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16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

November 25-December 10, 2025

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What is the 16 Days of Activism Campaign?

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international campaign that begins on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and ends on December 10, Human Rights Day. It was started at the inaugural Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991 and is one of the largest organizing strategies in the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence around the world.

During the 16 Days, Canada observes the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6. This marks the anniversary of the École Polytechnique massacre (also known as the Montreal Massacre). On this day, we remember the 14 women who were murdered simply because they were women. The École Polytechnique massacre is an example of the deadly impacts of gender-based violence and anti-feminist sentiments.

WE REMEMBER

the victims of the 1989 École Polytechnique massacre:

Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, and Annie Turcotte.

Commemorative Dates

November 25: International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

November 29: International Women Human Rights Defenders Day

December 3: International Day of Persons with Disabilities

December 6: National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women

December 10: International Human Rights Day

About Gender-Based Violence

"Everyone has the right to live free from violence. However, many people in Canada continue to face violence every day because of their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender. This is referred to as a gender-based violence (GBV) and it is a violation of human rights... GBV is not limited to physical violence. It can include any word, action, or attempt to degrade, control, humiliate, intimidate, coerce, deprive, threaten, or harm another person. Neglect, discrimination, and harassment can also be forms of GBV" (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2025).

Defining Gender-Based Violence

"Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms. The term is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence" (UN Women).

Gender-Based Violence Takes Many Forms:

- domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV)
- sexual harassment or assault
- child marriage
- psychological or emotional abuse
- human trafficking
- financial/economic abuse
- stalking
- femicide
- female genital cutting/mutilation
- online/digital violence

In Canada,

Indigenous women and girls, women with dis-abilities, newcomers, youth, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and non-binary individuals, and those living in rural or remote communities are dis-proportionately impacted by gender-based violence (Government of Canada, 2024).

Terms to Know

Colonialism

"The attempted or actual imposition of policies, laws, the economies, cultures or systems, and institutions put in place by settler governments to support and continue the occupation of Indigenous territories, the subjugation of Indigenous nations, and the resulting internalized and externalized thought patterns that support this occupation and subjugation" (National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, 2017).

Consent

Defined in the Criminal Code as the voluntary agreement to engage in the sexual activity in question at the time the activity takes place. This means that all parties must actively, willingly, and continuously give consent to the sexual activity. Consent cannot be assumed or implied, and an unconscious person is not capable of giving consent" (Government of Canada, 2023).

Incel

Incel is defined by Oxford Languages as "a member of an online community of young men who consider themselves unable to attract women sexually, typically associated with views that are hostile toward women and men who are sexually active." It is used to refer to someone (usually a person who identifies as a man) who is "involuntarily celibate" (Beauchamp, 2019). Incel culture is often linked with radicalized young men, several of whom have been motivated to commit acts of violence or encourage others to do so (Halls, 2018). Two examples close to home are the Toronto van attack in 2018 and the stabbing at a massage parlour in Toronto in 2020.

Terms to Know

Intersectionality

"Intersectional approaches recognize that every person's identity is made up of multiple identity categories such as (but not limited to) ability, attraction, body size, citizenship, class, creed, ethnicity, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion. The ways a person may experience systemic privilege and oppression are affected by the intersection of these identity categories, depending on how they are valued by social institutions" (Government of Canada, 2023). Intersectionality was a term coined by lawyer and professor Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw in a breakthrough paper around anti-racism and identity politics. Crenshaw describes how "intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects" (Crenshaw, 1989).

Femicide

Femicide refers to the intentional murder of women because they are women, but may be defined more broadly to include any killings of women or girls. Femicide differs from male homicide in specific ways. For example, most cases of femicide are committed by partners or ex-partners, and involve ongoing abuse in the home, threats or intimidation, sexual violence or situations where women have less power or fewer resources than their partner" (UN Women).

2SLGBTQQIA+

This term has and will continue to evolve as more people feel safe to openly express their gender and sexual identities. The acronym stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual. The '+' is inclusive of all other identities, including pansexual and non-binary.

