

Women in Numbers: Confronting Underrepresentation, Discrimination and Inequities

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On International Women's Day 2025, let's

Accelerate Action

to improve the lives,
ensure the safety, and
protect the rights of all
women and gender
diverse individuals.

International Women's Day (IWD) originated in the early 1900's and was known as "International Working Women's Day". Its roots come from labour movements led by women around the world at the turn of the century. In 1910, at a conference for working women in Copenhagen, German socialist Clara Zetkin proposed the celebration of an annual International Women's Day to "unite women across borders and demand equal rights, suffrage, and an end to gender-based discrimination". She believed that labour was essential to the emancipation of women and the key to economic freedom. Her proposal to create an annual day to celebrate the equality of women was unanimously supported by the attendees. The first IWD was celebrated on March 8, 1911, across several European countries. The United Nations officially recognized International Women's Day in 1977, and IWD has since become a Global Day of Observance.



This year's IWD theme is "Accelerate Action". This theme urges the "dismantling of systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality, such as unequal pay, limited access to education, and under-representation in leadership". In this edition of our newsletter, we examine women's narrow presence in a variety of spheres. Women's under-representation and exclusion in decision making circles negatively impacts access to safe reproductive and medical treatment. Under-representation limits opportunities for social and economic participation, and it restricts the ability to influence policies concerning women's safety and overall well-being.

We offer a snapshot of evidence of the barriers confronted by women to thrive in an economic system that has been built without considering their needs. Four articles demonstrate how the perspectives of women are under-represented in media, entrepreneurship, medical administration, and the disciplines of science, technology, engineering and math.

The remainder of the articles explore issues of safety and gender violence. The articles expose the heightened vulnerability of women to violence in communities, families, in intimate relationships, and in times of war and armed conflict.

Political changes in the USA that eliminate previously granted women's reproductive rights have a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities. In this issue, we discuss the lasting social and economic implications.

This year's IWD theme highlights the under-representation of women. It provides a platform to call for urgent action to promote gender equity across all sectors, ratifying the importance of women's equal participation and leadership in shaping a more equitable society. Women's voices must be heard in all aspects of life to foster participation, agency, self-determination and safety.

Clara Zetkin, the first to envision a global day to celebrate women, wrote about international solidarity, an unflinching strength, and a flaming enthusiasm. In this issue of our newsletter, we hope to inspire all that International Women's Day stands for: "A gender equal world and a world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination."





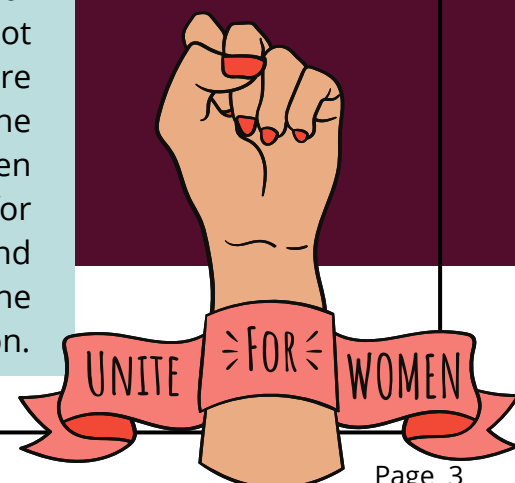
Safety of Women in Communities: Addressing Inequality and Gender-Based Violence

Whether through work within the private sphere or in the public sphere, communities continue to rely on women's emotional, physical, and sexual labour to remain organized and functioning. Unfortunately, due to inequalities between men and women, communities fail to safeguard women's sense of social integration. Issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), intimate partner violence (IPV), and family violence highlight the gravity of women's marginal status in their communities. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) estimated that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner and/or non-partner sexual violence.

In Canada, it was reported that women and girls made up 68% of the victims of family violence and 78% of the victims of IPV in 2023 (Statistics Canada, 2024). The report also indicated that girls and young adult women aged 12 to 24 had the highest rate of police-reported IPV cases, indicating a high risk of victimization for this age group.

High rates of victimization and risk for violence, alongside gender inequality make it difficult for women to truly feel integrated within their communities. This likely influences the vast underreporting of GBV, IPV, and family violence by women and girls, as community exclusion results in a lack of trust in the criminal justice system, fears of not being believed, and a sense of hopelessness. The reasons behind underreporting suggests that women's rights and safety are not equitably centred within communities.

We must recognize that GBV, IPV, and other forms of violence disproportionately experienced by women are not individual issues; they are *social issues* that require collective community action to address and dismantle the gendered systems that perpetuate violence against women and girls. Communities must collectively advocate for improved culturally appropriate support for women and girls, create spaces where women see themselves at the centre, and generate strong systems of safety and inclusion.



