

Committee for the Status of Women and Human Rights (CSWHR)

November 2020

Issues of Note

(Note: Information appearing below may have been taken verbatim from sources. The author in no way intends these to represent original work.)

1. Human Rights Watch

Eagerly awaiting publication of 2021 Human Rights Watch (which covers 2020).

The 2020 Report (for 2019) identified kudos and challenges for Canada:

“The Trudeau government has been a vocal advocate for a pluralistic society that respects the rights of immigrants, people with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, and other minorities. Despite these efforts, Canada continues to struggle to address longstanding human rights challenges, including wide-ranging abuses against Indigenous peoples, the continued confinement of immigration detainees in jails, and a prison law that does not rule out prolonged solitary confinement. Canada also grapples with serious human rights issues relating to the overseas operations of Canadian extractive companies, and persistent exports of military equipment to countries with a record of human rights violations.”

Extractive Companies in Ontario

Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2020, 10am On this day, the Ontario Superior Court heard an appeal, by Hudbay Minerals, of a January 2020 decision strongly in favour of the 11 of the Q’eqchi’ plaintiffs, victims of the 2007 gang-rapes linked to Hudbay Minerals (then Skye Resources).

Also from Human Rights Watch

Read the Canadian Report from Human Rights Watch entitled: My Fear Is Losing Everything. The Climate Crisis and First Nations Right to Food. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/21/my-fear-losing-everything/climate-crisis-and-first-nations-right-food-canada> . Almost 51% of Canada’s First Nation on-reserve are food insecure.

2. Report from Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC)

Bias in Housing and Housing Security

On National Housing Day, November 22, 2020, the OHRC called on the Province to amend Ontario’s Building Code Regulation to require all units in new construction or major renovation of multi-unit residences to fully meet universal accessibility standards. The OHRC also called on municipalities to prioritize universal design construction, consistent with their obligations under the *Code*. Government and housing providers must work together to make sure that new developments are fully inclusive.

Even prior to the onset of the pandemic, securing safe, accessible, and affordable housing had been a serious concern for people with disabilities, seniors, Indigenous peoples, Black communities, low-income people, and other marginalized groups in Ontario. For some, the pandemic has intensified the desperation to find adequate housing; for others, it has meant exile to the streets. Recent research from the Wellesley Institute, a policy and research organization that works to improve health equity, shows that there are disproportionately higher rates of evictions in Black neighbourhoods and that they are increasing. According to the Wellesley report, low-income neighbourhoods where the majority of the residents are Black have been among the worst hit by COVID-19. Black people account for 23 per cent of the COVID-19 cases in Toronto, even though they make up less than nine per cent of the total population. Concerningly (sic), the report further highlights the fact that Black people have experienced the worst eviction-filing rates, signalling systemic racial bias in evictions.

If we can shift our focus to recognizing that safe, accessible, and affordable housing is an equity imperative rather than just a financial commodity, we can begin to protect those who are most vulnerable and shelter them from the risks of wrongful evictions —and this pandemic.

OHRC on Right to Read

Reading is a fundamental skill that students must have to navigate their school experience and their later lives. Students with reading disabilities have the right to learn to read. Yet, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) is concerned that Ontario's public education system may be failing to meet the needs of students with reading disabilities (dyslexia and other learning disabilities that affect reading).

On October 3, 2019, the OHRC announced a public inquiry into potential human rights issues that affect students with reading disabilities in Ontario's public education system. Launched on October 26, 2020, the OHRC debuted a new video that provides a snapshot of the progress of Right to Read, the OHRC's public inquiry into human rights issues affecting students with reading disabilities in Ontario's public education system. The video also features the real-life experiences of students and parents, who attended public sessions across Ontario in the past year, and artwork submitted by students to the inquiry. A final report with findings and recommendations is planned for Spring 2021.

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/right-read-public-inquiry-on-reading-disabilities>

For a half hour updated learning module on your rights and obligations, go to:
www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/media/html/hr101ed3_en-temp/story.html.

Call It Out is a half hour learning module from Ontario Human Rights on racism. Go to:
www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/media/html/call-it-out_en/index.html.

Do you have questions about Ontario Human Rights and COVID-19? Is it your right to visit someone in a residential institution during Covid? Can retailers refuse cash? Go to
http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/covid-19-and-ontario%E2%80%99s-human-rights-code-%E2%80%93-questions-and-answers.

