



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA

VitalSigns.



Gender Equality in Canada

Peace

Introduction to Gender Equality in Canada

To create communities of true belonging, we need to advance gender equality across the country.

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated gender inequality.

For a just recovery from the pandemic, it is more pressing than ever to invest in women*, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people.

THERE IS WORK TO DO

From a lack of representation in political and decision-making positions to persisting wage gaps, economic inequalities and staggering rates of gender-based violence, it's clear that we have work to do.

In 2019, Canada ranked only 11th among all countries for women's equality and well-being.¹

From coast to coast to coast, the women's movement and feminist organizations have a long and rich history of mobilization to advance gender equality in our country. As budgets get re-allocated to public health and economic programs in the wake of the pandemic, these organizations are most at risk of losing funding. There is an urgent need to fund organizations that work with the most marginalized. These organizations cannot and should not have to do this work alone. If Community Foundations of Canada is serious about creating communities where everyone belongs (and we are!), it's time we invest more meaningfully in a just recovery for all and a feminist future.

**References to "women" are inclusive of trans women.*

What we mean by "feminist future"

A vision of a world where all women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people have equal access to justice, opportunities, resources and decision-making. One where people have body autonomy and self-determination, and can live a life free from violence. A global community that benefits when those most impacted by oppression are lifted up. A decolonized future, a future where power is shared and where identity does not dictate life outcomes. We have a vision of the future where all identities are celebrated and are a source of joy and solidarity.

In the context of the pandemic, we need a clear vision of a just recovery and a path to get there, leaving no one behind.

TAKING THE PULSE: WHY NOW?

Alongside many community foundations and partners across Canada, Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) is [stepping up through our commitment](#) to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #5 Gender Equality as well as collaborating with the Equality Fund—an unprecedented multi-year initiative to advance gender equality in Canada, with support from the federal government. 2019 marked the first of a five-year collaboration with CFC and community foundations to deliver momentum for women’s movements and grants through the [Communities for Gender Equality](#) program.

At CFC, we are focusing our three-part *Vital Signs* report series on gender equality in Canada. Each report corresponds to a theme from the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), and Women and Gender Equality Canada’s Gender Results Framework: Power, Peace and Planet. *Vital Signs* reflects the integration of the economic, social and environmental elements that are key to sustainable development, analyzed through the lens of gender equality.

→ **READ:** [CFC’s Sustainable Development Goals Guidebook and Toolkit](#)



Why peace? Building a future free from violence for all women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people.

Violence against women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people is the world’s single-largest human rights violation. While Canada is frequently considered to be one of the safest, most conflict-free nations in the world, this does not mean we are immune to gender-based violence. Far from it. Statistics point to some alarming trends. As the Canadian Women’s Foundation reports, 1 woman is killed by her intimate partner every 6 days.² Sexual assault is the only violent crime that is not declining.

But gender-based violence is far more than domestic violence and sexual assault, from the small but insidious daily acts of public harassment, to deeply entrenched systemic oppression. In this report, we do a deep dive on gender-based violence and look at related issues that impact that experience of safety and freedom for women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people. All people deserve a life of peace. Achieving gender equality means ensuring freedom from violence, freedom from fear, freedom to be and freedom to define justice in the community.

Canada ranks 6th out of 163 countries on the Global Peace Index.³



UNDERSTANDING THE EVIDENCE

Within each report—Power, Peace and Planet—we explore how different dimensions of inequality and privilege intersect and interact in people’s lives and identities. These dimensions include age, class, gender, race, Indigeneity, religion, immigrant status, sexual orientation and disability.

THE DATA CHALLENGE

Gender is commonly defined as it relates to the characteristics cultures apply to the concepts of “feminine” and “masculine.” These characteristics range from social roles to physical appearance. Gender identities include female, male, non-binary and gender non-conforming. The term “sex” is biological, but the term “gender” is a social construction.

Finding inclusive data that captures the experiences of trans and non-binary individuals is a challenge. For the most part, sources used in this report do not indicate inclusion of trans or non-binary individuals.

All Statistics Canada data is based solely on sex: “male” or “female” as designated on birth certificates. However, Statistics Canada has made a commitment to using gender—as self-identified—rather than biological sex in most social statistics programs. Look for this change in the 2021 Census!⁴

→ **TIP:** When collecting data, community foundations and others can adjust their surveys to allow more options in the “gender” box, asking people to self-identify and offering Two-Spirit, non-binary, trans and open fields.

Intersectionality

noun | ,in(t)ərsəkSHə'nalədē |

The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class and gender as they apply to a given individual or group regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

This report is framed in the context of SDG #5 Gender Equality.

It also speaks to the interconnectedness of gender inequality and outcomes related to SDG #3 Good Health and Well-being, SDG #10 Reduced Inequalities and SDG #16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.



The Many Faces of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence is highly prevalent in our communities. The lives of many women, girls, Two-Spirit people and non-binary people are affected by GBV.

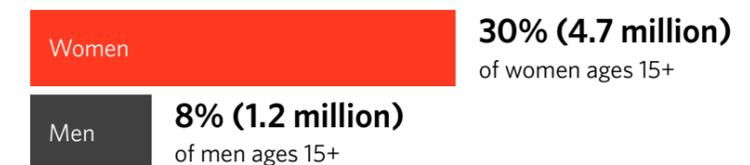
Gender-based violence is an umbrella term that describes violence committed against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender.

GBV is not limited to physical abuse—it also includes words, actions or attempts to degrade, control, humiliate, intimidate, coerce, deprive, threaten or harm another person based on their gender. The United Nations defined violence against women in the [1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#) as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."⁵

NATIONAL IMPACT

5.9 million Canadians report that they have been sexually assaulted at least once since the age of 15.⁶

BREAKDOWN BY GENDER





INEQUALITIES ACROSS IDENTITIES

People of all social classes, occupations and races are affected by GBV, but access to resources to prevent or heal from violence is not equal. Women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people who are impacted by oppression in addition to gender—including Indigeneity, disability, sexual orientation and age—experience the highest rates of GBV.

