

Cross-Sectoral Solutions: Strengthening Community Capacity to Address the 'Parallel Pandemic' of Gender-Based Violence-Related Brain Injury Through a Survivor-Led Support Program



Womenattheцентр

October 2, 2025

Knowledge Hub Presents Conference



presents:

Innovations in Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Trauma- and Violence-Informed Health Promotion

A NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Oct 1–2, 2025

Content Warning

We are offering a trigger/content warning, as this presentation addresses sensitive topics that may be triggering/activating for folks. This includes discussions around gender-based violence, brain injury, and various forms of systemic violence (Ex. anti-Black racism, colonialism, ableism, etc...).

Please only listen if you are able to do so and take breaks and reach out to your support systems as needed.





Solidarity Statement

- Stolen unceded territory of ancestral lands belonging to the Huron-Wendat, the Anishnaabe Nation, the Haudensaunee Confederacy, the Mississaugas of the Credit
- Violence on the land = violence on bodies
- Home to generations of people of African descent
- Violence and attempted genocide of Indigenous & Black people who are still enduring systemic anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism
- Ongoing impacts of colonialism, white supremacy, toxic patriarchy, and racial capitalism that values accumulation over life, leaving a world ravaged and unsafe for all



Image: Katie Douglas



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WomenatthecentrE

WomenatthecentrE is a pan-Canadian non-profit created by and for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

We are committed to ensuring the voices and expertise of survivors are central in the implementation and development of policies and programs aimed at eradicating all forms of GBV.

What is Gender-Based Violence (GBV)?

- Gender-based violence (GBV) is systemically rooted violence based on someone's gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender
- GBV occurs interpersonally, in communities, and systemically/institutionally
- Women, girls, 2-spirit, trans, and gender diverse folks are those most impacted by GBV, but **it harms us all**
- GBV is a universal issue, impacting individuals, families, communities, societies, values, policies, and practices



What is Brain Injury (BI)?

- Damage to the brain that affects how it works
- Frequently characterized as Acquired (Internal Factors) or Traumatic (External Factors)
- Brain injuries can be mild, moderate, or severe
- The effects of BIs vary depending on the part of the brain impacted and the extent of the injury

| Acquired | Traumatic |
|-------------------------|---|
| Lack of oxygen (Stroke) | Lack of oxygen (strangulation, choking) |
| Infection | Blow to the head |
| Exposure to substances | Shaking |
| Tumour | Fall |

The Intersection of GBV & BI

- Highlights a hidden public crisis, as survivors often sustain head injuries through blows, shaking, choking, or strangulation, etc...
- These injuries are frequently under-diagnosed or misinterpreted as mental health issues due to overlapping symptoms and lack of provider awareness
- Survivors, especially those who are Black, Indigenous, disabled, or 2SLGBTQIA+, face compounded barriers to care, justice, and healing
- Addressing this intersection requires trauma & violence and brain injury-informed services & policies, survivor-led approaches, and cross-sector collaboration

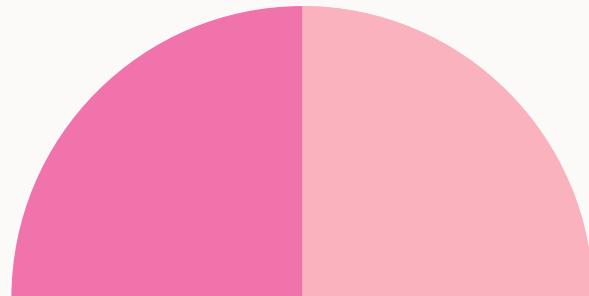




Cross Sectoral Solutions: Overview

Team Development

Survivor led, multilevel, cross-sectoral, and pan-Canadian



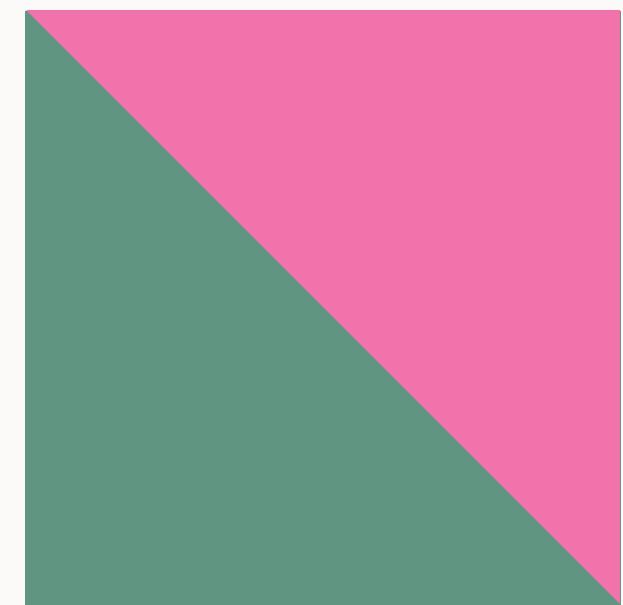
Research & Pilot Program

Developing and delivering a survivor led pilot program, and ethics approved evaluation plan, to support GBV-BI survivors



