof; some can be confusing and, at times, even condescending.

"What I find tends to be the feedback is: 'Now I've been given all this language and I'm overwhelmed. I'm now learning how trauma isn't just this one experience I had, but every single experience I've had. What am I supposed to do with this? I've done five sessions now, it's the end of my cycle and I walk away holding this. Where am I going?'"

I have seen many survivors reach this point and I ask Roza what the antidote to this could be for someone feeling like that in the spaces she works in.

"That's something that we are currently in the midst of having many conversations about," she says. "And we are looking at creating spaces that are more curious and full of wonder than they are just full of answers that belong in a textbook."

In practice, Roza says this might mean survivors are given words which may be used to talk about feeling triggered or activated but being told that those words or that language might not resonate with them, which is completely acceptable.

"We are kind of moving away from this very specific 'languaging' all the time and opening up that space so that it's accessible for folks to be able to speak to their own strengths. It also provides people with language if that's what they find really helpful and useful on their journeys, but creates a space of curiosity for people to say, 'That's not right for me, but this is.' "

For Roza, it's about finding a balance between honouring the wisdom and knowledge in our spaces, and providing people with new information, new alternatives that may resonate or may not resonate. It's about acknowledging the reality that queer, trans and two-spirit communities are diverse. What works for one may not work for another, and that's okay. The "work" is to create safer spaces for folks to explore, connect, share, (re)discover and find what they need at this time.

Yasmeen agrees that this is particularly helpful to newcomer trans women, as their ways of addressing trauma can be very different to the way service providers are used to addressing it. It is important to recognize and celebrate cultural-diversity and ensure folks can draw strength from the cultural teachings they carry with them

This is why we keep saying to listen to The Grassroots.

As the interview winds down, Jacq brings up a brilliant point of the importance of being not only survivor-centred but community-centred.

"What does it mean for government folks to actually let it all go? To get down and dirty and gritty with community organizations and take the time to listen to things and show up to events and build on relationships and recognize the importance of relationships, and that relationships involve follow-through, constant communication, and transparency."

Jacq says that community is the fundamental thing that needs to drive everything we do.

"Because folks are here. The brilliance that exists within the groups, within the trans communities. People just want to be heard. They're screaming and no one is listening to them. So, show up! It is amazing what folks have to say. We don't need to do any more consultations about what the barriers are; those have all been identified. All these folks have the answers within them. How do we get people up here to, again, come and join us and understand that we have the answers?"

A great call to action.

"What does it mean for government folks to actually let it all go? To get down and dirty and gritty with community organizations and take the time to listen to things and show up to events and build on relationships and recognize the importance of relationships, and that relationships involve follow-through, constant communication, and transparency." Jacq, The 519

12 women and girls living with disabilities

"Never bend your head. Hold it high.
Look the world straight in the eye." – **Helen Keller**

THE SITUATION

According to the DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN), violence against women and girls with disabilities is not simply a type of gender-based violence, but an intersectional category dealing with gender-based and disability-based violence, resulting in an especially high risk of violence against women and girls with disabilities (DAWN, 2014). For women with disabilities, the risk of violence increases when they are racialized, younger, Indigenous, LGBTQI2S, migrant workers, immigrants, non-status migrants or living in rural areas. (DAWN, 2019: 94)

- Women with a disability were nearly twice as likely as women without a disability to have been sexually assaulted in the past 12 months (Statistics Canada, 2014 - released 2018: 3)
- Women with disabilities are nearly twice as likely as women without disabilities to be the victim of a violent crime (Ibid.)
- 46% of women who have experienced homelessness also have a disability (Ibid.)
- 39% of women with disabilities experienced serious forms of spousal abuse (39%) while 49% were physically injured because of violence, and 38% feared for their lives (Ibid.)
- 24% of women with a cognitive disability and 26% with a mental health-related disability were sexually abused by an adult before they were 15 years old (Ibid.)