GBV is about power. Perpetrators of harassment and assault often seek victims who are in a position of lesser power, for example younger people, people who are less able to fight back or people at risk of retribution, such as losing a job, if they speak up.

“This cycle of violence came from residential schools, racism against our Peoples, and colonization. It was never in our culture to do violence to the women and children in our families and communities, it was always our responsibility to protect them.”

— THE MOOSE HIDE CAMPAIGN

National genocide

Among gender-diverse and Two-Spirit Indigenous people in Ontario, 73% had experienced some form of violence due to transphobia, including 43% who experienced physical and/or sexual violence.⁷

INDIGENOUS WOMEN, GIRLS AND TWO-SPIRIT PEOPLE

12x more likely to be murdered or missing than non-Indigenous women and girls.⁸

3x more likely than non-Indigenous women to be killed by someone they know.

3x more likely to experience sexual assault than non-Indigenous women.⁹

3x more likely to experience domestic violence than non-Indigenous women.

WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Women with disabilities are nearly twice as likely as able-bodied women to have recently experienced a violent crime.¹⁰

14.9% of Canadian women report living with a disability.

Of all the sexual assaults, physical assaults and robberies against women, 45% involve a woman with a disability.

36% of women with disabilities report living through more than one victimization.¹¹

2SLGBTQ+ COMMUNITY*

(Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning)

For women-identifying people who are part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, the likelihood of experiencing GBV more than doubles.¹²

1 in 5 LGBTQ secondary school students is physically harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.¹³



Compared to heterosexual women, bisexual women are 4x more likely to report violence and 7x more likely to report sexual assault.¹⁴

Canada ranks only 14th among OECD countries for social acceptance of homosexuality, and less than half of Canadians (44%) say they would be comfortable with their child expressing and dressing as a child of another gender. However, attitudes are changing—younger generations are increasingly accepting of same sex marriage.¹⁵

SENIORS

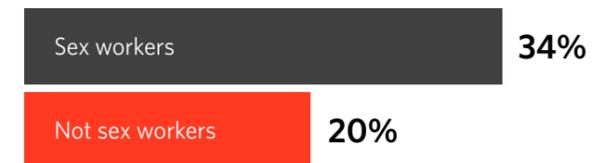
Of all police-reported sexual assaults against seniors, 92% of the victims were women.¹⁶

11% increase in family violence toward seniors since 2009.

SEX WORKERS

Sex workers face higher rates of violence but have fewer protections than other Canadians. High rates of violence experienced by sex workers are thought to be exacerbated by criminalization of sex work, stigma and discrimination.¹⁷

VICTIMS OF HOMICIDE CASES BETWEEN 1991 AND 2014¹⁸



→ **DID YOU KNOW?** Disability is a physical or mental condition that limits a person's daily activities including hearing, vision, pain, mobility, flexibility, dexterity, learning, developmental, memory, or mental or psychological health.

*This report uses the acronym 2SLGBTQ+ except in cases where a research source used a different grouping of people (then the acronym from the original research is used).

Reconciliation, Opportunity & Indigenous Women as Leaders

In order to address gender inequality, the concept of feminism must be challenged through a decolonial lens and be centred on the voices of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women.



When statistics are used to talk about Indigenous women and communities, they often paint a negative picture, and the voices of Métis, Inuit and First Nations women are left out. Each *Vital Signs* report in this series features the voice of an inspiring Indigenous leader from the field. Here, we hear from Michelle Cameron, Ts'il Kaz Koh First Nation, former RCMP analyst and current investigator for the University of British Columbia (UBC) focused on sexual misconduct on campus.

What do the findings of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls teach us about the roots of violence that Indigenous people and communities experience?

The final report refers to intergenerational genocide. The roots of violence are the systemic human rights violations perpetuated every day by ongoing colonialism. These are not past tense issues.

What is your hope for how your work will contribute to change?

I work as an investigator of sexual misconduct at UBC. Our office is trauma-informed and culturally safe. We are changing investigative processes from being overly complex and communicated in incomprehensible legal jargon, to simplified reporting that regular people can understand and navigate. As an Indigenous investigator, it is critically important to me to break down unnecessary barriers to access and ensure we are not retraumatizing people with the investigation process.

What is your hope or vision for the future of Indigenous girls' and women's well-being?

We must ReMatriate our cultures. In my Nation, members seem to have forgotten the central role women held in our bah'lats (potlatches) and governance structures. This cultural amnesia is due to colonization and is a form of lateral violence pushing women to the margins. Mending the fabric of our Nations involves honouring our women and their roles.

NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

Nearly 20 years ago, the Native Women's Association of Canada started calling on the federal government and members of the Canadian public to pay attention to systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls. The organization's Sisters in Spirit project created the first database of missing and murdered Indigenous women.¹⁹

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was launched by the Government of Canada in 2015 with a mandate to look into and report on the systemic causes of all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls.²⁰ The National Inquiry released its final report, *Reclaiming Power and Peace*, in 2019. The report is a product of extensive, cross-country evidence gathering and provides 231 Calls for Justice. The Calls for Justice are directed at governments, institutions, social service providers, industries and all Canadians, setting out a clear path to reducing violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

- 2,386 people participated in the Truth Gathering Process
- 1,484 family members and survivors provided testimony

WHY IS VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED BY MANY INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS?

