

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

International Women's Day 2026

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The 115th International Women's Day (IWD) will take place on March 8th. The IWD is a global movement marked by rallies, fundraising events and protests to educate and raise awareness about women's rights. International Women's Day is both a celebration of progress and a protest against inequality, used to urge governments to guarantee equal pay, access to education and healthcare or justice for gender-based violence (UN Women, 2026, 12 January 2026).

The IWD started in 1911 as women struggled to improve their labour conditions and to demand the right to vote. The United Nations officially recognized International Women's Day in 1975, marking it as a global celebration of gender equality (UNESCO, 2024). Yet, across the globe women still only have access to 64% of the legal rights that men hold (United Nations, 4 March 2026). At this pace, with women's legal rights not being met, it may take nearly 286 years to close legal protection gaps between men and women (United Nations, n.d.).

Women's health and healthcare is deeply affected by this. From sexual, reproductive and maternal health to noncommunicable diseases, mental health, ageing and access to care, women face a plethora of often overlooked challenges shaped by social, economic, cultural, commercial and environmental determinants of health (WHO, 5 March 2026). For example, violence against women is a widespread and under-appreciated barrier to health and well-being. Nearly 1 in 3 women experience physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime, most often by an intimate partner. Yet fewer than 40% of countries in the WHO European region (the countries with the highest gender equality) have adopted the minimum recommended health service policies for post-rape care (WHO, 5 March 2026).

The Office of the Women's Health Research Chair in Mental Health (OWHC), Faculty of Health, led by Dr. Nazilla Khanlou has conducted numerous research projects directed at closing the gap in health, mental health and general wellbeing of racialized women and girls. We found racialized and marginalized women were disproportionately impacted by health inequities as a result of historic and systemic health inequalities. The experiences of racialized women and girls highlight the differentiated risks and marginalization they face, which have been always present, and are amplified during emergencies and crisis.

Here we share some of our research projects that address the health inequities women and girls face:

Project titled "***Online Gender-Based Violence: Youth Voices in Addressing Mental Health Harms and Solutions to Prevent***" focuses on addressing online GBV experienced by youth. In progress!

Project titled "***Challenges Faced by Black Mothers of Children with Developmental Disabilities***" focused on health promotion strategies for racialized mothers of children with developmental disabilities [Info-Sheet-23-Black-Mothers-and-Children-with-Developmental-Disabilities.July2025.pdf](#).

Project titled "***COVID-19 Pandemic Guidelines for Mental Health Support of Racialized Women at Risk of Gender-Based Violence***" focused on advancing trauma-informed mental health care for

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racialized women at risk of GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic's response and recovery phases
[Info-Sheet-on-GBV-and-COVID19-pandemic-Khanlou-et-al.22July2020.pdf](#).

Project titled “*Gender-Based Violence against Refugee Youth: Toward Trauma-informed Practice*” examined the extant literature on recommended approaches and interventions for refugee youth who have been victimized by GBV [Info-Sheet-14-GBV-Feb-2020.pdf](#).

The **City of Toronto** will celebrate International Women's Day on March 7 and 8 with the theme "Rise and Resist: Uniting for a New World." (IWD Toronto, 2026). The largest International Women's Day march in North America will take place on Saturday March 7. The event begins at 11am with a rally at the OISE Auditorium on Bloor Street before the march starts at 1 p.m.

References

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UN Women. (2026, 12 January). International Women's Day 2026: Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/announcement/2026/01/international-womens-day-2026-rights-justice-action-for-all-women-and-girls>

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