Violence Against Indigenous Women & Girls

Source: Mike McArthur/CBC

Gender-based violence has a disproportionate impact on Indigenous women and girls in Canada. From 2009 to 2021, the homicide rate against First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women and girls was six times higher than the rate among their non-Indigenous counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2023). Indigenous women are also more likely to be victims of sexual assault: more than four in ten (43%) Indigenous women have been sexually assaulted since the age of 15, compared to 30% of all women in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2020).

"INDIGENOUS WOMEN, GIRLS, AND 2SLGBTQQIA PEOPLE LIVE WITH AN ALMOST CONSTANT THREAT TO THEIR PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL SECURITY." -National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls

In 2022, 56% of Indigenous women have experienced physical assault, while 46% have experienced sexual assault. In comparison, about a third of non-Indigenous women have experienced physical assault (34%) or sexual assault (33%) in their lifetime (Heidinger, 2022). Indigenous women are also nearly three times more likely to experience intimate partner violence compared to non-Indigenous women (Heidinger, 2022). While Indigenous women account for about 5% of all women in Canada, they make up about 26% of all women killed by an intimate partner in 2022 (Government of Canada, 2024). Indigenous women face unique barriers to reporting violence or seeking help afterward, including a lack of access to culturally appropriate resources, inaccessibility of support services, a general distrust of law enforcement and a perceived lack of confidentiality in the justice system (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). When justice systems fail to respond adequately to violence, trust in institutions is eroded, and barriers to reporting crimes increase.

Violence Against Indigenous Women & Girls

Violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals is a systemic, national crisis that is rooted in colonial laws and practices. The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls outlines four pathways that maintain colonial violence:

Source: Spencer Colby/The Canadian Press

- Historical, multigenerational, and intergenerational trauma;
- Social and economic marginalization;
- Maintaining the status quo and institutional lack of will; and
- Ignoring the agency and expertise of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people (National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019)

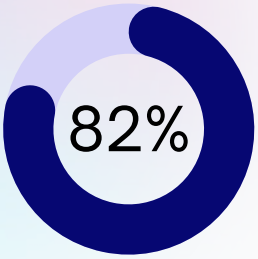
As shared by National Inquiry Expert Witness Josie Nepinak, Executive Director of Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society in Calgary:

"Violence for Indigenous women is a result of colonization, and the whole experience around colonization and the dispossession of our sacred ways, the dispossession of our grandmothers and the dispossession of our Elders. And it is manifested through oppressive policies such as the Indian Act for First Nations women, and it is manifested through the residential school by killing the Indian in the child and killing the spirit of the child. And it is manifested in those abuses that we have suffered through, whether it's being placed in a dark room or being told that we're savages or being told that we cannot speak our language" (National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

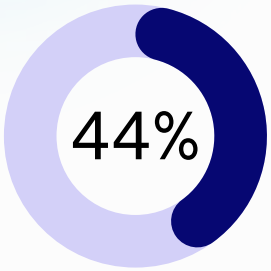
Violence Against Women in Politics

Violence against women in politics (VAW-P) is a form of gender-based violence that remains a serious problem in Canada and around the world. While politicians of all backgrounds and identities are facing increasing aggression— particularly on social media— women, Indigenous people, members of 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities, and racialized individuals are more frequently subjected to identity-focused attacks. These attacks are often graphic in sexuality, gender, and race-based insults and focus on physical appearances. This violence can have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of women in politics (Raney et al., 2019).

A 2016 GLOBAL SURVEY FOUND:



82% of women parliamentarians experienced psychological violence.



Among them, 44% received threats of death, rape, beatings, or kidnapping.

"IF YOU'RE A WOMAN...EXPERIENCING NEGATIVITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA, THAT NEGATIVITY BY FAR AND AWAY TARGETS YOUR SOCIAL IDENTITY, IN A WAY THAT'S NOT THE CASE FOR WHITE MEN...IT'S NOT JUST GENERAL NEGATIVITY ABOUT NOT LIKING THEIR POLITICAL POSITION, IT'S NOT LIKING THEM BECAUSE THEY ARE WOMEN OR BECAUSE THEY ARE RACIALIZED WOMEN."