The National Inquiry found four contributing factors:

1. Historical, multigenerational and intergenerational trauma
2. Social and economic marginalization
3. Maintaining the status quo: institutional lack of will
4. Ignoring the agency and expertise of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people²¹

"Women are the life-givers, but women are not going to be life-givers without men. So, that's a balance in life. Our Two-Spirited people bring that balance again, of masculine and femininity. Our lives are not about our sexuality or even our gender identity, it's about us being a human being. It's about us following those teachings that our ancestors put in place for us, those teachings of kindness and respect, truth, honesty, humility, love, wisdom, about living those ways of life. Trying to look at each other as a valuable portion of a community, what gifts does that person have to bring to the table, so that we can become a very rich table."²²

— LAUREEN "BLU" WATERS (ISTCHII NIKAMOON)

Member of the Elders and Grandmothers Circle of the National Inquiry

Surviving Domestic Violence

A global pandemic mandating isolation and quarantines has made many homes dangerous.

1 in 10 women says they are “very or extremely” concerned about the possibility of violence in their home due to the stress of COVID-19-related confinement.²³

Global research on gender-based violence indicates that it is common for domestic violence to appear during and after a crisis.²⁴

Loss of social networks, financial hardship and uncertainty are all crisis-related factors that can lead to increased violence by husbands and intimate partners within the family.²⁵

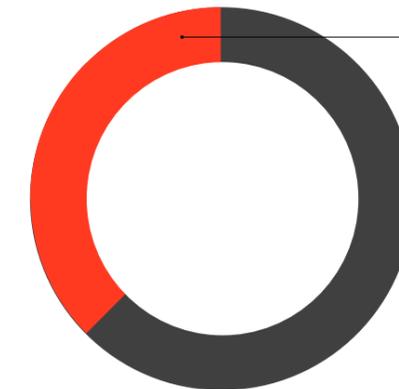
A survey conducted by the Native Women’s Association of Canada found that 1 in 5 First Nations, Inuit and Métis women reported that they were a victim of physical or psychological violence during the spring of 2020. Preliminary consultations show that Indigenous women are more concerned about violence than the pandemic.²⁶

Even without government-mandated isolation, people trying to leave an abusive relationship face a number of barriers that make it difficult to do so. Threats of heightened violence, financial and housing insecurity, and access to a car can influence a person’s decision.²⁷

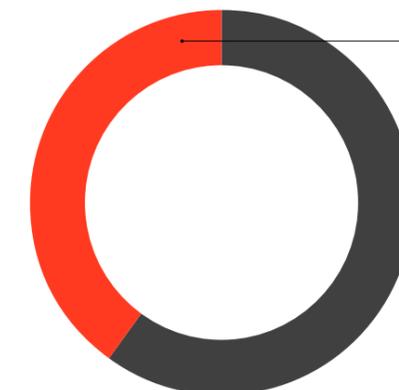
Women in abusive relationships remain vulnerable even after they attempt to leave their abusers.

58% of victims of family violence were women, and the most likely perpetrator was their spouse.²⁸

DOMESTIC ABUSE



33%
Intimate partner violence against women occurs after the relationship ends.²⁹



40%
Women who leave an abusive marriage suffer violence after their relationship has ended. Of these women, half experience an increased severity of violence after the breakup.³⁰

SHELTERS: CHANCE AT A NEW LIFE

Residential facilities (shelters) provide a safe haven for people fleeing domestic violence. These can include short-term shelters for emergency services and second stage transitional housing for women and children who are at high risk of danger.³¹

Battered Women's Support Services in Vancouver had a 300% increase in crisis line calls when lockdown began in British Columbia in March 2020.³²

Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH), which has called sexual violence a "pandemic within a pandemic,"³³ stated that 20% of the 70 shelters they run in the province have seen an increase in domestic violence calls.³⁴

STARK NUMBERS BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

Over 68,000 admissions to Canadian residential facilities for victims of abuse in the year 2017-2018.³⁵

PEOPLE STAYING IN SHELTERS FOR VICTIMS OF ABUSE

6 in 10 are women; 4 in 10 are their children.³⁶



On a typical day, over 36% of Canadian shelters are full.³⁷

1 in 8 people seeking refuge from violence in a shelter is turned away on any given day.³⁸

Second stage shelters

Although second stage shelters play a vital role in breaking the cycle of GBV, most are not funded adequately to do their life saving-work.

- 80% of second stage shelters report that insufficient funding is a "major challenge."
- 69% need some form of repairs and renovations, with 48% unable to afford them.³⁹

Most of these shelters are not universally accessible for people with reduced mobility and, despite two-thirds of second stage shelters serving Indigenous clients, only 11% were able to offer culturally appropriate programs.⁴⁰ Shelters are especially lacking in rural, Northern and First Nations communities.⁴¹

JUST RECOVERY

According to Ontario Nonprofit Network's COVID-19 Flash Survey, 78% of organizations primarily serving women, girls and 2SLGBTQ+ communities reported that, as a result of COVID-19, they were experiencing or anticipating reduced revenue from fundraising, compared to 74% of the sector overall.⁴² In [Resetting Normal](#), a report released by Canadian Women's Foundation, the authors review current COVID-19 funding efforts for the women's sector and equity-serving organizations. The report calls on the government and foundations delivering emergency funds to do so with a deep gender-based analysis to ensure funding goes to organizations on the frontlines and to the whole ecosystem of organizations serving women and girls. Canadian Women's Foundation also makes five recommendations to the government for a thriving women's sector. Read the full report [here](#).

Community Safety & Belonging

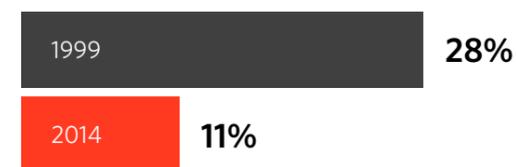
Women are 5x more likely than men to stay home at night because of safety concerns.⁴³

More women feel safe on the streets compared to 20 years ago; however, women's sense of safety is still much lower than men's. The pandemic has made people feel even more unsafe.

