



MUSLIM  
ADVISORY COUNCIL  
OF CANADA



**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE  
SUMMARY REPORT BY MUSLIM  
ADVISORY COUNCIL OF CANADA**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Muslim Advisory Council of Canada is pleased to be participating in YWCA Canada's National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence community engagement initiative. Our goal is to ensure that the diverse Canadian Muslim population has their voice heard while adding valuable insight and perspective in shaping our policy recommendations to the Government of Canada.

This project aligns with our mission of empowering the Canadian Muslim diaspora and advocating for an equitable society through the intersectional lens of the diverse Canadian Muslim population.

Gender-based violence can be defined as violence committed against someone based on their gender or gender identity and it is one of the most pervasive forms of human rights violations.

All communities are affected by gender-based violence, including the Canadian Muslim community. However, due to some data gaps such as lack of collection of disaggregated data (ex. race, ethnicity, woman and girls with disabilities, migrant woman and limited research on GBV during a pandemic, lack of documentation of prevention best practices during times of

crisis such as a pandemic etc) the extent to which gender-based violence in racialized communities occurs is unknown.

Data indicates that gender-based violence disproportionately affects marginalized communities as a result of structural discrimination, gender norms, ableism, biphobia, homophobia, racism, sexism, transphobia, and xenophobia. While we know the gender-based violence is occurring at alarming rates across the country, in order to address the problem, we first need to understand that gaps that exist.

This is our why of taking part in this very important project. We recognize the gaps that exist in society and particularly, the Canadian Muslim community and we wish to be part of the solution in ending gender-based violence. Through our community consultations and survey, we hope to gain valuable insight and perspective from survivors of GBV, community organizations working to ensure services needs of the community are being met and more.

**Signed**  
**Tabassum Wyne**  
Executive Director  
Muslim Advisory Council of Canada  
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# INFORMATION ABOUT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CANADA

Gender-based violence is one of the most pervasive forms of human rights violations.<sup>2</sup> When people experience violence due to their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender, this is an example of gender-based violence.<sup>3</sup> Gender-Based Violence includes, but is not limited to: economic, emotional, physical, psychological, sexual, societal, and technology-facilitated violence.<sup>5</sup>

Gender-based violence can be defined as: 'violence perpetrated against someone based on their gender or gender identity. As this violence is generally targeted against women and girls, sometimes the term is used interchangeably with violence against women and girls, but gender-based violence also has a disproportionate impact on LGBTQ2+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and Two-Spirit) and gender non-binary people'.<sup>6</sup>

Data on gender-based violence indicates that marginalized communities experience disproportionate rates of gender-based violence due to ongoing experiences of colonization, structural discrimination, and

systemic forms of oppression such as but not limited to gender norms, ableism, biphobia, homophobia, racism, sexism, transphobia, and xenophobia.

**For example, the following statistics paint a picture of the pervasiveness of gender-based violence in Canada, especially as it impacts diverse equity-seeking communities:**

- 39% of women aged 15 and older have reported experiencing physical or sexual violence.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2018, women represented 77% of deaths due to intimate partner homicides.<sup>9</sup>
- Between 2009 to 2014, 87% of police-reported survivors of sexual assault were women, with approximately 7 in 10 being women under the age of 25.<sup>10</sup>
- A 2019 report by the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability found that a woman or girl is killed every 3 days in Canada. The highest rates were in Nunavut, followed by the Yukon, Manitoba and Alberta.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>2</sup> UN Women. (2020). Ending violence against women. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>

<sup>5</sup> Government of Canada. (2020). About Gender-Based Violence. Retrieved from: <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/violence/knowledge-connaissance/about-apropos-en.html>

<sup>6</sup> The Minister's Advisory Council on Gender-Based Violence Terms of Reference.

<sup>8</sup> Cotter, A., & Savage, L. (2019). Gender-based violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada, 2018: Initial findings from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00017-eng.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Roy, J. & Marcellus, S. (2019). Homicide in Canada, 2018. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00016-eng.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Rotenberg, C. (2017). Police-reported sexual assaults in Canada, 2009 to 2014: A Statistical Profile. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/54866-eng.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. (2019). #CallItFemicide – Understanding gender-related killing of women and girls in Canada 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.femicideinCanada.ca/callitfemicide2019.pdf>

- Lesbian, gay and bisexual residents of Canada are twice as likely to experience violent victimization compared to heterosexual residents of Canada.<sup>13</sup>
- According to the 2015 Trans Pulse survey, 20% of Trans people who answered the questionnaire had been physically or sexually assaulted for being trans, with another 34% being verbally threatened or harassed.<sup>14</sup>
- According to the 2014 General Survey on Victimization, women with a disability were twice as likely as women who do not have a disability to have been a victim of violent crime. Furthermore, women with a disability were approximately twice as likely to have been sexually assaulted in the last 12 months as compared to women without a disability.<sup>15</sup>

However, this data is an underestimation of the state of gender-based violence; there are numerous data gaps and more work needs to be done to have a fully intersectional understanding. Additionally, (study) found that only around 25% of cases of gender-based violence are even reported, this leaves the vast majority of cases unreported and undocumented, resulted in a significantly large data gap.

