



Brock University



The Coalition to  
**END VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN**  
C.E.V.A.W

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - CEVAW REPORT

## OVERVIEW:

Research consistently shows that women and members of other socially marginalized groups experience gender-based violence (GBV) at relatively high rates. Intersectional feminist scholars explain this by demonstrating that the experiences of people targeted for GBV are influenced by simultaneous and interlocking systems of oppression, which include ableism, ageism, classism and capitalist exploitation, colonialism, heterosexism, patriarchy, racism and white supremacy, and transphobia. Research also shows that dominant systems of oppression impact provision of – and access to – important organizational supports available for people who have experienced GBV.

For these reasons, the **Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW)** sought support from Brock University's **Social Justice Research Institute (SJRI)** to explore barriers that people may face when attempting to access and continue to access member organizations for support in relation to their experiences of GBV, with the aim of continuing to address this problem in an informed way.

Together, the CEVAW-SJRI research team developed a plan to survey three groups about their associated insights: **leaders** (e.g. executive directors) and **employees** (i.e. paid and volunteers) of CEVAW member organizations, and **participants** (i.e. community members who sought support from CEVAW organizations between 2014-2019).

Importantly, despite the study's focus on organizational barriers, some participants shared aspects of their experiences that highlighted the value of CEVAW member organizations. For example, one person said:

*"All the organizations I used were extremely helpful and made me feel comfortable when I came to them for help."*

This executive summary highlights key findings from the respective survey groups, as well as associated recommendations made by the Brock-based research team.

NEXT:  
FINDINGS

## FINDINGS:

Both the leader and employee surveys asked respondents which of the barrier types listed in **Table 1** they perceive as impacting people's initial *and* continued access to CEVAW organizations and supports.

In both cases, leaders and employees pointed to **institutional complexity** -- particularly governmentally imposed mandates for how money can be used -- as the main barrier to initial and continued support access and one that impacts all other barrier types. For example, **leaders** noted that some CEVAW organizations are funded to serve women only, which means that transgender, gender non-conforming, and nonbinary people, as well as cisgender men, cannot access these supports. Others noted that minimal and fixed funding allocations are barriers to organizations' abilities to develop and to staff supports that meet the needs of specialized groups and this creates initial and continued access barriers for Indigenous women, LGBTQ+ people, refugees, people involved in the sex trade. As one leader said:

*"Indigenous peoples deserve programming that is informed by an understanding of their unique stories, experiences, beliefs and practices. We have none of this."*

### TABLE 1:

Barrier Type	Examples
Institutional Complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Availability of funding</li> <li>- Funding cycles</li> <li>- Spending stipulations</li> <li>- Organizational structure</li> </ul>
Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Availability of programs</li> <li>- Content of programs</li> <li>- Program delivery language</li> <li>- Program capacities</li> </ul>
Building Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Location</li> <li>- Physical architecture</li> </ul>
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual capacities</li> <li>- Collective capacities</li> <li>- Workload</li> </ul>
Other	



Access this link to learn more about gender identity and expression: <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-because-gender-identity-and-gender-expression/appendix-b-glossary-understanding-gender-identity-and-expression>

Leaders also perceived restrictive funding mandates as overlap with these additional factors, further negatively impacting people's continued access to GBV supports:

- lack of full programming (beyond translations services) in languages other than English and French, which can cause people belonging to ethnic and racial minority groups to feel especially left out and unsafe;
- mandatory child welfare reporting mandates that reinforce organizational distrust particularly among Indigenous people and people who use drugs and/or alcohol; and
- the regional lack of shelters as well as transitional and more permanent housing options, which poses ongoing and complex barriers for people experiencing and at-risk of experiencing homelessness.

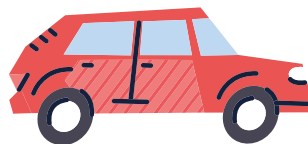
**Employees** also pointed to restrictive funding as a main barrier to both immediate and ongoing support access. However, when asked about initial access, they mentioned three other barriers more frequently than lack of funding:

Barrier identified	Total mentions
Wait times/wait list	14
Distance/transportation	14
Inadequate building size/space	11
Lack of funding	9

Likewise, as a group, employees perceived transportation to be a more pressing continued access barrier than an overall lack of organizational funding (which was distinguished here from lack of personal financial resources):

Barrier identified	Total mentions
Transportation	21
Lack of funding (organizational)	14

In other words, as one employee stated :



***"Transportation is always a barrier."***

In addition to distance, employees identified the following as factors associated with transportation as a barrier:

- lack of transportation options -- both personal and regional;
- limited bus scheduling options; and
- relatively high costs associated with taxi-cabs.