Our public places—parks, sidewalks, schools, transit systems and workplaces—should be safe and welcoming for all.

However, women and gender-diverse people, particularly youth and 2SLGBTQ+, racialized and Indigenous people, experience GBV in community spaces at a much higher rate than others. From harassment to hyper-surveillance, access to public space is not experienced equitably by all. Feeling safe is intrinsically linked to a sense of well-being. A lack of safety, both real and perceived, can have adverse effects on individuals and communities, as it can lead people to avoid community activities and spaces.⁴⁴

PROPORTION OF WOMEN WHO FEEL UNSAFE WALKING IN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOODS AFTER DARK⁴⁵

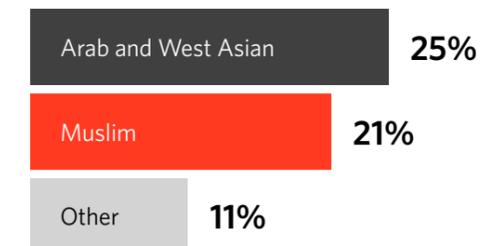


50% of women vs. 22% of men worry about their safety while taking public transportation alone after dark.

38% of women vs. 18% of men routinely take a taxi, car or public transportation instead of walking out of concern for their safety.

Women are 5x more likely than men to stay at home at night because of safety concerns.⁴⁶

IMMIGRANT AND RACIALIZED WOMEN FEEL MORE UNSAFE THAN OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS⁴⁷



Cultural safety & racial profiling

Cultural safety is the condition of being physically, socially and spiritually safe, being free of racism and stereotypes, and having access to services, institutions and environments where people are treated with empathy, dignity and respect.^{48,49}

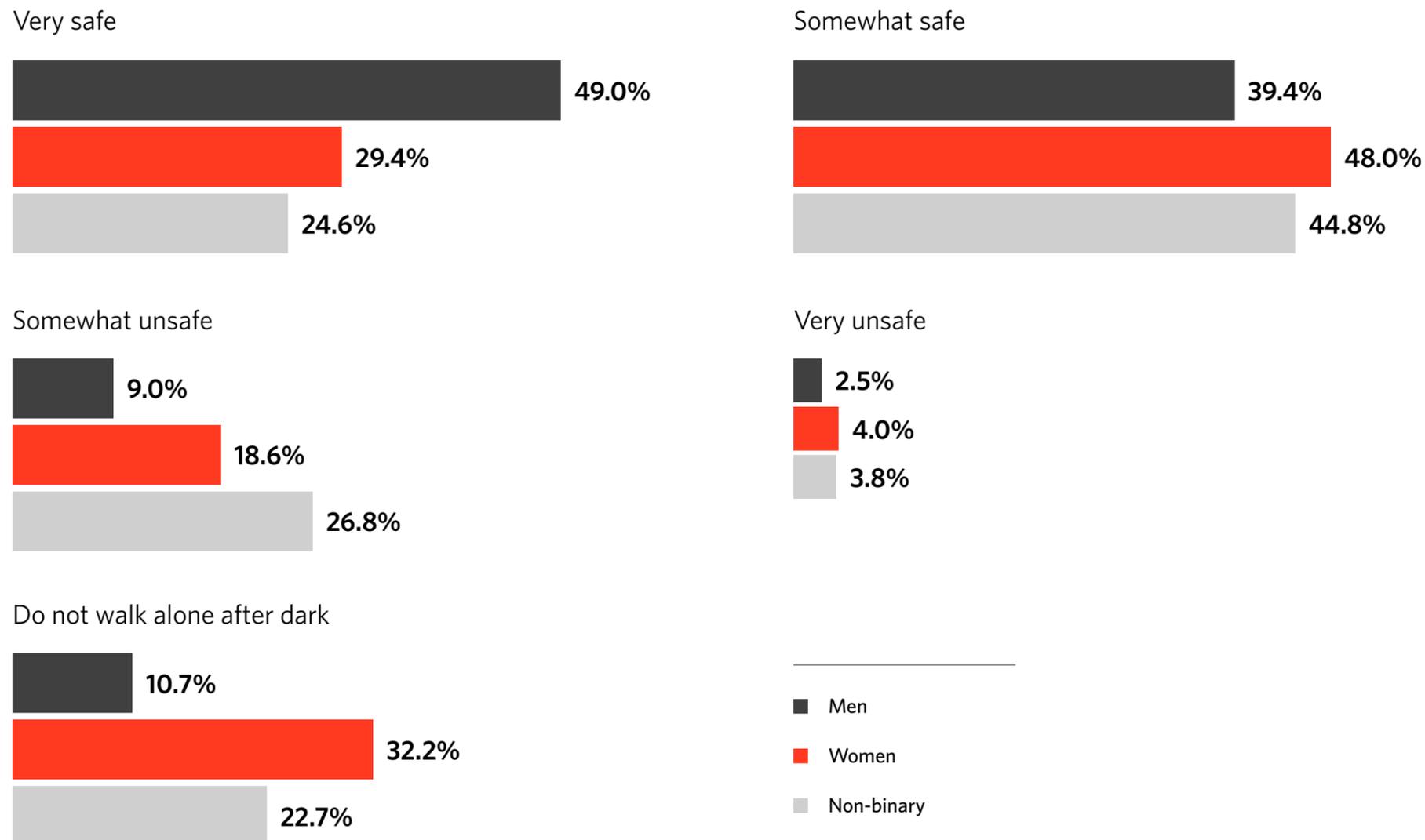
Racial profiling, i.e. being unfairly singled out for surveillance, scrutiny, investigation and disproportionately hard treatment based on perceived race or ethnicity,⁵⁰ is most experienced by people who are Black, Arab, West Asian, Indigenous and/or Muslim.⁵¹ Racial profiling can lead to individuals feeling less culturally safe.