Knowledge Mobilization, Capacity Building, & Awareness Raising & Advocacy

Building survivor, BI, trauma & violence, and evidence-informed communities, supports, policies and practices





- Host Sites
- Stakeholder Advisory Committee
- Students & Volunteers
- Occupational Therapy Committee
- Cross-Sector & Multi-Level Partners

A Survivor-Led and Cross-Sectoral Team

WomenatthecentrE is a survivor-led team, with project team members identifying as survivors of various forms of gender-based violence and/or brain injury.

This project worked in collaboration with **WomenatthecentrE's Survivor Expert Collective (WE SEC)**, a survivor collective that provided strategic direction for the project's key activities and deliverables. Their leadership ensured survivors did not fall through the cracks.



Cross Sectoral Solutions: Research

Reviews

Filling the gap in survivor-led GBV-BI research through secondary and community-based participatory research



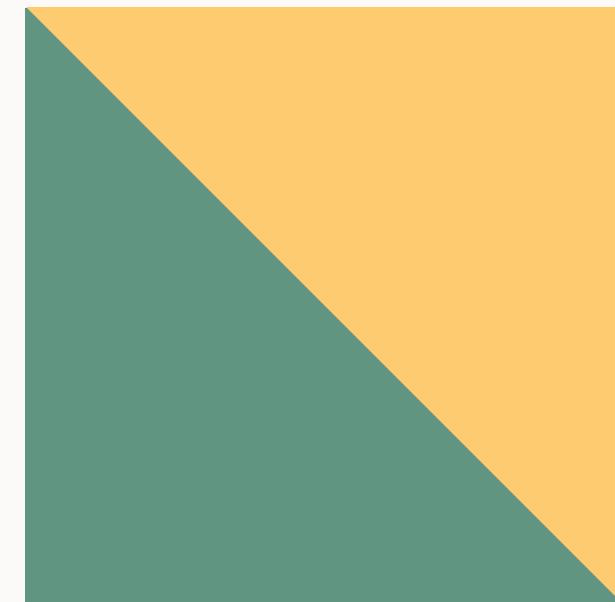
Ethics

Collaborating with WE SEC, service providers, host sites, academics, collaborators, to devise research process, tools, methodologies, and evaluation



Pilot Program

Developing and delivering a survivor led pilot program to support survivors at the GBV-BI intersection now





Cross Sectoral Solutions: Reviews

► **Trauma Violence Abuse.** 2024 Apr;25(2):1638-1660. doi: 10.1177/15248380231196807.
Epub 2023 Sep 30.

Exploring the Relationships Between Rehabilitation and Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence: A Scoping Review

Danielle Toccalino ¹, Gifty Asare ², Jenna Fleming ^{1 3}, Joyce Yin ¹, Amy Kieftenburg ⁴,
Amy Moore ⁵, Halina Lin Haag ^{1 4}, Vincy Chan ^{1 6}, Jessica Babineau ⁶, Nneka MacGregor ⁷,
Angela Colantonio ^{1 6}

Affiliations + expand

PMID: 37776318 PMCID: [PMC10913349](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10913349/) DOI: [10.1177/15248380231196807](https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231196807)

SOCIAL WORK IN INTIMATE-PARTNER VIOLENCE & TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

► A literature scan of 13 works designed to explore the role of social work in helping survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL WORK?

► Social work plays a vital role in supporting survivors of TBI and IPV by providing safety planning, referrals to community agencies and counseling services.

However, there is a lack of knowledge within the social work field in identifying and subsequently providing treatment to survivors of TBI and IPV.

CONCLUSION

► There is a need for more specialized education of social workers and interconnected service providers on BI and on the intersection of BI and IPV to diagnose, treat, and care for survivors.

There is also a need for BI-related standardized assessments to develop adequate interventions for the acute and lingering TBI in IPV symptoms.

