



Preventing Gender-Based Violence

Engaging young women in gender-based violence prevention



The YMCA is working to prevent gender-based violence across Canada.

In Canada, we strive to be an inclusive and open society that welcomes newcomers from all backgrounds. Our diversity is our strength, and we proudly draw upon the backgrounds of all Canadians to help create our own, unique culture.

When it comes to understanding the societal and cultural norms of a new country, the YMCA has partnered with the Government of Canada to ensure newcomers have the information they need to be successful in their new home. Working from a human rights perspective, it's helpful to provide information to newcomers about the history and the major rights gained for people in Canada on the basis of gender and sexual orientation. However, we still have social changes to make to prevent gender-based violence.

According to Statistics Canada, “While violence affects people of all genders, ages, cultures, ethnicities, geographic locations, and socio-economic backgrounds, some populations are more at risk of experiencing violence. This could include women and girls, Indigenous people, LGBTQ2 and gender non-conforming people, those living in northern, rural, and remote communities, people with disabilities, newcomers, children and youth, and seniors.” (Government of Canada, 2017)

The YMCA considers information about prevention and readily-available resources to be important factors in making sure new Canadians have a thorough understanding of what gender-based violence (GBV) is, and how we can work together to prevent it before it happens.

The information in this booklet aims to answer questions around GBV and provides insight into the resources you have available through the YMCA Gender-Based Violence Prevention Project.



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Immigration, Refugees
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Serving as centres of community across Canada, responding to the needs of newcomers is a key part of the YMCA's purpose.

For generations, Canada's YMCAs have been welcoming newcomers and supporting them in building their new lives with a strong framework of programs and a history of successful partnerships with like-minded community agencies and all levels of government. YMCA Immigrant Services provides a variety of programs and outreach services for children, youth, and families as they move to new communities.

With a focus on successful settlement for the whole family, our Immigrant Services programs help people settle into their new homes in Canada and become engaged in healthy, inclusive communities.

What is the YMCA?



What is Gender-Based Violence?

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term used to describe violence perpetrated against someone because of their gender, gender identity, or perceived gender. GBV is a complex social issue with several aspects.

What is the gender-based violence prevention project?

The YMCA gender-based violence prevention project started in September 2017 and is part of YMCA Immigrant Services, funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. The beginning of the project involved researching different organizations and resources in the fields of settlement and GBV and getting input from clients.

The project also seeks to enhance staff and community capacity to respond to and prevent gender-based violence in newcomer communities through resource development, awareness raising and educational tools for recognizing GBV, intervening, and disseminating prevention-based programming.





The ImPowered Girls Conference

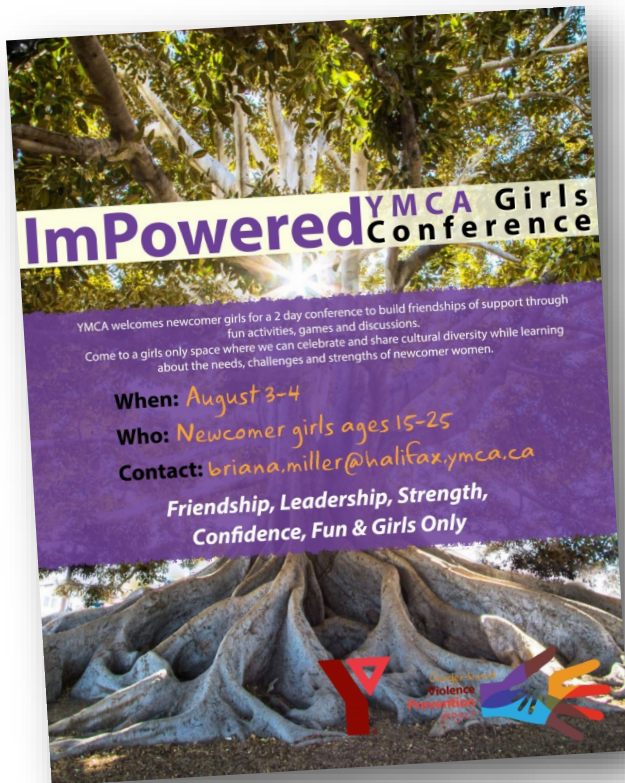
The ImPowered Conference was an overnight Girls Conference which brought 21 newcomer girls together. The aim was to build confidence, share cultures, make friendships and increase their knowledge around gender-based violence prevention in a girls only space.

The purpose of many of these discussions was to enhance teamwork skills as well as build confidence. Workshop topics included:

- ✓ **Balancing cultural identities & values**
- ✓ **What is gender-based violence**
- ✓ **Consent**
- ✓ **Gender equality & stereotypes**
- ✓ **“Good” Girl vs. “Bad” Girl labels**

These themes were approached in ways that encouraged honesty, empowerment and growth among the young women participating which resulted in the exploration of new and thoughtful dialogues.

