

Peel Institute of Research & Training

Building Bridges Between Academia and Community



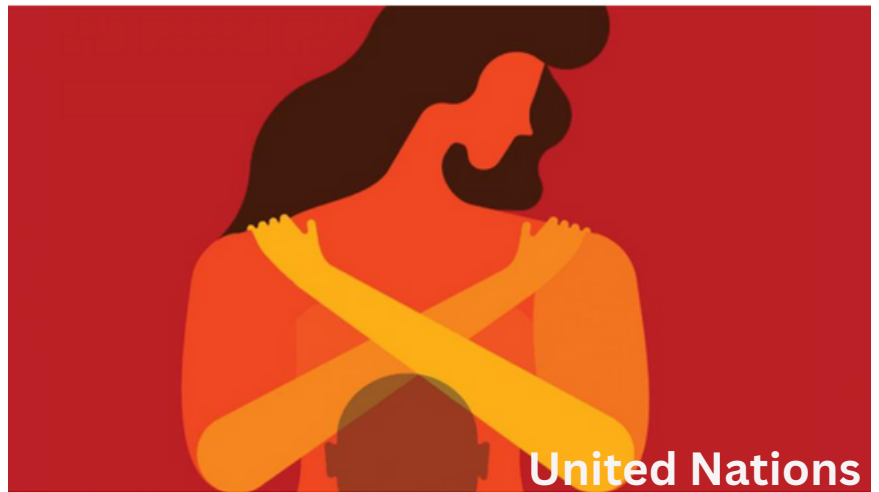
In This Issue

We mark:

**International Day
for the Elimination
of Violence Against
Women**

We tell the story of:

**Building an Institute
in the community to
address violence
against women and
other marginalized
groups**



Foreword: November 25th marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Since 1981, women's rights activists have observed November 25th as a day against gender-based violence. This date was selected to recognize and honour the Mirabel sisters, three political activists from the Dominican Republic who were brutally murdered in 1960 under the order of Rafael Trujillo, the country's ruler. In 2000, November 25th was officially designated as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women by the United Nations General Assembly. It is a day that invites international organizations and governments to join together and organize activities and initiatives aimed at raising public awareness of the ongoing issue of gender-based violence.

The Peel Institute of Research and Training (formerly the Peel Institute on Violence Prevention) was established in 2013 with a specific focus on the area of violence prevention among vulnerable groups, including women,

youth, seniors, Indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities. For the Institute, there was and continues to be an imperative need to enhance the understanding of the social, political, and economic forces and factors that continue to influence the ongoing oppression of women, as well as advance collective action aimed at identifying issues and pathways forward for survivors and their families.

One of the innovations of the Peel Institute of Research and Training (PIRT) has been promoting community participatory research that includes the voices of community members, survivors, and service users throughout different stages of the research process. Operating from an intersectional, anti-oppression, and equity framework, PIRT has continued to work to bridge academia and community, theory and praxis. It serves as an example of how academic research; community organizations and individuals can come together to successfully facilitate research that directly addresses the needs of the community and informs congruent service delivery.

While the focus of the Institute has expanded beyond violence prevention in recent years, our work remains dedicated to the elimination of violence against women and advancing support services for survivors and their families. As the Institute shifts to a broader focus, as the needs of the community change, it is important to remind ourselves, our staff, our partners, and others committed to the elimination of violence against women, of where the Institute began, has gone, and its path forward. In the following pages, you will find the story of the Peel Institute of Research and Training: how it all began, its innovation, the guiding framework, the importance of

community-based research for bridging research and practice and developing community-based evidence, the successes experienced, challenges faced, and our path forward into the future.

Over the years PIRT has evolved as the needs of the community shift. It has been able to adapt and align with changing needs in research and program-building capacity. However, regardless of how needs change, we remain committed to the ongoing need to eliminate violence in the lives of women, children, and other vulnerable groups both in Peel, Canada, and globally.



The Beginnings: The Idea for a Community Institute



In March 2013, the Peel Committee on Sexual Assault, through funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), hosted *Cafe Scientifique: An Open Discussion of the Experiences of Immigrant and Racialized Women Survivors of Sexual Assault in Accessing Primary Health Care Services*. The event brought together a group of panelists, with expertise in sexual assault, who shared their personal experiences as immigrant and racialized women, as service providers, as educators, and as survivors of violence. During this informal discussion, they spoke openly about the barriers faced by immigrant and racialized women who are survivors of sexual assault, in accessing primary health care and social services.

They exposed the pressing need to understand the social, political, and economic forces influencing the ongoing oppression of women. They inspired the concept of a community institute, that would facilitate active collaboration among academics, service providers, and survivors to improve service access and provision for survivors of violence.

