



Preventing Gender-Based Violence

Engaging Young Men 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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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. This definition of gender-based violence includes these six significant areas:



Violence against women



Sexualized violence



**Intimate partner violence
(which includes teen dating abuse)**



Family violence



Violence against LGBTQ2+ persons



Human trafficking

GBV also includes sexism and discrimination of all types which are at the root of violence.

What is the YMCA 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.

An important part of the GBV prevention project is the education of male youth new to Canada about how to identify and prevent GBV in their lives. As part of the project, the YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth hosted a conference in March 2018 to work with young men about GBV. The conference, an intensive two-day retreat, focused on the topics of male vulnerability, masculinity and rites of passage such as the transition into adulthood. The workshop engaged young newcomers in conversations surrounding healthy masculinity, male vulnerability and consent which is a best practice for GBVP.





The Gender-Based Violence Prevention Project Conference

On March 15th and 16th, 2018, 30 young men gathered on Nova Scotia's south shore for an intensive, two-day program that focused on gender-based violence and its prevention in everyday life.

The conference was an opportunity for young men from diverse backgrounds to discuss their thoughts, feelings and perceptions around sensitive topics in a safe and open space. The goal of this conference was to remove the stigma around conversations that young men typically do not have, and to share experiences and perceptions around what it is like to be a newcomer to Canada. The attendees were able to proactively talk about topics like sexuality, the role of women and men in society, sexual consent, what constitutes gender-based violence, and how men can play a role in prevention.

Through the exercises and conversations, some key themes that emerged from the conference:

- ✓ Identifying and defining gender-based violence
- ✓ Explaining the role of men in gender-based violence prevention
- ✓ Defining consent and what it means
- ✓ The concept of brotherhood and experiences as new Canadians
- ✓ How gender-based violence prevention contributes to a healthy profile

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

Identifying and defining gender-based violence



After introductions, the participants discussed the definition of gender-based violence and what it looks like in the real world. This included concrete examples, and helped provide the participants with a framework for the session. **Gender-based violence was described as violence that happens as a direct result of a person's gender or sexual orientation.** This understanding carried through the weekend, and was a commonly-held definition that resonated across the ten languages in the room.

It was explained that despite each participant's experience with gender-based violence—whether they have been directly involved in some form or have experienced it up close—this retreat would help shape their mindset going forward, with an understanding that GBV can be prevented through education and an ability to identify and prevent it.





The role of men in gender-based violence prevention

Being able to self-identify as men who have a unique and vital role in the prevention of GBV was a key component of the conversations during the conference. The facilitators explained the concept of the “male script”—a set of conventions that men feel they need to live up to or adhere to.

This has been found to be consistent across the world, and contains many rules or norms that males feel they cannot violate. For example, men commonly feel that their script does not allow them to show sensitivity or emotion, and that they must be tough and strong.

Breaking down these gender-based constructs allowed participants to identify that men should be able to break from the script and show emotion, sensitivities and vulnerabilities.

The differences between men and women in sexual interactions was also discussed, allowing the participants a safe space to ask questions, inject thoughts, and share experiences around what is acceptable and unacceptable with intimate partners.

The restrictions and expectations of the male script was a common theme of the conference, and was not just approached through group discussion. The participants engaged in a physical activity where they formed a circle, each holding onto a segment of rope. One by one, the young men climbed onto the rope and walked around the circle, relying on those holding to support them as they travelled around the perimeter. This activity was not only fun, but showed the participants that it is ok to rely on other men for help and support, especially when you need it the most.



Defining consent and what it means

It is important for all young men to have a conversation around the definition of sexual consent, what it means, and how to ensure that you are aware of your partner's feelings and comfort at all times.

This specific theme was explored through open dialogue, and allowed for the group to share their thoughts in a safe and non-judgemental environment. The goal of this portion of the conference was to remove the stigma around sexual interaction in order to inform the participants on what is acceptable behaviour.

The participants were encouraged to share their thoughts on what consent means. After an open conversation, the facilitators were explicit in the definition of consent, and how to ensure it is present in all sexual interactions. The participants learned that consent means an active, uninfluenced agreement by all parties involved in the interaction, and ensuring that partners feel safe during sexual activity. This conversation allowed the participants to ask questions and advice on a topic they had rarely discussed previously.