New survey data from Statistics Canada shows that the number of women who feel very safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark has decreased since the pandemic began.

38% of women felt very safe in 2014.⁵²
29% of women feel very safe in 2020.⁵³

The same survey found that 27% of visible minorities and 26% of Indigenous participants were more likely to say that they feel unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark than those who identified as a non-visible minority (15%) and non-Indigenous (16%).⁵⁴

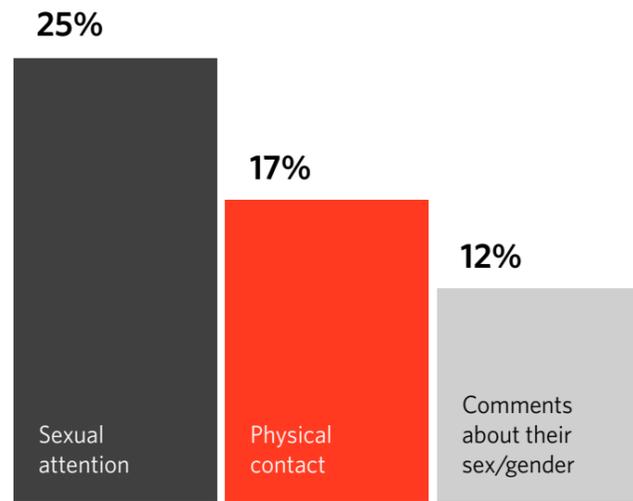
PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY FROM CRIME WHEN WALKING ALONE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AFTER DARK, BY GENDER OF RESPONDENT



HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC SPACES

1 in 3 women vs. 1 in 8 men experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in public in the last year.⁵⁵ For both women and men, being younger and of a sexual orientation other than heterosexual was associated with much higher odds of experiencing harassment in public.

MOST COMMON TYPES OF UNWANTED SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN IN PUBLIC⁵⁶



PLANNING OUR COMMUNITIES WITH GENDER IN MIND

Much can be done to improve safety and equality in our communities by applying Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) in community planning.

“GBA+ is an analytical process used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and non-binary people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. The 'plus' acknowledges that GBA goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences. GBA+ also considers many other identity factors, like race, ethnicity, religion, age and mental or physical disability.”⁵⁷

— WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY CANADA

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Concerns about physical distancing and new emergency bylaws during the pandemic have exacerbated existing inequalities when it comes to access to public spaces. Layered increases in racial profiling onto gender-based harassment creates an alienating environment for Black women, Indigenous women and women of colour, which negatively impacts belonging and well-being.

New survey data published in June 2020 by Statistics Canada showed that 30% of Chinese respondents and 27% of Korean respondents said they have perceived an “increase in harassment or attacks on the basis of race, ethnicity or skin colour” in their own neighbourhood since the start of the pandemic.⁵⁸

Statistics Canada also asked a general question about perception of frequency of racial and ethnic harassment and attacks. Black and Korean respondents were highest to report that these incidents happen often or sometimes (26.5%), followed by Chinese (25%) and Filipino (24%).⁵⁹

White Canadians are least likely to believe that racist attacks or harassment regularly occur or are happening more often in their neighbourhood since the pandemic began.⁶⁰

According to Statistics Canada, “Feeling unsafe can have negative impacts at both the social and the individual level, by reducing social cohesion or resulting in poorer physical

or mental health and well-being.” In June 2020, Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) released [Stay Off the Grass: COVID-19 and Law Enforcement in Canada](#), a report that focuses on “the use of coercive fines and law enforcement to respond to a public health crisis.”

Across the country, law enforcement has collected \$13 million in COVID-related fines. 98% of the national total was collected in just three provinces: Quebec (77%), Ontario (18%) and Nova Scotia (3%).⁶¹ Penalties ranged across provinces, the largest being \$1,500 in Quebec.

CCLA’s research points out that “increased enforcement powers and significant fines are having a disproportionate impact on specific communities, including Black, Indigenous and other racialized groups, those with precarious housing, recent immigrants, youth, members of the LGBTQ2S+ community and certain religious minorities.”

Quantitative data on race, gender, sexual orientation and other identifying demographic information is not available as law enforcement and municipalities have declined to collect it.⁶²

Safety in Institutions

POLICING AND SECURITY FORCES

What about gender equality within our policing and security forces? Operation HONOUR was launched by the Canadian Armed Forces in 2015 to eliminate sexual misconduct in the Canadian military.⁶³

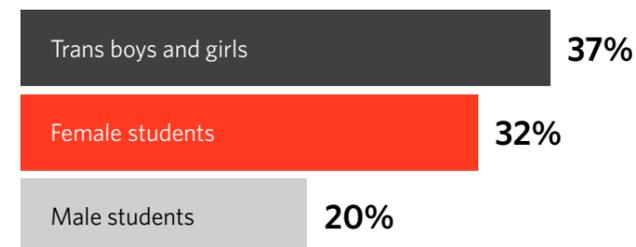
70% of Regular Force and Primary Reserve members saw, heard or experienced inappropriate sexualized or discriminatory behaviours in the military workplace or involving military members in 2018.⁶⁴

Approximately 1,500 of these members reported that they were victims of sexual assault.⁶⁵

In March 2020, a new \$100 million class action lawsuit was approved against the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for harassment or discrimination at work based on gender or sexual orientation. 2,000 claimants are expected to come forward.⁶⁶ A similar class action lawsuit was approved in 2016 in which hundreds of current and former female officers and RCMP employees came forward to report bullying, discrimination and harassment.⁶⁷