Women and girls living with disabilities in Canada remain at high risk of violence and abuse in many forms - neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and financial exploitation (DAWN, 2014: 1) - just to name a few. These forms of violence may be perpetrated by their family members, their partners, and even their caregivers and healthcare providers. Unfortunately, there is limited data and literature regarding the risk of abuse, women and girls' experiences of abuse, and barriers to seeking help among women with disabilities (Ibid.). This is an issue as it contributes to the 'invisibility' of the victimization of women and girls with disabilities (Ibid.).

To understand the 'invisibility' of sexual violence against women and girls with disabilities, we need to understand ableism and rape mythology. Ableism is the "belief that the able-body is preferred over the disabled body" (DAWN, 2013: 3). This causes women with disabilities to be viewed as asexual or undesirable - impossible of being victims of sexual assault and harassment according to dominant rape mythology that exists in our patriarchal society. A key view to rape mythology is that "sexual violence [is] caused by the victim's attractiveness and sexual desirability (e.g., her behaviour, clothing) as opposed to acts of power and control by men over women" (Ibid.).

Together, ableism and rape mythology create dangerous misconceptions of sexual violence and place women living with disabilities at greater risk for sexual assault - it makes them a 'good target' for perpetrators when society believes no one would assault a woman who is labelled as 'undesirable' (Ibid.). These myths cause authorities to call a survivor's credibility into question when they report the assault - and is particularly common for women who live with brain injuries, intellectual, mental health, and other cognitive-based disabilities (Ibid.). These are but a few of the factors that contribute to an increased risk of violence in the lives of women and girls with disabilities.

Women and girls living with disabilities face many barriers when trying to access services and support in Toronto. In Ontario, the rights and needs of people with disabilities are enshrined in the 2005 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the 1962 Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC). The purpose of the AODA is to improve accessibility standards for Ontarians with physical, mental, and invisible disabilities. Despite this, DAWN has

As feminist organizations working to end gender-based violence, it is important to create space for women and girls with disabilities to tell their own stories and lead their own journeys to healing, and advocate for more research, supports, and services for survivors living with disabilities. We can, and must, do better.

reported that only one woman out of ten received the support she requested at women's shelters or transition houses. When they do not receive proper support, it is often for accessibility reasons. (DAWN-Factsheet: Women with Disabilities and Violence)

The Beijing Declaration notes that women living with disabilities have rights concerning access to services, goods, and support (1995). The Canadian National Beijing+25 Report (2019) also notes, in various sections, the importance of an accessible society for women and girls living with disabilities - and that they experience violence at a higher rate than women without disabilities.

Unfortunately, Ontario is currently in a period of proposed provincial budget cuts where social assistance services and programs are usually the first to be targeted.

DAWN and other organizations that support women and girls living with disabilities have been calling for increased research and supports and services for years. In DAWN's most recent report entitled, More Than A Footnote: A Research Report on Women and Girls with Disabilities in Canada (2019), National Executive Director Bonnie Brayton says this "The gravity and scope of this situation cannot be addressed through short-term means. Rather, an effective response to the social and economic exclusion of women with disabilities must address the long-standing and systemic gaps in policy, programs, and services that have resulted in the current situation. Such a response must necessarily be national, coordinated, inter-governmental, cross-ministerial and cross-sectorial. Such a response must be informed by empirical evidence.

While feminist academics and researchers have built a significant body of work on Canadian girls and women, most of that research has been and continues to be done without an intersectional lens, particularly the disability lens. As a result, there is an absence of analysis of the implications for women and girls with disabilities and Deaf women and girls." ." (DAWN, 2019: 94)

Women and girls living with disabilities are often left out of the narrative of their own lives, and their own experiences with violence. As feminist organizations working to end gender-based violence, it is important to create space for women and girls with disabilities to tell their own stories and lead their own journeys to healing, and advocate for more research, supports, and services for survivors living with disabilities.

We can, and must, do better.