Pre-Conference Planning



Recruitment:

YMCA staff that already had pre-existing relationships of trust with youth and families called, met in person and discussed concerns. They ensured parents had a sense of confidence regarding conference details. This involved:

- ✓ showing photos of the location
- ✓ providing contact information of all staff
- ✓ ensuring the space was women's only
- ✓ Transparency about all topics in a way that was culturally sensitive

Best Practices

- ✓ Ensure a women's only space, including all people on site e.g. cooks, cleaner etc.
- ✓ Ensure food meets dietary requirements (ex: Halal)
- ✓ Be accessible to youth and parents during day and night for updates
- ✓ Accessible translation available when needed
- ✓ Create opportunities for free time for art, music or playing sports
- ✓ Be mindful that this may be the first time many stay outside of their home overnight
- ✓ Putting girls who speak the same language or share similar religious needs in rooms together can help create more comfort
- ✓ Be flexible to change plans or arrangements
- ✓ Trauma-Informed
- ✓ Anti-Oppressive
- ✓ Cultural Humility
- ✓ Feminist Approach (ex: staff supporting each other)



The Conference Team

The team working at the conference was comprised of all young adult women. All have worked with newcomer girls and have built relationships with families. The team was diverse in education, experience, culture, religion and languages. This helped to promote youth seeing themselves represented in leadership as well as to ensure that cultural/religious sensitivities were met. The team was able to incorporate translation in Arabic and Somali in the facilitation of workshops.



Briana, Coordinator of GBVP, is passionate about social justice. She has experience in facilitation and youth work in addition to working with newcomers in Youth Outreach. She was also the Youth Engagement Coordinator for the NS Sexual Violence Strategy. She believes in supporting youth to amplify their voices on topics that impact them.



Zahra is the Facilitator for the GBVP Project. Zahra has worked in public and private healthcare settings in Uganda, previously, which prompted her to complete her honours in global mental health. Zahra brings both her academic knowledge combined with her deep connection to her own community as a Somali Canadian.



Orit, a former Youth Outreach staff is from Ethiopia. As a Muslim and new comer woman it was hard for her to be involved, in opportunities until she started to go to the YMCA youth programs. She led girls groups in her school for newcomer girls because she knows how important it is to have space to talk freely and be yourself.



Iman brings her passion for youth work and experience working with marginalized youth in different organizations including the YMCA's School Settlement and Youth Outreach Programs. This has given her the ability to bring her frontline work to practice. She also has first hand experience navigating life as a Muslim woman in Canada.

The Sessions

Welcome Activity:

The ImPowered Newcomer girls conference focused on creating a safe and inclusive space that aimed to celebrate cultural and religious backgrounds that ground people in their identities. Part of prevention is creating these spaces where girls can learn how to support each other and build each others confidence and pride. The intersecting challenges of racism and sexism are a reality many newcomer girls face so having a space like this empowers girls.

Introductions were done in the form of leaf cut-outs to symbolize every part of a person's identity. Many girls chose to write countries, religions, languages, hobbies, passions, goals and more. The girls each introduced themselves with their leaf to add to a tree that remained hung up during the whole conference. Girls were reminded that where we come from and our perspectives, understandings and experiences are often drawn from our roots and they may be different from one another.

The girls then worked on creating community standards (group rules) to ensure everyone felt safe and comfortable over the course of the two days.



Workshop:

What is Gender Based Violence?

The purpose was to increase the understanding of what is GBV, explore what that means in their own contexts and begin to discuss what are contributing factors that allow, support and perpetuate this to exist in our communities. The Forum Theatre Video Project* was used as a tool to help connect the definition to real life context for newcomer youth. The video was made by the GBVP Project with other newcomer youth and therefore was strategic to use as it shared more relevant contextual examples by their peers. Space was created for discussions in smaller groups often in their own languages supported by staff and larger group opportunities to ensure the entire group had a shared understanding.



*Video: ymcahfx.ca/gbvp

Participant Responses: What is GBV?

- Family favors boys over girls (in some places baby girls are killed)
- Forced marriages
- Forcing a girl to wear a Hijab or bullying her for it
- Husband controls wife; doesn't let her leave home, have work or other rights
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Cat calling/ Street Harassment
- Not allowing her to go to school
- Blackmailing women who say no to dating
- Men ruining women's reputation as revenge
- Belittling, insulting or comparing her to other women to put her down
- Forcing a women to have a lot of children
- Sharing photos without someone's permission
- Rape
- Hitting Women



What is Gender Based Violence?

Workshop Continued

Participant Responses: What are the contributing factors that support and allow GBV to exist?

- Believing leadership positions are for men only
- Men have more power; physical strength, financial power, decision makers
- Women feel they don't have power or are too weak to be able to speak up
- Blame and judgment only falls on the girl not the boy
- Girls fear of being labeled a trouble maker, fear of stigma and backlash from their own community
- Girls are often blamed for violence that happens to them - victim blaming
- Sexism, Racism, Discrimination
- Movies, Music, Social Media, News
- Men think and know they will never be accountable
- Girls feel no one will help them
- Gender Stereotypes



What is Gender Based Violence?