RECOMMENDATION

- Build BI and BI in IPV education into rehabilitation program
- Train service providers on BI symptomatology (acute and lingering) in IPV
- Build an interconnected network of service providers

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PEER SUPPORT IN INTIMATE-PARTNER VIOLENCE & TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

► A literature scan of 10 review articles designed to explore how peer support can help rehabilitate survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) and/or survivors of traumatic brain injury (TBI).

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF PEER SUPPORT?

► The 4 reviews identified explored the effects of peer support on survivors of violence, injury, crime, calamities, and suicide. These reviews included at least one IPV article.

It is suggested that peer support can provide both positive and negative outcomes. In some cases, it has not been found to be more or less effective than free flowing speech.

CONCLUSION

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It is suggested that peer support can provide both positive and negative outcomes. In some cases, it has not been found to be more or less effective than free flowing speech.

RECOMMENDATION

- Peer support in IPV should be independently reviewed to better assess its efficacy.
- Peer support interventions in IPV would benefit from being TBI-focused.
- In peer support, an emphasis on quality of life, knowledge, and coping mechanisms have shown great promise thus far.

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ALTERNATIVE CARE PRACTICES TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND BRAIN INJURY

Research Question What are the effects of alternative interventions on GBV-TBI?

Keywords "(intervention modality)" / "(service provider)" X "(survivor population)" / "(brain' injury)"

Search Source Google Scholar (Based on 152 studies)

Inclusions Survivor, women/women-identifying, injury (TBI/BI)





Cross Sectoral Solutions: Ethics & Pilot Program

What is the impact of a 20-week evidence-based, trauma- informed, multi-sectoral pilot program on survivors of GBV-BI?

- Co-adapt, pilot, and evaluate an evidence-based, trauma and violence informed, multi-sectoral Program
- Creating a blueprint of 'what worked' for critically needed supports to improve the health and well-being of survivors of GBV with a BI





Cross Sectoral Solutions: Pilot Program

8

Services Offered

1:1 PEER COUNSELLING

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY

MUSIC THERAPY

NATUROPATHY

SOMATIC THERAPY

PSYCHOTHERAPY

YOGA



Cross Sectoral Solutions: Pilot Program

6

Surveys

Response Rate (RR*)
(100 % is 25/25):

- Pre-Survey: 100% RR
- Interim Survey 1: 92% RR
- Interim Survey 2: 100% RR
- Interim Survey 3: 100% RR
- Interim Survey 4: 96% RR
- Post Survey: 96% RR

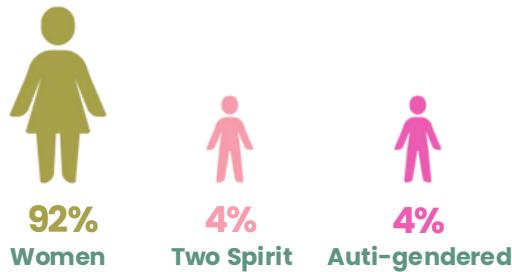
Data Collected:

- Demographics
- Health and Symptomology
- Program
- Knowledge/Skills
- Basic Needs, Supports, Accommodations
- Personal Goals & Satisfaction

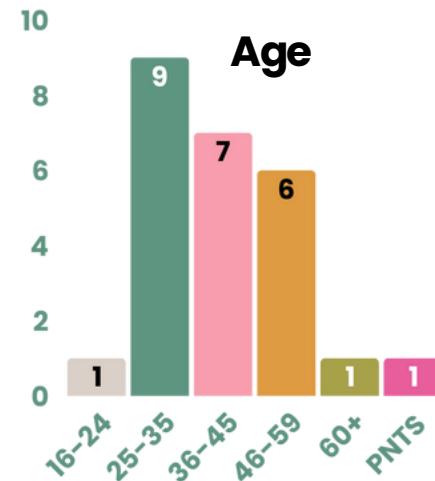
Research Findings

(25 survivors)