13 survivors of wartime sexual violence living in Canada

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."
– Maya Angelou

THE SITUATION

An unlikely form of gender-based violence that affects women living in Canada is wartime sexual violence. There is no available data on the number of women and girls living in Canada who have experienced sexual violence in conflict, although frontline accounts tell us that survivors of wartime rape from Sudan, South Sudan, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, the former Yugoslavia and more reside in Canada. And although the violence itself was not experienced on Canadian soil, the effects of the trauma know no borders.

According to Amnesty International, rape and sexual abuse are not just a by-product of war but are deliberately used as a military strategy. We have seen these brutal strategies at work in the DRC, Bosnia, Kosovo, Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, Iraq, and other countries.

Amnesty identifies three main goals of sexual violence in times of war:

- To terrorize women and their families out of a territory, making it "ethnically clean";
- To humiliate men and induce a breakdown in the social fabric;
- To effect pregnancy to "purge" the "inferior" race and propagate a "new" race.

Women's bodies have been used as weapons of war for many years, in many countries. In my activism and advocacy, I have heard survivors of wartime sexual violence describe a type of violence that is strategically designed to humiliate and degrade women and fracture entire communities.

According to the UN, mass rape is a crime against humanity. UN Security Council Resolution 1820 adopted in 2008 states that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide." This was one of a series of resolutions that followed the landmark UNSCR 1325 in 2000 and recognized the detrimental impact that wartime sexual violence has on communities and acknowledged how the violence undermines efforts to ensure peace and security and rebuild societies once a conflict has ended.

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, sexual violence was systematically used as a form of ethnic cleansing and affected thousands of women across the country. More than two decades after the conflict's end, thousands of survivors of wartime sexual violence continue to suffer socioeconomic marginalization and stigma. Stigmatization causes survivors' tremendous fear of being "outed" to family and community members, preventing many from speaking openly about sexual violence or seeking services or reparations. (Conflict Related Sexual Violence - Report of the United Nations Secretary-General, 2019:36)

So, what about the women who have experienced this terror who are now living in Canada, away from where the conflict happened? Surely, a section of Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security could be developed and added to support survivors of wartime sexual violence living in Canada to ensure they can thrive and contribute meaningfully to their families and communities here. The National Action Plan includes 93 targets across development assistance, humanitarian action and peace and stabilization efforts in warzones. In the plan, the federal government outlines projects to support survivors of wartime sexual violence, including the provision of health and psychosocial services and assistance to survivors to help reintegrate them into the community. Supports for survivors that are now living in Canada are missing from this implementation plan - a crucial gap that the federal government should consider. As we accept refugees of wartime sexual violence into Canada, we must also have the appropriate supports available to them.

This too is 'rebuilding societies once conflict has ended'.



THE RESILIENCE

Vasfije Krasniqi Goodman

Vasfije Krasniqi Goodman is a Kosovo-born survivor of sexual violence in the Yugoslav Wars. She is the first Kosovo survivor to speak publicly about her experience without hiding her identity. She is the recipient of the 2019 Kim Bok-dong Peace Prize, has provided testimony to the UN Human Rights Security Council and has received the Honourable Citizen Award from the President of Kosovo. Today, she is a member of SEMS, the global network of survivors of wartime rape.

I met Vasfije at the 2019 Women Deliver conference in Vancouver after a panel discussion hosted by Canada's Global Affairs on wartime sexual violence. I spoke to Vasfije about what could be done to support survivors living in Canada.

"The most important thing organizations and governments can do is to open the minds of society and build awareness of gender-based sexual violence. This includes a lot of advocating and not only to the public but to families of survivors and religious leaders, who can play a huge role in accepting and supporting survivors. Without the support of their families and communities, survivors will not speak or heal. Therapy is also important, as survivors want to speak without being judged."

I admire Vasfije.

And she tells us something that we already know how to do.

Walk alongside survivors, give them time to heal in a compassionate and non-judgemental way, let them determine their futures, and put them at the centre of any intervention.

Moreover, survivors of wartime sexual violence should be at the table when forming new policies and action plans to support them. A survivor-centred approach must also include victims often overlooked, including boys or men and children born of rape.

