

GENDER-BASED NEEDS ASSESSMENT



WHAT WE LOOKED AT

As part of the Western Canada Sexual Assault Initiative (WCSAI), EVA BC undertook a gender-based needs assessment and analysis in partnership with community-based anti-violence programs in five regions of BC: The Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island, Okanagan/Kootenays, the North West, and the North East.

The needs assessment explored the effectiveness of support services, with an emphasis on groups of girls and women who are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence.

The Western Canada Sexual Assault Initiative was a two-year (2014–2016) project conducted in partnership with Alberta (AASAS), Saskatchewan (SASS), and Manitoba (Klinic). This project was funded by Status of Women Canada.

This research had two focal points:

Disclosing Sexual Assault

- Focus group discussions with 31 women who had accessed support services for sexual assault

Providing Support Services

- Online survey with 47 community-based anti-violence workers

DISCLOSING SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sharing their experiences of disclosing sexual assault, survivors discussed what was important for them to receive from support services – specifically speaking to the needs of survivors from groups more at risk of sexual violence (15 of the 31 women self-identified as Aboriginal, LGBT, or as living with a disability). They identified both enablers of and barriers to disclosing.

Enablers of Disclosure

- Trust and safety
- Belief and validation
- Time and space to prepare themselves for the disclosure
- Fear that offender would assault another
- Public education information about sexual assault
- Availability of and access to services
- Existence of specific policies/protocols (including Third Party Reporting)
- Reassurance actions won't be taken without their consent

Although gender-based violence remains pervasive, the last national survey exploring the issue was the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey. The impact of this lack of research is compounded by the absence of a formalized provincial sexual assault policy in BC, as well as the cutting of funding for sexual assault / woman assault centres in BC in 2002-2003.

Barriers to Disclosure

- Fear that others would report to police, or disclose without their consent
- Fear of not being believed
- Fear of retribution from offender, and having been threatened not to disclose
- Fear of others' reactions
- Being in a relationship with the offender
- Offender's status and power (within family, workplace, community, gang)
- Fear of, or lack of faith in, responses to disclosure
- Lack knowledge about available services
- Uncertainty that what happened was sexual assault and was wrong

Some of the survivors described additional barriers, including lack of transportation to access services, the difficulty of ensuring confidentiality in small communities, and the potential of alcohol/drug use undermining their credibility.

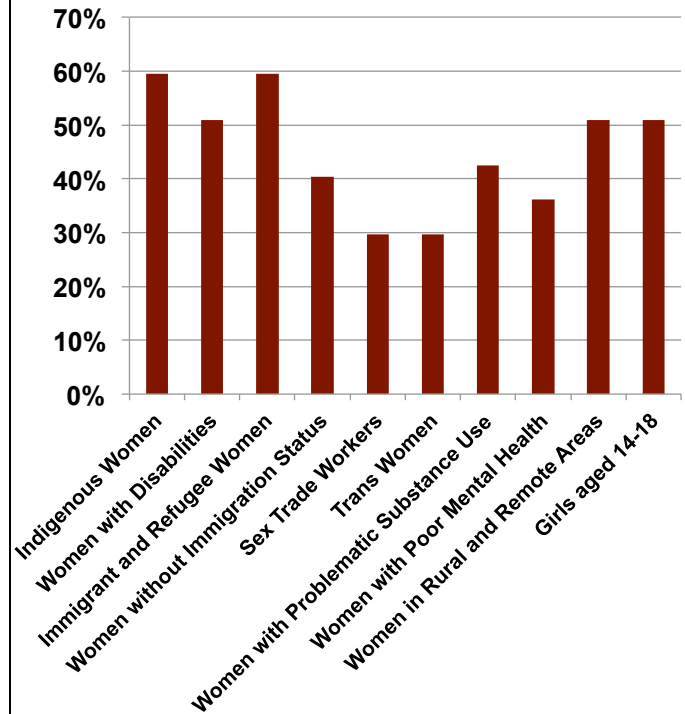
PROVIDING SUPPORT SERVICES

Through the online survey, community-based anti-violence workers gave an assessment of what they thought was working well and what needed attention. The survey focused on how effective services were in supporting groups of women who are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence.

Many anti-violence workers indicated that they or their organization faced barriers in providing support services to vulnerable groups of women. The top three barriers reported were:

- Waiting lists
- Insufficient training
- Inadequate funding (in relation to need)

Anti-violence workers who reported barriers to providing sexual assault services for each group.



For particular groups of girls/women, anti-violence workers identified additional barriers survivors faced in accessing support services.

Racialized women were described as encountering the greatest barriers, including:

- Racism
- Poor history with service providers
- Language barriers
- Lack of cultural awareness/sensitivity on the part of service providers

For **Indigenous women**, anti-violence workers saw the barriers they navigated as racialized women as compounded by:

- Legacy of colonization
- Normalization of violence
- Inadequate access to services

Anti-violence workers also identified barriers for **women living with disabilities**:

- Physical accessibility
- Lack of appropriate transportation
- Anti-violence workers' limited experience and expertise in providing different modes of communication (for women with intellectual or learning disabilities)

For **sex trade workers** seeking support services, anti-violence workers spoke about barriers related to their work, including:

- Stigmatization of sex work
- Potential for credibility to be undermined

Anti-violence workers also identified compromised credibility as a barrier to **women with concerns about mental health and substance-use** accessing support services.

For **trans and gender non-conforming people**, anti-violence workers emphasized the need for training to enable appropriate support, in order to address barriers that include stigmatization and disrespect.

Anti-violence workers also told us that access to support services for **women in rural/remote areas** is constrained by:

- Lack of transportation
- Limited support services available

The barriers shared for **girls (aged 14–18)** varied depending on individual programs' mandates. Generally, girls were more likely to be told that their access to support services was dependent on a police report.

Overall, the challenges anti-violence workers face in meeting the needs of diverse groups are concerning. These challenges are especially in need of attention given the high rates of sexual assault of women in these more vulnerable groups.

What's working well?

The anti-violence workers surveyed also identified a number of promising practices:

- Community coordination initiatives (ICAT, VAWIR committees, SARTs)
- Presence of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs)
- Initiatives like the SMART program (Surrey Women's Centre)
- Third Party Reporting protocol
- Good program level and personal links with other specialist services
- Operating low-barrier services
- Trauma-informed approaches
- Ensuring survivors know that a police report is not required to access services
- Prioritizing confidentiality
- Flexible service provision

NEW RESOURCES

This research was used to develop a number of resources, aimed at improving responses to the high rates of sexual assault of women and girls throughout BC.

- **Sexual Assault Support Worker Handbook**, revised from 2007 version
- **Sexual Assault Disclosure Response Practice Tips**, developed for 12 different sectors
- **Campus Sexual Violence: Guidelines for a Comprehensive Response**, and a 1-page overview of these guidelines
- **Sexual Assault Information Pamphlets** for women, in Arabic, Chinese, English, Persian, Punjabi, and Spanish

The resources developed through the Western Canada Sexual Assault Initiative are available on EVA BC's website:

<http://endingviolence.org/prevention-programs/western-canada-sexual-assault-initiative/>