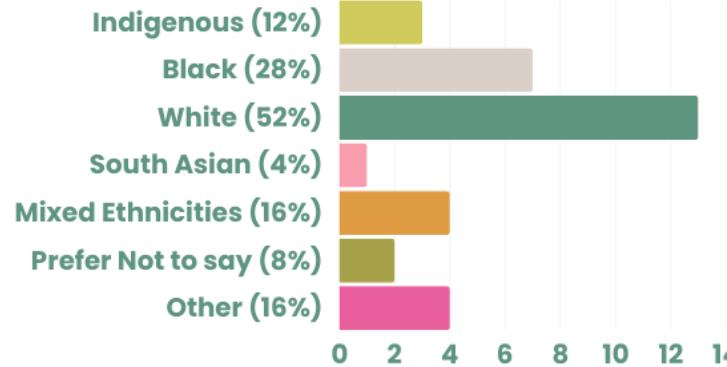
Gender



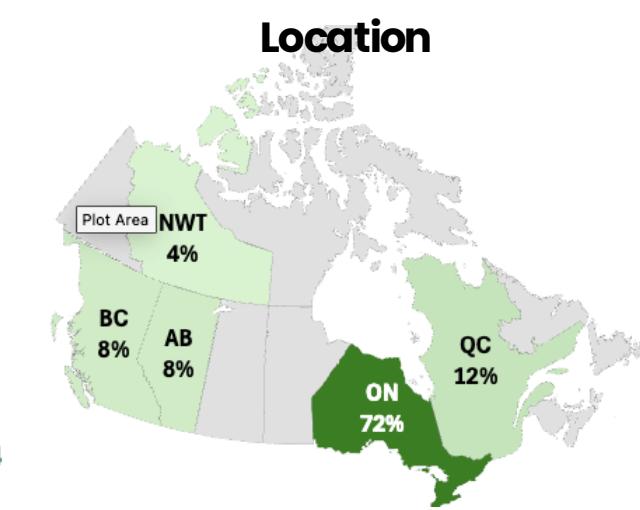
Age



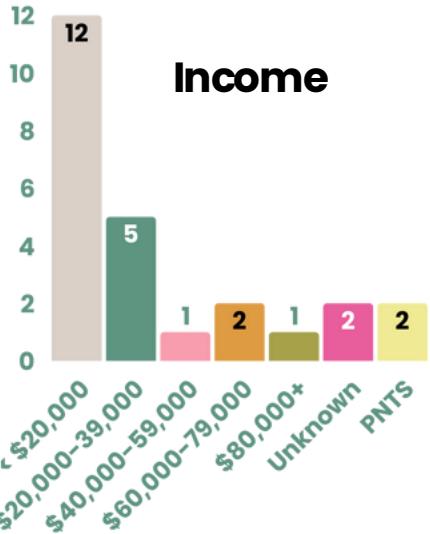
Ethnicity



Location



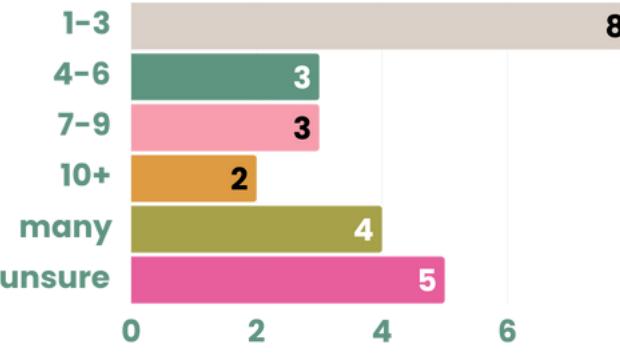