No matter an individual's background or upbringing, a conversation about sexual consent is vital in preventing GBV. Having conversations early about how to identify what is acceptable and what is not during times of intimacy is a key component towards ensuring GBV does not happen.





The concept of brotherhood and experiences as new Canadians

Leaving your home and coming to a new country is not easy. It has a long list of challenges that include adjusting to a different culture, learning a new language and making new friends. In a group of young men where the 30 participants were from 10 different countries, everybody was able to connect despite their diverse backgrounds through their shared journey as new Canadians.

A strong theme of the retreat was brotherhood. While there was plenty of fun and excitement in the social aspects of the two days, the themes of the conference were able to show the participants that they can also rely on each other in ways they may not have otherwise. This includes having conversations around GBV, asking for help when needed, and knowing that they have each other's support, even after they left.

Understanding and preventing GBV is not just an important piece of one's moral compass, but it is a pillar of living a healthy and rewarding lifestyle.

GBV prevention leads to healthier relationships, a stronger sense of self, higher confidence and self-esteem, and a more fulsome understanding of the role others play in society.

This topic was explored many ways throughout the conference, but specifically through an exercise where participants had to identify a hero of theirs who was a man. After saying who their male hero was, the participants were asked to explain why. The same reasons came up time and time again—respectful, understanding, a teacher, hard-working, compassionate. These are all values that are universally appreciated and contribute towards a lifestyle that works to prevent gender-based violence when it is identified.

The session ended with a goal—continuing the conversation and making sure men are productive partners in forwarding the dialogue around gender-based violence prevention wherever they go.

The session was a demonstration of the commitment made by the YMCA and partners to ensure that new Canadians from any and all backgrounds are provided with the necessary resources to succeed, learn and grow in their new home.

How gender-based violence prevention contributes to a healthy profile





Youth Reflections

When David found out about the conference through his involvement with the YMCA, he jumped at the opportunity. He was excited to be able to further connect with friends he has met through the program, and meet some new faces while discussing topics that are important for a 15-year-old entering high school next year. **“I wanted to talk about masculinity and what it means. I think it’s a topic that I’m comfortable talking about, and I wanted to share my experiences with others”** said David, who came to Canada from Afghanistan four years ago. “I learned about relationships, and the most interesting part was to share stories and experiences around relationships and normalize them to make sure as guys, we act in responsible and respectful ways always.”

Ahmed came to Canada 2 years ago from Iraq, and he was interested to learn about things he never had the opportunity to talk through previously. “These conversations have helped me, and maybe I can use them to help others if they have problems or questions on the same topics. The best thing to do is to share knowledge, not just keep it for yourself, so I’m happy to take it back.” When it comes to the most interesting part of the conference, Ahmed pointed towards the pre-conceived notions of what it means to be a man. **“The concept of a man—how he should be tough, strong, nice looking, not show emotion—this was interesting to challenge my thoughts and understand the role of a man within the concept of gender-based violence.”**

Khaled is 20 years old from Syria, and wanted to join a number of his friends who were participating in the conference. “It was a good opportunity to spend a couple of days with friends here, but the activities we did were very interesting.” Khaled expressed that he learned more than he expected when he came. **“I learned that we have to make a connection between boys, growth, and their role in gender-based violence. As men, we need to be more understanding of these dynamics.”** Khaled indicated that he thought the most interesting part was to normalize conversations that he and his friends or peers typically wouldn’t have. “It makes it more normal, and it makes people more comfortable to talk about these types of things which are really important.”

Khaled also reflected on the opportunity provided by going to the conference, one that was a unique chance for many of the participants. **“A lot of us did not have the opportunity to learn about these things before coming here, so it’s good to educate ourselves and bring these lessons back with us.”**

When reflecting on their experience, David, Ahmed and Khaled were able to point to clear and direct instances where their participation has provided lessons and knowledge that will allow them to identify, prevent and talk about gender-based violence going forward.



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

<http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/violence/strategy-strategie/fs-fi-en.html>

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