

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

January/February 2021 Report

SWHR Issues of Note

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Status of Women

1. Battered Woman Syndrome Used as Defence in Nunavut – Inadequate Shelters for Women Fleeing Abuse

A Nunavut judge who acquitted a woman of murder for killing her abusive spouse in self-defence is warning that the territory's cycle of domestic violence will continue unless victims get adequate support.

Statistics Canada figures show police-reported family violence in Nunavut is 10 times the Canadian average.

Across Inuit Nunangat, which represents regions of the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and Newfoundland and Labrador, 70 per cent of communities do not have shelters for women and children fleeing violence.

"Women have no place to go if there's no shelter. And up North in an isolated community, you can't just move to another house because all the houses are overcrowded," Kudloo said.

A recent federal government announcement to build five new Inuit-specific shelters is good news, said Kudloo, but more funding for shelters is needed.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/no-other-means-nunavut-judge-acquits-abused-woman-who-killed-husband-1.5292616>

Note: In 2011, police-reported rates of intimate partner violence tended to be higher in the territories than in the provinces. The rates in Nunavut and Northwest Territories were more than three times higher than those in any of the provinces, with rates of 4,807 victims per 100,000 population and 2,559 victims per 100,000 population, respectively. Yukon had the lowest territorial rate of 1,260 per 100,000 population, which was still 65% higher than Saskatchewan, the province with the highest rate.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11805/11805-3-eng.htm#a12>

2. A Silent Challenge for Canadian Women During COVID - Reproductive Health

Current issues affecting access to birth control and/or abortion as a result of COVID and lockdowns

- A few clinics may temporarily close due to staff illness or staff shortages.
- Some private clinics are restricting their catchment areas to abide by advice to limit travel.
- Some hospitals have sidelined or shut down surgical abortion services so they can focus on the pandemic.
- Patients are reluctant to travel (or unable to) due to exposure risk.
- Travel options may be restricted due to flight cancellations and other restrictions.
- It is difficult for patients who need a later abortion to cross the border into the United States. (Although they can bring a doctor's letter stating their visit is for essential medical reasons, this might not be accepted by U.S. border officials.)
- Access to blood testing and ultrasound services may be challenging in some areas (many providers require this prior to an abortion).
- There may be shortages of Mifegymiso in coming months.
- Many pharmacies are rationing drugs, including prescription birth control, and there may be shortages of contraceptives such as condoms in the near future. You may only be able to get a short supply of a prescription at a time.
- Access to STI testing and other sexual and reproductive healthcare is more difficult.

<https://www.arcc-cdac.ca/covid-19/>

3. Impact of COVID on Mental Health of Women

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) conducted a national survey to better understand the impact of the coronavirus on mental health. In general, all Canadians have had their mental health impacted to some degree. The survey results show that 1 in 4 Canadians report increased anxiety levels, and 1 in 5 report feeling depressed occasionally or most of the time. However, women, particularly those with children at home, and young adults, were more likely to feel both depression and anxiety, than any other demographic.

To help prevent women from suffering the debilitating long-term effects of physical abuse, anxiety and stress, this government needs to:

- expand the availability of safe, licensed, emergency child care to parents of preschool and/or school-age children who are required to work through the pandemic, free of charge;
- provide increased resources to shelters across the country to ensure they can help with those facing gender-based violence;
- provide affordable and accessible alternatives for those seeking mental health services

<http://psacunion.ca/women-covid-19-violence>

4. Sex Workers' Rights

Many sex workers have stopped direct-contact sex work to comply with social distancing guidelines. Others are out of work with the closure of strip clubs and massage parlours. Some of the most marginalized sex workers are not able to stop working and face an increased risk of surveillance. Most sex workers abruptly lost all their income, but because of the precarious and criminalized nature of their work, sex workers do not qualify for emergency income supports.

Responses to the pandemic must not discriminate. States must guarantee equal access to income supports for women, girls and gender diverse people in the informal economy. *A pandemic is not an excuse to violate women's rights!*

- [Canada must protect the rights of sex workers during COVID-19 by ensuring access to emergency income supports](#)
- [Canada's exclusion of sex workers from COVID-19 income supports is shameful and violates human rights](#)

<https://www.amnesty.ca/blog/womens-rights-and-covid-19>

5. General - Canadian Women's Foundation Facts

- 80% of Canadians believe the next generation of women is just as or more likely to experience sexual assault.
- 300 women and children are turned away from shelters on any given night in Canada because they're full.
- 1.9 million women in Canada live on a low income.
- 36% to 14%: The drop in the percentage of girls who say they feel confident between Grades 6 and 10.

- 60%: Women are 60% less likely than men to move from middle management to executive ranks.

<https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/>

Human Rights

6. Should Vaccination Against COVID (SARS COV-2) Be Mandated for Healthcare Workers?

Note: This information discusses US data. Despite the caveats, the data are troubling.

