

Submission to  
**Standing Committee on Justice Policy:**  
**A Study on Intimate Partner Violence**  
 July 2024

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# Introduction

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic offers trauma-informed legal services and representation, counselling and multilingual interpretation, and drives system transformation to support women and gender diverse people who have experienced violence. Rooted in the foundations of intersectionality, innovation, and a client-centered approach, we foster the skills and resilience of the people we serve and amplify their voices to create individual and collective change.

Located in downtown Toronto, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic counters gender-based violence through a unique and innovative range of wrap-around support services and advocacy and policy initiatives. We play an active role in survivors' lives when they most need assistance, offering trauma-informed counselling, interpretation in more than 170 languages, and legal services in immigration, family, and criminal law. Since its founding in 1985, the Clinic has become an indispensable part of the community, assisting more than 16,000 individuals in 2023-2024 alone, and more than 130,000 since our doors opened. We work with some of the country's most disenfranchised and marginalized women, yet ours is not a "top-down" model. The Clinic takes a collaborative approach to foster survivors' safety and equality by nurturing self-reliance and practical skills. We respect gender diversity: the Clinic uses "women" as an umbrella term, recognizing the importance of self-identification, the disenfranchisement of trans people, and the complexity of compounded identities. In addition to its outreach work, the Clinic tackles a roster of policy and system-based initiatives that are central to our mission of combatting gender-based violence. We also seek to intervene in legal cases, bringing our specialized client-based expertise to assist courts and develop changes in the common law. We provide expert advice to government bodies and community organizations. We conduct our own research on topics such as risk assessment, migrant rights and sexual violence in the community and workplace, among others.

## Context

One in three women worldwide experiences physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, highlighting the pervasive and persistent nature of intimate partner violence (IPV).<sup>1</sup> In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized IPV as a major global public health concern of pandemic proportions, since it affects millions of people and can result in immediate and long-lasting health, social and economic consequences.<sup>2</sup> Women who experience violence are more likely to face physical health (including sexual and reproductive health) and mental health consequences.<sup>3</sup>

The data on this is staggering. Over a quarter of women who have been in a relationship have been subjected to physical and/or sexual IPV at least once in their lifetime. This data starts from women at least 15 years old. Further, as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners, with intimate partner and sexual violence mostly perpetrated by men against women.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, it is no different in Canada. In 2023, Statistics Canada released that police-reported family violence has seen a troubling rise for the fifth consecutive year and the seventh consecutive year of gradual increase in police-reported IPV. There were 127,082 victims of police-reported family violence in 2021, a rate of 336 victims per 100,000 population.<sup>5</sup> In 2022, this number rose to 129,876 victims of police-reported family violence and 117,093 victims of IPV aged 12 years and older.<sup>6</sup> The sheer numbers are so concerning to the point that 95

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. "The Preventable Pandemic: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence." United Nations Academic Impact, 2021, [www.un.org/en/academic-impact/preventable-pandemic-sexual-and-gender-based-violence](https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/preventable-pandemic-sexual-and-gender-based-violence).

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. "Global Database on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women." World Health Organization, 2021, <https://vaw-data.srhr.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization. "Violence Against Women Data." World Health Organization, 2021, <https://platform.who.int/data/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights/violence-against-women-data>.

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization. "Violence Against Women." World Health Organization, 25 Mar. 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada. "Victims of Police-Reported Family and Intimate Partner Violence in Canada, 2021." Statistics Canada, 19 Oct. 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221019/dq221019c-eng.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

municipalities in Canada have declared IPV an epidemic.<sup>7</sup> The recognition of IPV and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) as an epidemic in Ontario is a critical and necessary step. GBV includes IPV, rape and sexual assault, and human trafficking in its definition.<sup>8</sup> The evidence from multiple reports and inquests highlights the severe impact on vulnerable populations, systemic failures, and the substantial economic and social costs.

The Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH) has defined femicide as:

*"killings in which cisgender men have been charged or deemed responsible in the death of a woman, child or gender-diverse individual."*<sup>9</sup>

OAITH reported 52 femicides within 52 weeks from November 2021 to November 2022, with 36% of these perpetrated by intimate partners.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, IPV and GBV incidents are notably higher in urban areas like Toronto, which accounted for 59% of the province's femicides.<sup>11</sup> The 2022 report from the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability's indicates that 58% of females were killed in urban areas and 25% in rural areas.<sup>12</sup> The number of women and girls killed involving male accused in 2022 has increased by 27% compared to 2019. Overall, there have been at least 850 women and girls killed in the country between 2018 and 2022.<sup>13</sup>

The disproportionate impact of IPV and GBV is further evidenced by the alarming rates of violence faced by marginalized communities. Aboriginal women, for instance, are six times more likely to be killed than non-Aboriginal women and are 2.5 times more likely to be victims of

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<sup>7</sup> Building a Bigger Wave. "Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Map." Building a Bigger Wave, 2021, <https://www.buildingabiggerwave.org/actions/gbv-epidemic#scroll>.

<sup>8</sup> Goodmark, Leigh. "The Criminalization of Survival." *Imperfect Victims: Criminalized Survivors and the Promise of Abolition Feminism*, 1st ed., vol. 8, University of California Press, 2023, p. 2. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2zp50tg.5>.

<sup>9</sup> Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses. *More Than a Number: Addressing the Roots of Gender-Based Violence*. Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses, 2022, <https://www.oaith.ca/assets/library/MoreThanANumber.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Dawson, Myrna, et al. "Call It Femicide: Understanding Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls in Canada 2018-2022." *Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability*, 2023, p. 29, <https://femicideincanada.ca/callitfemicide2018-2022.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, page 42.

<sup>13</sup> Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA). "Femicide in Canada." CFOJA, 2024, <https://femicideincanada.ca/>.

violence.<sup>14</sup> 61% of indigenous women in Canada were more likely to have ever experienced IPV in their lifetime when compared with non-Indigenous women.<sup>15</sup> These highlight the intersectional nature of gender-based violence, affecting those who are already vulnerable due to systemic inequities and discrimination.

Even with these numbers, IPV and GBV are significantly underreported, masking the true scale of these issues. Domestic Abuse Services Oxford estimates that only 25% of domestic violence incidents are reported. This statistic aligns with statements from Toronto Police Superintendent Pauline Gray, who acknowledged that police data does not truly reflect the severity of the problem because many victims do not report their attackers.<sup>16</sup> One of the reasons behind the underreporting is that survivors of IPV often do not trust the justice system due to experiences of victim blaming and discrimination, particularly among racialized communities.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from its devastating effects on survivors, IPV and GBV result in immense costs for Ontario. A comprehensive study estimated that the total economic impact of spousal violence in Canada in 2009 alone was \$7.4 billion, which translates to approximately \$220 per Canadian.<sup>18</sup> This figure encompasses various costs, ranging from direct expenses borne by the justice system to more diffuse costs experienced by victims and third parties.

The justice system incurs substantial costs. It was estimated that the justice system bore 7.3% (\$545.2 million) of the total economic impact of spousal violence. This includes expenses related to policing, corrections, courts, prosecutions, and legal aid. Policing services alone accounted for 45.5% of these expenditures. Additionally, the civil justice system incurs costs related to child protection systems, separations, divorces, and civil protection orders. These justice system costs

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<sup>14</sup> Canadian Women's Foundation. "Fact Sheet: Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence." Canadian Women's Foundation, Feb. 2018, p. 6, [http://canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FactSheet-VAWandDV\\_Feb\\_2018-Update.pdf](http://canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FactSheet-VAWandDV_Feb_2018-Update.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Women and Gender Equality Canada. "Fact Sheet: Intimate Partner Violence." Government of Canada, 7 Feb. 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intimate-partner-violence.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Domestic Abuse Services Oxford. "Statistics." Domestic Abuse Services Oxford, 2024, <https://daso.ca/statistics/>.

<sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada. "Intimate Partner Violence Among Diverse Populations in Canada, 2018." Statistics Canada, 19 May 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210519/dq210519c-eng.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Justice Canada. "Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment Tools: An Overview." Department of Justice Canada, 2012, p. 10, [https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12\\_7/rr12\\_7.pdf](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12_7/rr12_7.pdf).

highlight the extensive resources required to address and manage the aftermath of IPV and GBV incidents.<sup>19</sup>

Victims of IPV and GBV bear the most direct economic impact, with an estimated \$6.0 billion in costs. These include medical expenses, hospitalizations, lost wages, missed school days, and property damage. Intangible costs such as pain and suffering and loss of life account for 91.2% of the total victim costs. Tangible costs, while smaller in proportion, still represent significant financial burdens, covering personal costs like legal fees for divorce and separation, moving expenses, mental health issues, productivity losses, and healthcare.<sup>20</sup>

The impact of IPV and GBV extends beyond the immediate victims to affect third parties and the broader society. In 2009, third-party costs were about \$889.9 million, including funeral expenses, losses to employers, social service operating costs, and the negative impact on children exposed to spousal violence. For example, losses to employers alone amounted to \$77.9 million, reflecting the significant workplace consequences of IPV and GBV.<sup>21</sup> Given these extensive costs, IPV and GBV are not just personal or social issues but significant economic burdens that affect all levels of society.