We also know that this number is even higher for women from marginalized communities who are unable to access resources due to language barriers, immigration status, or lack of accessibility.

### COVID-19 and GBV:

The World Health Organization has previously noted that gender-based violence is a 'global health problem of epidemic proportions'.<sup>19</sup>

This has been further underscored during the COVID-19 crisis. Since the start of the pandemic, gender-based violence has not only risen but transformed as well. The United Nations have referred to it as the 'shadow pandemic'.<sup>20</sup> In Canada, there are reports that gender-based violence has increased between 20-30 percent.<sup>21</sup>

Civil society has reported instances of abusers controlling access to essential supplies, exploitation due to financial hardship, as well as increased incidents of cyber violence, racial profiling, and hate crimes.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Simpson, L. (2018). Violent victimization of lesbians, gays and bisexuals in Canada, 2014. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54923-eng.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Baeur, G.R., & Scheim, A. (2015). Statistics from the Trans PULSE Project to Inform Human Rights Policy. Retrieved from: <http://transpulseproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Trans-PULSE-Statistics-Relevant-for-Human-Rights-Policy-June-2015.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Cotter, A. (2018). Violent victimization of women with disabilities, 2014. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54910-eng.htm>

<sup>19</sup> World Health Organization. (2013). Violence against women: a 'global health problem of epidemic proportions'. Retrieved from: [https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/violence\\_against\\_women\\_20130620/en/](https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/violence_against_women_20130620/en/)

<sup>20</sup> UN Women. (2020). The Shadow Pandemic – Violence against women during COVID-19. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>

<sup>21</sup> Patel, R. (2020, April 27). Minister says COVID-19 is empowering domestic violence abusers as rates rise in parts of Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/domestic-violence-rates-rising-due-to-covid19-1.5545851>

<sup>22</sup> YWCA Canada. (2020, May 25). Why We Need a Feminist Recovery Plan. Retrieved from: <https://ywcacanada.ca/news/why-we-need-a-feminist-recovery-plan/>

# OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

The Muslim Advisory Council of Canada held two virtual roundtable discussions in February bringing together subject matter experts, survivors, religious leaders and community organizers. Of the 18 participants, a vast majority were women who had lived experience with intimate partner violence and/or sexual exploitation. We also had a large number of women who are living with disabilities and who identify as non-binary and gender diverse. Finally, we also did have male participants and although the majority of participants were from Ontario, we did have some participants from other provinces too. This wide diversity in the participants allowed

us to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of these Muslims across intersectionalities and backgrounds.



**We should refer to it as Muslim communities, not community, as we are made up of so many small communities, each different from the other in terms of geographic location as well as beliefs and activities conducted.**

**Quote from Participant**

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

Muslim women's experiences of gender-based violence is compounded with the additional barriers they often experience, such as language barriers, cultural shock, limited knowledge of the Canadian legal, justice and immigration system, limited knowledge and access to resources as well as racism and discrimination, as with any minority and marginalized community.



**How do you leave when the abuser is your caregiver, and you rely on them for even the basic things such as going to the washroom?**

**Quote from participant living with a disability**



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# RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are the top recommendations that stood out from our Roundtable Discussions and were presented to YWCA Canada:

## 01: Dedicated Funding:

### Short term goal:

Canadian Muslim shelters need dedicated funding in order to meet the growing needs of Muslim communities, build capacity to replicate their efforts and become accessible (currently, all Muslim shelters are not accessible which is troublesome as GBV affects this group even more; this is a gap that needs to be addressed)

### Long term goal:

Canadian Muslim organizations, such as the Muslim Advisory Council of Canada, need dedicated funding to undertake GBV prevention work in the community through partnerships, educational campaigns & to provide cultural competence training to broader community-based shelters (like Halton Women's Place)

## 02: Implement Universal Basic Income:

Improve income benefits and implement a universal basic income program to eliminate the barrier of poverty that disproportionately affects women, single moms, especially those fleeing abuse. This may also help alleviate any post-separation economic abuse that occurs.

## 03: Re-examine the Statutory Definition of Domestic Abuse from a GBV Lens:

- Currently, the criminal definition of domestic violence does not include forms of abuse such as financial, coercive and controlling, and spiritual abuse Include these different forms of abuse that frontline GBV workers and researchers

know to be a reality, in the statutory definition of domestic abuse

- Canada also needs more research done on economic abuse and the need for a post-separation economic abuse amendment

## 03: Training for Service Providers:

Improve income benefits and implement a universal basic income program to eliminate the barrier of poverty that disproportionately

## 04: Training for Service Providers:

Additional and improved training for service providers, front line workers such as police, doctors and nurses, as well as lawyers, social workers, counsellors, as well as religious leaders. This includes, but is not limited to cultural competency, trauma informed care, GBV training, and anti-oppression training. This is best made into a professional development program and preferably mandatory.