In the Wake of War: The Harsh Realities Faced by Women and Girls in Gaza

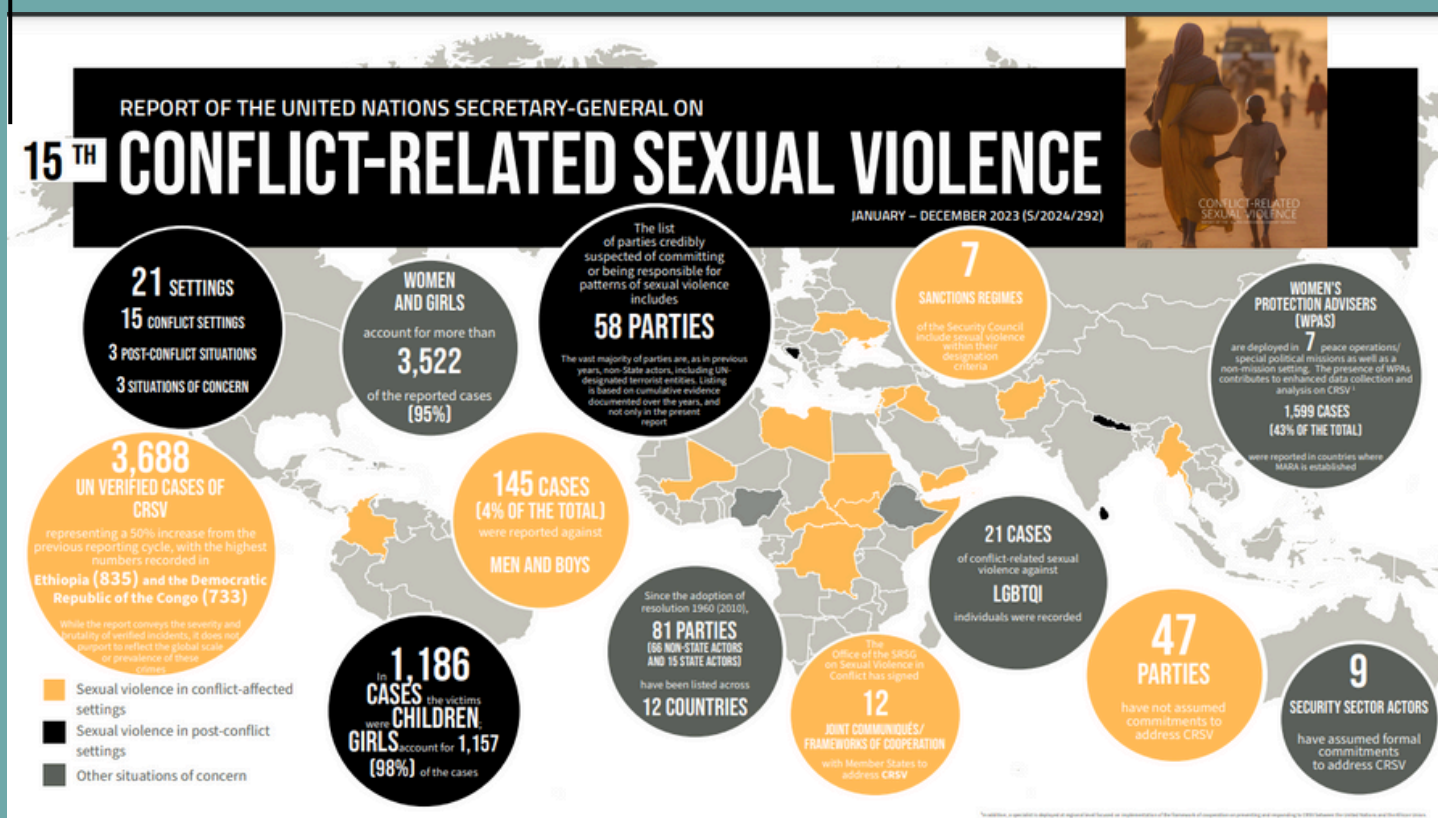
A staggering 46,707 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza—70% of whom were women and children—under the Israeli justification of self-defense. Another 110,265 people have been injured, while most of Gaza's population has lost their homes entirely (AJLabs, 2025).

Amid this devastation, women have endured horrific conditions. Around 1 million women and girls have been displaced, forcing over 46,300 pregnant women into extreme hunger and unsafe environments. The severe lack of medical care, compounded by fear and stress, has had lasting effects on maternal and infant health, leading to a generation of children born with poorer health outcomes—such as giving birth preterm. With hospitals overwhelmed and beds unavailable, many women have been forced to give birth on hospital floors (UNPFA, 2024).

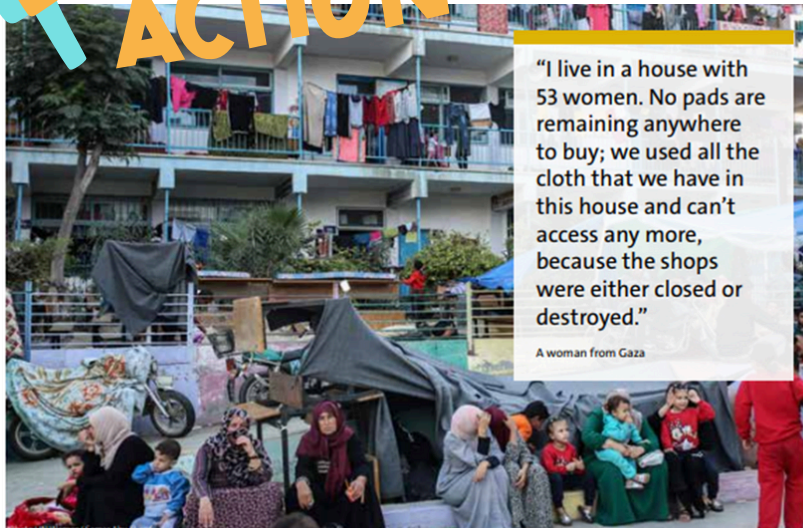


"A staggering 46,707 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, 70% of whom were women and children"