Addressing the widespread impact of IPV and GBV requires a multifaceted approach that includes legislative action, community engagement, and systemic change. Considering these stark realities, Bill 173, the Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act 2024, represents a critical legislative step forward. By formally recognizing IPV as an epidemic, this bill underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated action to address IPV and GBV in Ontario. Such recognition will pave the way for enhanced resources, improved policies, and more effective interventions aimed at preventing violence and supporting survivors.

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<sup>19</sup> Department of Justice Canada. "Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment Tools: An Overview." Department of Justice Canada, 2012, p. 10, [https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12\\_7/rr12\\_7.pdf](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12_7/rr12_7.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Department of Justice Canada. "Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment Tools: An Overview." Department of Justice Canada, 2012, p. 10, [https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12\\_7/rr12\\_7.pdf](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12_7/rr12_7.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Department of Justice Canada. "Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment Tools: An Overview." Department of Justice Canada, 2012, p. 10, [https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12\\_7/rr12\\_7.pdf](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12_7/rr12_7.pdf).

We thank the Standing Committee on Justice Policy for its dedicated efforts in addressing IPV through comprehensive study and legislative action. Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic is pleased to provide this submission to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy's Study on Intimate Partner Violence. Our submission focuses on some key points which the Clinic has identified in its decades of experience in addressing and combatting IPV and GBV, providing needed services to marginalized and racialized populations of women and gender diverse people. The attention and resources being allocated to understand and combat this pervasive issue are critical steps towards creating a safer and more just society.

# Problem Statements and Recommended Solutions

## 1. Lack of Comprehensive Data and Monitoring

Ontario is facing a pressing issue: a lack of comprehensive data collection and monitoring processes for IPV and GBV. Despite the high prevalence of these issues, data is often fragmented and not systematically collected or analyzed. This urgent situation prevents the accurate measurement of the full scope of IPV and GBV and hinders the development of effective interventions and policies. The primary sources of IPV data include police reports, which often underrepresent the true extent of the problem due to underreporting by survivors who fear stigma and retaliation, or do not trust the justice system. There is anecdotal information from interviewed police supervisors that mandatory police reports to child protection services after domestic violence calls does not deter victims from seeking help, however there is currently no formal data or tracking of domestic violence calls and their outcomes to confirm this claim.<sup>22</sup>

Inadequate data impedes the development of effective interventions and policies. With accurate and comprehensive data, it is easier to allocate resources effectively, identify trends, or evaluate the impact of existing programs. Efforts have been made to determine the impacts of intimate partner violence but “the lack of data has rendered this impossible.”<sup>23</sup> The literature we reviewed frequently encountered a significant barrier to policy analysis from the unavailability of data on gender-based violence in Canada. This urgent issue demands our attention, as it isn’t yet possible to draw connections between policy and violence rates. While Canada has committed to Gender-Based Analysis, there is little information available on Gender-Based Analysis of federal or provincial policies.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Paré, Emily, et al. "Responding to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Ontario, Canada: A Mixed Methods Study." *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 127, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2021.106069>.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Justice Canada. "Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment Tools: An Overview." Department of Justice Canada, 2012, [https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12\\_7/rr12\\_7.pdf](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12_7/rr12_7.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> <https://womanact.ca/publications/policy-impacts-on-violence-against-women-in-canada-a-review-of-literature-on-selected-policies/>, Page 21



This gap in data means that policymakers and service providers may not fully understand the scope of IPV and GBV or the specific needs of different communities, leading to ineffective or misdirected interventions. The need for more data also limits the ability to advocate for necessary changes and secure funding. Furthermore, the absence of detailed data affects the capability to measure long-term impacts and the effectiveness of interventions, thereby perpetuating the cycle of violence and inadequacy in response efforts.<sup>25</sup> A lack of data also hinders the improvement of current policies and procedures, as the number of referrals to child protection services (CPS) and the outcomes of these referrals are not tracked by police departments.<sup>26</sup>

## Proposed Solutions

The government should invest in comprehensive evaluation and monitoring processes to accurately measure the prevalence and impact of IPV and GBV. The government's obligations to respect, protect, fulfill, and promote human rights include the responsibility to act with "due diligence to prevent, investigate, and punish all forms of violence against women and provide effective remedies to victims."<sup>27</sup> This would involve systematically collecting data on all forms of IPV and GBV from multiple sources, "as well as to strengthen data collection and knowledge on forms of violence that may affect relatively few women and on new and emerging forms of violence."<sup>28</sup> This includes collecting data on health services, social services, and community organizations. Data should be disaggregated by factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, and geographic location to better understand the specific needs and experiences of different groups. Comprehensive data collection would also include longitudinal studies to track trends over time and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A broader study on the state of non-profit sector in Ontario for broader trends: <https://theonn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023-State-of-the-Sector-Policy-report.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740921002449>

<sup>27</sup> [https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/IndicatorsVAW/IndicatorsVAW\\_EGM\\_report.pdf](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/IndicatorsVAW/IndicatorsVAW_EGM_report.pdf), Page 6

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/IndicatorsVAW/IndicatorsVAW\\_EGM\\_report.pdf](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/IndicatorsVAW/IndicatorsVAW_EGM_report.pdf), Page 6

<sup>29</sup> <https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/GBV-Risk-Analysis-Guidance-2021.pdf>

A robust data collection and monitoring system should be implemented. This system should include developing standardized protocols for data collection across all relevant agencies and organizations, ensuring consistency and reliability. The system should also facilitate the sharing of data between agencies while protecting the privacy and safety of survivors. Additionally, the government should establish a centralized database to compile and analyze data on IPV and GBV. This comprehensive system has the potential to significantly improve our understanding and response to IPV and GBV.<sup>30</sup>

Standardized data collection protocols on IPV and GBV across all relevant agencies and organizations should be implemented. This will result in consistent, reliable, and comparable data from various sources. Furthermore, the establishment of a centralized database accessible to all stakeholders will not only facilitate data sharing but also serve as a powerful platform for analysis. It will enable us to identify trends, evaluate intervention effectiveness, and develop evidence-based policies while ensuring utmost privacy and safety for survivors. To achieve this, it is essential to provide regular training for data collectors, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to collect data accurately and sensitively. Additionally, investing in longitudinal studies to track trends in IPV and GBV over time will provide invaluable insights into their long-term impact and the effectiveness of interventions. Lastly, it is imperative to ensure that data is disaggregated by factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, and geographic location, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the specific needs and experiences of different groups, allowing for more targeted and effective interventions.<sup>31</sup>

We urge this committee to recommend the allocation of stable and ongoing resources to organizations such as the Barbra Schlifer Clinic, with a specific focus on data collection and monitoring. This support should be based on a well-defined formula that accounts for both service levels and the required data collection capacity.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/GBV-Risk-Analysis-Guidance-2021.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> [https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/backgrounders/covid19gbvcanada/covid19\\_\\_genderbased\\_violence\\_in\\_canada\\_key\\_issues\\_and\\_recommendations.html#\\_ednref3](https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/backgrounders/covid19gbvcanada/covid19__genderbased_violence_in_canada_key_issues_and_recommendations.html#_ednref3)

## 2. Unstable and Inadequate Sector Funding

The sector addressing IPV and GBV in Canada plays an important role in supporting survivors. In Ontario, various services such as child protection, law enforcement, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, women's shelters, support hotlines, legal information, advice and representation and counseling all play a role in preventing IPV and GBV. By providing training to these professionals, we empower them to recognize and address early signs of IPV and GBV, effectively preventing incidents and promptly linking survivors with the necessary support.<sup>32</sup> Support services for gender-based violence are necessary and can make a difference between life and death. They provide secure environments and offer social, healthcare, and community assistance to safeguard and empower individuals impacted by violence, including women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals. Those working within communities comprehensively understand their clients' needs, the systemic obstacles they confront, and the essential remedies.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the significance of these services, they face considerable instability due to inconsistent and often inadequate funding. A study on shelters that assist survivors of domestic violence in becoming self-sufficient found that inadequate funding is hindering the provision of programs and the retention of experienced staff.<sup>34</sup> This financial instability severely hampers organizations' ability to provide continuous and reliable support services since it usually leads to high staff turnover and reduced service capacity, especially during financial downtimes. Many support centers and shelters operate on shoestring budgets, relying heavily on short-term grants and donations.<sup>35</sup>

The lack of stable, permanent funding was highlighted as a significant concern for frontline workers, impacting on their ability to deliver effective services. Even the National Action Plan to