Income



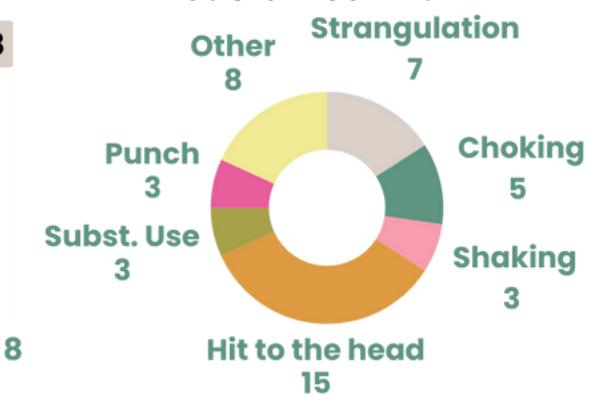
GBV as The Root Cause of BI



Number of GBV-BI Per Survivor

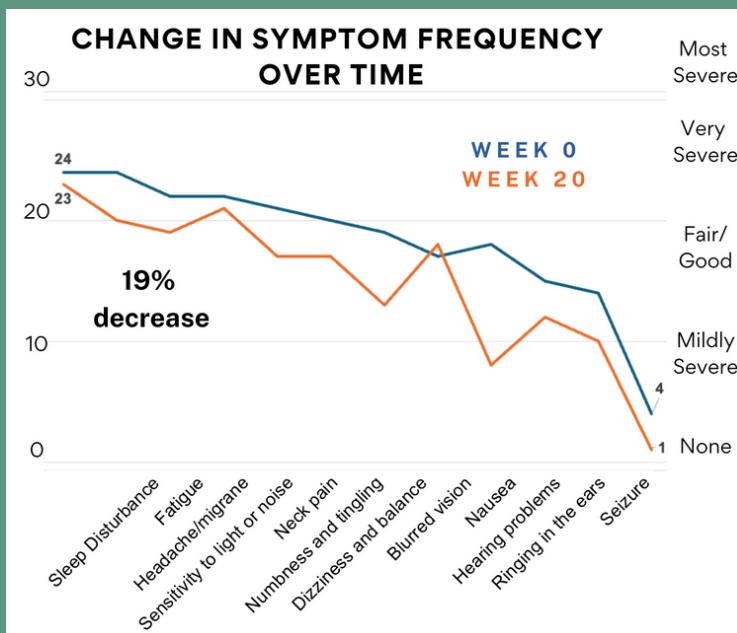
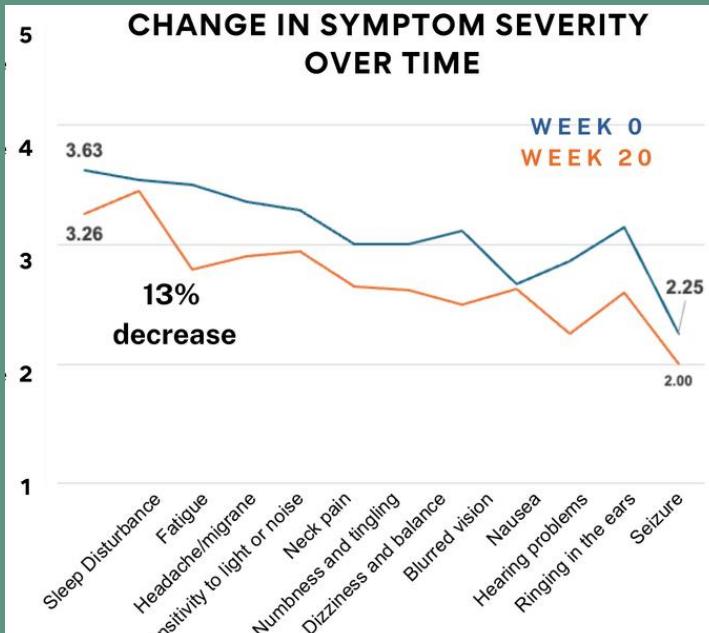