SCHOOLS

Verbally harassed at least once per week in high school because of their sexuality:⁶⁸

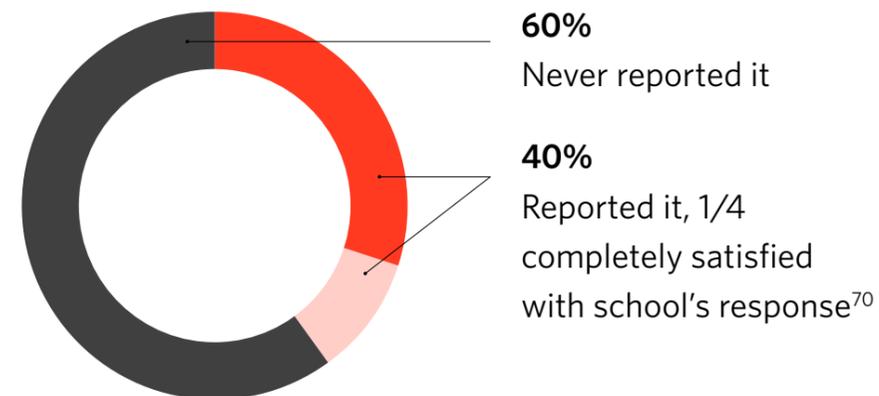


BETWEEN KINDERGARTEN AND GRADE 12...

1 in 4 girls reports that they were inappropriately touched at school.



1 in 7 girls reports that they were sexually assaulted by another student.⁶⁹



As students get older, they are less likely to report sexual violence at school.



Sexual health education helps young people develop a positive relationship with their own bodies and other people. Good quality sexual health education is an important factor in reducing violence. The benefits of comprehensive sex ed include:^{72,73}

- Prevention and reduction in GBV and discrimination
- Increased confidence and gender equality
- Development of stronger and healthier relationships

However, many provincial and territorial school boards do not provide adequate sex ed that meets the *2019 Canadian Guidelines for Sexuality Education*.⁷⁴

HEALTHCARE

Everyone deserves control over their own body. Yet many Canadians, especially women, youth and LGBTQ2S+ people, struggle to have their sexual and reproductive health needs met.

- “Reproductive coercion” is a form of violence that has only recently been named. It is used to describe when someone pressures another person about their reproductive decision-making or takes steps that make it harder for that person to freely exercise their reproductive choices.⁷⁵
- Contraception targeting women is more expensive and complicated than it is for men and is not always covered under public healthcare.⁷⁶
- There has been a steady decline in abortions since the procedure was made legal in Canada.⁷⁷ However, not all Canadians can access the procedure when they need it. The majority of abortion services are located in urban centres, making it difficult for those in northern, remote or rural communities to access.^{78,79}

1 in 3 trans Ontarians experienced an unmet health need in the last year vs. 1 in 10 of all Ontarians.⁸⁰



In the nonprofit workplace

Charitable and community organizations are not immune to workplace harassment.

1 in 5 fundraising professionals in Canada has been sexually harassed at work.

60% of the time the perpetrator was a donor.

15% of the time action was taken against the perpetrator when it was reported.⁸¹

“Workers in some fundraising roles can be particularly vulnerable to harassment due to the deep power imbalance between fundraisers—who are often young women and whose jobs depend on meeting donation targets—and donors, who are often wealthy older men.”⁸²

— FRANCES WILLICK
CBC News

Justice, Resistance & Resilience

Justice is not just a system,
but an ideal of what is right and fair.

While Canada has institutions built to provide safety and justice for some, the application of safety and justice is not equitably experienced by women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people.

The status quo is not serving the needs of women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people. For example, #MeToo began when justice was too slow and ineffective—women began organizing, calling “Time’s Up!” And incarceration has many gendered impacts, from increasing rates of incarceration of Black and Indigenous women, to body autonomy, to mothering and family unification. We need to use our collective imaginations and look forward to the future, to imagine new ways of building a just, feminist future.

INCARCERATION IS A FEMINIST ISSUE

1 in 3 federally incarcerated women is Indigenous.
This accounts for 32.6% of the total female offender population.⁸³

The number of incarcerated Indigenous women is rising exponentially. From 2000 to 2009 it increased 86.4% compared to an increase of incarcerated Indigenous men of 25.7%.⁸⁴ Black women represent roughly 6% of all federally incarcerated female prisoners, but only 3.1% of Canada’s overall female population.^{85,86} Moreover, the number of Black women incarcerated is rising.⁸⁷



Getting to the root

The UN Human Rights Council report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its mission to Canada, states that Black women are consistently and disproportionately incarcerated—the result of “racial bias at all levels of the [criminal justice] system, from racial profiling to the exercise of prosecutorial discretion, the imposition of pretrial incarceration and disparities in sentencing.”⁸⁸

According to [a report](#) published by Public Safety Canada, the effects of colonization are a key factor in the further marginalization of Indigenous women. The report states, “The devastating affect that centuries of oppression have had on Aboriginal women has resulted in far fewer social supports than non-Aboriginal women. Less access to social supports can contribute to initiation and continued involvement in the criminal justice system.”⁸⁹

→ **READ:** The [Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society](#) is working to break the cycle of Indigenous women’s overrepresentation in Canada’s prisons.

INCARCERATION AND FAMILY UNIFICATION

The United Nations has outlined and defined the human right to form a family. It includes a woman's right to all matters relating to children, the right not to be subject to arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence, and the right of the child to remain with their family.⁹⁰

Incarceration is a component of reproductive justice: most incarcerated women are imprisoned during child-bearing years.⁹¹ Incarceration is also a factor in children being apprehended into care and documented cases of forced sterilization, particularly of Indigenous women.⁹²

There are an estimated 20,000 children in Canada with incarcerated mothers.⁹³

Incarceration is a factor in the related statistic that Indigenous and Black children are overrepresented in apprehension and foster care.