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-stands-standing-together-against-gender-based-violence-now-through-decisive-actions-prevention-empowerment-supports#:~:text=Through%20Ontario's%20four%2Dyear%20plan,respond%20to%20gender%2Dbased%20violence.>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/wage-fegc/documents/gbv/National%20Action%20Plan%20on%20Gender-based%20Violence%20-%20In%20Brief%20-%20English.pdf>, page 4

<sup>34</sup> <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2020/09/30/lack-of-funding-hampering-to-aid-domestic-violence-survivors-report-says/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/federal-shelter-funding-1.6814859>

End Gender-Based Violence acknowledges that without sustained funding, organizations do not have the means to hire and retain qualified staff, increase occupational health, mental health, and safety supports to ensure staff wellness and well-being, provide ongoing professional development to support increasingly diverse and complex client needs, and meet communities' existing needs, let alone expand programming and services to address emerging needs.<sup>36</sup>

### Proposed Solutions

To stabilize the sector and address the pressing issue of gender-based violence, it is essential to secure funding rooted in sustainability as mentioned in the National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence.<sup>37</sup> IPV and GBV services must be treated as essential services and funded on a multi-year, sustainable basis. This approach will remove precarity from the equation, ensuring that services are stable and grounded in a decent work philosophy. Sustainable funding will enable the Clinic to provide consistent, high-quality support to survivors, prioritize long-term planning, and foster a work environment that values and supports its staff. By investing in sustainable funding, we can ensure that GBV services remain robust and reliable, ultimately enhancing the safety and well-being of all survivors.

## 3. Under-Resourcing of Organization (Schlifer Clinic) with Increased Service Pressures

Survivors and their families face a variety of risk factors, including exposure to racism, systemic poverty, and health challenges that are independent of the impact of violence but are exacerbated by IPV and GBV. Survivors also face dangers directly inflicted by an abusive individual, such as physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, controlling and isolating behaviours, all

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intergovernmental-collaboration/national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence/first-national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence.html>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intergovernmental-collaboration/national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence/first-national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence.html>

of which impact survivors' ongoing safety planning.<sup>38</sup> Organizations in Canada dedicated to addressing IPV and GBV provide needed services to safeguard and empower individuals impacted by violence. The IPV specialists within these organizations can identify gaps and cracks in the system's responses to survivors and understand that IPV and GBV are a manifestation of broader-level systemic injustice and violence.<sup>39</sup> However, they face significant challenges such as limited resources, inadequate protocols, and high staff turnover<sup>40</sup> due to unstable and often inadequate funding. Services available to address IPV are often funded at inadequate levels to meet service user needs.<sup>41</sup> This challenge undermines their ability to deliver consistent, effective and practical support.

Service providers can make an important contribution to preventative work,<sup>42</sup> offering specialized and wraparound services to ensure a holistic approach. These services address the multifaceted needs of survivors, helping them navigate complex legal and social systems and offering tailored support that considers their unique circumstances. For example, despite their training, mental health professionals have sometimes been "critiqued for their potentially stigmatizing responses to women seeking counseling" and the recommendation points to a more trauma-informed approach to counseling.<sup>43</sup> In fact, trauma-informed practice has become a strategy in offering group or individual counseling to women.<sup>44</sup> Wraparound services from various organizations aim to address these gaps; for instance, legal advice helps survivors understand their rights and options within the legal system, while trauma-informed mental health support addresses the psychological impacts of violence. Housing assistance provides safe

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<sup>38</sup><https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/08862605211062998#:~:text=Victim%20defined%20advocacy%20recognizes%20that,focused%20on%20advocacy%20beyond%20leaving%20>

Page 5, Everyone is Living in the Same Storm, but our Boats are all Different": Safety and Safety Planning for Survivors of Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic Rachel V. Schrag, PhD, LCSW<sup>1</sup> Sarah Leat, PhD, LCSW<sup>2</sup>, and Leila Wood, PhD, LCSW

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/docs/GBVExpertiseReport-June2022.pdf>, Page 89 Recognizing Critical Expertise: A Knowledge and Skills Framework for Intimate Partner Violence Specialists, Western University, June 2022

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/docs/GBVExpertiseReport-June2022.pdf>, Page 48 Recognizing Critical Expertise: A Knowledge and Skills Framework for Intimate Partner Violence Specialists, Western University, June 2022

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/docs/GBVExpertiseReport-June2022.pdf>, Page 89 Recognizing Critical Expertise: A Knowledge and Skills Framework for Intimate Partner Violence Specialists, Western University, June 2022

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.fcjrefugeecentre.org/resources-toolkit-for-migrant-women/>

<sup>43</sup> Looking Back, the Programs Kept Me Alive": Women's Impressions of Counseling for Intimate Partner Violence by Leslie Maureen Tutty, Page 135 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2023.2167309>

<sup>44</sup> Looking Back, the Programs Kept Me Alive": Women's Impressions of Counseling for Intimate Partner Violence by Leslie Maureen Tutty, Page 130 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2023.2167309>

and stable living conditions, which are necessary for the well-being and recovery of survivors. Interpretation services ensure that language barriers do not prevent access to essential support.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing structural inequalities, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. As per the Playbook designed by the Schlifer Clinic's #SheCovey Project<sup>45</sup>, among the hardest hit by the pandemic and afterward were newcomer, Indigenous, racialized, LGBTQ2S, and disabled women, who have faced an increased risk of gender-based violence. Indigenous women, already vulnerable, are three times more likely to suffer from IPV, with staggering statistics indicating that 1 in 5 Indigenous women are affected. The pandemic has also highlighted the dire need for culturally sensitive services tailored for Indigenous women, which remain woefully inadequate. Newcomer women grapple with isolation, financial hardship, and discrimination, heightening their vulnerability to gender-based violence. Racialized women encounter elevated levels of gender discrimination and are often trapped in low-income situations, which can force them to stay in abusive relationships due to financial dependency. Additionally, LGBTQ2S individuals confront heightened risks of social isolation, bullying, and IPV, compounded by economic strains. These challenges underscore the urgent need for targeted support and interventions to address the deep-seated inequities that the pandemic has intensified.<sup>46 47</sup>

Social and physical isolation, employment interruptions, economic stress, and restricted access to services during lockdowns have all contributed to a surge in IPV and GBV cases.<sup>48</sup> The already rising prevalence of IPV and GBV, further exacerbated by the pandemic, has significantly increased service pressures. Many regions saw a substantial increase in calls to domestic violence hotlines and a greater need for emergency housing and support services,<sup>49</sup> all of which resulted

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.schliferclinic.com/shecovery-project-playbook-6/>

<sup>46</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. (n.d.). Economic Impact of COVID-19. In The SheCovey Project Playbook. Retrieved July 22, 2024, from SheCovey Project Playbook

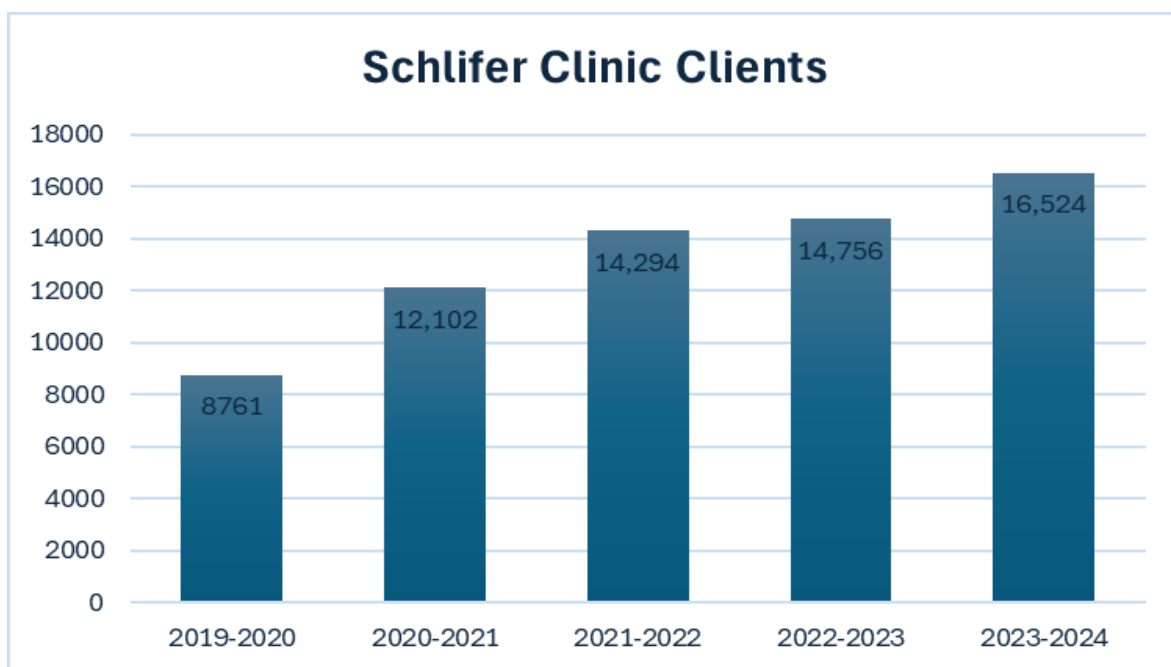
<sup>47</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>

<sup>48</sup> [https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/backgrounders/covid19gbvcanada/covid19\\_\\_genderbased\\_violence\\_in\\_canada\\_key\\_issues\\_and\\_recommendations.html#\\_ednref3](https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/backgrounders/covid19gbvcanada/covid19__genderbased_violence_in_canada_key_issues_and_recommendations.html#_ednref3)

<sup>49</sup> <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Responding-to-Rising-Intimate-Partner-Violence-Amid-COVID-19.pdf>, Page 16

in an overwhelming demand for support services. Even with this growing demand, there has been a lack of adequate funding and resources, contributing to operational challenges and decreased funding for local women's organizations.<sup>50</sup> As a result, service providers have been under strain and have had less capacity to offer comprehensive, effective and practical support.