Elaborating on these factors, some employees noted that people experiencing GBV and living in poverty often face overlapping housing, childcare, and transportation challenges that make initial and continued access to organizational supports difficult -- if not impossible.

For example:

- One employee identified these significant related barriers: "*[l]ack of support for women with disabilities who need additional supports to access services such as accessible transportation, [and] accessible long-term housing... to be able to leave the relationship and live safely in the community.*"
- Another employee noted a lack of affordable childcare options that prevents some women from continuing to access organizational supports, asking: "*who is going to watch the children while they are engaged in services?*"

**Participants** identified long wait times as the main initial access barrier, followed by:

- fear and distrust;
- perceived rudeness and judgement from employees;
- lack of confidence in organizations' abilities to maintain confidentiality;
- concerns about being closely monitored;
- unreturned phone calls and other organizational failures to respond to correspondence;
- distance from supports; and
- no access to reliable transportation.

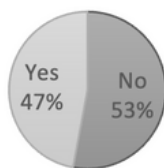
Did you face barriers when first trying to access CEVAW member organizations?



■ No ■ Yes

Among this group, the following were identified as the main continued access barriers:

Did you experience barriers in obtaining ongoing access CEVAW member organizations?



■ No ■ Yes

- fear;
- lack of service capacity, including long wait times;
- lack of confidence in the organizations' abilities to maintain confidentiality;
- too much "red tape"; and
- lack of organizational funding.

Again, this study's focus on barriers is not meant to deny the important work CEVAW does in Niagara to end GBV. Rather it is an example of their ongoing efforts and overarching mission to break down systemic barriers that perpetuate violence.



Learn more about  
CEVAW's  
vision and mission at  
<https://cevaw.com>

Indeed, at the end of the participant survey, three people shared insights about their positive experiences when asked for their opinions and feedback about what CEVAW member organizations do well and how they could be made more inclusive and accessible.

In addition to the participant feedback presented on **page 1 of this report** that "all organizations... were extremely friendly," other participant survey respondents said:

***"In my experience, [the organizations] women-identified supports are more [sensitive] to the needs of victims than men-identified agents such as police and government."***

**AND**

***"The organization has more than just employees that work [with] us... there are volunteers too... it's welcoming and warm and seemed like home."***

It is with the aim of continuing to support CEVAW's important work that the SJRI research team worked to translate survey findings into solid recommendations that are consistent with both CEVAW's vision and the research team's guiding intersectional feminist framework. The action plans presented next underscore the need for a multi-level, multi-pronged approach to addressing barriers to organizational supports for people -- particularly those from typically socially marginalized groups -- experiencing GBV. In other words, the barriers highlighted in the study surveys are not solely the responsibility of CEVAW to address; rather, because they are directly shaped by decisions made at multiple governmental levels, these bodies must also be held accountable for taking concrete actions to end GBV.

Learn more about this project and the research team at: <https://brocku.ca/social-justice-research-institute/cevaw/>

**NEXT: GOV'T  
ACTION PLAN**

# ACTION PLAN: CANADIAN GOVERNMENTS

## **ACTION ITEM 1:**

### **Increase Organizational Funding with Flexible Mandates**

Limited, inflexible funding is a root barrier to offering and accessing organizational supports for experiences of GBV. It is immediately within the power of federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments to provide organizations (e.g. CEVAW) with more reliable, ongoing, and comprehensive funding and greater flexibility in terms of how (including for whom and for how long) funds can be used. Study findings also point to the need for more targeted funding for specialized programming (e.g. racial and cultural sensitivity training), equipment, and space argumentations as well as more free and subsidized supports in more locations (i.e. those that are relatively rural).

## **ACTION ITEM 2:**

### **Provide More Income Supports**

Poverty and income precarity are known contributing factors to people experiencing GBV. To help address these barriers and ease some of the associated organizational burdens, governments must implement more and more stable income supports (e.g. guaranteed minimum income; higher social assistance rates). Doing so also will help to address some of the interrelated support access barriers noted above and below (e.g. housing, childcare, and transportation).

## **ACTION ITEM 3:**

### **Invest in Affordable Housing**

Lack of access to safe, secure, affordable housing makes it extremely difficult to leave violent relationships and situations and thus is life-threatening. Moreover, housing is a human right that, as such, must be guaranteed to everyone regardless of socio-economic status. This is a main premise that underlies Housing First programs supported by CEVAW organizations like Bethlehem Housing and YWCA Niagara and more needs to be done at the national level to support this work.