In Manitoba, 90% of children in care are Indigenous.⁹⁴

In Ontario the proportion of Indigenous children in care is 2.6 times higher than their proportion of the child population, and the proportion of Black children in care is 2.2 times higher than their proportion of the child population.⁹⁵

“... no Aboriginal language in Canada has a word for child removal or apprehension as we understand it in contemporary child welfare law.”⁹⁶

— CINDY BLACKSTOCK

Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada

According to the Legislative Review Committee of the Government of Manitoba, “The causes are deeply rooted in a legacy of colonial practices and policies, such as the legacy of the residential school system and the 60's Scoop. These practices separated children from parents, family, community, culture and language... perpetuating the cycle of children being removed from their familial homes.”⁹⁷

The Ontario Human Rights Committee reports that racial bias, confusing poverty for neglect, and cultural differences lead to discrimination and apprehension of racialized children.⁹⁸ The establishment and maintenance of a bond between mother and child improves outcomes for both. When a mother is taken away from their child, the child may face separation from siblings, time spent with inappropriate guardians, shame, isolation and even trauma.⁹⁹

INCARCERATION AND THE PANDEMIC

The Black Legal Action Centre and the Alliance for Healthy Communities released a Statement on Detainees and COVID-19 calling on all levels of government to increase health protections for those in detainment centres during the pandemic.¹⁰⁰

The statement cites the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, quoting her saying that neglecting incarcerated populations during the pandemic could be catastrophic.¹⁰¹

Incarcerated women are at heightened vulnerability to large outbreaks of COVID-19.

8 inmates and 1 correctional officer tested COVID-19 positive at Grand Valley Institution—Canada's largest federal prison for women.¹⁰²

#MeToo in Canada

The #MeToo movement was founded in 2006 by American activist and community organizer Tarana Burke to help victims of sexual violence find support for healing, join and grow a community of survivors and, ultimately, advocate for solutions to GBV.¹⁰³

The #MeToo movement went viral in October 2017 when women from around the world and all walks of life began to publicly share their experiences of sexual assault or harassment online, in the media and beyond.¹⁰⁴ #MeToo encouraged Canadians to share their experiences with GBV at home, in the workplace and in public policy discussions like never before.¹⁰⁵

THE PROFOUND IMPACT #METOO HAS HAD IN CANADA SINCE 2017

There has been a significant jump in the number of survivors who have come forward both formally to police and informally to friends, family and community organizations.

In 2017, there were more police-reported sexual assaults than in any other year since 1998.¹⁰⁶

In 2014, only 5% of sexual assaults were reported to police.

In the three months following the explosive growth of #MeToo on social media, reports to police of sexual assault increased by 25% Canada-wide, 61% in Quebec and 48% among girls 12 to 14 years old.¹⁰⁷

Community organizations that support survivors of sexual violence have been overwhelmed by the increase in requests for assistance. Most are at or over capacity and lack the financial resources to meet the needs of all survivors.

Wait times for counselling are currently as long as 11 months.

Some sexual assault centres have had to temporarily stop accepting new clients.¹⁰⁸

#MeToo has also had an impact on the response of police to GBV. Thanks to Robyn Doolittle's groundbreaking work of investigative journalism, *Unfounded*, in 2017 and advocacy from women's organizations, police have begun to investigate

sexual assault cases more thoroughly, including re-opening closed "unfounded" cases.

For a case to be considered unfounded, it must be "determined through police investigation that the offence reported did not occur, nor was it attempted."¹⁰⁹

19% of sexual assault allegations in Canada were dismissed as baseless and unfounded during 2010-2014.

This rate is nearly twice as high as physical assault (10.8%) and much higher than other types of crime.¹¹⁰

Between 2016 and 2017, the number of unfounded sexual assault cases across Canada was reduced by over 25%.¹¹¹

Some women begin to feel revictimized when they report sexual assault and go through the legal process. According to Canadian Women's Foundation, "Women often suffer secondary victimization when they turn to the police, social services, friends or family if, as can happen, they are not believed, blamed or made to feel responsible for the violence or subjected to callous or insensitive treatment when police fail to take evidence or when their cases are dropped arbitrarily."¹¹²

It is estimated that less than 1% of sexual assaults experienced by women lead to an offender being convicted.¹¹³

Statistics Canada. [Rotenberg, C. and Cotter, A.](#) 2018. Police-reported Sexual Assaults in Canada Before and After #MeToo. Juristat. (Compared to average quarterly sexual assault report figures for the 21 months prior to October 2017).

Redefining justice through community

How can we create a world where women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people can live happy, healthy lives? The Canadian government defines restorative justice, "as an approach to justice that focuses on addressing the harm caused by crime while holding the offender responsible for their actions, by providing an opportunity for the parties directly affected by the crime—victims, offenders and communities—to identify and address their needs in the aftermath of a crime."¹⁴ Many Indigenous-led and serving organizations have restorative justice programs. Find a list of them [here](#).

PRIMARY PREVENTION

Prevention is key to alleviating violence faced by women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people. Many of the avenues for justice through institutions are reactionary and take place after the crime has been committed. There are organizations in Canada dedicated to primary prevention, cultural and systemic change, and funding (re)distribution to support people's safety and well-being.

JUST RECOVERY

[The Feminist Recovery Plan](#) released by YWCA Canada made a call for "the establishment of a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence that addresses: (a) violence against Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people as recommended by the Inquiry Report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and (b) all forms of racism and hate crimes."