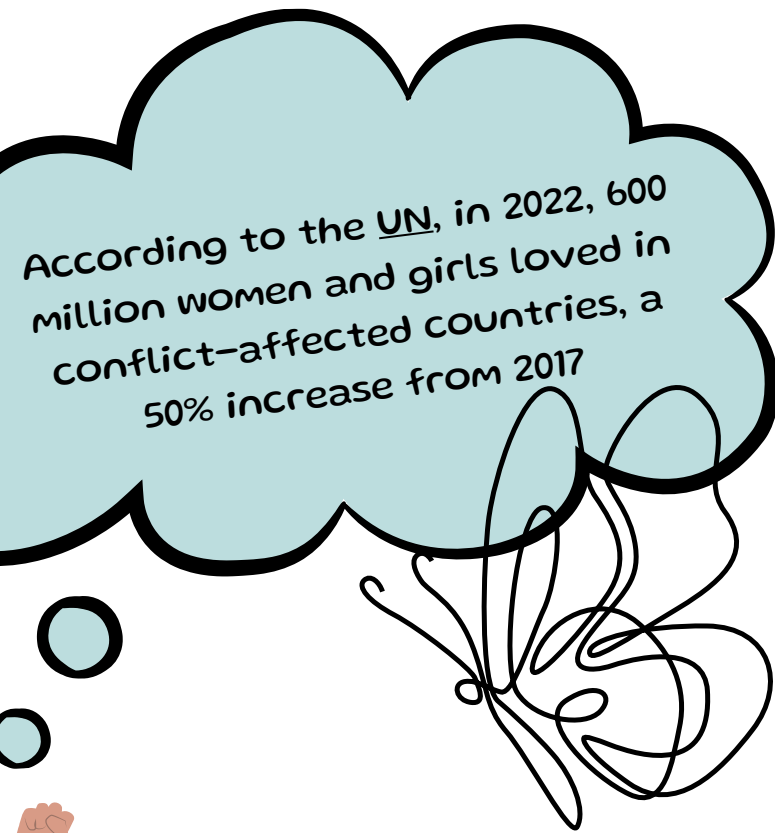
The crisis has also deeply affected 155,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women, many of whom have struggled to access medical care. Some mothers, suffering from severe malnutrition, have been unable to produce breast milk—leading to the tragic deaths of infants from starvation.



Source: [United Nations \(2024\)](#).



Source: [UN Women, 2024](#)



According to the [UN](#), in 2022, 600 million women and girls lived in conflict-affected countries, a 50% increase from 2017



Women seeking refuge in overcrowded shelters have faced a sanitation disaster, with scarce access to soap and feminine hygiene products. Women and girls have resorted to using cloths or tent scraps as menstrual pads, increasing the risk of infection. One in four women in Gaza has reported a skin infection due to these unhygienic conditions ([UNPFA, 2024](#)).

The extreme overcrowding in camps has also heightened the risk of gender-based violence. With critical resources stretched thin, many survivors have been left without essential care or support.

The disproportionate harmful experiences women and girls face during times of war and conflict are not limited to the Palestinian genocide; Throughout history and up to today, women and girls have continued to experience the worst impacts of war and conflict, from loss of life, displacement, starvation, gender-based violence, limited access to healthcare, and denial of human rights.

The inequality experienced by women and girls in conditions of war and conflict must come to an end. We must make women and girls a priority, both during crises and in the aftermath, to ensure their needs are met and their rights upheld.



Press release

War on women – Proportion of women killed in armed conflicts doubles in 2023

UN paints dire picture of women in war: Despite rising conflict less than 10 per cent of negotiators in peace processes in 2023 were women.

22 OCTOBER 2024

Source: [UN Women, 2024](#)



Women's Rights and the Battle Against Femicide: A Call for Action in Canada

Femicide—the intentional murder of women because they are women—is recognized as a pervasive, global human rights violation and considered the most extreme and brutal form of violence against women and girls ([Canadian Femicide Observatory, n.d.](#)). According to [Statistics Canada \(2023\)](#), 1,125 gender-related homicides of women and girls occurred between 2011 and 2021, two thirds (66%) of which were perpetrated by an intimate partner. The killing of women and girls, both globally and in Canada, occurs in distinct ways that differ from other forms of violence. This highlights the critical need to develop and implement specific and nuanced responses that address sex/gender inequality and misogyny, in which femicide is deeply rooted. This brings to question how femicide can be eliminated in Canada.

The World Health Organization (WHO) draws attention to the importance of a public health approach ([WHO, 2012](#)). This approach emphasizes the benefits of a multisector collaboration, rather than separating the issue as inherently a medical or criminal problem (WHO, 2012). Within this framework, there are four main factors to observe in order to understand what leads to femicide: the individual-level, relationship-level, community-level, and the societal-level.

In order to combat femicide, we must first attend to root causes. Thus, we must develop and implement initiatives at and across all levels. Examples include:

Individual/Relational Levels:

- Programs aimed at education and awareness.
- Direct intervention services and programs for survivors and perpetrators.

Community/Relational Levels:

- Addressing gender norms and inequalities in community groups, schools, and workplaces.
- Increasing resources within communities that address employment, social connectivity, and other risk factors.

Societal Level:

- Addressing structural inequality and entrenched gender stereotypes.
- Policies and legal frameworks that explicitly address femicide.

**VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN STOPS HERE**

Over-represented and Under-valued: Women in Healthcare During the COVID-19 Pandemic

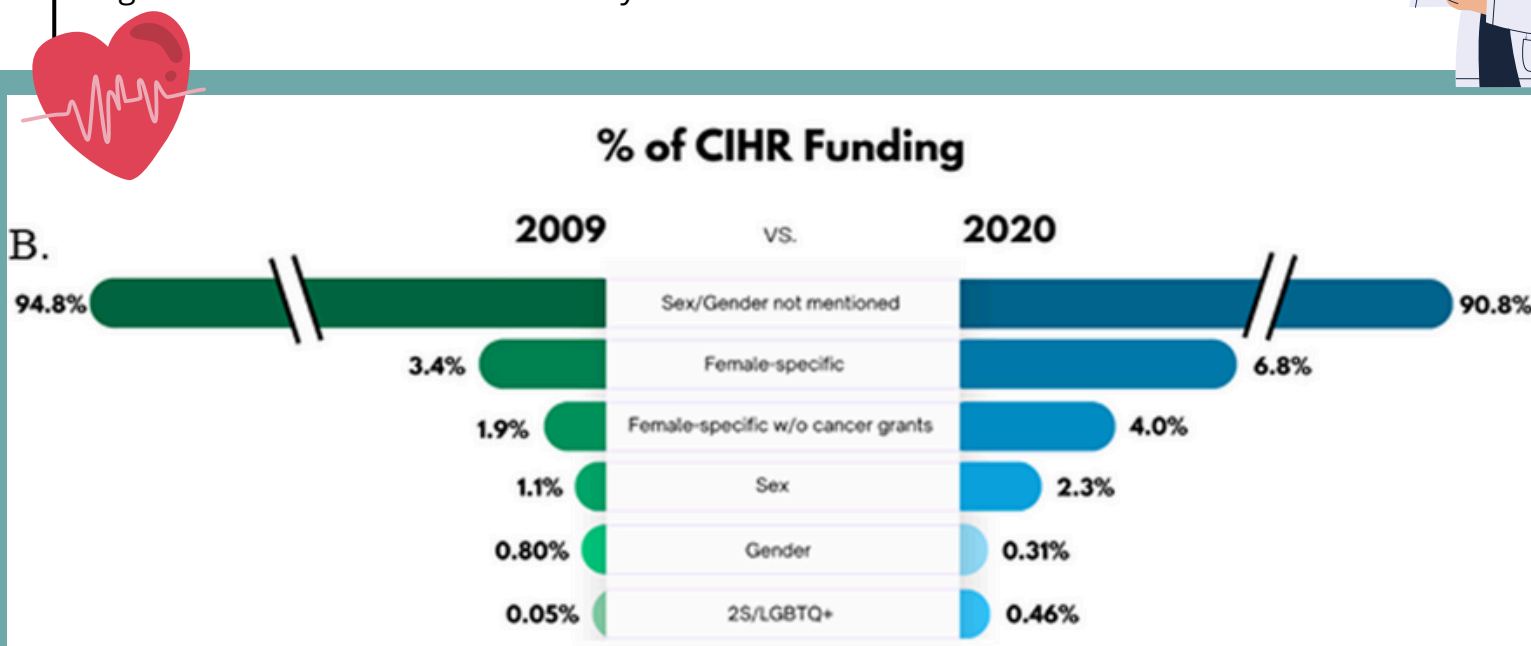
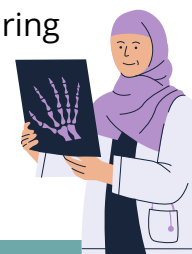


As a Registered Practical Nurse whose career began at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have experienced first-hand many disparities commonly faced by women in healthcare.

Women make up 75% of the healthcare field, with numbers greater in nursing and midwifery ([Morgan et al., 2022](#)). At the same time, women healthcare workers face greater health crises, including higher rates of disease outbreaks, insufficient personal protective equipment (PPE), fewer leadership opportunities, heavier household responsibilities, and higher rates of mental health illness. This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many women had to balance demanding jobs with caregiver/household responsibilities. This resulted in higher rates of absenteeism, burnout, and mental health concerns. Such disparities highlight that despite their significant value to the healthcare system

women remain under-paid and undervalued.

Existing policies, typically tailored for men, fail to recognize and address the gender-based challenges faced by women. To support women in healthcare, we must implement stronger mental health support, increased wages, strategies to balance work and home life, and greater leadership representation. Research has indicated that supporting women healthcare workers is essential to preparedness for disaster recovery. With the evidence available on the disparities faced by women healthcare workers, we can work to make changes. By recognizing the disparities women faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, we can plan to better support the women who will serve in the future as front-line workers during disasters and illness outbreaks.



Source: [Stranges et al. \(2023\)](#)

Percentage change in CIHR funding in the years 2009 and 2020 that did not mention sex/gender in their grant abstracts and those that mentioned female-specific health not including cancer grants, as well as grants mentioning gender, sex, and 2S/LGBTQ+

Women's Reproductive Rights: The Changing Landscape in the U.S.

Recent years have seen increased assaults on reproductive rights in the United States. In June 2022, the United States Supreme Court revoked *Roe v. Wade*, abolishing federal abortion rights protections and allowing states to impose brutal restrictions. This ruling has had a disastrous impact on women, trans men, and other oppressed groups, as well as medical professionals and reproductive justice activists (Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2022).

The Aftermath of the Overturn of *Roe v. Wade*

Since the ruling, more than a dozen states have passed strict abortion prohibitions, disproportionately affecting low-income women, Black and Indigenous women, and rural populations. These communities confront financial and logistical barriers to healthcare, resulting in more coerced births, greater maternal health risks, and increasing criminalization of reproductive choices (ACLU, 2023).