## 05: Reframe Shelter System

Rather than the survivor and her children having to uproot their lives, move to a shelter and restart their lives, the abuser should be the one to leave, or be removed, and go to a shelter to receive treatment solutions for their behaviour

## 06: Education

- Education and awareness campaigns for youth on GBV
- For newcomers to understand the system, their rights, the services and destigmatizing seeking help
- For the general public on the legal system, how to access it and how to navigate it

## SURVEY RESULTS

The second part of our community engagement initiative was a survey with **157 participants**. The majority of participants were from Ontario followed by Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec. There were also respondents from New Brunswick, Nunavut and Yukon.

Demographically, the majority of participants were women between the ages of **35-44** years old. Of those participants, **44** identify as racialized, **33** participants identified as refugees, immigrants or non-status while **36** identified as belonging to a language minority community. We also had participants who identify as members of the 2SLGBTQQI+ communities, Black Muslims, seniors, living with a disability, and those with lived experience of sexual exploitation.

## KEY FINDINGS SUMMARIZED

We found that a majority of clients highlighted several key findings, including the lack of cultural competency among service providers as this hinders many minority women from seeking help and services.

Additionally, the lack of knowledge of services and resources available as well as how to navigate the system is an obstacle for women of all backgrounds,

but especially those who are new immigrants or refugees, those who don't speak English and those living with disabilities. Finally, participants continue to highlight the need for additional resources, especially shelter beds and community-based shelters.



## WHAT WE HEARD

We receive at least 10 calls a day regarding family disputes and abuse. It's the number one issue we deal with at our mosque.

### Quote from an Imam

Those who have a job are trapped, because we can't access many services although we aren't making ends meet, and those who don't have a job are trapped.

### Quote from a survivor

The abuser uses spiritual abuse because it's important to the survivor and they use this vulnerability to control and coerce them. For example, purposely misinterpreting religious texts and using them to coerce their partner or to justify their actions and forcing the client to do certain acts in the name of religion.

### Quote from Survivor

On the contrary, service providers will further perpetuate the spiritual abuse by holding the religion and the traditional values accountable for the abuse, without considering the interplay of how culture affects them, thus once again abusing these survivors in a different form.

### Quote from Service Provider

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### Quote from Survivor

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### Quote from Service Provider

I was afraid to access resources because I didn't want to make Muslim women look worse because I was abused, as though I was proving the stereotype to be true.

### Quote from Survivor

The justice system is another means for abusers to exert coercive control. Abusers often present and speak well, while survivors usually lack confidence from being abused for years or not speaking English well. They also have difficulty securing legal aid, finding a good and competent lawyer, and even then, keeping that lawyer is a struggle, not to mention the cost if it isn't through legal aid. The stress women go through during this process is mentally taxing and further victimizes while making it harder to get on with their lives.

### Quote from participating Lawyer

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Funding:**

Community organizations should receive funding to do preventative work through collaboration

Muslim shelters need more funding to expand and meet the needs of the growing population

## **Education and Training:**

The number one response by survey respondents when asked about the barriers Muslim GBV survivors face is the lack of cultural and religious competence. As a result, service providers need to receive cultural competency training to ensure they are being non-judgemental towards all clients.

This also needs to be reflected in their work and outreach efforts to ensure women needing to access their services are aware of the work they are doing to be inclusive. This also includes having representation among staff.

Community leaders and religious leaders should receive GBV training as well as trauma informed care training

## **Service Delivery:**

Increase funding and support to agencies working to end GBV as their resources are currently stretched very thin not allowing for more work and investments into capacity building

Increase number of shelter beds available across Canada as many shelters have reported they turn away around 70% of the women who call in needing help

More research needs to be done in the community-based shelter model and implemented across the country to provide the most effective model of support for survivors as there is no "one size fits all"

Resources such as legal services and counselling should be more readily available for free or low cost and accessible to all communities by having them available in places like religious centres



**Survivors need emotional support, which is almost non-existent in our system, government regulated women centres just let you know about the available resources but most of the resources are not even interconnected.**

# CONCLUSION

The Muslim Advisory Council of Canada has taken the recommendations and learnings from this project to expand our work in addressing and ending gender-based violence, specifically within the Muslim community.

We aim to work collaboratively with Muslim organizations partaking in gender-based violence work, mainstream organizations and the government to address this issue through learning, listening to community advocates perspective, providing input in the form of policy recommendations.