How BI Was Sustained in GBV



Research Findings: Quantitative

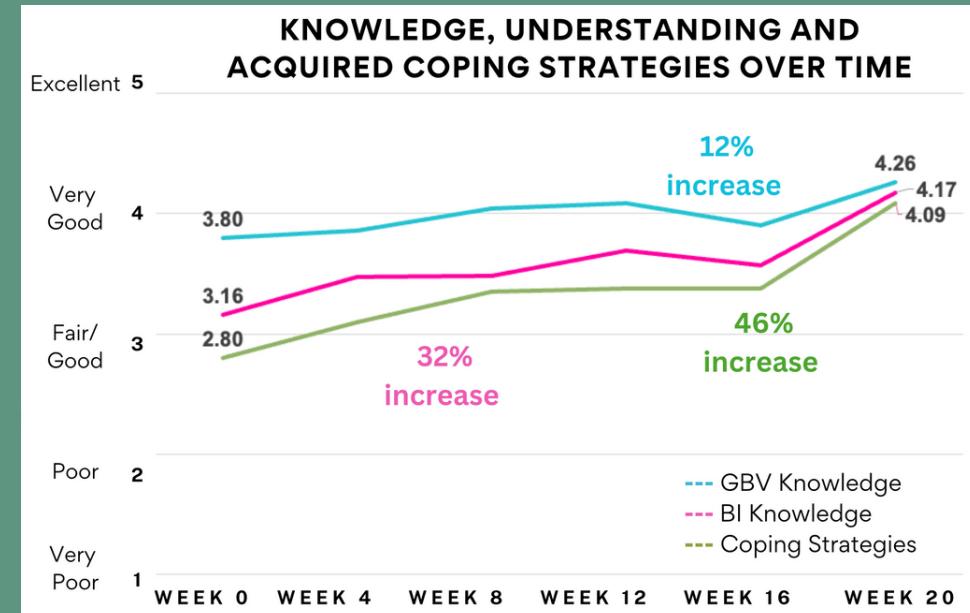
Symptom Severity and Frequency



19% Decrease in Symptom Frequency

13% Decrease in Symptom Severity

Knowledge and Coping Strategies



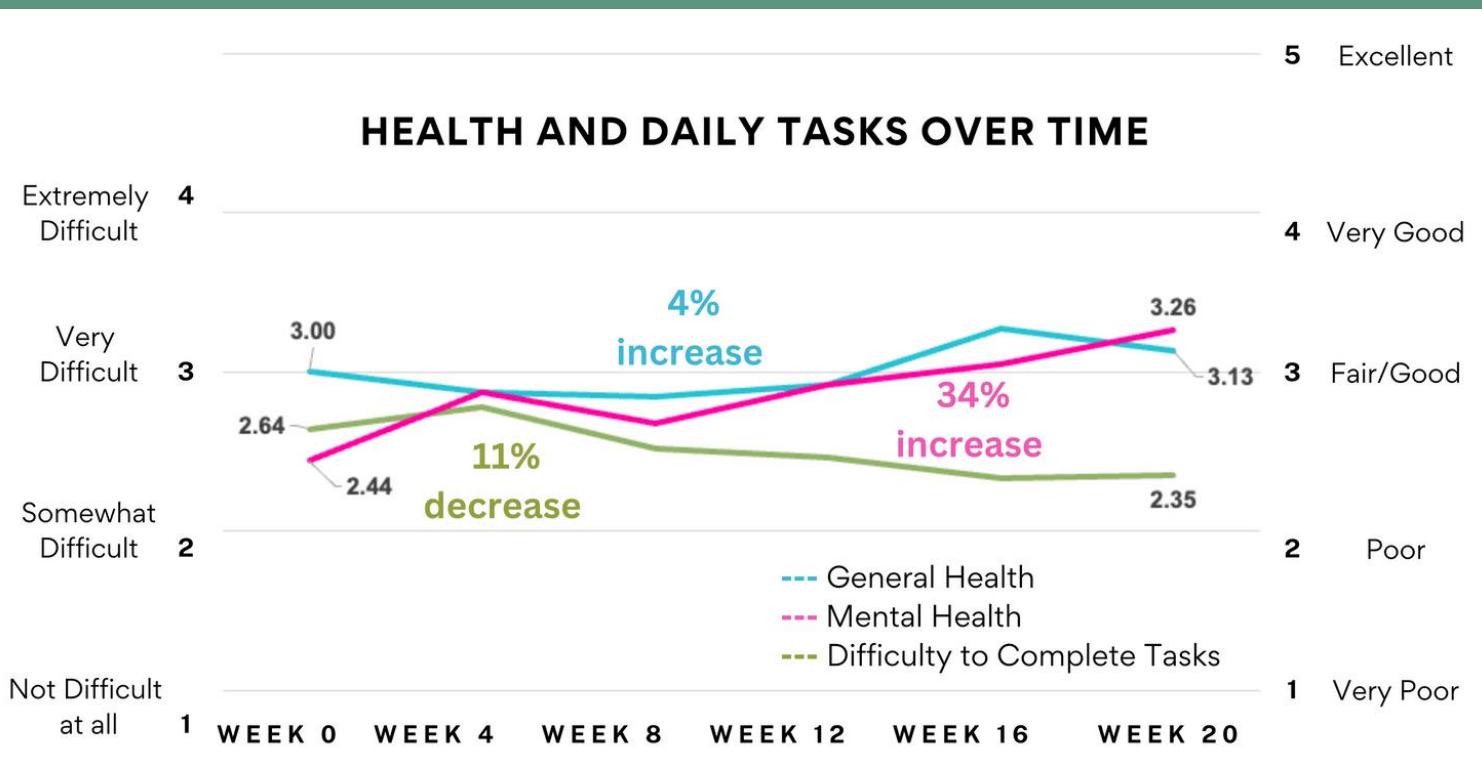
12% Increase in GBV Knowledge

46% Increase in BI Knowledge

32% Increase in Coping Strategies Knowledge

Research Findings: Quantitative