As states respond with the imposition of abortion bans or severe restrictions, maternal deaths are expected to increase, as people who would have chosen abortion, with its low mortality risk, will be exposed to the high risks of certain pregnancy complications (Stevenson et al., 2022). Rates

of maternal death in the US already exceed those of countries such as Italy, Australia, and Canada. With abortion bans, Stevenson et al. (2022), estimate that across the set of 26 *Dobbs*-ban states, maternal deaths will increase by 24%, with Black women seeing a 39% increase in the maternal death rate.

We have already witnessed cases highlighting the risks of these prohibitions. A 14-year-old in Arizona was denied essential medicine, women who have miscarried have been denied care, and a Texas woman had to travel eighteen hours to receive treatment for an ectopic pregnancy. Similarly, the case,

14

Number of states where
abortion is illegal

3X

The rate of maternal mortality in
the US is more than three times
more than the rate in most other
high-income countries

24/100,000

Black women in the US are 3
times more likely to die from
pregnancy-related complications
than white women

SisterSong v. State of Georgia details how Georgia's abortion ban is putting lives in danger ([Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP, 2025](#)). We see how legal vagueness and deprivation of doctor discretion to make urgent calls to save people from physical harm, death, and lifelong trauma, further prevents doctors from delivering vital reproductive healthcare ([Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2025](#)).

The Rise of Abortion Bans and Restrictions

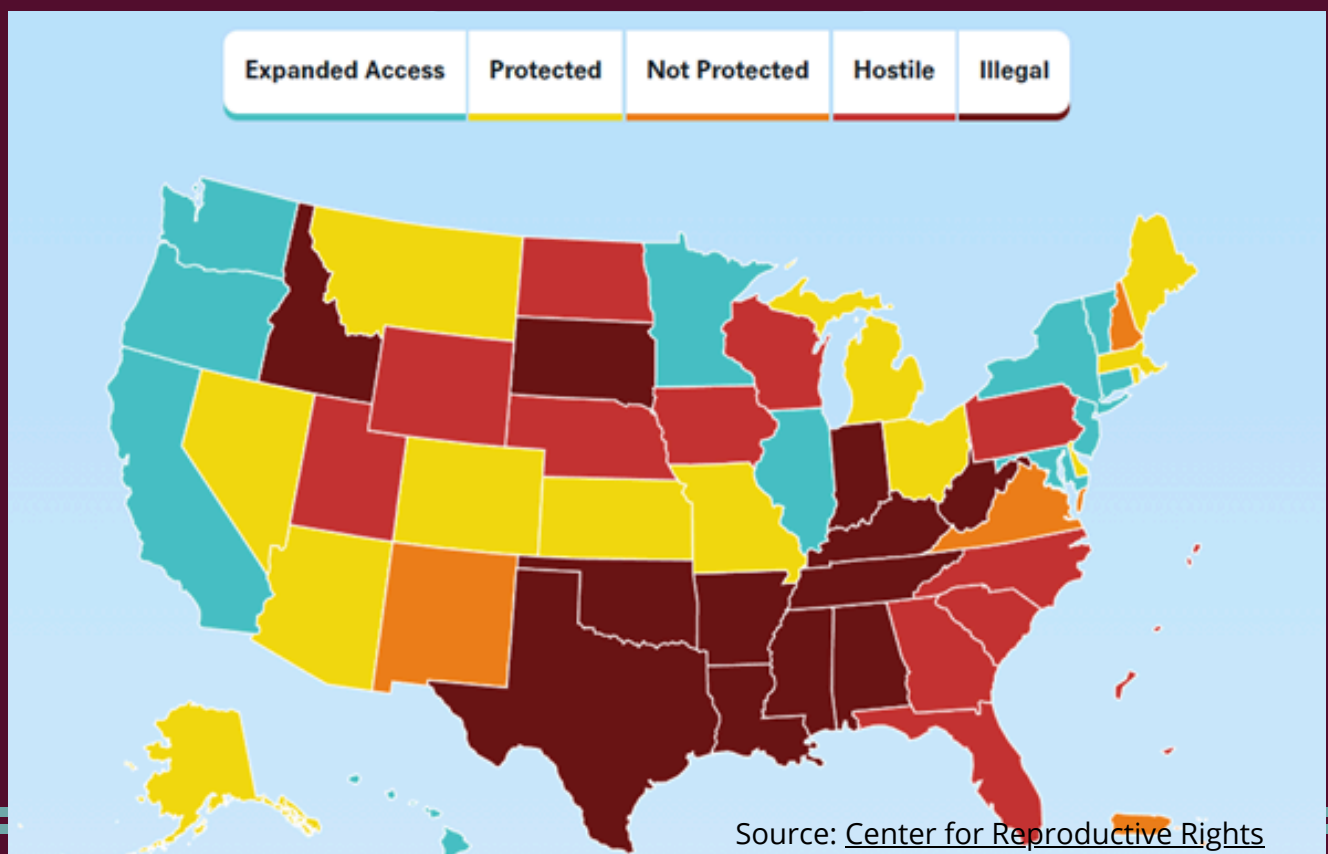
With abortion bans and restrictions, clinics, including Planned Parenthood, have closed, limiting access to abortion, contraception, prenatal care, and cancer screenings (ARCC, 2024). Many people must go out of state for abortions, yet numerous states now punish anyone who seeks help in getting out-of-state services. Legal risks prevent healthcare practitioners from providing life-saving reproductive procedures (ACLU, 2023). This attack on abortion is part of a larger campaign to restrict reproductive rights, which includes limits on emergency contraception, in-vitro fertilization (IVF), and gender-affirming care.