3. Hate Crimes

Action

The Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police's (OACP) Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee has produced a *Hate/Bias Crime: A Review of Policies, Practices, and Challenges* document as a resource for police services across Ontario. The document, which builds on original resource by Dr. Timothy Bryan of Dalhousie University, aims to assist police services by providing information and practical resources to address challenges related to the investigation and frontline policing of hate/bias crimes and to provide strategies for more effective interventions to prevent their occurrence.

Rise in Hate Crimes as a result of US Elections

Canada has stricter hate crime laws than the U.S. and the message that sends seeps into how people express racism.

“Canadians have learned that explicit racism is wrong and so they’ve learned to express their racial prejudices in ways that are much more implicit.”

“That’s one reason why you’ll hear people say that in Canada, the ways people express their racism, people often refer to that as ‘polite racism.’ There’s nothing polite about it, it’s still racism ... The smug satisfaction that we’re much more open and tolerant than the United States, it’s a fiction.”

No matter who wins the election, Canada will have to reckon with the racism and hate that came to the surface after 2016.

There are no easy solutions, but one way to start tackling it would be through stricter hate crime legislation and better enforcement of the rules we do have, Perry said. As an example, she pointed to an incident in Nova Scotia last month where the RCMP were criticized for failing to stop an angry mob that barricaded Mi’kmaq fishermen inside a lobster storage facility, smashed its windows and set a van on fire. (The RCMP has said its officers tried to de-escalate the situation.)

“Something is wrong there when (police) don’t have the will to protect communities. That’s got to change.”

“Canada should also crack down on social media platforms, where hate speech has flourished.”

<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/11/03/analysis/us-election-hate-in-canada>

4. Mental Health and Accessibility during COVID

In response to the release of *Ontario’s Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover*, Addictions and Mental Health Ontario is warning that the annual investment of \$176 million for mental health and addiction care falls well short of what is needed. The government is behind target on the implementation of key foundational elements of their 10 year, \$3.8 billion platform, commitment to the sector.

“The pandemic is exacerbating mental illness and addiction across the province. Even before COVID-19, community mental health and addiction providers were already underfunded and

under supported. That needs to change,” says Adrienne Spafford, CEO of Addictions and Mental Health Ontario.

<https://amho.ca/budget-2020-falls-short-for-the-well-being-of-ontarians/>

Our Children Are Not Okay: Health care leaders in Ontario issue warning and express deep concern about new COVID-19 modelling data

Nov. 20, 2020 (National Child Day) – Ontario’s leading children’s health-care providers issued a stern warning and expressed deep concern about the current trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic. If the pandemic continues to spin out of control, schools will have to close which must not happen. Our children’s health and wellbeing are at stake.

Other parts of the world show evidence that as case counts rise, children pay a big price – most significantly through the closure of schools and daycares, as well as through delays in health care caused by added pressure to the health care system. This is magnified further for marginalized and vulnerable children and families, for example those with a disability, those who are racialized, those without a place to call home or who have an unsafe home.

The new COVID-19 modelling data from the federal and provincial governments, released today and last week, respectively, puts children and youth at risk. Although children are far less likely to be infected by COVID-19, they are profoundly affected.

<https://cmho.org/our-children-are-not-okay/>

Children’s Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) is disappointed by the Government of Ontario budget which ignores the crisis identified by mental health care providers that Ontario children, youth and families are facing due to COVID-19 and the pre-pandemic wait of 28,000 kids of up to 2.5 years which is now growing rapidly.

With no new funding announced, there will be no improvement in the levels of mental health service which is not meeting demand, leaving too many children behind. CMHO has identified and advised the Ministry of Health that there is a need for an increase of \$150 million to reduce wait times to 30 days or less and to address the growing demand for services and gaps in child and youth mental health care.

The Public Health Agency of Canada recognized in its annual report the considerable need by Canadians for mental health support and recommended adaptations and increased additional training be provided to mental health providers.