Men and boys are essential to reducing gender-based violence

Canada was the birthplace of [White Ribbon](#), now the world's largest movement of men and boys working to end violence against women and girls, and promote gender equity, healthy relationships and a new vision of masculinity. What men and boys can do to be an active ally to women and girls:¹⁵

1. Think about the kind of man you want to be. Be true to yourself.
2. Be respectful towards women, girls and other guys. Sexism and homophobia hurt us all.
3. Never use force, threats or violence in your relationships with others.
4. Practice enthusiastic consent. Ask first. Whether it's holding hands, kissing or more, it's important to communicate.
5. Speak out against violence against women.
6. Be a good role model and share with those around you the importance of respecting women and girls.
7. Learn about the impact of violence against women in our communities.
8. [Challenge and speak out](#) against hurtful language, sexist jokes and bullying.
9. Accept your role as a guy in helping end violence against women. It affects everyone.



The Moose Hide Campaign

The Moose Hide Campaign is a grassroots movement that involves Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and boys wearing a small square of tanned moose hide to signal a public commitment to honour, respect and protect women and children from violence. It engages men in efforts to reduce violence against Indigenous women and girls. Wearing a square of tanned moose hide is a public declaration that wearers will:

- Stand with women and children, and speak out against violence towards them
- Support other men and hold each other accountable
- Teach young boys about love and respect, and act as healthy role models
- Heal themselves as men, and support their brothers on their healing journey
- Encourage others to take action, make the pledge and stand up to end violence towards women and children

Visit the [website](#) to order your pin and help the campaign reach their goal of donating 10 million squares.

→ **HOW TO:** Toronto Foundation created the [Better Toronto Coalition](#) at the start of the pandemic. Their Hub has links to webinars about women's safety, Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people in Toronto in the context of COVID-19, as well as lists of organizations to give to. Toronto Foundation also published a guide to using philanthropy to advance racial justice, read it [here](#).

COMMUNITY RETHINKING THE MODEL

The recent police killing of Chantel Moore and death of Regis Korchinski-Paquet under police supervision have prompted calls from organizations across the country for a re-examination and reform of police responsibilities and funding. The Native Women's Association of Canada released a statement, with three calls for change to protect the lives of Indigenous people, based in the [Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#). The third is to "turn over some of the duties currently performed by police when called to deal with an Indigenous person who is suffering from a mental health issue to social workers, health professionals or elders."¹¹⁶

In [Black Lives Matter Canada's](#) calls to defund the police, they suggest that money be re-allocated to shelters for those experiencing gender-based violence and community-based emergency services for victims of sexual assault.¹¹⁷

→ **DID YOU KNOW?** International philanthropic organizations such as [Justice Funders](#) and [Resource Generation](#) are calling for the defunding of police. Read "[A Philanthropic Commitment to Dismantling White Supremacy and Anti-Blackness Must Include Support for Defunding the Police.](#)"

Pursuing a Future Where Everyone Belongs

Community foundations across Canada are finding innovative ways to support community members, creating a future where gender equality is a reality.

KITCHENER WATERLOO COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (KWCF)

KWCF created a [podcast series](#) in collaboration with the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region (SASC). Both organizations recognized that, while the economy of the Waterloo Region was booming, sexual violence was a problem of huge proportions and rarely discussed in public. “In the post #MeToo era, our centre has been flooded with calls for support,” says Sara Casselman, Executive Director of SASC. The Centre is using the podcast to highlight their work as well as “the amazing resilience of survivors.”

Elizabeth Heald, President and CEO of KWCF, explains: “We had been searching for a way to bring awareness to some of our community’s most pressing issues. The release of the [Best and Worst Places to be a Woman in Canada 2015](#) report was a compelling call to action. KW was 25th out of 25. This podcast gives us the opportunity to share knowledge that will hopefully lead our community towards action, whether it be through philanthropy, volunteering or furthering the discussion.” Since 2015, Kitchener Waterloo has made progress. In 2019, KW ranked 17 out of 26 as described in the [Best and Worst Places to be a Woman in Canada 2019](#).



Community foundation leadership: Activating *Vital Signs* to advance gender equality

In 2018, Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) focused its *Vital Signs* program entirely on gender equality. The foundation produced a series of Vital Topics reports on the [status of Edmonton women](#), including senior and visible minority women and LGBTQ2S+ communities. “We wanted to look at all aspects of gender,” explains Elizabeth Bonkink, Communications Advisor at ECF, “but we found there were very few data points that were not binary (the only choices are male or female), and surveys usually define family as married couples with children.” To help address these data challenges, ECF commissioned original research through a polling firm and advocated for Statistics Canada to collect information in a way that would include Canadians of all gender identities.

ECF brought *Vital Signs* to life by co-sponsoring a speaker series of women leaders with a local library, mailing the report to all elected officials and hosting a successful speaking tour which reached everyone from Rotary Clubs to nursing students. Elizabeth and the team plan to continue expanding the audience: “Next year we will work with a curriculum coordinator so teachers can use *Vital Signs* in the classroom. Kids can take *Vital Signs* home with them.”

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Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) is the national network for 191 community foundations from coast to coast to coast, driving local solutions and national systems-level change on the issues that matter most. Together we are relentlessly pursuing a future where everyone belongs.

VitalSigns

Vital Signs is a national program led by community foundations and coordinated by Community Foundations of Canada that leverages community knowledge to measure the vitality of our communities and support action towards improving our quality of life.

Collaborating partner:



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Within each report—Power, Peace and Planet—we explore how different dimensions of inequality and privilege intersect and interact in people's lives and identities.

- Read the [Vital Signs Power](#) report to learn more about how women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people face obstacles building economic power and are leading on the frontlines.
- Read the [Vital Signs Planet](#) report to learn more about how women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people are impacted by and leading during a climate crisis.



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