The concept led to the creation of the Peel Institute on Violence Prevention (PIVP), renamed the Peel Institute of Research and Training (PIRT) in 2022. Funding for the Institute was approved by the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), under the administration of Family Services of Peel (FSP), and the Institute was officially launched at FSP's 43rd Annual General Meeting in 2014.

The Institute continues to serve and thrive as the research arm of FSP, operating as one of the few research institutes embedded within a social service agency. It is this placement in a social service agency that sets the Institute apart as a unique and innovative endeavour, offering opportunities for deep service and program development and transformation.



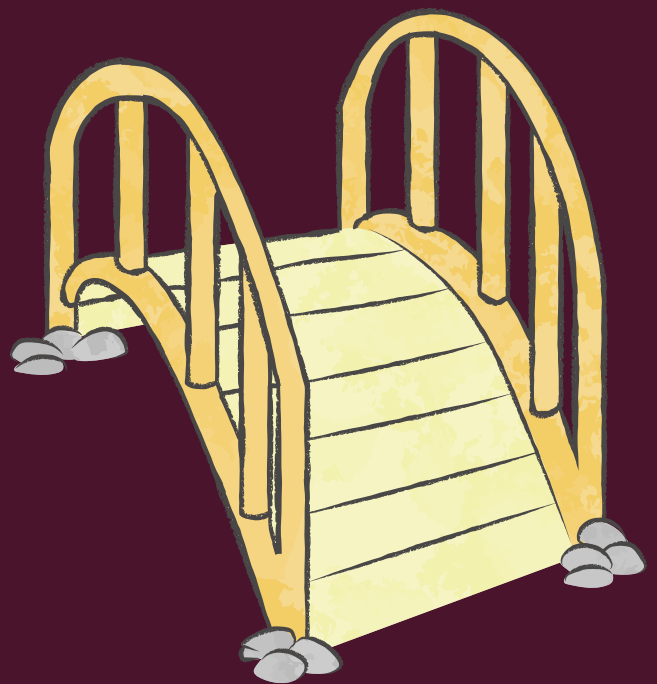
A Centre of Innovation



PIRT is a centre of innovation. It is an example of how a social service agency can integrate research and knowledge generation into its practices and work to bring together academic researchers, community organizations, and community members to bridge the long-standing gap between research and practice.

Since its inception, PIRT has remained dedicated to eradicating violence against youth, seniors, women, indigenous populations, and people with disabilities. To work towards this goal, the Institute has remained committed to bridging academia, research, and practice by centering the voices, needs, and desires of the diverse communities in Peel and Canada, utilizing a participatory research approach.

“Bridging academia, research, and practice by centering the voices, needs, and desires of the community”



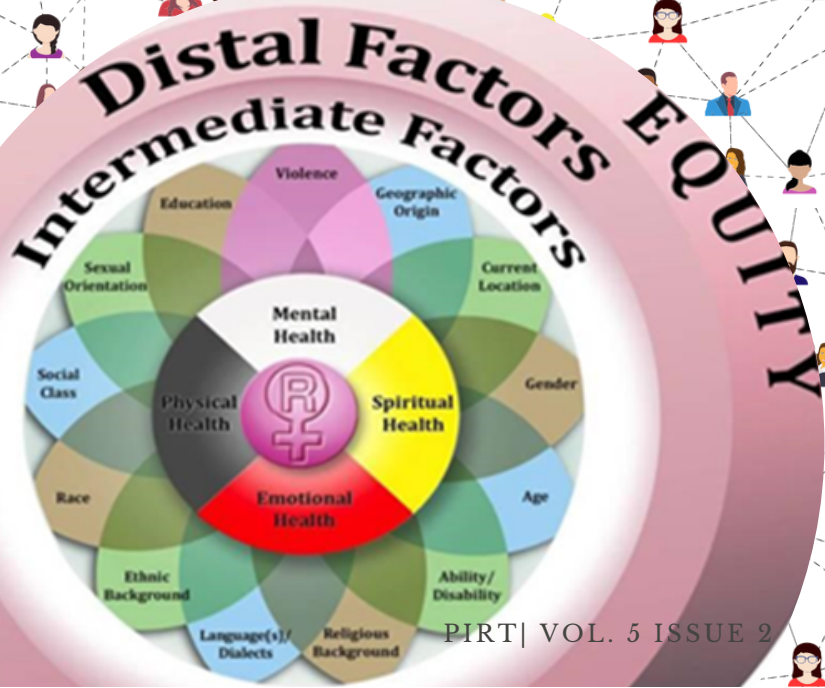
Guiding the Way for Research and Training:

FSP's Equity, Anti-Oppression and Anti-Racism Framework

Central to the work of PIRT is the *Equity, Anti-Oppression, and Anti-Racism framework*. This framework, underpinned by intersectionality, the Indigenous Wheel of Health, and the social determinants of health, has led to an expanded focus that addresses inequities across the boundaries of race, age, gender, and so much more. It enables the Institute to address the complexity of community members' lives that so often get excluded from research.