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic has experienced a substantial and consistent increase in clients over the past few years, with numbers rising from 8,761 in 2019-2020 to 16,524 in 2023. This surge reflects a broader increase in gender-based violence, which has significantly heightened service pressure.<sup>51 52 53</sup>



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<sup>50</sup> United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. "Impact of COVID-19 on Violence against Women and Girls and Service Provision: UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women." UN Women, 2020, p. 5.  
[https://untf.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20UNTF/Publications/2020/External%20brief/Impact%20of%20COVID-19\\_V08\\_single%20page-compressed.pdf](https://untf.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20UNTF/Publications/2020/External%20brief/Impact%20of%20COVID-19_V08_single%20page-compressed.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. "Annual Report 2020-2021." Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, 2021.  
<https://www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BSCCAR-2020-21.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. "Annual Report 2021-2022." Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, 2022.  
<https://www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Annual-Report-2021-2022.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. *Annual Report 2020-2021*. Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, 2021.  
<https://www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BSCCAR-2020-21.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> In the years spanning from 2019 to 2024, the Schlifer Clinic experienced a steady increase in the number of clients served. Starting with 8,761 clients in 2019-2020, the clinic saw a rise to 12,102 in 2020-2021, 14,294 in 2021-2022, 14,756 in 2022-2023, and reaching 16,524 in 2023-2024

However, the Clinic has not seen a corresponding percentage increase in funding to match this rising demand. To address this challenge, the Clinic's three-pillar strategy is essential. It offers trauma-informed legal and counseling services tailored to the complex needs of survivors, provides accessible interpretation services to overcome language barriers, and integrates these with a network of additional support services. This holistic approach ensures that survivors receive the necessary support, despite the gap between increasing client numbers and funding increases.<sup>55</sup>

The Clinic's three-pillar strategy trauma-informed legal services tailored to the specific needs of survivors, addressing complex issues related to family law, immigration law, criminal and other responses to sexual assault. To overcome language barriers and ensure that all survivors can fully engage with the legal process, the Clinic offers professional and trauma-informed interpretation services. Additionally, the Clinic integrates its legal and interpretation services with other essential support systems, such as counselling and housing support, to create a cohesive and holistic support network. This integrated approach is crucial in meeting the rising demand for these services, ensuring that survivors receive the comprehensive assistance and advocacy they need in a seamless and effective manner.<sup>56</sup>

## Proposed Solutions

The Clinic's "SheCovetry Project"<sup>57</sup> has identified a set of best practices to combat gender-based violence (GBV), particularly in times of crisis. A pivotal aspect is the development of a dynamic crisis response plan that specifically targets the surge in GBV during emergencies, such as pandemics. This plan should be adaptable, informed by real-time data, and lessons learned from previous crises. Another key practice is the promotion of mentorship programs and peer support networks, which are essential in fostering

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<sup>55</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. *Annual Report 2022-2023*. Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, 2023, pp. 8-10. <https://www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2022-2023-Annual-Report.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. *Annual Report 2022-2023*. Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, 2023, pp. 8-10. <https://www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2022-2023-Annual-Report.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. (n.d.). Economic Impact of COVID-19. In *The SheCovetry Project Playbook*. Retrieved July 22, 2024, from SheCovetry Project Playbook



resilience, aiding recovery, and preventing social isolation among those affected. Additionally, there is a continuous need for advocacy to strengthen legal frameworks and policies that focus on GBV prevention, protection, and survivor support. It's also crucial to advocate for long-term support services for survivors, which go beyond immediate crisis intervention, ensuring sustained care and assistance. Lastly, forming collaborative partnerships between GBV service organizations is recommended to provide survivors with a cohesive and comprehensive support system. These practices are instrumental in shaping a robust response to GBV, ensuring that survivors receive the necessary support during challenging times.

To address the significant increase in clients and the broader rise in gender-based violence, the Clinic proposes a strategic enhancement of its funding to continue providing essential services effectively. These suggested amounts are based on our current analysis of service pressures. To eliminate the uncertainty associated with non-permanent funding, we propose stable core funding and multi-year tenures. This approach will create a reliable environment for clients and staff, ensuring that essential services can be provided in a sustainable way.

## Key Funding Recommendations for the Clinic

### Specialized Legal Support

*Additional Annual Funding Needed: \$200,000*

How It Helps: This funding will allow the Clinic to create two new positions for lawyers specializing in gender-based violence cases. These new hires will provide specialized legal support for survivors and strengthen representation during court proceedings.

### Programs to Address Criminalization

*Additional Annual Funding Needed: \$200,000*

How It Helps: This funding will support the creation of two new positions dedicated to developing tailored programs to address systemic discrimination faced by criminalized

survivors. These new roles will help ensure that systemic issues are effectively addressed.

### Court Support Workers

*Additional Annual Funding Needed: \$200,000*

How It Helps: Hiring and training three new court support workers will offer crucial emotional support, accompany survivors to court, and assist them in navigating the legal system.

### Counseling Services Enhancement

*Additional Annual Funding Needed: \$150,000*

How It Helps: This funding will support the training and professional development of existing counselors and enable the creation of two new counselor positions. This will improve counseling services, ensuring high-quality support that addresses trauma and promotes healing.

Stable core funding and multi-year tenures will help remove the precariousness often faced by organizations like ours, where funding is not permanent, and services cannot be promised in a sustainable way. By creating an environment of stability for clients and staff, we can ensure that essential services are consistently available. More detailed analysis and examples can be shared upon request to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these proposals will enhance our services and address current pressures effectively. These targeted investments can ensure the Clinic meets the growing demand for services and would be able to continue providing comprehensive and effective support to survivors of gender-based violence, maintaining high-quality care and advocating for systemic improvements that benefit both survivors and service providers.

## 4. Need for Increasing Investment in Language Interpretation

Part of the multiple barriers to reporting or disclosing violence, and even seeking help are language barriers and the lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services that are easy to access.<sup>58</sup> Language interpretation services for IPV survivors exist, but have not received additional investment in many years, a “chronic underfunding” of the GBV sector in Canada,<sup>59</sup> with interpreter remuneration remaining at the same rate over the years leaving interpreters feeling unappreciated and unworthy despite the critical service they provide. The already underfunded existing language interpretation services for IPV survivors have been under increased pressure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Stay-at-home orders and isolation have left victims isolated with their abusers, heightening the chances of abuse. Financial and emotional pressures, and the restricted availability of health and social services such as language interpretation, have intensified the problem.<sup>60</sup> This added strain has highlighted the limitations of the current system, which has not been significantly invested in for years. This stagnation means the services may not fully meet the evolving needs of the community or keep pace with the growing demand.

The Clinic took steps to address the impact of COVID-19 on language interpretation services for IPV survivors. Enhancing digital access, equipping interpreters for remote sessions, and expanding service capacity are vital measures that helped meet the increased demand and ensure continued support for survivors during the pandemic and beyond.<sup>61 62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> VAW Learning Network. "Issue-Based Newsletter 26: Plain Text Version." Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, Western University, 2023, p. 5, [www.gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased\\_newsletters/issue-26/Plain-Text-Issue-26.pdf](http://www.gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-26/Plain-Text-Issue-26.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> House of Commons, Canada. "Towards a Violence-Free Canada: Addressing and Eliminating Intimate Partner and Family Violence." 44th Parliament, 1st Session, 2022, p. 38, [https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2022/parl/x71-1/XC71-1-1-441-4-eng.pdf](https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/parl/x71-1/XC71-1-1-441-4-eng.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Arora, Mansi. "Unveiling Intimate Partner Violence: Exploring the Role of Media." *Unseen Conflicts*, 2023, [www.unseenconflicts.in/post/unveiling-intimate-partner-violence-exploring-the-role-of-media](http://www.unseenconflicts.in/post/unveiling-intimate-partner-violence-exploring-the-role-of-media).