-Erin Tolley, Canada Research Chair in Gender, Race, and Inclusive Politics

Violence Against Women in Politics

VAW-P has broader consequences as well: “While violence in politics is usually directed at a specific person, its implications extend beyond those targets, serving to frighten and deter other politically active women from engaging in politics. It also communicates to the broader society that women generally do not belong in public life” (Raney et al., 2019). By signaling that women are not welcome in politics, VAW-P is a key reason why women—racialized and Indigenous women in particular—are still under-represented at all levels of government.

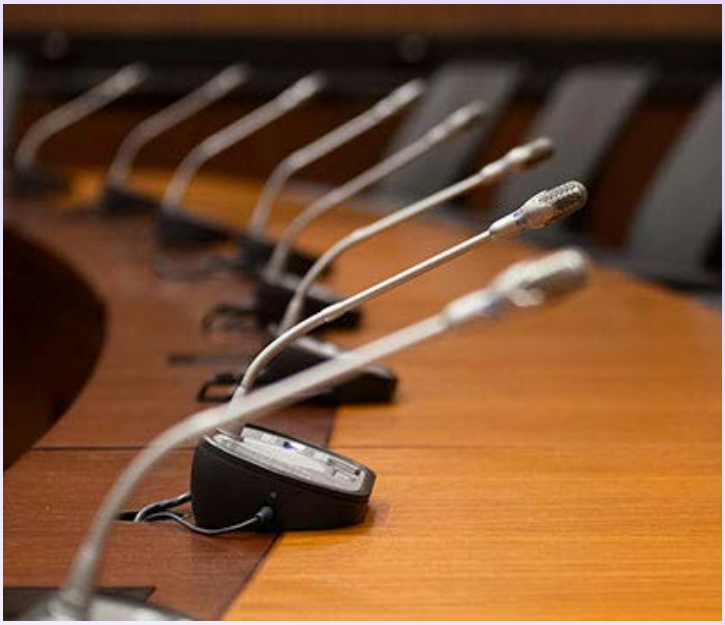


Photo: © House of Commons Canada

“GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN ALL ITS FORMS HAS A DETRIMENTAL IMPACT ON DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN CANADA... WHEN WOMEN ARE FORCED TO LEAVE POLITICS IN ORDER TO SAFEGUARD THEIR OWN WELL-BEING AND SAFETY, IT REDUCES THEIR OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE THEIR VOICES, OPINIONS, AND IDENTITIES HEARD AND REFLECTED IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS” (COLLIER & RANEY, P.288, 2024).

In June 2024, The Canadian Association of Feminist Politicians launched “a parliamentarian-led initiative to call for improvements to our workplace with respect to harassment and civility.” They created a pledge and asked MPs to sign it, to commit to calling out harassment and abuse when they see or experience it and support women in office.

CFUW is also encouraging our Clubs, members, and allies to write to your local representatives to urge them to stand against violence and harassment of women in politics and to promote and practice greater civility.

Femicide in Canada

"Femicide which refers to the sex/gender-related killings of women and girls is recognized as the most extreme form of violence on a continuum of male violence and discrimination against women and girls. However, discussions continue globally as to how femicide should be defined, why and how it is distinct from other homicides, and how these differences can be measured to better identify sex/gender-related killings of women and girls." (Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, n.d)

Sex/gender-related motives and indicators include:

- **Women and girls killed by intimate partners**
- **Women and girls killed by family members**
- **Previous record of harassment/violence**
- **Illegal deprivation of her liberty**
- **Use of force and/or mutilation**
- **Body disposed of in a public space**
- **Sexual violence was committed before and/or after the femicide**
- **Victim was working in the sex industry**
- **Hate crime motivated by bias against women or girls**
- **Victims of forms of illegal exploitation**