While residents of nursing homes and their caregivers have been considered a top priority for COVID-19 vaccination, only 38% of nursing home staff accepted shots when they were offered, new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed recently.

Anecdotal reports have been circulating for weeks that nursing home staff members were turning down vaccination offers, but these are the first national-level figures.

"These findings show we have a lot of work to do to increase confidence and also really understand the barriers to vaccination amongst this population," said Dr. Radhika Gharpure, lead author of the study and a member of the CDC's Vaccine Task Force.

The report cited previous polling data to suggest why employees have been declining vaccines.

Many raised concerns about vaccine side effects. Others said they didn't want to be among the first to receive the vaccines, which were first authorized in December. Some said they didn't trust the government, or referenced false claims about the shots.

It's also possible, Gharpure said, that some people didn't get vaccinated because they weren't working when the shots were distributed, or because they work in multiple facilities and were only counted at one.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/02/01/nursing-home-workers-reluctant-get-covid-vaccine-cdc-study-finds/6664743002/>

7. What Does It Take to Make a Sweat Shop? Canada Goose!

Defecating in buckets? Padlocked exits? Random speed ups? Verbal tirades? Racial insults? Arbitrary fines and firings? Inadequate PPE? Poverty wages? Canada Goose clothing factories in Winnipeg have all that. But no union. Not yet.

Alelie Sanvictores wants to change that. Alelie is one of a determined band of workers fighting to form a union at one of those Winnipeg Canada Goose factories. Canada Goose just fired her for it.

Several workers also reported being targeted for abuse by management. One Filipino worker explained how a white manager yelled at her for talking to a colleague, while another told of how another supervisor berated her for not working faster when her machine was broken.

Another worker said that managers would often stand behind older workers and shout at them like teenagers, yelling, "Faster, faster, faster."

Paid just \$11.90 per hour, the workers are driven to work at high speed by piecework pay incentives with limited or no breaks.

In August 2020, the company closed the already inadequate number of toilets in one of its factories for repairs. The entire workforce was forced to use ten portable toilets set up outside that were hardly ever cleaned. Workers said the state of the toilets got so bad that they chose to leave the premises to go to the bathroom, or ask relatives or friends to bring portable containers to the worksite for them to defecate in.

The coronavirus only worsened these conditions. Canada Goose landed lucrative contracts last March to produce personal protective equipment (PPE) for hospitals at its Toronto and Winnipeg factories. But the workers producing these life-saving items were not given adequate PPE themselves until they protested. Canada Goose provided just one hand sanitizer in one of its Winnipeg factories for three floors of sewers.

A union drive in 2019 failed due to an employer challenge granted by the Labour Relations Board. Workers United does represent 1200 workers at Canada Goose plants in Toronto. Workers United continues to organize in Winnipeg and has just launched a public campaign for union recognition.

The union is focusing on putting pressure on Bain Capital. The U.S. private equity firm that was founded by Mitt Romney, a one time Republican nominee for president of the USA. Bain bought control of Canada Goose in 2013.

<http://www.canadianlabourinstitute.org/story/breakin-a-sweat?fbclid=IwAR2ggNyiQVR68t7AQBytI5Q9Kol1B2Jf5vH6wvczrCGRoMCmpdFVFgou21U>

8. Child Labour - Warning: Your Groceries may Contain Child Labour

A World Vision report warns Canadians could be contributing to child labour with every grocery trip. The "Risky Goods" report estimates more than \$3.7 billion in goods involved child labour in 2019 -- a 63 per cent increase from 10 years ago.

The report says imports from Mexico account for the largest value of risky products, with \$965 million in 2019.

- [World Vision Canada - 'Risky Goods' report](#)

The report also says economic pressures of the pandemic are forcing more children to harvest and produce much of Canada's food imports.

Previous research by World Vision estimates the pandemic has pushed as many as eight million boys and girls into labour.

Report author Simon Lewchuk says COVID-19 is undermining previous gains that had reduced those numbers by 94 million since 2000.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/business/child-labour-behind-every-canadian-s-grocery-haul-and-it-may-get-worse-world-vision-1.5293642>

<https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/child-protection/warning-your-groceries-may-contain-child-labour>

9. Human Rights Watch Canada – Report 2021 (covering 2020)

The report is out and addresses human rights issues Canada (and to some extent Ontario) still violate in the following areas:

1. [Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
2. [Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls](#)
3. [Immigration Detention](#)
4. [Corporate Accountability](#)
5. [Counterterrorism](#)
6. [Religious Freedom](#)
7. [Key International Actors](#)
8. [Foreign Policy](#)

Longstanding and systemic discrimination against Indigenous peoples persists across Canada. The water supplied to many First Nations communities on lands known as reserves is contaminated, hard to access, or at risk due to faulty treatment systems. The poor water and sanitation conditions have a disparate and negative impact on at-risk populations, including children. While the most severe public health concerns—water-borne illnesses and related deaths—have mostly been avoided through water advisories, the social costs and human rights impact of the water crisis are considerable.