<sup>61</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. "Interpretation Services." Schlifer Clinic, 2023, [www.schliferclinic.com/interpretation-services/](http://www.schliferclinic.com/interpretation-services/).

<sup>62</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. "Annual Report 2020-2021." Schlifer Clinic, November 2022, [www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BSCCAR-2020-21.pdf](http://www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BSCCAR-2020-21.pdf).

## Proposed Solutions

To ensure these services effectively support IPV survivors, it's crucial to renew and increase investment. We recommend a structured increase in interpreter remuneration, acknowledging that there has been no increase for over a decade. This adjustment is crucial to maintain fair compensation in line with the evolving economic landscape and industry standards. This would involve updating funding for training programs for interpreters, expanding service availability, and integrating the latest technologies for remote interpretation. By revitalizing these services, the community can offer more responsive and accessible support to all IPV survivors, regardless of language barriers.

## 5. Access to Justice Challenges

Survivors of IPV and GBV “are resourceful individuals who tirelessly self-advocate in the face of continuous barriers to accessing justice.”<sup>63</sup> Accessing justice for survivors of violence in trauma-informed settings is a complex and pressing task. The process is full of challenges, from the initial understanding of legal options, reporting or initiating a case, through preparing and attending the trial. Moving to safety can disrupt social support systems, sever connections to services and familiar legal channels, and adds stress and economic insecurity, which are significant contributors to violence.<sup>64</sup> Victims and survivors often express the desire that their efforts and advocacy will prevent others from experiencing the same hardships they have faced.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, survivors of IPV and GBV encounter numerous legal obstacles in different areas of the law, including family law, immigration law, and criminal law. Many individuals exhaust all available options for legal representation due to barriers such as the private cost of legal assistance at times when financial resources are strained, denial of Legal Aid certificates, inability

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<sup>63</sup> Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. *Re-thinking the Victim-Offender Overlap: June 2021*. Government of Canada, 2021, pp. 8-10. <https://www.victimsfirst.gc.ca/res/pub/ROV-ROV/index.html>

<sup>64</sup> Gordon, Eleanor, et al. *Accessing Justice for Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings*. Wilson Center, 2022, p. 3. [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Accessing\\_Justice\\_for\\_Gender-Based\\_Violence\\_in\\_Humanitarian\\_Settings.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Accessing_Justice_for_Gender-Based_Violence_in_Humanitarian_Settings.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime. "Re-thinking the Victim-Offender Overlap: June 2021." Government of Canada, 2021. <https://www.victimsfirst.gc.ca/res/pub/ROV-ROV/index.html>

to find a lawyer to represent them, and experiencing abuse, myths and stereotypes during legal proceedings.<sup>66</sup> These challenges often leave survivors unprepared for legal battles against their abuser where they hope for recognition of the abuse. Systemic and structural barriers affect victims directly and indirectly, such as lack of understanding of the law, language barriers, poverty, mental health challenges, and lack of access to childcare.<sup>67</sup> All these further complicate the pursuit of justice. For example, a survivor may struggle to understand legal terms or afford transportation or online access to attend court hearings. In smaller jurisdictions, finding a lawyer who accepts a Legal Aid certificate is particularly difficult, often leading to conflicts of interest with the survivor's ex-partner.

## Family Law

In family law, reconsideration is needed for the mandatory charging policy in IPV cases. While this policy aims to protect victims, it can result in dual charging, where both the victim and the abuser are charged.<sup>68</sup> This is especially problematic in cases involving coercive control and psychological abuse, where the dynamics are complex and not always apparent to law enforcement.<sup>69</sup> Educating law enforcement about patterns of violence and coercive control can help them use discretion and not lay charges automatically and indiscriminately.

There is also an urgent need to provide more support to the vulnerable partner, often female identifying, in the immediate aftermath of IPV and GBV incidents, including access to legal advice before giving a statement to the police. It is also essential to increase the availability of family court support workers, particularly in the three Toronto family courts, to address staff shortages, accommodate new clients, address the demands of high needs and high risk clients and to

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<sup>66</sup> Birnbaum, Rachel, and Nicholas Bala. "The Impact of the Lack of Legal Aid in Family Law Cases." Department of Justice Canada, 6 November 2019, p. 10, [www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/laf-ljdf/docs/RSD\\_RR2019\\_The\\_Impact\\_of\\_the\\_Lack\\_of\\_Legal\\_Aid\\_in\\_Family\\_Law\\_Cases\\_EN.pdf](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/laf-ljdf/docs/RSD_RR2019_The_Impact_of_the_Lack_of_Legal_Aid_in_Family_Law_Cases_EN.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Interval House. "Barriers to Employability and Employment for Women Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence." Interval House, 2018, p. 5, <http://intervalhouse.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Barriers-Report.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> Women's Legal Education and Action Fund. "What Does Mandatory Charging Mean?" Ontario Women's Justice Network, 6 Sept. 2022. <https://owjn.org/2022/09/06/what-does-mandatory-charging-mean/>

<sup>69</sup> Gill, Carmen, and Mary Aspinall. "Understanding Coercive Control in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence in Canada: How to Address the Issue Through the Criminal Justice System?" Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, 20 April 2020, [www.victimfirst.gc.ca/res/cor/UCC-CCC/index.html](http://www.victimfirst.gc.ca/res/cor/UCC-CCC/index.html).

manage growing caseloads.

The scarcity of lawyers practicing family law in rural areas and their reluctance to accept Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) certificates intensify the challenges for survivors seeking justice. In our experience even when clients receive a certificate, they may not find lawyers willing to accept the certificate. This can create a barrier to accessing the legal support they need. It's important for legal aid systems to ensure that survivors have both the means to acquire assistance and a network of lawyers who are available and willing to help them with their certificates. For the many family litigants who have to go to court without representation because they don't qualify for Legal Aid, can't find a lawyer or can't afford one, they need more resources to navigate the family law system on their own.

We also support consideration of expanding the Integrated Domestic Violence Court (IDVC) model to more communities across Ontario where a single judge is aware of and able to deal with both domestic assault charges and family law issues in a family, in one place. Another example of streamlining legal processes to increase access to justice for survivors of IPV is consideration of amending the *Family Law Act (FLA)* and *Children's Law Reform Act (CLRA)* to allow survivors the opportunity to seek financial compensation for the harm of enduring family violence by an intimate partner.<sup>70</sup> This would give the court the opportunity to assess the nature and impacts of family violence and order abusers to take responsibility by contributing to the financial independence of survivors. Another gap in the Ontario family law system could be remedied that would also allow courts to order former spouses to assist in their partner's financial independence at the end of the relationship. We recommend consideration that the definition of spouse in the *FLA* for the purposes of spousal support be amended to include "former spouses" so that Ontario residents who have divorced in a foreign jurisdiction may have equal access to apply for spousal support.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> <https://canliiconnects.org/en/commentaries/92441>

<sup>71</sup> Howie, Jason. "Claiming Spousal Support in Ontario After a Foreign Divorce." Jason Howie Family Law, 2024, [www.jasonpaulhowie.com/claiming-spousal-support-in-ontario-after-a-foreign-divorce/](http://www.jasonpaulhowie.com/claiming-spousal-support-in-ontario-after-a-foreign-divorce/).

## Immigration Challenges

Survivors of IPV and GBV who are also navigating immigration challenges encounter additional obstacles. For example, women who have filed for refugee status may not realize that they can initiate the process separate from their abusive partners. Their partners may falsely inform them that they can only obtain refugee status if they remain in the relationship. Women relying on an abusive partner to sponsor them may also feel trapped to stay in the relationship, without knowledge of other possible pathways to status. Women without status face heightened vulnerabilities due to their lack of legal protection. They are hesitant to involve the authorities for fear of deportation and losing custody of their children. Often, these women are subjected to manipulation by their partners, who use their immigration status as a method of control.<sup>72</sup> We recommend that the criteria for Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) certificates should be relaxed in cases of IPV and GBV to assist survivors seeking help with immigration issues. Immigrant, precarious status and non-status survivors of IPV and GBV, especially those who belong to racial or ethnic minority groups, often face unique, intersecting barriers to justice.<sup>73</sup> There is a shortage of lawyers with sufficient expertise in immigration, family and trauma-informed practices to assist these clients,<sup>74</sup> particularly in non-urban areas. Furthermore, language barriers, lack of knowledge of Canadian systems and laws necessitate enhancing outreach efforts for migrant survivors of IPV and GBV. This should include providing comprehensive information about legal and social assistance and establishing a provincial-level helpline with interpreters. Applying an intersectional lens allows advocates and policymakers to better understand and address the complex realities of migrant survivors, ensuring no one is left without support due to overlapping identities and obstacles.