Women and girls are being killed in ways that differ from other forms of homicides. (Femicide Canada, n.d). Accordingly, any government response should appropriately address the nuances of femicide. As femicide is recognized as the most extreme form of discrimination against women and girls, the government's response should also "address the distinct motivations and patterns involved in male violence against women and girls, acts which are deeply rooted in sex/gender inequality and misogyny" (Femicide Canada, n.d). Governments at all levels in Canada should be encouraged to make every effort to address the sex/gender inequality and misogyny present in society. Unfortunately, "current data available in Canada do not allow for an analysis of the underlying sociocultural or systemic factors and are instead limited to individual and incident characteristics" (Sutton, 2023).

"IN 2018, THE UNITED NATIONS REPORTED ON THE FINDINGS OF A GLOBAL STUDY, STATING "HOME IS THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACE FOR WOMEN." CANADIAN DATA REINFORCE THIS FINDING. IN THE 5 YEARS FROM 2016 TO 2020, MORE THAN 50% OF VICTIMS OF FEMICIDE IN CANADA WERE MURDERED AT HOME, AND 83%–90% WERE MOTHERS"

(Bradley et. al, 2021, pE1844)

Femicide in Canada

Statistical Data:

- The 2024 #CallItFemicide Report finds that 187 women and girls were violently killed in Canada in 2024, involving 155 primary or sole male accused where accused identified.
- In Canada, of solved homicides that occurred in 2021, almost three quarters (72%) of women and girls were killed by an intimate partner or a family member (David & Jaffray, 2022). In comparison, men are most often killed by someone with whom they share a more distant relationship (e.g., an acquaintance, friend, stranger) (Sutton, 2023).
- In 2021, the territories recorded the highest rate of gender-related homicide of women and girls (3.20 per 100,000 women and girls) and, for the provinces, the highest rate was in Saskatchewan (1.03), followed by Manitoba (0.72) and Alberta (0.68). (Sutton, 2023)
- In 2021, the rate of gender-related homicide in Canada was more than 2.5 times greater in rural areas compared to urban areas (1.13 versus 0.44 per 100,000 women and girls) (Sutton, 2023)
- Between 2011 and 2021, of all gender-related homicides of women and girls, the largest proportion died by stabbing (34%). About four times as many victims of gender-related homicide died of strangulation, smothering or drowning (17%) compared to victims of non-gender-related homicides (4%). (Sutton, 2023)
- One-third (32%) of gender-related homicides of women and girls were reported by police as motivated primarily by the accused's anger, frustration or despair, almost triple the proportion found among non-gender-related homicides (12%) (Sutton, 2023)
- Data between 2011 and 2021 show that of all gender-related homicides of women and girls, 21% (n=233) of victims were Indigenous, despite comprising only 5% of the female population in Canada in 2021. (Sutton, 2023)
- Nearly half of murdered women present to health care for an IPV-related injury 2 years before their death, which suggests that physicians have an opportunity to identify and support those at risk (Bradley et. al, 2021).

16 Ways to Take Action

1 Write to your city's Mayor urging them to light City Hall/public buildings in purple or orange throughout the 16 Days to raise awareness about gender-based violence. Download a template letter for CFUW Clubs here.

2 Donate to or volunteer at a women's shelter, sexual assault or crisis centre, or an Indigenous women's support centre in your community.

3 Read the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls for Justice here and consider how you can act on them.

4 Wear purple on November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, to raise awareness.

5 Call out gendered violence when you see it: counter victim-blaming and the idea that it is women and girls' responsibility to avoid "dangerous" situations. Read this resource on "How to be an Active Bystander in 6 Steps."

6 Wear a white ribbon and plan or attend a vigil on December 6, National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

7 Write a letter to your representatives urging them to stand against violence against women, harassment, and toxicity in politics. Download a template letter here.

8 Write an op-ed or letter to the editor in your local media outlet to raise awareness about gender-based violence and ways to combat it.

