

A Call to Action: Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on BIPOC Women+ on the North Shore

SUMMARY RESOURCE

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a number of seismic shifts and vulnerabilities to people across communities, and contributed to a shadow pandemic of violence against women and gender diverse people. In April 2022, Hollyburn Community Services Society and Roots & Rivers Consulting embarked on a one year community-engaged research project to identify gaps in services that address gender-based violence, explore the impact the COVID-19 pandemic, and explore how North Shore service providers can better support BIPOC women+ who are at risk of or experiencing gender-based violence. For this research, BIPOC women+ is defined as anyone who identifies with one or more of the following identities: Black, Indigenous, or racialized cis or trans women, gender diverse, or Two-Spirit.

This project was designed and carried out with the engagement of the BIPOC women+ communities on the North Shore, including 11 Community Research Assistants identifying as BIPOC women+ and allies. The data collected included 142 survey responses, 42 interviews, and 2 focus groups.

The following sections outline key thematic findings from the research as a summary. The full report is available at Hollyburn's [website](#).



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

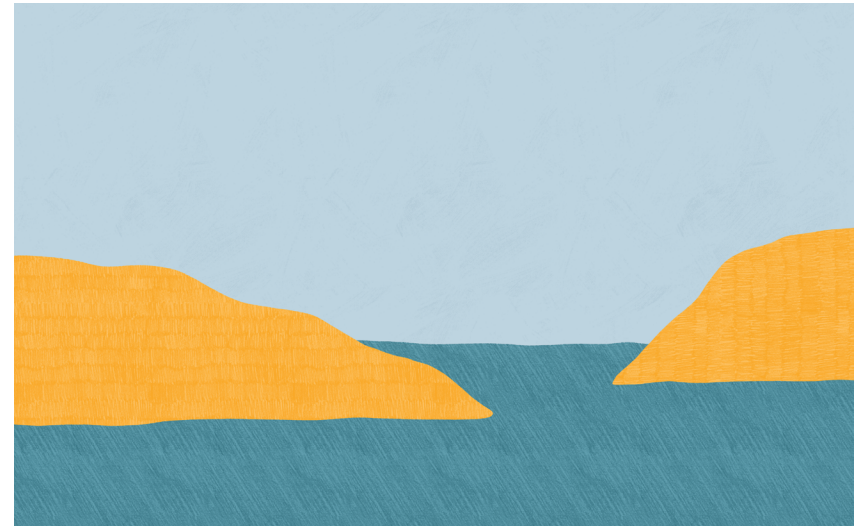
Femmes et Égalité
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Summary of Findings

The largest barriers to accessing support that BIPOC women+ identified were fear, shame, lack of awareness, accessibility of support services and the impact of past poor experiences with service providers, such as experiencing harm as a result of systemic oppression. Largely, BIPOC women+ wonder if accessing support will only make things worse. Respondents shared that they see the pandemic has contributed to an increase in violence due to isolation, increased financial pressures, and increased racist and anti-trans sentiment.

Respondents called for more opportunities for education, longer term supports, increased and simplified legal supports, language and translation, expanded modalities for emotional supports, as well as the need for service providers to have additional training when it came to racial bias, cultural sensitivity and gender identity. BIPOC women+ articulated a desire to experience a sense of connection with the person they were speaking with and an opportunity to be building a trusting relationship.

Below are highlights from our intentional engagements to involve Indigenous women+ and Farsi-speaking women+. We uniquely engaged these populations given that Indigenous women+ face unique impacts of gendered violence from ongoing colonialism, and that there is a significant Farsi-speaking community on the North Shore.



Indigenous women+

Indigenous women+ identified housing, transportation and an absence of culturally appropriate supports as their largest barriers. When housing was shared as a need, it was also for the most part mentioned in tandem with a need for more Indigenous spaces on the North Shore, including Indigenous housing, shelters and transition houses that are set up to be culturally appropriate for survivors. Indigenous women+ also spoke clearly to the impacts of colonization as well as microaggressions, gaslighting, and the dimensions of the racism they encounter in the support seeking process. This ranged from overt bias in the form of assumptions service providers made to a broader felt sense of distrust.



Respondents described the pandemic disrupting their support systems, a decrease in privacy at home, and heightened stress levels contributing to increased violence in some forms.

Indigenous women+ spoke to a desire to be able to build and be in relationship with service providers and for service providers to receive training on harm reduction and building more supportive spaces. Many people spoke to the increase in comfort they and others would feel if Indigenous culture was part of their support-seeking journey. This might include Indigenous support workers, access to Elders, but many pointed to the need for a broader more systemic approach to making these changes in policies, practices, education and governing structures.

Farsi-speaking women+

The top barriers to accessing support for Farsi-speaking women+ who are experiencing or feeling at risk of violence were fear of judgment and shame from people around them, lack of awareness of services available to them, precarious immigration status, and lack of culturally and linguistically accessible services. Many respondents described seeing violence in their communities increase as a result of the pandemic, as a result of stay-at-home measures increasing isolation with abusers, and identified increased alcohol and substance use as contributing to that violence. Some respondents described ableist systems being exacerbated from the pandemic, making it more difficult for people with disabilities and immunocompromised people to access support.

More access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services emerged as the top support respondents wanted to see, as well as more awareness on services available. Respondents also described a desire for education around their legal rights, specifically for newcomer women+, to support their empowerment and agency to identify and seek support for gender-based violence. This community also wanted to see upstream interventions to prevent a culture of patriarchal violence and spreading more awareness about services available.

Calls to Action

Increase accessibility in various forms: A strong need for increased access was named in the forms of reduced financial barriers to support and transportation to services, increased protocols for confidentiality and anonymity, and queer and trans-inclusive language and practices.

Deepen support for service providers themselves: BIPOC women+ are noticing burnout and heightened stress among service providers, and call for better supporting service providers, so they can provide the best care possible.

Strengthen service providers' ability to provide culturally-safe care: A relationship-centered approach, non-judgmental care, and culture/language accessibility were named as key parts of culturally-safe and trauma-informed support.

Create accessible Indigenous housing: Indigenous women+ would like to see culturally-safe Indigenous-specific housing, across the housing continuum, including shelters and transitional housing.

Increase and expand anti-oppression education for service providers: BIPOC women+ want to see service providers deepen their capacity around anti-oppression to bring this lens to their work.



Education on rights and resources for the Farsi-speaking women+ community: Overwhelmingly, Farsi-speaking women+ identified a desire for education around their rights as women+ and resources available to them, particularly for newcomers, to support their empowerment toward seeking support.

Upstream interventions to address patriarchal violence: Patriarchal, colonial, and sexist violence were named as the root causes of gendered violence, and require upstream initiatives around education and awareness to collectively build toward communities free of violence.