However, within the Canadian gender-based violence sphere, there is hardly any mention of survivors of wartime sexual violence living on Canadian soil. They too, deserve to be counted and supported.

I asked Vasfije what helped her heal from her experiences. Before anything else, she said, it was family support.

"My family's support helped me get to where I am today. It took a while for me to open up to the public, but I was always free to talk to my family members about my ordeal. My therapist also helped me heal and be more open about it. It's never easy to talk about with others but it's something that needs to be heard. We don't want to suffer in silence any longer."

Kandaka International for Women's Rights

As mentioned in Section 6 on FGM/C, Kandaka International for Women's Rights is a grassroots women's group providing support and access to resources for Sudanese survivors of wartime sexual violence currently living in Toronto. Many of them are refugee claimants.

Kandaka International is a lively bunch and I love working with them. As women are so good at doing, they are able to take an atrocity such as wartime sexual violence and turn it into an opportunity for women to unite in sisterhood and solidarity.

It's a powerful thing to bear witness to.

Kandaka International currently has no funding and run all of its programs on a volunteer basis. They provide what Elham Bakri, the group's Co-Founder, calls "informal support" like counselling and access to services. Sometimes, the support is as simple as being present with survivors.

"They need to be surrounded by people (who) they can trust, (who) they can share their stories with," says Elham.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, Newcomers who arrive in Canada traumatized by war or oppressive governments are much less likely to report physical or sexual violence to the authorities, for fear of further victimization or even deportation (Moving Out of Violence Factsheet, 2016).

Kandaka International says that survivors are facing long wait times for counselling and many frontline service providers are "unfamiliar with warzone rape and the community implications that come with it." Even when agencies genuinely want to support the women, Elham says they are just not equipped to. This lack of training, paired with cultural and language barriers, are stopping survivors of wartime sexual violence from seeking support. Furthermore, as other grassroots organizations have pointed out, long term support is hard to come by.

"...It reaches a certain stage and that's it. Done," she says.

When we think about the fact that most conflict in the Global South is influenced in many ways by the West, I would say there is a responsibility that Canada, and Canadians, have to support survivors of conflict living here now.

We know that dealing with the trauma of sexual violence is a long process, yet so many women are given a handful of counselling sessions and sent on their way due to a lack of funding. This does not just affect the survivors, but their entire families and communities.

Elham spoke about one particular survivor who was struggling with her trauma.

"She said she wasn't able to be the same mother she used to be to her kids after that happened to her. Her life has been totally impacted. She said she couldn't go to work after that because she was too afraid, even though she was a support worker for women. Unfortunately, she wasn't able to go back and continue supporting those women."

There it is again. A clear and startling picture of how violence against women affects society as a whole. It affects women's ability to work, advance their careers and even interact with their children.

Moreover, so many of us doing 'this work' do it for a reason. Many of us have a story to share and supporting other women is a part of our own journey to healing. Yet, how often have we seen one of our colleagues or co-workers succumb to the trauma that they themselves are working to address? Now, we have lost a member of our feminist community, a pillar of support for other women, because she herself doesn't have the appropriate support to cope with the trauma.

It's just not sustainable.

Elham and I also discussed the different layers of oppression that survivors of wartime sexual violence experience. Not only do they experience gender inequality, but they also experience racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia.

"For most of these women, they feel the racism. They live it. Every single day."

Elham's call to action is education on gender equality that addresses the root causes of violence and more funding for specialized frontline services for long-term recovery from sexual violence in conflict.

As we end our Zoom meeting, Elham and I make plans to go for dinner and discuss her upcoming trip to Ottawa. We even 'hug' the computer screen.

The sisterhood is alive and well.

CONCLUSION

A collective call to action from The Grassroots to address and prevent gender-based violence in Canada

The Grassroots has spoken.

For a long time, we have known what is needed to truly end gender-based violence in Canada.

We are ready and willing to work together with the Government of Canada to make it happen.

