

**Office of Women's Health Research Chair in Mental Health
Faculty of Health, York University**

Gender-Based Violence Experienced by Racialized and Refugee Women and Girls

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It has been 3 decades since the pivotal Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women demanded for advancing gender equality—equal rights for ALL women. The conference also sparked a global commitment for ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV) through legal protection and empowerment for women and girls, and service and supports for survivors (UN Women, 2025). GBV is violence inflicted on persons based on their “gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender” leading to psychological, physical, or sexual suffering or harm (Status of Women Canada, 2018). GBV affects one in three women globally (UN Women, 2025).

This year, the UN Secretary-General’s campaign “**UNiTE to End Digital Violence against All Women and Girls**” focusses on digital violence against women and girls, a rapidly escalating form of abuse (UN Women, 2025). Online GBV is a deeply rooted human rights violation facilitated through technology and involving a spectrum of harmful behaviours such as harassment, sexual abuse and violence (Hicks, 2023). The 16 Days of Activism under the theme to mark End Gender-Based Violence began on 25 November (beginning of International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) and ends on 10 December 2025 (Human Rights Day).

As the Chair of the Women's Health Research Chair in Mental Health (OWHC), Faculty of Health, Dr. Nazilla Khanlou has been leading funded equity-focussed research projects directed at promoting health and mental wellbeing of racialized women and girls including studies addressing GBV. At our Office we have conducted studies providing policy recommendations to address GBV. Our most recently funded project, titled “***Online Gender-Based Violence: Youth Voices in Addressing Mental Health Harms and Solutions to Prevent***”, will focus on online GBV experienced by youth.

In 2020, we conducted a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) funded knowledge synthesis project titled “***COVID-19 Pandemic Guidelines for Mental Health Support of Racialized Women at Risk of Gender-Based Violence***.” The goal of the study was to advance trauma-informed mental health care for racialized women at risk of GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic’s response and recovery phases.

We found that racialized and marginalized women were disproportionately impacted by the negative effects of the pandemic as a result of historic and systemic health inequalities. The experiences of Indigenous, Black, Asian and other racialized communities highlight the differentiated risks and marginalization they face, which have been always present, and were further amplified in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our synthesis of literature explicated the impact of the social determinants of mental health of racialized women and girls at risk of GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic. We invite you to read the following knowledge transfer outcomes from this study:

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- Khanlou N, Vazquez LM, Pashang S, Connolly JA, Ahmad F, & Ssawe A. (2022). 2020 Syndemic: Convergence of COVID-19, gender-based violence, and racism pandemics. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 9, 2077-2089. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-021-01146-w>
- [Report COVID19 Pandemic guidelines for mental health support of racialized women at risk of GBV \[PDF\]](#)
- [Policy Brief COVID19 Pandemic guidelines \[PDF\]](#)
- [Information Brief GBV and COVID19 pandemic \[PDF\]](#)
- [Infographic GBV during COVID-19 \[PDF\]](#)
- [Toolkit GBV during COVID-19 \[PDF\]](#)

The GBV Toolkit is a public service resource and provides guidance to service providers, advocacy groups and activists serving gender-based violence survivors, to help them better address the needs of racialized women during and post pandemic. The toolkit was developed through a review of literature, website searches, and input from community partners.

In 2018 we conducted a scoping review, titled “***Gender-Based Violence against Refugee Youth: Toward Trauma-informed Practice***”, and examined the extant literature on recommended approaches and interventions for refugee youth who have been victimized by GBV. We organized a roundtable to discuss the research findings with community agency representatives, service providers, faculty members and graduate students. A total of 18 individuals attended the workshop and shared their perspectives. The attendees proposed recommendations to address GBV experienced by refugee youth, which included: implementing comprehensive trauma informed interventions, designing programs to empower youth and build resiliency, training service providers and health care staff, and most importantly acquiring government support in terms of policy and funding. We invite you to read in more detail some of the research findings:

- Information Sheet 15: Service providers' perspectives on trauma-informed care for refugee youth with gender-based violence experiences. [Info-Sheet-15-GBV-Service-Providers.2020.pdf](#)
- Information Sheet 14: Gender-based violence and refugee youth: Towards trauma-informed practices. [Info-Sheet-14-GBV-Feb-2020.pdf](#)

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