## ACTION ITEM 4:

### Invest in Childcare

Lack of childcare spaces and prohibitive childcare costs are hinderances both to leaving abusive relationships and to accessing organizational supports. Access to affordable, flexible, culturally appropriate childcare is key to achieving the economic stability required to find and secure a new home (e.g. rent, bills, furniture, food, etc.) and, more broadly, to achieving gender equality. These are driving premises of going calls for a nationwide, publicly funded childcare system, which this study's findings fully support.

## ACTION ITEM 5:

### Invest in Public Transportation

Improving the public transit infrastructure in Niagara and minimizing or eliminating costs associated with taking public transportation would both help to ensure more people (e.g. those who live in relatively rural parts of the region; those who are economically marginalized) can access organizational supports for their experiences of GBV and ease the costs of paying for taxis for participants, which many CEVAW organizations do. More broadly, accessible and robust public transportation may encourage economically marginalized and privileged people alike to choose public over private transportation, thus likely having other environmental and social benefits as well.

## ACTION ITEM 6:

### Implement National Inquiry Calls for Justice

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls establishes a direct link between child welfare apprehensions and the disappearances and deaths of Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ+ people. Thus, to meaningfully address this historic and ongoing systemic violence, the Province of Ontario (and all governmental bodies/organizations implicated in child welfare) must implement the associated calls for justice (2019, pp. 25-35) -- notably:

- Recognition of Indigenous self-determination & inherent jurisdiction of child welfare (12.1)
- Transformation of existing child welfare systems so that Indigenous communities have control over the design & delivery of supports for Indigenous families and children (12.2)
- Prohibiting the removal of Indigenous children on the basis of poverty or cultural bias (12.4)
- Prioritize family & community members' rights to assume care for Indigenous children (12.6)
- Recruitment of Indigenous social workers & continuous anti-bias/anti-racism training for non-Indigenous staff (12.12)



## **ACTION ITEM 7:**

### **Review and Revise Policing Institutions**

A disproportionately high number of Black, Indigenous, and other racialized groups are subjected to discriminatory police actions, including but not limited to carding, incarceration, and murder (see, Cole, 2020). At the same time, other groups (e.g. women and girls; LGBTQ+ people; people with disabilities; people involved in the sex trade) regularly experience dismissal and inaction by police in relation to their experiences of GBV. Thus, it is unsurprising that police are consistently identified as posing a significant barrier to people seeking and accessing support from this and other related organizations (e.g. courts, hospitals, child welfare agencies). This points to the need for Canadian governments to do more to take real and meaningful actions in relation to long-standing arguments about the benefits of defunding the police in favour of more community-based, research-informed approaches to support and justice.



# ACTION PLAN: CEVAW MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

## ACTION ITEM 1:

### **Increase organizational planning, programming, and staff diversity**

- Undertake an environmental scan of each member organization
- Prioritize hiring candidates from socially marginalized groups
- Create and enhance existing programming by and for marginalized groups
- Implement mandatory, ongoing training and policies
- Invite other community organizations to join the network

## ACTION ITEM 2:

### **Increase building accessibility and community outreach**

- Off-site outreach especially to those who live in rural areas of Niagara
- Greater community knowledge-gathering and sharing

## ACTION ITEM 3:

### **Address gaps in organizational and network knowledge**

- Increase data collected about participants - whether mandatory or not
- Provide more opportunities to receive participant feedback
- Provide more opportunities to receive employee feedback
- Create greater transparency in relation to organizational processes and data

## ACTION ITEM 4:

### **Review organizational child welfare reporting mandates**

- Review the application of child welfare and protection mandates in Niagara
- Provide all leaders and employees (paid and volunteer) with related training
- Support the calls for justice issued by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019).

## ACTION ITEM 5:

### **Immediate Action**

We applaud CEVAW member organizations (individually and collectively) for their ongoing work to end GBV and we urge them to continue to work together and with other partners to ensure the actionable recommendations presented above are followed.

# REFERENCES

- COLE, DESMOND. (2020). **THE SKIN WE'RE IN: A YEAR OF BLACK RESISTANCE AND POWER**. TORONTO, ON: PENGUIN HOUSE CANADA LTD.
- NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS (2019). **CALLS FOR JUSTICE**. RETRIEVED FROM [HTTPS://WWW.MMIWG-FFADA.CA/FINAL-REPORT/](https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/)
- ONTARIO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION. (N.D). **APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY FOR UNDERSTANDING GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION**. RETRIEVED FROM [HTTPS://WWW.OHRC.ON.CA/EN/POLICY-PREVENTING-DISCRIMINATION-BECAUSE-GENDER-IDENTITY-AND-GENDER-EXPRESSION/APPENDIX-B-GLOSSARY-UNDERSTANDING-GENDER-IDENTITY-AND-EXPRESSION](https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-because-gender-identity-and-gender-expression/appendix-b-glossary-understanding-gender-identity-and-expression)