Canada is a global leader on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Indeed, our Feminist International Assistance Policy and Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security are examples of this.

Yet, when we look inside, we see a nation struggling to address its own gender-based violence crisis, with Indigenous women paying the highest price.

It's time to look inward.

The following is a set of consistent calls to action from interviews in this report.

Develop a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence with Urgency

A National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence is urgently needed and must be set as a priority for the Federal Government of Canada.

- The Action Plan must work across all ministries and developed in collaboration with women's organizations, including smaller grassroots groups, groups advancing the feminist movement, and survivors.
- The Action Plan must be intersectional, recognizing and centering the most marginalized women including Indigenous women, racialized women, immigrant and refugee women, women living with disabilities, rural women, gender diverse people, and the Girl Child.
- The Action Plan must include concrete, time-bound goals and measurable outcomes.
- The Action Plan must include a separate National Action Plan on violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people developed in collaboration with Indigenous women's organizations, including smaller grassroots groups, groups advancing Indigenous rights, and survivors. The Indigenous National Action Plan must have concrete, time-bound goals and measurable outcomes.
- The Action Plan must implement nation-wide education to address the root causes of gender-based violence that aims to eliminate gender inequality, systemic racism, colonialism, homo/transphobia, and ableism. Education must be age-appropriate and embedded throughout Canadian school curricula, from elementary to post-secondary schools.
- The Action Plan must implement nation-wide education to address consent, healthy relationships, healthy sexuality and awareness of gender-based violence. Education must be age-appropriate and embedded throughout Canadian school curricula, from elementary to post-secondary schools.
- The Action Plan must implement nation-wide education to address deeply entrenched and rigid social and gender norms that impede equity and dictate the way people behave. Topics should also include rape culture, toxic masculinity, and sexism in the media. Education must be age-appropriate and embedded throughout Canadian school curricula, from elementary to post-secondary schools.
- The Action Plan must involve and engage men and boys and promote healthy masculinity.

A failure to address root causes and connect gender and social norms to gender-based violence will result in another generation of missing and murdered Indigenous women, intimate partner violence, femicide, child exploitation, and more. The topics outlined above must be viewed as important as Math, Reading, and Science in order to foster a more equitable and peaceful society free of violence. This education cannot be offered as an after-school program or annual assembly, but carefully embedded into all parts of Canadian school curricula, from Kindergarten to post-secondary school. As Canada works to address the root causes of gender-based violence, we will begin to see benefits in all other areas of Canadian society.

We will see Canada flourish.

- The Action Plan must work in conjunction with the National Housing Strategy to ensure safe and equitable access to housing for women experiencing violence, with particular attention paid to Indigenous, racialized, disabled, immigrant and refugee, and trans women.
- The Action Plan must address the lack of available and affordable child care for women and families in Canada and work toward a more equitable child care system to ensure access to the most marginalized (See special addendum for more info).
- The Action Plan must include provisions for trauma-informed training and gender-based violence awareness for service providers including healthcare providers, the police, Crown attorneys, judges, teachers, school administrators, youth workers, education assistants, professors, immigration officers, by-law officers, child welfare workers, and other stakeholders who come into contact with survivors of gender-based violence.
- The Action Plan must meaningfully collaborate and work with grassroots organizations and provide funding for grassroots groups, frontline workers, activists, and feminist movement building. Funding cannot be limited to projects and must include provisions for core staff costs to build the capacity and sustainability of grassroots organizations. We cannot run our organizations without people.

  Women's organizations are understaffed, underfunded, underappreciated, burning out. The fact that those working to address gender-based violence are often underpaid, or not paid at all, says a lot about a system that is unsustainable and fails to prioritize women and girls, only further exacerbating and feminizing poverty.
- The Action Plan must address data gaps on all forms of gender-based violence, with special attention paid to Indigenous women and girls, women living with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women and gender diverse people.

Gender-based violence is a result of extreme inequities that intersect with different identities. It is a very old story of who is valued less and who is valued more. The antidote… is education. Education is the key to ending and preventing gender-based violence in Canada.