“This is a matter of life and death for some children, youth and their families, said Kim Moran, CEO of CMHO. “Families are in crisis and today’s lack of action will again delay help to kids in receiving the mental health services they need to help them and the wait will continue for thousands of kids,”

<https://cmho.org/budget-announcement/>

Youth Suicidal Ideation

Even before the pandemic began, Ontario students were experiencing the highest levels of suicidal ideation and serious psychological distress ever recorded. Suicidal ideation is currently the highest on record since CAMH began monitoring it in 2001. One in six students (16 per cent) had serious thoughts about suicide in the year preceding the survey. Serious psychological distress—which refers to symptoms of anxiety or depression—has also been rising steadily among Ontario students in Grades 7 to 12 since it was first monitored in 2013. One in five students (21 per cent) reported serious psychological distress, almost double the rate it was just six years prior.

“As concerning as these numbers are, they likely underestimate the degree of suicidal ideation and psychological distress currently experienced by Ontario students, because all the survey data predate the COVID-19 pandemic,” said [Dr. Hayley Hamilton](#), Senior Scientist in CAMH’s Institute for Mental Health Policy Research, and survey co-lead. “

“Students are seeking help for their mental health at much higher rates than in the past, but many still don’t know how to seek support,” said [Dr. Joanna Henderson](#), Director, Margaret and Wallace McCain Centre for Child, Youth & Family Mental Health, and Executive Director, [Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario](#). “There are clearly unmet needs that need to be filled, and the need for more visibility of mental health services in schools and the community.”

5. Violence Against Women

A must read for anyone advocating against GBV! *Shelter Voices November 2020* is the seventh national survey of shelters and transition houses (THs) that serve women and children affected by violence. This special issue of Shelter Voices focuses on how violence against women (VAW) shelters/THs were affected by and have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes information on capacity, crisis calls and 2020 requests for admittance, changes in violence (both severity and frequency), how COVID-19 has impacted the work of shelters/THs, how they have adapted, and what adaptations they plan to keep post-pandemic.

<http://endvaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Shelter-Voices-2020-2.pdf>

16 Days of Activism

Executive members have been asked to post on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and our website each day throughout the 16 days (from November 25th to December 10th). Check our social media outlets for daily information.

Different community groups are responding in a variety of ways, some of which raise issues of human rights in Canada. Here is one examples:

The Centre Victoria pour Femmes in Sudbury said it can't meet women face-to-face right now because of the pandemic. So it's offering French language services for women affected by violence on the phone and some virtually, which can present challenges.

"We need to know that the partner is not in the environment, is not listening in on what is being discussed," said Gaetane Pharand the executive director of the Centre Victoria pour Femmes.

We need to know that this person is in a safe place and we need to know what's happening is not being recorded also for the person's safety and for our own safety."

The centre has posted a list of related stories/sites on GBV.

- [Understanding the science of trauma](#)
- [Understanding domestic violence](#)
- [Family violence increasing during lockdown, but less reporting: experts](#)
- ['It scares us': northern Children's Aid Societies see significant call decrease](#)
- [Feds double COVID-19 fund for abused women to \\$100 million](#)
- [Sudbury domestic violence support moves downtown to improve accessibility during pandemic](#)
- [Domestic violence could increase during COVID-19 crisis](#)
- [This hand signal helps victims of domestic violence indicate they need help](#)
- [Domestic violence shelters adapt as COVID-19 forces families home](#)
- [How teachers can help students being abused at home during COVID-19](#)
- [Here's who to contact if you need help dealing with domestic violence in Canada](#)
- [Advocates scramble to help domestic abuse victims as calls skyrocket during COVID-19](#)
- [Domestic violence and teleworking: employers are called out](#)
- [When home isn't safe: Domestic violence spikes during COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [New hope for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence on Manitoulin Island](#)
- [Child abuse a big concern during COVID-19 outbreak](#)
- [Police lay charges in historic domestic assault case in Sturgeon Falls](#)
- [Canadian company creating face masks that offer support to domestic abuse victims](#)
- [Organizations want to help victims of family violence during COVID-19 isolation](#)
- [Domestic abuse a bigger fear for survivors than COVID-19: Expert](#)
- [Online chat and text service launches for women living with abuse during COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [Police calls for domestic violence, mental crises rise during pandemic](#)
- [Sudbury webinar looks to end gender-based violence by asking 'are you safe?'](#)
- [Global push to end domestic violence, worse amid COVID-19](#)

FAQ's for the Impact of COVID on Women in Canada

<https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/women-and-pandemics/>