The US issues have also sparked debate over reproductive healthcare access in Canada, particularly among Indigenous and rural populations. Advocate warn that these practices are motivated by power and control over marginalized bodies ([Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2022](#)).

The Fight for Reproductive Justice

Despite these obstacles, reproductive rights activists continue to persevere in their advocacy. The ACLU, the Center for Reproductive Rights, and grassroots groups are fighting restrictive legislation, providing abortion services, and advocating for policy change (ARCC, 2024).

The erosion of reproductive rights emphasizes the necessity for continued advocacy. Canadians must continue to be diligent in protecting reproductive rights. Organizations like Family Services of Peel are important in providing equal healthcare access and reproductive freedom. Standing in solidarity with reproductive justice groups helps to guarantee that people can make their own decisions about their bodies without political intrusion.



Source: [Center for Reproductive Rights](#)

Women Entrepreneurs:

DRIVING CHANGE, OVERCOMING
CHALLENGES,
AND SHAPING COMMUNITIES



According to the State of Women's Entrepreneurship in Canada 2023 annual report:

According to the State of Women's Entrepreneurship (SOWE) annual report, in 2023, approximately 18.4% of all businesses in Canada were majority own by women, up from 15.6% in 2017. This article elaborates on the factors that influence the paths taken by women who seek to open and operate their own business.

The motivation most often cited by women entrepreneurs is their desire for personal autonomy in their work. Autonomy is defined as "functioning independently without control by others". In recent studies, nearly two thirds (64%) indicate they became a business owner to be their own boss and make their own decisions. The business magazine Forbes attributes the entrepreneurial mindset to the lure of self-determination.

In addition to the top motivation, a significant proportion of women are driven by the opportunity to contribute to their communities (29%) and to create local jobs (24%). This suggests women entrepreneurs are likely to engage with the community where they do business, and this is further supported by the fact that 40% of these women consider creating jobs in their community to be a marker of their business' success. Another recent study clearly documents the many ways women business owners give back locally.



In 2022, **988.400** women in Canada were self-employed

The average amount of financing for men-owned businesses is about **150%** higher than that for women-owned businesses

18% of all businesses were majority owned by women

Women-owned businesses focus more on innovation than men-owned businesses

Less than **1%** of small- and medium-sized enterprises are owned by people with a disability

A staggering four in five women business owners (80%) reported that they employ people from their community or province, while another 69% use products or materials from other local businesses, and 37% provide services that are essential to their community. Women tend to run smaller businesses and operate mostly in service sectors. Owners of smaller businesses are more likely to be risk averse, especially those operating in the social services sector. Enterprises in administrative management sector are also more likely to be risk averse.

When starting or owning a business, the most common challenges revolve around managing multiple roles and a heavy workload, as well as labour, attracting customers, and competition. These are universal pressures faced by entrepreneurs, irrespective of gender. According to women entrepreneurs, their primary challenge is managing multiple roles within their businesses, followed by striking a balance between work and personal life.



Additionally, women owners identified accessing financing for their businesses as a significant challenge. While this is comparable to male entrepreneurs, it signals an opportunity for governments and institutions that are eager to support women entrepreneurship to improve access to financing for them.

Other challenges, while affecting fewer entrepreneurs overall, might provide opportunities to better support women. For example, significantly more women expressed difficulty finding, or applying and qualifying for, government support programs, compared to men. Accessing support networks and finding mentors proved to be more challenging for women than for men. Women entrepreneurs reported experiencing a perceived lack of legitimacy or credibility as business owners (to a greater extent than their male counterparts). These challenges highlight the importance of increasing the visibility and accessibility of support programs, networking, and mentorship opportunities that are specifically designed for women entrepreneurs.



Transforming STEM: The Need for Greater Gender Diversity in Science and Technology

Women have made extraordinary contributions to science, yet they remain underrepresented in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. Currently, less than 30% of those employed in professional STEM roles are women, while men account for over 70% (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2024). This gender imbalance poses a significant challenge for the future of science and technology. Diversity within the STEM fields should be considered a strength as it leads to creativity, sustainability, and competitiveness.

One key reason for this disparity lies in societal norms that tend to advance men in STEM careers while discouraging or overlooking women. Young girls are often deterred from pursuing STEM pathways due to a combination of factors. Studies have highlighted recurring themes, including a noticeable gender gap (Reinking & Martin, 2018).

The lack of visible female representation in STEM can create a perception that these fields are not for women. Additionally, stereotypes about STEM professions, such as the notion that they involve social isolation, can further discourage young females from exploring these careers (Reinking & Martin, 2018).

Building a stronger pipeline for women in STEM starts at a young age. Encouraging girls to explore these fields through accessible education, mentorship, and exposure to inspiring role models can help dismantle these barriers (Reinking & Martin, 2018). By promoting curiosity and confidence in STEM early on, we can empower more young women to pursue these careers and close the gender gap in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.



Katherine Johnson



Katherine Johnson, an African-American space scientist and mathematician is a leader in American space history. She has made major contributions to aeronautics and space programs in the US through her incorporation of computing tools. She calculated the trajectory for Alan Shepard, the first American in space, as well as for the 1969 Apollo 11 flight to the moon.

Rosalind Franklin



Rosalind Franklin was a British chemist and crystallographer. Her research was essential to elucidating the structure of DNA, for which she was not credited for during her lifetime. It was years later, after her death in 1958, that she was recognized for her pivotal contribution to the DNA story.