Health and Mental Health

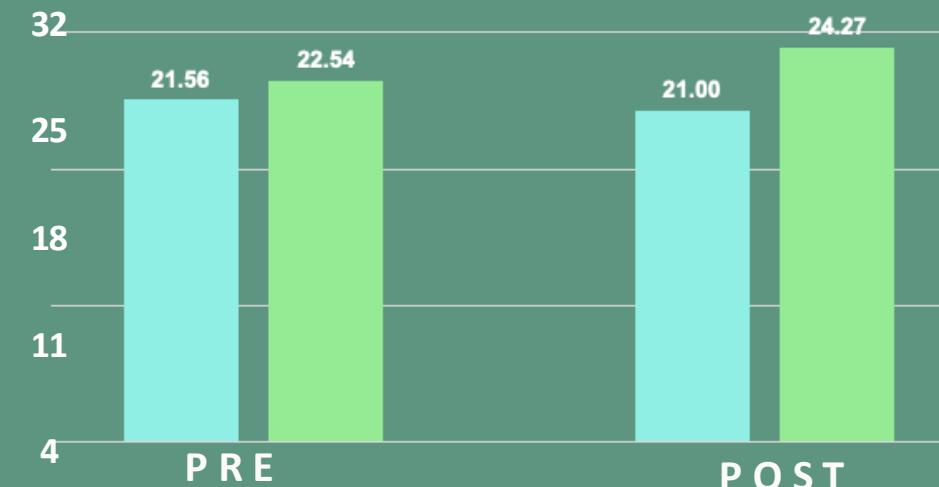


4% Increase in General Health

34% Increase in Mental Health

11% Decrease in Difficulty to Complete Tasks

Hope Score



3% Increase in Overall Hope characterized by:

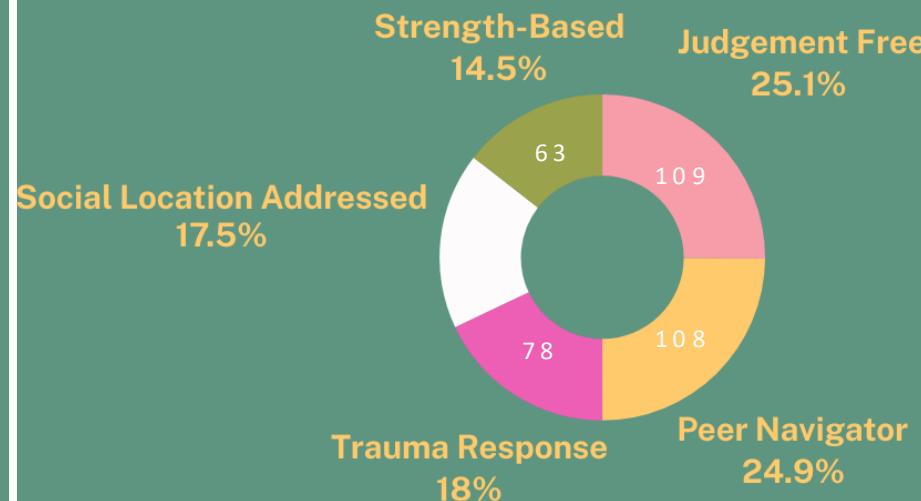
3% Decrease in Agency

7% Increase in Pathways

With a score between **40** and **48**, survivors remained "Hopeful" during the entire program