16 Ways to Take Action

9 Support survivors of gender-based violence. Tell them “I believe you” and “this is not your fault.” Learn more about identifying the signs of relationship abuse and how you can help here. Learn about the hand “Signal for Help" that survivors can use to subtly indicate they are in need of help.

10 Reach out to Indigenous community partners about hanging red dresses in your area to raise awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, as a part of the REDress Project.

11 Hang posters raising awareness about gender-based violence and support services in your community.

12 Meet with your MP to express your concerns about gun violence in Canada and affirm your support for strict gun control measures.

13 Encourage women to get involved with politics and support them as candidates. Call out and report misogynistic, racist, and homophobic comments made towards women in politics, and commit to civility in your interactions with politicians and candidates.

14 Host kitchen table talks with your friends or CFUW Club members to discuss gender-based violence issues, how they affect your local community, and what you can do to support survivors and end the violence.

15 Organize webinars, panel discussions, public forums, speakers, or film screenings on topics related to gender-based violence.

16 Share this 16 Days of Activism package and CFUW’s and other organizations’ social media posts, or create and post your own.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

BOOKS

"Unbroken" by Angela Sterritt
"Know My Name: A Memoir" by Chanel Miller
"Believing: Our Thirty-Year Journey to End Gender Violence" by Anita Hill
"For the Love of Men: From Toxic to a More Mindful Masculinity" by Liz Plank
"The Break" by Katherena Vermette
"Nobody's Victim: Fighting Psychos, Stalkers, Pervs, and Trolls" by Carrie Goldberg
"The Power of Women: A Doctor's Journey of Hope and Healing" by Denis Mukwege
"Highway of Tears" by Jessica McDiarmid

FILMS/VIDEOS/PODCASTS

"The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open" by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers and Kathleen Hepburn
"A Comprehensive Guide to Campus Gender-Based Violence Complaints" by Courage to Act
"The 'Victim' Onscreen and How She's Been Misrepresented" by The Take
"Welcome to Paradise" by Anna Maria Tremonti
"Missing and Murdered" by CBC

REPORTS

"Preventing Intimate Partner Violence in Two-Spirit, Nonbinary, and Trans Communities and Supporting Survivors" by the TransFormed Project
"Rooting Resilience: Women, Girls, and Non-Binary People With Disabilities and the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence" by Dr. Jihan Abbas, DisAbled Women's Network of Canada
Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
Elect Her: A Roadmap for Improving the Representation of Women in Canadian Politics; Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Crisis Resources

CANADA

- Assaulted Women's Helpline: Phone: 1-866-863-0511; Text: #SAFE (#7233)
- Shelter Safe (to find a shelter near you)
- Hope for Wellness (for Indigenous people): Phone: 1-855-242-3310
- iHEAL app

ALBERTA

- Family Violence Info Line: Phone: 310-1818
- Alberta's One Line for Sexual Violence: Phone/Text: 1-866-403-8000

BRITISH COLUMBIA

- Victim Link BC: Phone: 1-800-563-0808

MANITOBA

- Domestic Violence Crisis Line, Family Violence Prevention Program: Phone: 1-877-977-0007

NEW BRUNSWICK

- CHIMO Helpline: Phone: 1-800-667-5005

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

- End Sexual Violence Centre: Phone: 1-800-726-2743

NOVA SCOTIA

- Transition House Association of Nova Scotia
- Neighbour Friends and Family Line (Provincial Government): Phone: 1-855-225-0220

ONTARIO

- Ontario Victim Support Line: Phone: 1-888-579-2888
- Phone: 211
- Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres
- Femaide (Francophone survivors): Phone/Text: 1-877-336-2433

PEI

- PEI Family Violence Prevention Services Inc.: Phone: 1-800-240-9894

QUEBEC

- SOS violence conjugale: Phone: 1-800-363-9010; Text: 438-601-1211; Online chat: https://www.resourceconnect.com/sosvc/chat
- Sexual Violence Helpline: Phone: 1-888-933-9007

SASKATCHEWAN

- Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan
- Phone/Text: 211

See further services here.

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The City of Ottawa is located on the unceded and traditional territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation.

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