Workshop Continued

Participant Responses: What are prevention ideas?

- Education and awareness
- Raise boys to respect women and raise girls to be empowered
- Men to teach other men it is wrong
- Families raising their children to respect girls and boys equally
- Find key men who will support women to be leaders
- More consequences by police
- Women support other women
- Teach people racism is wrong

When discussing GBV, it can be overwhelming. By highlighting the contributing factors the girls began to understand small steps focusing on one of these can be taken to create change. By having conversations, raising awareness, empowering women to support one another rather than stigmatize each other, and much more. We can work collectively to shift the social and cultural norms in our community. Gender based violence is everyone's responsibility.



Balancing Cultural Values

Many newcomer girls find it difficult to balance their traditional culture and new culture in Canada. As young girls navigate this, it can often cause tensions and even violence in the family and it is important they know they do not have to leave their culture behind. The activity included art and discussion which allowed youth to draw out both cultures and where they feel they fit. The purpose was to highlight the importance of being grounded in strong values to ensure they know their own boundaries and won't be pressured or influenced in directions in which they aren't comfortable.

The girls really enjoyed discussing their own challenges with this and said this was the workshop that was the most impactful. The staff presented their drawing to the girls and they had very similar values but were from different religions and cultures which allowed for a discussion on uniqueness of individuals and the importance of not judging others.



Self Care

One evening session was focused on self care. This workshop was less structured and was casual, calm and relaxed while girls discussed things they did for self care and also practiced self care together. The girls had the opportunity to make homemade lip balms, decorate self care bags and listen to music together. Creating a space to practice self care together was an important aspect to model.



Gender Stereotypes

The girls discussed stereotypes of girls and boys using acting. Participants were asked to do things "like a girl" then "like a boy" such as kick, throw, play, fight, sit, walk, talk, fight, and more. Each time the girls did "like a girl" it was usually done in a silly, weak or unskilled way. The girls were asked to reflect on why it always seemed "like a girl" was negative. Girls talked about the power and impacts of labeling and were asked to create skits in groups that highlighted gender stereotypes that are harmful to girls and then to re-do the same skit for an ideal world.

This interactive workshop allowed the girls to be expressive through acting, have fun but also highlight gender stereotypes connected to discrimination in their experiences. This also created space for peer led teaching and problem solving by identifying the issues and creating an ideal situation.



Good Girl vs. Bad Girl Labels

This workshop focused on addressing victim blaming, the impacts and how prevalent it can be even between girls. They were asked to identify what society deemed a "good" or a "bad" girl and noticed that many people from different backgrounds had different ideas and that the definition is not universal.



Art Activity

As a closing activity the girls were given different mediums of art to work with to create a piece of art that would symbolize either women empowerment or highlighting something they learned or wanted to share about women's experiences. Some girls chose to create collaborative art pieces, while others used words in poems and phrases.



"We found an image of a girl online but she looked really shy and sad. We decided to make her **strong, confident and proud** of herself."
-Yusra & Marwa



"Look forward with **hope** not backwards with regret. Don't let anybody stop you"
-Rayan-



"Women can do anything we are all strong and **superheroes!**"
-Aya-



"My painting is about how not a lot of girls have **freedom**. Its a girl walking to the moon, there is no where else to go. She is asking herself where should I go? The moon is the answer"
-Hana-



Over the course of the weekend there were different opportunities to use creative ways to express women's empowerment, challenges, cultural celebration and collaborative moments together. Art has been a creative way to make a shared space together. The evening created an opportunity for a talent show that began as karaoke and turned into a beautiful cultural shared dance experience. Girls were sharing traditional dances, dancing to each others music, and creating an empowering, positive women's space that broke down barriers between cultures. This continued to create a sense of cultural pride as well as appreciation for the diversity in the room.



Participant Reflections

*"This event was so important because most of the time girl's opinions and emotions are not considered in society, sometimes even by family which makes us feel that we are alone and should take care of ourselves because no one cares about how you feel. But **everyone cares** about how you should make the society feel... this space for newcomer girls meant really a lot to me because that's the first time in my life when I was asked how I felt and nobody was to judge me for that or what I wanted and not what anyone else wanted. My worth of **respect and attention** just like anyone would like" -Mwamini-*

*"For when I came here I was really shy and not thinking about girls rights or women's rights but now I learned that **we are all equal** and the community should know that too" -Hana-*

*"It helped us to know that each of us have something **unique** and we should **never change ourselves** to be loved".
-Aya-*

*"My message to every girl is to **be strong** and don't be afraid of anything. **Be proud** of yourself and do something for your future" -Rayan-*





For more information, please see Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence:

<https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/violence/index-en.html>

Briana Miller

YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth,
Centre for Immigrant Programs
104-7071 Bayers Rd Halifax NS, B3L 2C2
t: 902-457-6879
Briana.miller@halifax.ymca.ca ymcahfx.ca

ymcahfx.ca/gbvp



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