Shifting the Lens: Advancing Gender Equity in News, Politics, and Entertainment



While improvements have occurred, women, particularly those of marginalized identities, continue to face underrepresentation and gendered stereotypes across various forms of media.

Women in the News

Globally, women make up 43% of news reporters and have their voices, expertise, and opinions increasingly featured in news stories. However, gendered disparities remain, as unlike men, women remain underrepresented in political, business, and economic news stories (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2020 – see Table 5).

MAJOR TOPIC	Print, Radio & Television 2015		Internet, Twitter 2015		Print, Radio & Television 2020		Internet, Twitter 2020	
	%F	%M	%F	%M	%F	%M	%F	%M
Politics & Government	23	77	17	83	26	74	29	71
Economy	41	59	40	60	36	64	32	68
Science & Health	43	57	71	29	36	64	39	61
Social & Legal	39	61	42	58	45	55	50	50
Crime & Violence	38	62	48	52	29	71	31	69
Celebrity, Arts, and Media, Sports	29	71	31	69	26	74	40	60
Gender Related	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	50	50	54	46

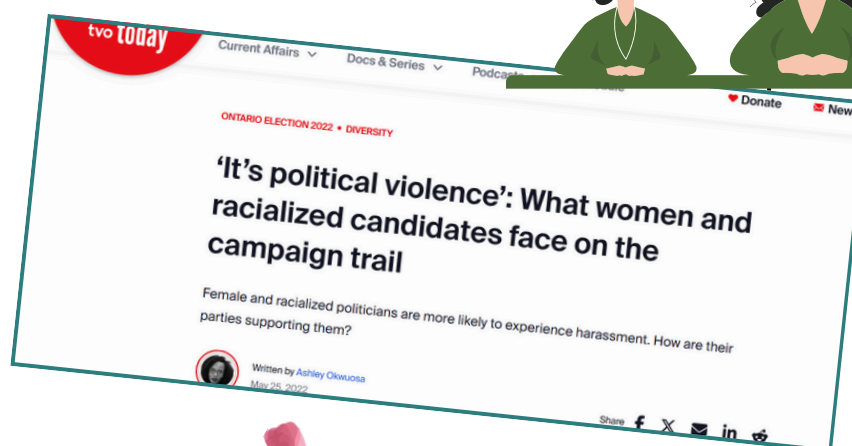
Source: Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), 2020

Table 5: Presence of men and women in the news, by medium, major topic, and by GMMP year



Women in Politics

In politics, women experience media coverage differently than men. For example, in a meta-analysis, Van der Pas and Aaldering (2020) found that women politicians receive 17% less media coverage. In that media coverage, women politicians receive more family, appearance and gender-specific coverage, experience exaggerations of their 'combative' behaviour, alongside often being portrayed as less viable candidates than men.





While 40% of athletes are women, they only receive on 4% of sports media coverage (Media Smarts, n.d.)

Women in Sports

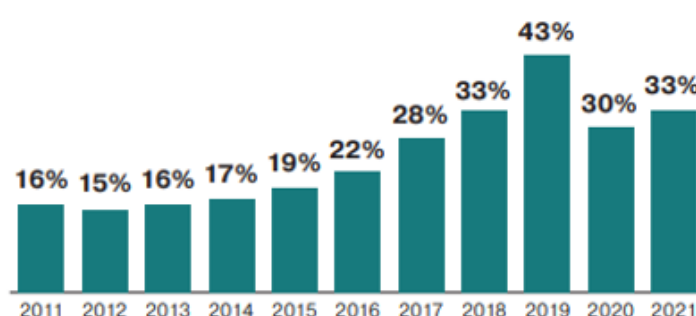
In sports media, coverage of women's sporting events is minimal. Moreover, commentators often use covertly gendered and sexist language to describe women athletes and may showcase less enthusiasm for women's sports.

Women in Television and Film

In film and television, women have long been underrepresented as directors, writers, and producers; received less pay; had fewer opportunities than men; and faced sexual harassment. Despite decades of efforts to address gender inequities, change has been slow and gender equity in television and film has worsened in some places (Loist et al., 2024).

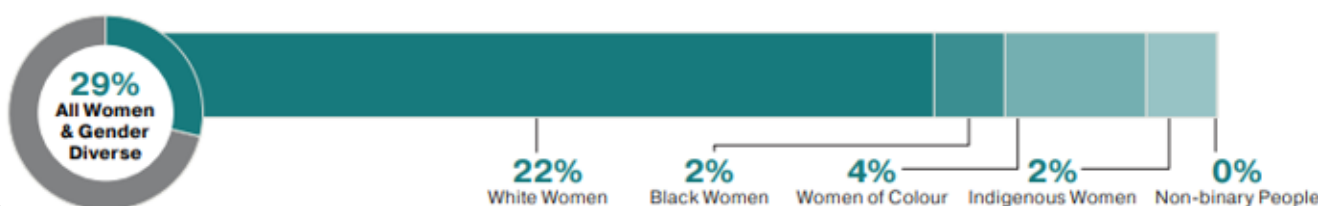
For example, the 2023 On Screen Report found a decrease in representation of women and gender diverse individuals in key creative roles in Canada in 2020 and 2021, with a disproportionate impact on Indigenous, Black and racialized women.