The Region of Peel is home to a diverse population, where many residents live at multiple intersections of oppression and identity related to race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and more, which deeply influence their life experiences and needs in relation to social services. Evidence-based practices and interventions used in many social service settings do not always effectively account for the diversity of experiences within and across groups.

The Institute implemented the *Equity, Anti-Oppression, and Anti-Racism framework* as a way to work towards the breakdown of dominant models in care and broaden the creation of knowledge, frameworks, interventions, programs, and training to account for the vast diversity and complexity across individuals, families, and communities in Peel. The Institute's framework and ongoing commitment to social justice have contributed to their leadership in social service research and to their focus on areas where there is a paucity of research and services for clients with intersecting identities and needs.



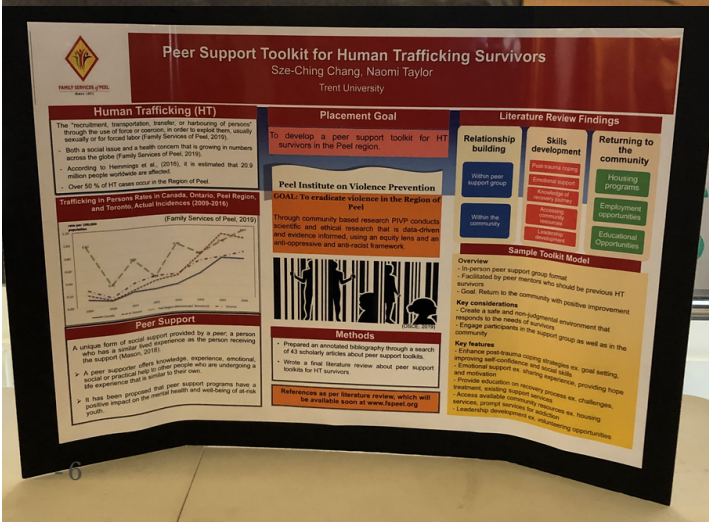
Bridging Research and Practice



Evidence for programs and services has an ongoing legacy of occurring outside of or separate from the deep conversation and involvement of communities, particularly those who are marginalized and continue to experience oppression. This complicates the ability to provide services and programs that align with the emergent needs, concerns, and desires of the community served. For the Institute, bridging the gap between research and community practice is central. Grounded in feminist consciousness-raising and critical intersectional theories and perspectives, the Institute is dedicated to community-based participatory research to enable the collection of real-time information and documentation of specific concerns and needs.

There is a strong commitment to preventing further marginalization, discrimination, and/or oppression of community members. This approach ensures that individuals hold a sense of agency in creating solutions to the specific problems they face. Ultimately, the Institute's primary goal is deep community engagement that facilitates creating a solid foundation for program development, adaptation, implementation, and maintenance of services in Peel.

Research with and for communities



Evidence-Based Research in the Community



Research involves the goal of generating knowledge – of generating evidence. This evidence is intended to inform how services, programs, policies, and more are formed, implemented, and maintained. Since the 1990s, evidence-based practice has become central to service delivery. Evidence-based practice focuses on “the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual [clients].” The goal is to create programs and services that will result in positive outcomes for clients.



GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND TRAUMA: A PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE



Conference Report
June 24th – 25th, 2019
University of Toronto, Mississauga

There remains a gap, however, between what we know theoretically and clinically to be effective, and how to integrate it into practice in community settings with diverse populations. This can largely be attributed to the fact that evidence-based programs and interventions are often tested in clinical settings with specific populations, where various intersecting facets of identity and well-being are strictly controlled. These contexts often differ from the environments in which community social service organizations operate, where populations served are more complex, and are often formed by those who are multiply marginalized. Most evidence-based practices used for social services have been predominantly developed for the heteronormative White Canadian, and so, they are unlikely to align with the needs, cultures, and desires of diverse clients of social service agencies. Thus, PIRT is committed to the ongoing practice of evidence built in the community; that is, community-based evidence that will enable programs and services that align closely with the complexity of the lives of the people served.

FAMILY SERVICES OF PEEL
PEEL INSTITUTE ON VIOLENCE PREVENTION

TRAUMA SCREENING MODULE ONE

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH
ENHANCING TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE FOR TRAUMA SCREENING



Successes

Over the past 10 years, the Institute has flourished, evidenced by the continued completion of projects and the growth of proposals submitted and accepted. There are a few major successes that deserve specific mention. One significant accomplishment of the Institute is the development of the *Equity, Anti-Oppression, and Anti-Racism framework*, which is central to the work the Institute does.

The Institute has organized and participated in major conferences. In 2016, PIRT organized the Global Symposium on Violence Prevention. This symposium is viewed as a landmark success of the Institute as it brought together leaders in the field to spread awareness of violence prevention and push for changes. The Global Conference on Human Trafficking and Trauma, held in 2019, was the first of its kind in the Region of Peel and marked the Institute as a leading organization tackling human trafficking globally.



