



Connectivity and the impact of VAW among Newcomer Women in BC

Studies have shown that violence against newcomer women, especially those a part of visible minorities, is more prevalent than non-newcomer women (Mahapatra & Rai, 2019; Henry et al., 2018; Raj & Silverman, 2002).

The causes and consequences of violence against newcomer women can be attributed to a multitude of challenges. Newcomer women face obstacles such as “being in a new country, isolation from immediate family members and relatives, lack of support systems, language barriers, limited awareness of legal and other systems in the host country, fear of exclusion from their own community, [...] threats of deportation, fear of divorce, [and] economic dependence” (Mahapatra & Rai, 2019). Additionally, they are burdened with the systemic inequality and oppression that comes with being a visible minority in Canada. It is important to note that these barriers are not inherently exclusive to newcomer women, but compounded when compared to non- newcomer women.

***Newcomer women** is an umbrella term for women who have come to Canada under various legal statutes. This includes immigrant, migrant worker, refugee, international students, and non-status women.*

Role of connectivity in Violence against Newcomer Women

TFGBV has become a prevalent and overlooked form of violence that affects newcomer women. Studies have shown that perpetrators, who understand how essential connectivity is, manipulate technology to abuse (Mahapatra & Rai, 2019). Newcomer women are more susceptible because perpetrators use women’s “immigration status, geographical isolation from families and friends, as well as their ethnic or religious backgrounds” to evoke fear, cut supportive ties, and inflict abuse (Henry et al., 2021). When newcomer women do try to seek support in informal ways, barriers (i.e., “language barriers, cultural bias from support services, lack of financial resources, lack of trust in state institutions, and additional challenges with justice and migration systems”) prevent immediate justice (Henry et al., 2021). For example, in



a qualitative Australian study, a stakeholder stressed that a photo of them without their hijab would not be considered as image-based sexual abuse due to the legal system and cultural hegemony of Australia - which is strikingly similar to the system and culture in Canada (Henry et al., 2021). This would prevent newcomer women from addressing the violence by reaching out and accessing support. Another example of these barriers lies with Western perceptions of violence against women. As newcomer women often “experience domestic violence perpetrated by extended family members, including relatives overseas” (Mahapatra & Rai, 2019), it contrasts with Western notions of violence against women often refer to as the abuser as the intimate partner. As a result, newcomer women may feel anti-violence support or legal systems will misunderstand or minimize the abuse.

Beyond the manipulation of connectivity, there comes a problem with its absence or limitation. Newcomer women – like most people, rely on technology and digital spheres for everyday essential tasks. From information to connection, access to the internet and devices is critical every day. However, in addition to common necessities of technology, newcomer women tend to rely on it more in response to the obstacles they face; in other words, access and engagement with technology become vital for seeking support. In fact, studies have shown that technology “[is] used as a way to extend their social life and ensure [newcomer women] had social interaction beyond the abuse of their spouses” in which the support often means addressing the violence they experience (Mahapatra & Rai, 2019). Simply, the most meaningful support came from friends and family within their inner circles which stresses how quintessential technology is for these women. (Mahapatra & Rai, 2019). Violence against newcomer women increases when this technology is inaccessible. The lack of connectivity further increases the digital divide of newcomer women in BC as an additional form of systematic marginalization is present as their connection to personal and anti-violence support is threatened. As a result, newcomer women struggle unfairly with establishing and maintaining meaningful connectivity. Existing digital divides restrict or limit meaningful connectivity to opportunities, support, and engagement.

Secondly, the presence of technology can be a concern when it is manipulated and misused by abusers. When TFGBV occurs, newcomer women often are isolated from the support that they need to escape violence. Experiencing TFGBV, such as having their technology use being minimized or having devices being tracked or monitored combined with limited structural connectivity is now two barriers for women to seek support.



How to support newcomer women facing TFGBV

Newcomer women benefit when the digital divide diminishes, meaningful connectivity is prioritized, and barriers to reach out for support are reduced. This translates into two main focuses: increasing connectivity and decreasing barriers.

Recommendations to increase connectivity and decrease the digital divide for newcomer women:

- **Access to affordable devices and plans:** newcomer women may need a safety device to communicate with and access information. . Additionally, newcomer women may also need affordable internet, wireless cell phones, and data plans to maintain their usage to ensure they can access emergency services when their safety is at risk.
- **Access to affordable devices and plans for anti-violence programs:** As anti-violence programs are essential for women experiencing violence, there needs to be safe agency owned devices that ensure workers can provide the most confidential services possible.
- **Sufficient infrastructure** (broadband, satellite, coverage, etc.) is essential for newcomer women who reside in rural and remote areas. In some communities, not having cell phone towers or having sufficient broadband and download speed can prohibit newcomer women from accessing anti-violence support services.
- **Digital Privacy:** newcomer women need to be informed on digital privacy (e.g., how to install and change passcodes, complete safe searches, deleting or blocking messages or contacts, how to screengrab evidence) to ensure safe and secure tech use. Additionally, it may allow women to reduce the impacts of TFGBV as they can change passwords, block contacts, and collect evidence for court matters.
- **Digital Literacy** (e.g., how to update settings, change language preferences, manage online accounts, differentiate credible information online, etc.) is a necessity as newcomer women deserve the ability to confidently maximize their usage of technology. Additionally, as COVID -19 has pushed many services online, digital knowledge ensures newcomers can seek anti-violence support when needed; whether

“We can’t just give out devices, there needs to be digital literacy, financial security, legal support to make a real change” – B.C. Anti-violence worker



it's filling out virtual forms to scheduling video counselling sessions, this fluency will aid women.

Recommendations to reduce barriers for newcomer women seeking anti-violence support:

- **Address legal systems and laws** that prevent justice and illegitimate newcomer women's abuse. This includes consistent, victim centered and updated cyber laws, creating safe ways to [preserve evidence](#) that ensure women are not charged, affordable legal aid, and reducing unnecessary paperwork that systemically overwhelms newcomers.
- **Affordable and accessible language education:** Steps are needed to ensure language courses are welcome to all which can include providing low-cost childcare for mothers enrolling, transportation accommodations or reimbursements, day and evening courses for working mothers, etc.
- **Increase digital literacy:** Provide free courses, sessions, information sheets in anti-violence programs.
- **Translated material and translators in anti-violence programs:** This means meaningful translations that evoke the same tone and message. This should also extend to newcomer women with disabilities such as those hard of hearing in which various sign languages should be accommodated.
- **Information on newcomer women's rights and freedoms in BC:** This can be done by the creation of posters, info sheets, or courses provided by anti-violence programs with the appropriate level of government financial support.
- **Cultural sensitivity training** for frontline workers, law enforcement, and legal advocates who support newcomer women experiencing violence.

Importantly, these recommendations are not for individuals or underfunded anti-violence programs to achieve on their own. Properly funded partnerships with government, legal societies, internet and mobile providers as well as newcomer organizations **must** be in place. Newcomer women will begin to feel supported when holistic and collaborative

"A one size solution does not work; instead, we need cultural awareness, research, funding, and education for all our newcomer women." - B.C. Anti-violence worker



approaches and efforts are made on all fronts to ensure the fulfillment of all - or any - recommendations.

Technology Safety Project

This document is part of a larger report “[Connectivity and Violence against Women in British Columbia: TFGBV, barriers, impacts, and recommendations](#)” about connectivity and violence against women in BC. We encourage you to read to full report for a deeper analysis of Connectivity and Violence against Women in BC.

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For more information about BCSTH’s Technology Safety project, <https://bcsth.ca/projects/technology-safety/>



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