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<sup>72</sup> Tabibi, J., Ahmad, S., Baker, L., & Lalonde, D. (2018). *Intimate Partner Violence Against Immigrant and Refugee Women*. Learning Network Issue 26. London, Ontario: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children. Retrieved from [https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased\\_newsletters/issue-26/Plain-Text-Issue-26.pdf](https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-26/Plain-Text-Issue-26.pdf)

<sup>73</sup> Iliadis, Pearl, Melpa Kamateros, Anne Andermann, Reeve Kako, Lara Khoury, and Cassandra Neranjan. "Law Reform Opportunities in Quebec for Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence." *Max Bell School of Public Policy, McGill University*, November 2022, p. 2, [www.mcgill.ca/maxbellschool/files/maxbellschool/2022\\_qhppc\\_report\\_english\\_copyright.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/maxbellschool/files/maxbellschool/2022_qhppc_report_english_copyright.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> Iliadis, Pearl, Melpa Kamateros, Anne Andermann, Reeve Kako, Lara Khoury, and Cassandra Neranjan. "Law Reform Opportunities in Quebec for Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence." *Max Bell School of Public Policy, McGill University*, November 2022, p. 38, [www.mcgill.ca/maxbellschool/files/maxbellschool/2022\\_qhppc\\_report\\_english\\_copyright.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/maxbellschool/files/maxbellschool/2022_qhppc_report_english_copyright.pdf).

## Sexual Assault

In cases of sexual assault, it is essential to enhance awareness campaigns about independent legal advice (ILA), which should include messaging specifically about sexual assault within intimate relationships. At the Clinic, we continue to meet clients who make police reports before receiving legal advice. Increased funding should be considered for ILA services in Ontario, to the program offered by the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic (BSCC) as well as to the government-funded voucher program. We also support expanding ILA funding to cover some representation of survivors through the daunting, confusing and often traumatizing criminal court process. In fact, a former Crown prosecutor with Ontario's Ministry of the Attorney General has proposed the need for:

*"a fully funded confidential trauma-informed model of victim representation for survivors of sexual violence to better protect their rights and facilitate equal access to justice. I find support for my proposed model by looking to systems of victim representation internationally, in the U.S. Military and in the International Criminal Court."*<sup>75</sup>

We also continue to see many clients facing significant barriers to accessing justice as a result of little understanding of the law and other social systems; language barriers; poverty; mental health challenges; no access to childcare; lack of access to education; etc. As a result, in several cases, we have focused our resources on building support teams with other service providers and providing advocacy in areas of basic living needs such as income support and housing.<sup>76</sup> This work of the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic has aimed to help stabilize clients' living conditions as a foundation to be able to assist with their legal issues.

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<sup>75</sup> McDonald, Susan. "Accessing Justice for Victims and Survivors of Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence." *Victims of Crime Research Digest No. 17*, Department of Justice Canada, 2024, p. 25, [www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/ci-ip/victim/rd17-rr17/pdf/RSD\\_VCRD2024\\_17th-Victims-of-Crime-Digest\\_EN.pdf](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/ci-ip/victim/rd17-rr17/pdf/RSD_VCRD2024_17th-Victims-of-Crime-Digest_EN.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. "Counselling Services." Schlifer Clinic, 2023, [www.schliferclinic.com/counselling-services/](http://www.schliferclinic.com/counselling-services/)



## Lack of Compensation for Survivors

Compensating victims for the harms that have impacted their health, security and opportunities is an important first step in their journey to recovery. While the state may not have a legal duty to compensate victims, it has a moral obligation to safeguard its citizens from crime, especially the negative impacts of crime. It is not just about showing support for victims; it is about ensuring they have fair access to their rights.<sup>77</sup> The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) underscores the importance of compensation. In its final report, the inquiry identifies systemic and deliberate human rights violations as the root causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls. Among its 231 Calls for Justice, the report recommends establishing compensation schemes for families and a healing fund for survivors affected by violence to address these deep-seated issues.<sup>78</sup>

Further, the Jury Recommendations in the Renfrew Inquest, which was a primary catalyst that led to the push for a law such as Bill 173, suggested that a fund be created to support women living with IPV.<sup>79</sup> The recommendations mentioned that the fund should include the following:

- a. Easy, low-barrier access for IPV survivors seeking to improve their safety
- b. Referral to the fund through IPV service providers
- c. Small grants of up to \$7000
- d. It should have no impact on Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Plan payments
- e. Consideration for the needs of rural and geographically remote survivors of IPV
- f. Funding to be provided on an annualized basis, with adequacy assessed and considered after the first three years
- g. Inject a significant one-time investment into IPV related support services<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Wemmers, Jo-Anne. "Compensating Crime Victims." Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, Government of Canada, March 2021, [www.victimfirst.gc.ca/res/cor/CCV-CCV/index.html](http://www.victimfirst.gc.ca/res/cor/CCV-CCV/index.html)

<sup>78</sup> National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. "Master List of Report Recommendations Organized By Theme and Jurisdiction." National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2018, p. 28, [www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/National-Inquiry-Master-List-of-Report-Recommendations-Organized-By-Theme-and-Jurisdiction-2018-EN-FINAL.pdf](http://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/National-Inquiry-Master-List-of-Report-Recommendations-Organized-By-Theme-and-Jurisdiction-2018-EN-FINAL.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario. "Inquest Verdict and Recommendations: CKW." Luke's Place, 2022, p. 3, [www.lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CKW-Inquest-Verdict-Recommendations-SIGNED\\_Redacted.pdf](http://www.lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CKW-Inquest-Verdict-Recommendations-SIGNED_Redacted.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> CKW Inquest Jury. "Inquest Verdict and Recommendations: Christine Knox-Walker." Luke's Place, 2022, p. 4, [www.lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CKW-Inquest-Verdict-Recommendations-SIGNED\\_Redacted.pdf](http://www.lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CKW-Inquest-Verdict-Recommendations-SIGNED_Redacted.pdf)

The Ontario Superior Court in the case of *Ahluwalia v. Ahluwalia* recognized the need for the tort of family violence, allowing survivors to seek damages specifically for the harm resulting from their abusive relationship. Justice Mandhane granted \$150,000 in damages to the IPV survivor in that case, acknowledging the severe impact of a "sixteen-year pattern of coercion and control"<sup>81</sup> involving psychological, physical, and financial abuse. While the tort of family violence may intersect with existing torts, "existing torts do not fully capture the cumulative harm associated with the pattern of coercion and control that lays at the heart of family violence cases<sup>82</sup>... existing torts are focused on specific, harmful incidents, while the proposed tort of family violence is focused on long-term, harmful patterns of conduct that are designed to control or terrorize."<sup>83</sup> This case is now before the Supreme Court of Canada after the Ontario Court of Appeal wrote that any significant changes regarding the issues presented should originate from legislation rather than the courts.<sup>84</sup> The Supreme Court's involvement indicates the case's complexity and the broader implications it may have on family law and the recognition of new torts related to family violence.<sup>85</sup>

We urge the Standing Committee on Justice Policy to consider a plan including revisions to Ontario legislation to provide for ways to compensate victims of violence. This plan should offer monetary assistance to aid victims in paying for medical bills, psychological therapy, legal expenses, and other recovery-related costs associated with safety and independence. A new tort or statutory amendment that recognizes and compensates for family violence could be a part of this broader compensation plan, by which the Committee can ensure that survivors receive comprehensive support, addressing both immediate financial needs and long-term recovery. This would demonstrate the government's commitment to addressing the impacts of violence and ensuring that survivors receive the necessary resources to rebuild their lives.

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<sup>81</sup> *Ahluwalia v. Ahluwalia*, 2022 ONSC 1303 (CanLII), <https://canlii.ca/t/jmpnf>, para 5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ahluwalia v. Ahluwalia*, 2022 ONSC 1303 (CanLII), <https://canlii.ca/t/jmpnf>, para 54.

<sup>83</sup> *Ahluwalia v. Ahluwalia*, 2022 ONSC 1303 (CanLII), <https://canlii.ca/t/jmpnf>, para 54.

<sup>84</sup> <https://canliiconnects.org/en/summaries/91811>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.scc-csc.ca/case-dossier/info/dock-regi-eng.aspx?cas=41061>

## Criminalization of Women

In cases of IPV, women survivors are sometimes charged with assault and are faced with the impacts of defending against a charge in addition to the impacts of an abusive relationship.

