

YWCA Canada Gender Equity During a Pandemic Townhall

What came up? Questions, comments, resources and actions

Criminalization

- Many calls by public to increase punishment for not engaging in physical distancing – what actually happens? We cannot police our way out of a public health crisis.
- Racialized folks are impacted disproportionately by the use of police to enforce social distancing (**especially** Black and Indigenous folks)

Incarcerated / prison populations / Detainees

- Prisons and police are not immune to a pandemic
- Social distancing is impossible in prisons
- Women (largely Black and Indigenous women) are the highest rising prison demographic
- [Hunger strikes in Laval Migrant Detention Centre](#) demanding to be released due to dangers of COVID
- [Action] prison abolition and decarceration action: [Contain COVID-19, Not People](#) - no one is disposable, identifying who is left behind in depopulating prisons
- [Resource] [Amnesty's set of 10 principles](#) for Canada to follow to ensure that human rights are at the core of the COVID response (includes points around prisons and immigration detention centres)

Gender-Based Violence

- Sex workers' safety: less demand means sex workers might lessen their screening just to pay the bills, meaning they're at higher risk of GBV
 - o What about digital safety for online sex work?
- GBV adapted to the COVID-19 context:
 - o Rise in domestic violence
 - o Perpetrators have more to hold over victims' heads: can control prescription or 'illegal' drug supply (intersection of substance use and GBV), health and safety factors related to COVID
 - o One participant shared a man spit in their face on the street which was a gendered/racist attack

Equity during COVID

- Social service sector isn't being protected nearly enough. Do essential workers have the right to refuse dangerous work?
- Eugenics: Who will be chosen to receive a ventilator and who will not?
- Who's been left behind by government assistance?
 - o Refugees who haven't yet received their SIN can't apply for CERB

- What about income supports for undocumented people and migrant workers? People who make cash incomes / ‘work under the table’? Recent graduates?
- Increased racism towards Chinese, Asians, and Iranians due to COVID pandemic
- Financial stress on grassroots groups and non-profits (fundraising ability is hindered; HR capacity is lower)
- [Report] [COVID-19: How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement](#) - IFRC, OCHA, WHO
 - Please send comments or feedback to Mica via email: Micaperbai@gmail.com

Migrant populations

- In addition to accessing income supports, health care access and treatment a concern as well as public health information available in different languages
- International trained medical graduates should be allowed to work – [in Ontario they can apply for a 30 day license](#)
- Safety and protections for international students? Especially if dorms and campuses are closing
 - Resource: MOSAIC in BC has supports for international students, especially with GBV supports (women.support@mosaicbc.org)
- [Statement] [Justicia 4 Migrant Workers \(J4MW\) Requesting urgent action from provincial and federal governments: Temporary Foreign Workers and COVID-19](#)
- [E-petition] [Migrant Rights Network - COVID19 RESPONSE MUST LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND](#)

Digital Access

- Education for adult learners - Adult literacy work: How do we support learners when they’re not coming to the physical program? Do they have computers, Wi-Fi?
- Internet is not a luxury, it’s a right and a utility
- What about connectivity in northern communities?
- Given this switch to remote work and service delivery what are the technical/digital tools and resources that could assist in this transition? How are non-profits engaging with folks (when possible) digitally?
- Not just about accessing digital spaces, how can we ensure **digital safety**?

Ways forward – Recovery & Reimagining

- Permanent universal basic income might make us better prepared to deal with future crises (climate change, pandemics)
- Complete restructuring of our society / economy is needed
- Flexible funders / funding agreements for non-profits & charities: “One of our major funders sent a message indicating that they would allow up to 50% of our grant (and all grants issued within the past 12 months) to be allocated to operations. This was a HUGE help to help us transition our staff to remote working, and we will be asking our other funders to allow something similar.”

Initiatives / Reach out

1. MPP Jill Andrew, NDP Women's Issues Critic: For those living in Ontario with questions or concerns on gender equity / intersectionality during COVID – email JAndrew-CO@ndp.on.ca with subject line: Intersectional Gender Equity in Ontario
2. Punam: creating a coordinated response from women’s groups towards reversing the social disinvestments of the neoliberal era
3. Sidrah: creating a resource on GBV and COVID-19 – contact sidrahmay@gmail.com
4. Kaitlin: Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network will be putting out a statement on women’s homelessness and housing need re: COVID. For others working on housing issues, feel free to reach out.
5. Mica: If you have insights into what equity-seeking communities should be named in a WHO report for COVID-19 responses - contact Micaperbaj@gmail.com

Other resources

- HN Open Lab has created a hotline for socially isolated seniors who need support - <http://uhnopenlab.ca/project/hotline/>
- Action Canada on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights during COVID <https://www.actioncanadashr.org/>
- Maggie’s Toronto and Butterfly: [Resource on sex work during COVID](#)
- [Online training on GBV](#) as part of OCASI learning opportunities