Share of Key Creative Roles in TV & Film for Women and Gender Diverse People



Source: On Screen Report (2023)

Women and Gender Diverse People's Share of Key Creative Roles in 2020 & 2021 Combined



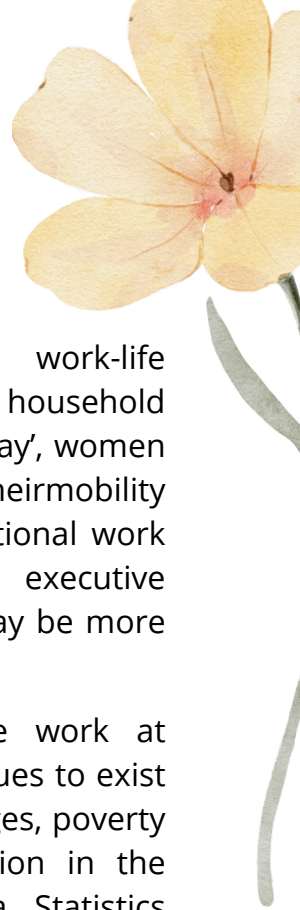
Source: On Screen Report (2023)

Accurate representation of women across forms of media is critical to positively influence future generations women to take on leadership roles, enter male-dominated fields, and participate equitably in all aspects of life.

We must continue to advocate for improved gender equity policies and diversification of the individuals and narratives featured in the media to dismantle deeply rooted stereotypes and create an inclusive society for all.



From Home to the Workplace: How Gender Shapes Women's Time and Earnings



Women play a significant role in the process of managing a household. In 2022, 52% (or 8.4 million) women aged 15 and older provided some type of care (paid or unpaid) to children and care-dependent adults ([Statistics Canada, 2022](#)). Women have been indicated to provide the majority of unpaid care. Additionally, according to a Western News report from 2020, women are responsible for 61% of laundry tasks, 56% of meal preparation, and 50% of dishwashing activities, while men were primarily responsible for masculine-coded tasks (i.e., outdoor work and repairs) ([Statistics Canada, 2020](#)). As a result, women are more susceptible to the adverse effects associated with caregiving, including feelings of fatigue, worry, or anxiety ([Statistics Canada, 2022](#)).

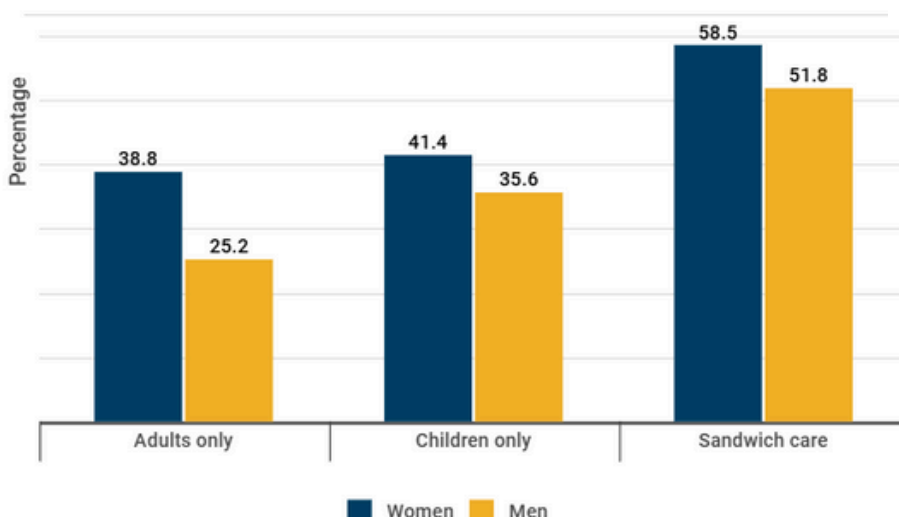
Changes have been seen, as men have taken on more home tasks, particularly in couples when both the woman and man work outside the home ([Van Brenk, 2020](#)). However, even as women's participation in the paid workforce has increased, their involvement in unpaid care work in the home has remained higher than that of

men, creating inequities in work-life balance. Due to higher household responsibilities or the 'double-day', women may experience limitations to their mobility and careers, as taking on additional work responsibility or taking an executive position further from home, may be more challenging ([Van Brenk, 2020](#)).

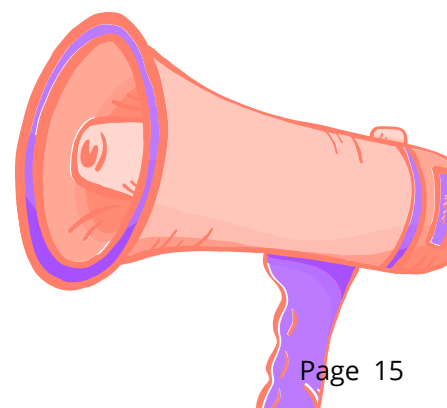
Alongside imbalances in care work at home, gender inequality continues to exist in the form of disparities in wages, poverty levels, and reduced participation in the labour force. According to a [Statistics Canada \(2022\)](#) report, women earn 89 cents for every dollar earned by men. The gender pay gap is worse among racialized women, Indigenous women and women with disabilities.

Continued efforts are needed to generate equitable work and home environments, where women receive equal pay for the same responsibilities and can equitably share care responsibilities at home, reducing adverse outcomes and promoting well-being.

Percentage of unpaid caregivers who reported that their caregiving had an impact on their employment, by gender, Canada, 2022



Source: Graph from [Vanier Institute of the Family, Families Count 2024](#);
Data from [Wray, 2024](#)



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