The unintended consequences of criminalization don't always align with the intended solutions. For example, we have observed that existing mandatory charging policies in cases of domestic assault can inadvertently result in survivors being charged with the same offences that are meant to protect them. Moreover, survivors, particularly those from marginalized and racialized communities, specifically from non-status immigrant communities, indigenous and LGBTQ+ communities face additional hurdles, such as language barriers, discrimination within the system, intergenerational trauma and lack of trust in the legal system.<sup>86</sup>

Many victims of violence have become entangled in the criminal justice system. The implementation of mandatory charging policies has led to a troubling trend of confusing offenders with victims. This creates an opportunity for perpetrators of IPV to exploit the situation to their advantage. In this context, the criminalization of coercive control raises concerns, particularly regarding the potential for abusers to manipulate women's protective actions, especially those concerning their children. This manipulation can occur in collaboration with the patriarchal criminal justice system, portraying women as offenders. As a result, women and their children are subject to "double victimization," with far-reaching consequences across criminal law, family law, and child welfare systems. An example of this is evident in parenting disputes, where courts still rely on the outdated yet influential concept of "parental alienation."<sup>87</sup>

This issue has developed to such an extent that a whole movement, identified by the hashtag #SurvivedandPunished, has arisen to oppose their re-victimization by the criminal legal system.<sup>88</sup>

The aim of criminalization was to raise awareness about IPV and GBV and reduce such violence by altering community attitudes that treated "domestic" violence as a private matter, and by

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<sup>86</sup> Speech of Deepa Matoo, House of Commons, Canada. "Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights: Evidence, Meeting No. 97." 44th Parliament, 1st Session, 29 February 2024, [www.ourcommons.ca/documentviewer/en/44-1/JUST/meeting-97/evidence](http://www.ourcommons.ca/documentviewer/en/44-1/JUST/meeting-97/evidence)

<sup>87</sup> Hoffer, Eden, and C. Nadine Wathen. "Criminalizing Coercive Control Could Further Victimize Women." Western News, 15 July 2024, [www.news.westernu.ca/2024/07/criminalizing-coercive-victimize/](http://www.news.westernu.ca/2024/07/criminalizing-coercive-victimize/)

<sup>88</sup> Goodmark, Leigh. "The Criminalization of Survival." *Imperfect Victims: Criminalized Survivors and the Promise of Abolition Feminism*, 1st ed., vol. 8, University of California Press, 2023, p. 2. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2zp50tg.5>

implication, acceptable behind closed doors. However, these efforts have also ironically and tragically resulted in higher rates of arrest, prosecution, conviction, and imprisonment of victims of violence.<sup>89</sup>

The Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic's Criminalization of Women Project aims to challenge the pattern of survivors being charged with crimes when seeking state protection from gender-based violence. This issue is prevalent in family law, sexual assault law, and immigration and refugee law. Survivors often face criminalization due to parenting orders that require them to maintain contact with their abusers, lack of protection while being close to their assaulters, or heightened scrutiny based on their immigration status.<sup>90</sup>

The project seeks to comprehend the contributing factors to this criminalization and develop strategies to address it. Research efforts encompass reviewing academic studies, analyzing domestic and international case law, hosting community forums, and examining client files to identify criminalization patterns. This research informs the creation of effective intake assessments, safety plans, and service protocols.<sup>91</sup> By integrating research, advocacy, and education, the Clinic strives to ensure that the justice system protects and supports violence survivors rather than penalizing them. To eliminate the criminalization of survivors, it is recommended that the Ontario government enhances trauma-informed training for police forces, crown prosecutors, and enforcement agencies.<sup>92</sup> This training should focus on understanding coercive control and its traumatic impacts to reduce the misapplication of laws that harm victims, particularly marginalized women.<sup>93</sup>

## Proposed Solutions

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<sup>89</sup> Goodmark, Leigh. "The Criminalization of Survival." *Imperfect Victims: Criminalized Survivors and the Promise of Abolition Feminism*, 1st ed., vol. 8, University of California Press, 2023, p. 2. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2zp50tg.5>.

<sup>90</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. "Criminalization of Women." Schlifer Clinic, 2023, [www.schliferclinic.com/criminalization-of-women/](http://www.schliferclinic.com/criminalization-of-women/)

<sup>91</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. "Criminalization of Women." Schlifer Clinic, 2023, [www.schliferclinic.com/criminalization-of-women/](http://www.schliferclinic.com/criminalization-of-women/)

<sup>92</sup> [https://themanitobalawjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/articles/MLJ\\_46%20%28Published%20Issues%20and%20Article%20Pre-prints%29.6/466-criminalizing.pdf](https://themanitobalawjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/articles/MLJ_46%20%28Published%20Issues%20and%20Article%20Pre-prints%29.6/466-criminalizing.pdf)

<sup>93</sup> [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4619067](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4619067)

The consequences of these access-to-justice challenges are severe and widespread. Without adequate legal representation and support, many survivors struggle to seek help and access their rights: “fighting for their families but [they] must do so while navigating their own trauma, facing their abuser in court, protecting their children, and providing for their households.”<sup>94</sup>

This inability to achieve justice perpetuates the cycle of violence and reinforces the power dynamics that abusers exploit.<sup>95</sup> The lack of access to justice hinders survivors' efforts to rebuild their lives and discourages others from coming forward, knowing the daunting legal hurdles they might face. These consequences are not just individual but also societal, as they contribute to a culture of impunity for abusers<sup>96</sup> and a lack of trust in the justice system among survivors and the wider community.

Addressing access-to-justice challenges for survivors of IPV and GBV is crucial to ensuring that they can seek justice and receive the support needed to rebuild their lives. A comprehensive approach as discussed above should include:

- Evaluation of Mandatory Charging Policies: Reassess policies and environments that contribute to the criminalization of women
- Compensation Model for Survivors: Implement compensation models suggested by the MMIWG and CKW Inquest, including tort and other options in family law
- Foreign divorced spouses often face significant challenges in accessing justice, specifically the opportunity for spousal support available to other spouses in Ontario. We recommend making changes to align this with practices in other provinces and ensure equitable treatment
- Enhanced Resources for ILA Projects: Provide better resources for Independent Legal

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<sup>94</sup> Walters, Carla. "How Trauma-Informed Lawyering Can Empower Victims of Domestic Violence to Take Back Their Power." *Law Journal for Social Justice*, 24 October 2023, [www.lawjournalforsocialjustice.com/2023/10/24/how-trauma-informed-lawyering-can-empower-victims-of-domestic-violence-to-take-back-their-power/](http://www.lawjournalforsocialjustice.com/2023/10/24/how-trauma-informed-lawyering-can-empower-victims-of-domestic-violence-to-take-back-their-power/)

<sup>95</sup> Lanchimba, C., Díaz-Sánchez, J. P., & Velasco, F. "Exploring Factors Influencing Domestic Violence: A Comprehensive Study on Intrafamily Dynamics." *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, vol. 14, 7 Sept. 2023, p. 4, doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2023.1243558. PMID: 37743993; PMID: PMC10513418.

<sup>96</sup> Equality Now. "The Culture of Impunity Needs to Be Addressed." Equality Now, 25 April 2023, [www.equalitynow.org/news\\_and\\_insights/the-culture-of-impunity-needs-to-be-addressed/](http://www.equalitynow.org/news_and_insights/the-culture-of-impunity-needs-to-be-addressed/)

Advice (ILA) projects across the province, and expanding service to include representation, with a focus on marginalized communities

- Tailored Services for Immigrant, Refugee, and Non-Status Women: Ensure services and information are easily accessible in multiple languages for these groups
- Ontario must ensure the availability of comprehensive, wraparound legal services tailored to effectively support survivors of IPV and GBV

Addressing the access-to-justice challenges for survivors of IPV and GBV is crucial to ensuring that they can seek justice and receive the support they need to rebuild their lives. It requires a comprehensive approach that includes revisiting existing policies, enhancing legal support services, and ensuring survivors have the necessary resources to navigate the legal system effectively.

## 6. Inconsistency in Risk Assessment

For almost a decade, the Clinic has been reviewing existing risk assessment frameworks and developing new tools to better serve survivors. We have worked on multiple projects to create risk assessment tools that take into account the complex lived realities of survivors and current understandings of GBV. These tools consider various forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, mental, social/cultural, financial, legal, and spiritual, while also addressing the multiple sources of oppression and systemic barriers that women face.

Between 2021-2022, the Clinic engaged in research and outreach consultations with 597 service providers through national consultation forums, an online survey in both official languages, and knowledge exchange opportunities. The research aimed to understand current risk assessment and safety planning practices, gather feedback on service providers' experiences using these tools, and explore ways to improve them to be trauma-informed, survivor-centered, and intersectional.