Both the provincial government of Ontario and the federal government have consistently failed to address the health consequences of decades-old mercury contamination in the First Nation community of Grassy Narrows. While the federal government committed funds to support the building of a mercury care home in Grassy Narrows in April, it has yet to provide compensation to most of the affected community, who continue to live with the physical and mental health impacts of mercury exposure.

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/canada>

10. Disability Discrimination in Hidden Places

In May 2020, Justin Yerbury narrowly missed the cut for an annual grant funded by Australia’s National Health and Medical Research Council. Yerbury, who studies neurodegenerative disorders, has motor neuron disease. The feedback he received on his grant application showed that the assessors were underwhelmed by his publication record. “This made me mad,” Yerbury wrote on Twitter. “How could someone think that I could physically produce more than what I had done given

my disability?” Yerbury has since successfully appealed the rejection and his case has prompted the Australian funding agency to revise its policies. His experience illustrates recent research showing the funding barriers facing researchers with disabilities or long-standing health conditions.

https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0228686&utm_source=Nature+Briefing&utm_campaign=4dbcabc567-briefing-dy-20210203&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c9dfd39373-4dbcabc567-45026489

11. Terrorist Groups in Canada

Four right-wing extremist groups, including the Proud Boys, have been placed on Canada’s list of terrorist organizations amid an apparent crackdown on far-right violence.

The Proud Boys, Atomwaffen Division, the Base and Russian Imperial Movement were among 13 additions to the list announced by the federal government on Wednesday.

Five affiliates of ISIS, three al-Qaida affiliates and Hizbul Mujahedin were also listed. Being on the list makes it more difficult for groups to operate, and their property can be seized.

With the additions, six out of the 73 groups on Canada’s list of terrorist entities — or eight per cent — are right-wing extremist factions. Blood & Honor and Combat 18 are the only other two.

Proud Boys members allegedly played a key role in the Jan. 6 attack at the U.S. Capitol. On Jan. 25, MPs passed a motion calling on the government to list the Proud Boys.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7616542/proud-boys-added-canada-list-terrorist-groups/>

12. Animal Rights

Until animals are considered sentient by law, abuses will continue.

Health Canada says it won’t consider cruelty to animals in strychnine review

Animal suffering won’t be considered when a Health Canada agency next reviews licences for poisons used to kill predators, the department has ruled.

In a decision released this week, Health Canada says the Pest Management Regulatory Agency won’t include “humaneness” in how it assesses toxins such as strychnine.

“Health Canada will not be taking steps towards incorporating humaneness considerations into the pesticide risk assessment framework,” said the department’s ruling.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-health-canada-says-it-wont-consider-cruelty-to-animals-in-strychnine/>

13. New Measures for Economic Prosperity – Bringing in the Environment as a Component in the Measure of Prosperity

The world is being put at “extreme risk” by the failure of economics to take account of the rapid depletion of the natural world and needs to find new measures of success to avoid a catastrophic breakdown, a landmark review has concluded.

Prosperity was coming at a “devastating cost” to the ecosystems that provide humanity with food, water and clean air, said Prof Sir Partha Dasgupta, the Cambridge University economist who conducted the review. Radical global changes to production, consumption, finance and education were urgently needed, he said.

The review said that two UN conferences this year – on biodiversity and climate change – provided opportunities for the international community to rethink an approach that has seen a 40% plunge in the stocks of natural capital per head between 1992 and 2014.

“Nature is our home. Good economics demands we manage it better,” said Dasgupta. “Truly sustainable economic growth and development means recognising that our long-term prosperity relies on rebalancing our demand of nature’s goods and services with its capacity to supply them. It also means accounting fully for the impact of our interactions with nature. [Covid-19](#) has shown us what can happen when we don’t do this.”

Sir David Attenborough said the review was “immensely important”. In a foreword, he said: “If we continue this damage, whole ecosystems will collapse. That is now a real risk. The review at last puts biodiversity at the core [of economics]. It shows how we can help save the natural world at what may be the last minute, and in doing so, save ourselves.”

14. Significant Dates for Status of Women and Human Rights in Canada

- Human Trafficking Awareness Day on February 22
- International Women’s Day on March 8
- Sexual Assault Prevention Month in May
- Sexual Harassment Awareness Week from June 1 to June 7
- Gender Equality Week during the fourth week in September
- Women’s History Month in October
- National Day of Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls on October 4
- Person’s Day on October 18
- Woman Abuse Prevention Month in November
- Transgender day of remembrance for Ontario on November 20
- United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25
- National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on Dec. 6