PIRT has worked in human sex trafficking for several years. Two projects have been implemented: "A Survivor Centered Approach to Build Capacity to Address Human Trafficking in Peel" and the Human Trafficking Mobile Health Clinic. The target population of these projects were youth, living in Peel Region and pertains to the following priority identified groups: youth and adults with developmental disabilities; LGBTQ2S, racialized and newcomer populations. We also worked with children building in previous collaborations between Peel School Boards and survivors.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the needs of the community shifted. It has been increasingly recognized that the social determinants of health significantly influence the lives of individuals and groups, a topic to which PIRT has a long-standing commitment. PIRT has been increasingly engaged in the critical needs of the community, including violence against women, as well as topics involving immigration, mental health, anti-Black racism, and seniors' rights.

The Challenges of Growing the Institute



While the Institute has grown and thrived as a community-based research institute over the past decade, this has not come without several challenges, many of which continue to be obstacles today. One of the greatest concerns the Institute has faced relates to its funding structure, which in turn, influences staff retention. PIRT does not have a primary funding base, so the Institute relies predominantly on project-based funding. This has resulted in times of precarity and a limited set of resources. The lack of consistent funding has also impeded the ability of PIRT to retain skilled staff, making it difficult to plan for the long term, develop strategic initiatives, or build partnerships with stakeholders in the community. A continued need exists to prioritize the securing of funding. Moreover, it has been a challenge for PIRT to integrate seamlessly into the community and build its reputation as an influencer for policies, programs, and services available in the Peel region.

Struggles to integrate research into the community have a historical underpinning. There is a longstanding division between community and academia, which is associated with academic researchers coming into communities, extracting information, and then moving on, maintaining only minimal contact after they've left. As a result, there is often a high level of mistrust and misunderstanding of what researchers can offer the community. It is critical for the Institute that the community is involved, which requires deep trust and collaboration. This is a time-consuming task, with efforts focused on establishing rapport with communities, understanding their needs and priorities, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to the community. This is difficult to accomplish in a setting with competitive funding, strict project timelines, and staff retention based on funding levels. Even with these ongoing challenges, the Institute continues to seek innovative ways to build community partnerships and advance research efforts that engage deeply with the communities served.



The Future of the Institute

Building Partnerships in the Community

Continuing the work of the Institute, which is dedicated to community collaboration, will require the ongoing prioritizing of building and strengthening community partnerships. The Institute continues to strive to build relationships with social service organizations across the Region.



Raising Awareness

Strengthening the value of the Institute's work involves advancing efforts to disseminate research findings throughout the region, as well as provincially and nationally. This will help to gain support from private donor funding, which will contribute to the Institute's sustainability, as well as build the academic and research integrity of the Institute on a broader scale.



Expanding Research

In recent years, the Institute has been expanding its research focus. While the prevention and elimination of violence against women remains central to our work, the Institute has adapted to the growing and shifting needs of the community, taking on projects in immigration, mental health, seniors' rights, and more. As we move into the coming years, it will be critical to remain adaptable in the research work we do. This will involve remaining closely connected to the community, and building research projects and programs that align with the changing needs and desires of our communities.



Working at the Institute

A reflection from a research assistant of PIRT:

Over the past year, I have been a research assistant at the Peel Institute for Research and Training (PIRT) within Family Services of Peel. My time at the Institute has involved a fusion of academic principles and the real-world needs of our community. Before this role, I focused exclusively on intricate, data-driven research within university settings while completing my undergrad. The Institute adopts an approach to research that combines scientific investigation, community participation, and collaborative engagement. A cornerstone of our work at PIRT is the practice of community-based participatory research (CBPR). This method fosters cooperative involvement from community members, organizational stakeholders, community partners, and researchers from academic or non-academic backgrounds. They all bring unique insights and expertise to the research process.



Engaging in this type of research has been enlightening, as it has allowed me to connect with populations to which I had limited exposure during my academic research endeavours. Our work with qualitative data, which includes participant responses to interviews and focus groups, provides us with a deeper insight into the minds of participants which is not captured through quantitative, numerical methods. I have played a key role in helping various departments at Family Services of Peel expand their research knowledge and incorporate research into the evaluation of their programs. My favourite example of CBPR was the anti-Black racism seminar I helped work on and attended. We had amazing discussions with Black youth who provided us valuable insight into their daily lives and experiences of microaggressions. In an academic setting, I would have never had the chance to work so closely with participants and learn about who they are. As one of my colleagues says, *"People are not numbers"* and this statement holds true to the work the Institute does. Our research provides a platform for the voices of those who are not heard in society. We will continue to bridge the gap between academia and the community.



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