And although we might not be able to 'see' it working in real-time…it is RIGHT. The ripple effects of the education outlined above will be seen for generations to come. Every single human being in Canada deserves to live healthy and vibrant lives free from violence.

We can't wait any longer.

Gender-based violence in Canada is a national emergency.

Act accordingly.

Gender-based violence is affecting every aspect of Canadian life and hindering the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The following is a look at gender-based violence in Canada across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#EndGBVtoAchieveSDGs

For a copy of Aura Freedom's GBV/SDG Snapshot, email info@aurafreedom.org

AURA FREEDOM INTERNATIONAL

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CANADA ACROSS THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

AURA FREEDOM INTERNATIONAL

#EndGBVtoAchieveSDGs

1 NO POVERTY



2 ZERO HUNGER



GBV is a major cause of homelessness and poverty among women and their children.[1]

ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT,

6,000+

women and children in Canada sleep in emergency shelters because it is not safe at home.[2]

Many Canadian women must choose between leaving an abusive relationship or facing poverty.[3]

Evidence shows that women sometimes stay in violent relationships to avoid poverty for themselves and their children.[4]

Women who leave a partner to raise children on their own are **5x** MORE LIKELY TO BE POORER THAN IF THEY HAD STAYED.[5]

Gender-based violence perpetuates and feminizes poverty and food insecurity in Canada.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Each year in Canada, an estimated

362,000

CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED TO FAMILY VIOLENCE.[6]

Children who witness family violence have 2x the rate of psychiatric disorders as children from non-violent homes.[7]

64% of women who have experienced IPV exhibit symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.[8]

IPV leads to significantly poorer general health, mental health, and quality of life. Women with both recent IPV and IPV experience over 12 months ago have the poorest health.[9]

Women who have experienced sexual assault are more likely to attempt suicide.[10]

Canadian women, girls and gender diverse people cannot enjoy good health and well-being when they are experiencing violence.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



41% OF ALL REPORTED INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT IN CANADA WERE REPORTED BY STUDENTS.[11]

63% of university students in Ontario have experienced some form of sexual violence AT SCHOOL.[12]

The rate of sexual assault for Canadians aged 15-24 is 18x higher than those aged 55+.[13]

Sexual violence at school is affecting access to quality and safe education for Canadians.

5 GENDER EQUALITY



Canadian women and girls are more likely than Canadian men to experience sexual harassment and sexual abuse in the form of rape, child sexual abuse, IPV, incest, drug-facilitated sexual assault, stalking, and sexual exploitation.[14]

90% OF REPORTED SEXUAL ASSAULTS IN CANADA ARE COMMITTED AGAINST WOMEN.[15]

Every 3 days

ONE WOMAN OR GIRL IS KILLED IN CANADA.[16]

87% of the accused in Canadian femicide cases are male.[17]

Women are 2x as likely as men to be victims of family violence.[1]

Women who experience spousal violence are more likely to endure extreme forms including choking, beating, being threatened with a knife or gun, and sexual violence.[19]

Girls are 1.5x

more likely than boys to experience violence at home.[20]

79% of police-reported IPV is against women.[21]

Women most likely to experience online harassment in its most severe forms, including stalking, sexual harassment and physical threats, are aged 18-24.[22]

Women were more than twice as likely as men to say they had experienced unwanted sexual contact while at work.[23]

Canada will not achieve gender equality while women and girls continue to experience violence at these rates.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



29% of women have experienced one or more unwanted sexual behaviours in the workplace.[24]

1 in 4 women working in a male-dominated environment were personally targeted by unwanted sexual behaviour.[25]

A Canadian study suggests that domestic violence (DV) can carry over into the workplace, threatening women's ability to maintain economic independence.[26]

53% of respondents who had experienced DV said that at least one type of abuse HAPPENED AT OR NEAR THEIR WORKPLACE.[27]