The research revealed an “unequal patchwork” of risk assessment and safety planning practices

across Canada, with significant variation in the use and types of formal risk assessment tools. Participants highlighted limitations in existing tools and expressed a need for more holistic, trauma-informed tools adaptable to different service settings. We have observed a critical issue in the sector due to the lack of consistent risk assessments for survivors of gender-based violence. This inconsistency hampers the ability to accurately identify and address the immediate and long-term safety needs of survivors. Without a standardized risk assessment process, there are significant gaps in prioritizing and managing high-risk cases, leaving survivors vulnerable to continued harm and inadequate support. The absence of a uniform approach affects the overall effectiveness of resource allocation and intervention strategies. It is essential to address this issue by implementing consistent risk assessment protocols across the sector to ensure that all survivors receive timely and appropriate support.<sup>97</sup>

Risk assessment tools should be based on evidence-based risk factors, including static and dynamic variables that predict violence, recidivism, and appropriate responses. These tools typically measure outcomes such as predicting future violence, recidivism, the need for intervention, lethality, and preventing or mitigating risk. However, risk assessment is just one part of an ongoing process to address GBV and should be integrated with risk management and safety planning.

Despite advances in research, no risk assessment tool is perfect. There are limitations to their predictive accuracy, and even statistically validated tools cannot guarantee precise predictions of lethality or recidivism. Some high-risk individuals may not re-offend (false positives), while others may. Screening methods, risk assessment tools, risk management strategies, and safety planning should all be seen as complementary processes in preventing GBV.<sup>98</sup> A holistic risk

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<sup>97</sup> Findings from our national research on risk assessment & safety planning, including major finding that there is an "unequal patchwork" when it comes to the use of formal risk assessment tools by service organizations addressing IPV, and that there are significant limitations to existing tools. See 2 research bulletins: <https://www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/RISA-Research-Bulletin-1.pdf> and <https://www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/RISA-Research-Bulletin-2.pdf>

<sup>98</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. "Risk Assessment Approaches." Schlifer Clinic, August 2023, [www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Risk-Assessment-Approaches.pdf](https://www.schliferclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Risk-Assessment-Approaches.pdf)

assessment helps determine the types of interventions which will be effective.<sup>99</sup>

## Proposed Solutions

In response, the Clinic has developed a more holistic tool for service providers launched in 2024 called RISA, but much more funding and support are required to advance organizations' capacity to identify risks of IPV, femicide, and GBV, as well as the capacity of other stakeholders to understand and respond in trauma-informed ways. The RISA Tool is a Risk Identification and Safety Assessment tool specifically developed for front-line service providers working with survivors of GBV or those at risk of violence. The RISA framework is based on three levels of factors that can impact risk and safety: social, institutional, and systemic. It outlines these key factors and the essential circumstances to consider when assessing risk and safety for survivors of GBV.<sup>100</sup>

The RISA Tool is a free, open-source resource that includes a learning hub and an interactive space for service providers. It facilitates a common understanding of risk and safety while emphasizing the importance of intersectionality in the experience of violence. This comprehensive tool supports front-line workers in effectively identifying and addressing the needs of survivors of GBV.

Risk assessment, as part of the RISA framework, can serve as a preventive tool by identifying factors that may lead to escalation or lethality. By understanding and addressing these risk factors, service providers can implement strategies to mitigate risks and prevent further violence. This proactive approach helps ensure timely and appropriate interventions to safeguard survivors and reduce the likelihood of severe outcomes.

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<sup>99</sup> Schrag, Rachel V., Sarah Leat, and Leila Wood. "Everyone is Living in the Same Storm, but Our Boats are All Different: Safety and Safety Planning for Survivors of Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 37, no. 21-22, 2022, pp. NP18318-NP18342. DOI: 10.1177/08862605211062998.

<sup>100</sup> Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. "RISA Framework." Schlifer Clinic, 2023, [www.riseaboverisk.ca/explore-the-tool/#framework](http://www.riseaboverisk.ca/explore-the-tool/#framework)



## 7. Need for Ongoing Consultation Framework

It is essential to have appropriate preparation and consultation methods involving all relevant parties, including women's rights non-governmental organizations working in the field, to implement high-quality legislative and policy measures more likely to be effective in practice. In the examples of best practices that have been presented, establishing appropriate legislation, policy measures, and coordination mechanisms creates a fundamental framework for additional tools, instruments, and measures that ensure a practical response to all forms of violence against women.<sup>101</sup> An ongoing consultation process is so important. The findings from the Mass Casualty Commission and the CKW Inquest highlight the importance of comprehensive preparation and consultation involving all relevant stakeholders, including women's rights NGOs, to enact effective legislative and policy measures against gender-based violence<sup>102 103 104</sup>. The best practices presented emphasize the need for proper legislation, policy measures, and coordination mechanisms as a foundational framework. This framework supports the development of tools and measures that provide practical responses to all forms of violence against women.

For instance, the Mass Casualty Commission released its final report, "Turning the Tide Together," which is organized across seven volumes detailing recommendations, main findings, and lessons learned. The report underscores the necessity of addressing the root causes of violence and investing in a public safety system that involves community engagement and multiple partners working together.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Krizsan, Andrea, and Eniko Pap. "Implementing a Comprehensive and Co-ordinated Approach: An Assessment of Poland's Response to Prevent and Combat Gender-Based Violence." Council of Europe, April 2016, p. 37, [www.rm.coe.int/168064ecd8](http://www.rm.coe.int/168064ecd8).

<sup>102</sup> Mass Casualty Commission. "Turning the Tide Together: Final Report." Mass Casualty Commission, 30 March 2023, [www.masscasualtycommission.ca/final-report/](http://www.masscasualtycommission.ca/final-report/).

<sup>103</sup> Mass Casualty Commission. "Mass Casualty Commission Website." 2023, [www.masscasualtycommission.ca](http://www.masscasualtycommission.ca).

<sup>104</sup> Luke's Place. "CKW Inquest Advocacy Toolkit." Luke's Place, 23 June 2024, [www.lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CKW-Inquest-Advocacy-Toolkit-June-23-2024.pdf](http://www.lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CKW-Inquest-Advocacy-Toolkit-June-23-2024.pdf).

<sup>105</sup> Mass Casualty Commission. "Turning the Tide Together: The Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission." Mass Casualty Commission, 30 March 2023, [www.masscasualtycommission.ca/updates/turning-the-tide-together-the-final-report-of-the-mass-casualty-commission/](http://www.masscasualtycommission.ca/updates/turning-the-tide-together-the-final-report-of-the-mass-casualty-commission/).

In line with these findings, there are numerous organizations dedicated to fighting for gender equality and women's rights, such as UN Women, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), and Womankind Worldwide. These organizations work globally to influence gender policies, support gender justice movements, and advocate for the equitable distribution of wealth and resources.<sup>106</sup>

## Proposed Solutions

Addressing the widespread impact of IPV and GBV requires a multifaceted approach, including legislative action, community engagement, and systemic change. Bill 173 represents a critical legislative step forward, recognizing IPV as an epidemic and underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated action. It's clear that the involvement of women's rights NGOs is crucial in shaping and implementing measures that effectively address violence against women, ensuring that legislative and policy frameworks are not only well-crafted but also practical and enforceable in real-world scenarios.

This bill reflects a global recognition of the issue, aligning with the United Nations' and World Health Organization's characterization of gender-based violence as a widespread and pervasive challenge. The involvement of women's rights NGOs is indispensable in crafting and executing measures that effectively combat violence against women, ensuring that legislative and policy frameworks are not only theoretically sound but also practical and enforceable in real-life situations. Moreover, the emphasis on ongoing engagement and consultation with survivors, community agencies, and stakeholders underscores the collective effort required to address this issue. It is a testament to the understanding that ending gender-based violence is a shared responsibility, necessitating the commitment and collaboration of all sectors of society.

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<sup>106</sup> [25 Organizations Fighting for Gender Equality - Human Rights Careers](#)

## Conclusion

The recognition of IPV and GBV as an epidemic by numerous municipalities in Canada underscores the gravity of the situation. It is a call to action for all stakeholders to unite in creating a society where safety and equality are not just ideals but realities for all. The Clinic's wrap-around and collaborative model, which empowers survivors through practical skills and self-reliance, is a testament to what can be achieved when we work together. As we move forward, it is imperative that we maintain this momentum, ensuring that our legislative and policy frameworks are not only robust but also actionable, with the continued involvement of NGOs, community agencies, and survivors themselves.

It is only through collective resolve and sustained effort that we can hope to eradicate the scourge of gender-based violence. We extend our sincere gratitude to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy for their dedicated efforts. It is our hope that this submission contributes to the formulation of effective and impactful recommendations. Such guidance is essential in the ongoing battle against IPV and GBV within Ontario. We stand committed to supporting initiatives that foster safer communities and uphold the dignity of all individuals.

## For More Information

For more information or clarification please contact:

**Deepa Mattoo B.A, LL.B, MBA, PGD, LSM** (She/her)  
Barrister and Solicitor

Executive Director  
Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic  
489 College Street, Suite 503  
Toronto, ON M6G 1A5

C: 647-278-4744  
T: 647-264-9000