81.9% from the same study reported that DV negatively affected their job[28] and 8.5% had lost a job due to DV.[29]

$7.4 BILLION is the annual cost to Canadians to deal with the aftermath of spousal violence alone.[30]

$3.4 BILLION is the collective annual financial impact for Canadian women who experience sexual assault, including medical costs, lost productivity, and pain and suffering.[31]

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CANADA ACROSS THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

AURA FREEDOM INTERNATIONAL

#EndGBVtoAchieveSDGs

Globally, GBV can cost countries 1.2% to 3.7% of their GDP.[32]

Gender-based violence is affecting women's ability to maintain and excel at their jobs and achieve economic empowerment. It is also limiting economic growth as the cost of gender-based violence leaves Canada with less money to invest in industry, innovation and infrastructure. How are we to achieve SDGs 8 and 9 without eradicating gender-based violence?



INDIGENOUS WOMEN ARE **12x** more likely to be murdered than any other women in Canada.[33]

Those who commit crimes against Indigenous women in Canada are often punished less severely (or not at all) than those who commit crimes against white women.[34]

Although Métis women experience more violence than non-Indigenous women, issues facing Métis women, girls and two-spirit people are under-researched.[36]

INDIGENOUS WOMEN EXPERIENCE **3x** spousal violence higher than non-Indigenous women and double that of Indigenous men.[37]

Women with a disability were nearly 2x as likely as women without a disability to have been sexually assaulted in the past year.[38]

For women with disabilities, the risk of violence increases when they are racialized, younger, Indigenous, LGBTQI2S, migrant workers, immigrants, non-status migrants or living in rural areas.[39]

Women in rural areas experienced the highest overall rates of IPV, with rates almost 4X higher than those for men in these areas.[40]

To achieve SDG 10, Canada must work to eradicate gender- based violence against all women, especially the most marginalized.



ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT IN CANADA, **3,491 AND THEIR 2,724 CHILDREN** SLEEP IN EMERGENCY SHELTERS.[41]

300+ women and children are turned away from shelters on any given night in Canada because they are full.[42]

Women and girls are in the greatest danger in their homes - 55% of femicide victims are killed in their own home or the home they shared with the accused.[43]

In Toronto, women and children are staying in violence against women shelters an average of 10-14 months or longer while they wait for housing to become available.[43B]

Gender-based violence perpetuates homelessness and increases housing instability for women and their children.



The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) concluded that the violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people in Canada amounts to **GENOCIDE**.[44]

MURDERS OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO GO UNSOLVED. ONLY **53%** of murder cases in the Native Women's Association of Canada's database have been solved, compared to 84% of all murder cases in Canada.[45]

Indigenous women and girls only make up 4% of Canada's population, but 50% of human trafficking survivors.[46]

There is no exact number of MMIWG in Canada. **THOUSANDS** of deaths and disappearances have gone unrecorded over the decades and families are still waiting for justice.[47]

We can't have peace and justice until we have peace and justice for Indigenous women in Canada.

How is Canada to achieve SDG 16 when Indigenous women are still being trafficked, going missing and being killed?



There are approximately 19 million women and girls in Canada.[48] Half of them have experienced at least one incident of physical/sexual violence since age 16.[49]

When half of the women and girls in Canada are experiencing violence and forced to deal with its effects on their health, wealth and well-being, how are they to contribute as meaningfully to their families and communities?

IMAGINE A CANADA FREE FROM GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.

Ending GBV in Canada will:

- Create healthier and stronger families and communities.
- Create a more peaceful, just and equitable society.
- Increase wealth and economic growth for all Canadians.
- Increase the political and economical participation of women, as well as increase their decision-making skills.
- Increase the participation of women and girls in mitigating climate change and bringing forth climate justice, especially in Indigenous communities, where women are often the traditional custodians of the land and water.
- Harness the untapped talent and power of all women, girls and gender diverse people and all they can contribute to Canada.

End GBV and watch Canada flourish.

End GBV and watch the world flourish.

#EndGBVtoAchieveSDGs

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