Research Findings: Qualitative

Positive Feedback



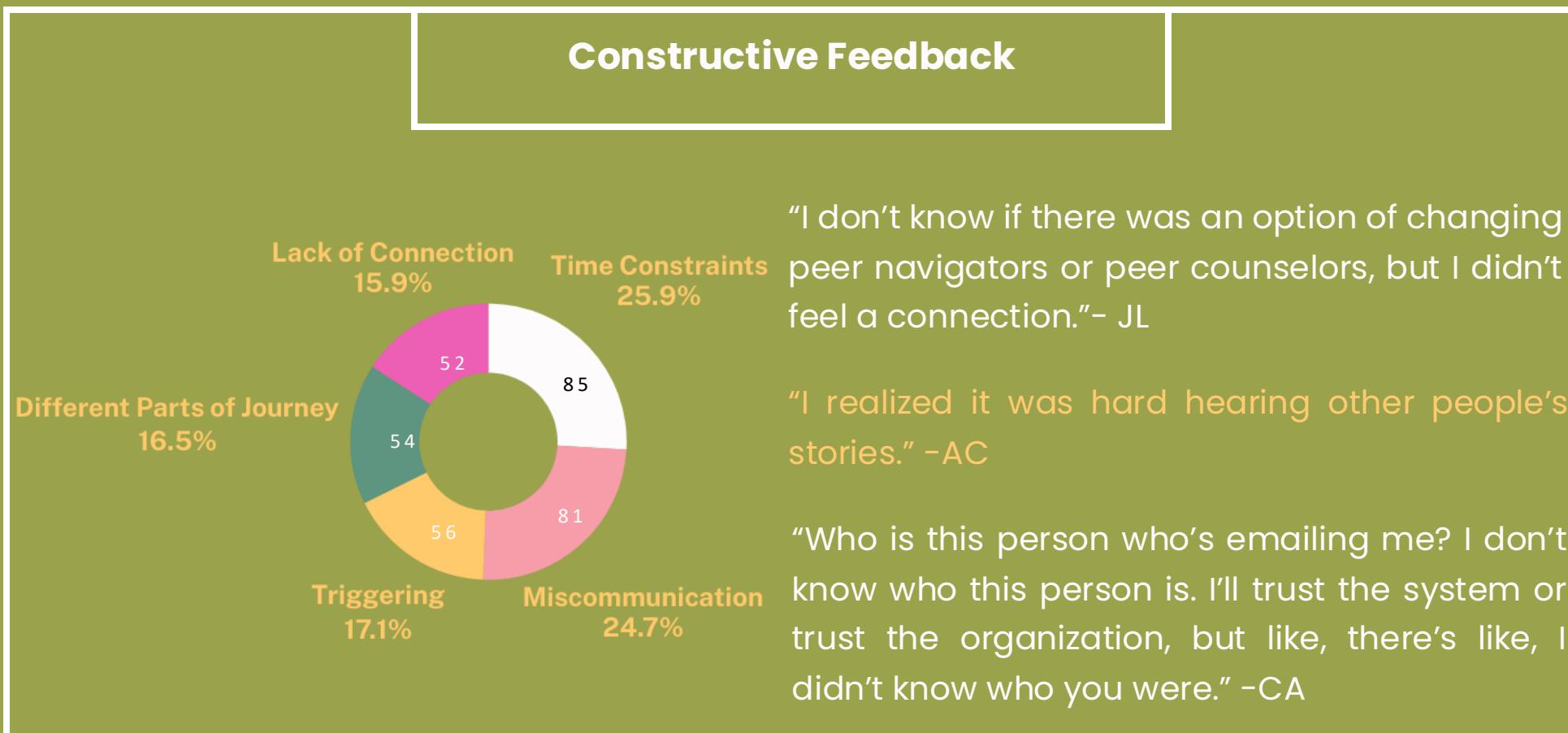
"It's always a non-judgmental stance that we are all unique in our experiences of TBI." RI

"I like how this includes all women that are like myself, with trauma and all these different types of issues that we've had. So I really appreciate the inclusivity and the respect I was given here." -CW

"My peer navigator! THE BEST! TOP NOTCH! AMAZING! Words can't express how much she has poured into me." - SH

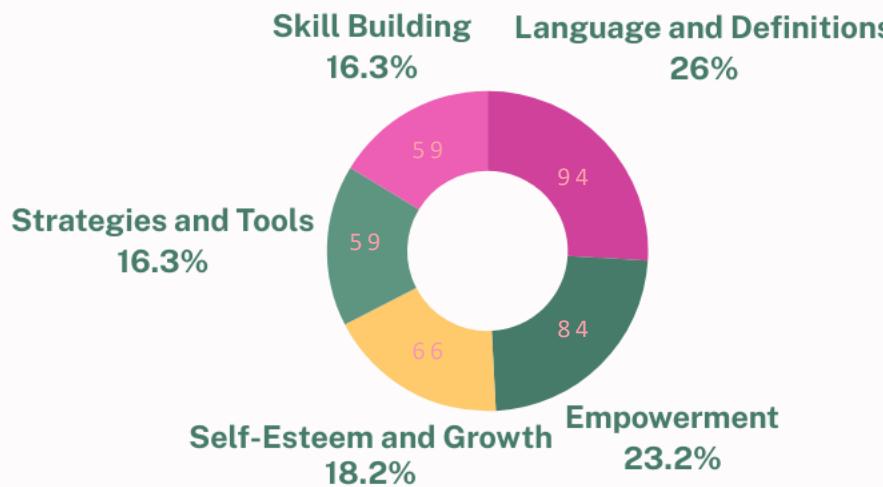
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Research Findings: Qualitative



Research Findings: Qualitative

Survivor's Key Takeaways

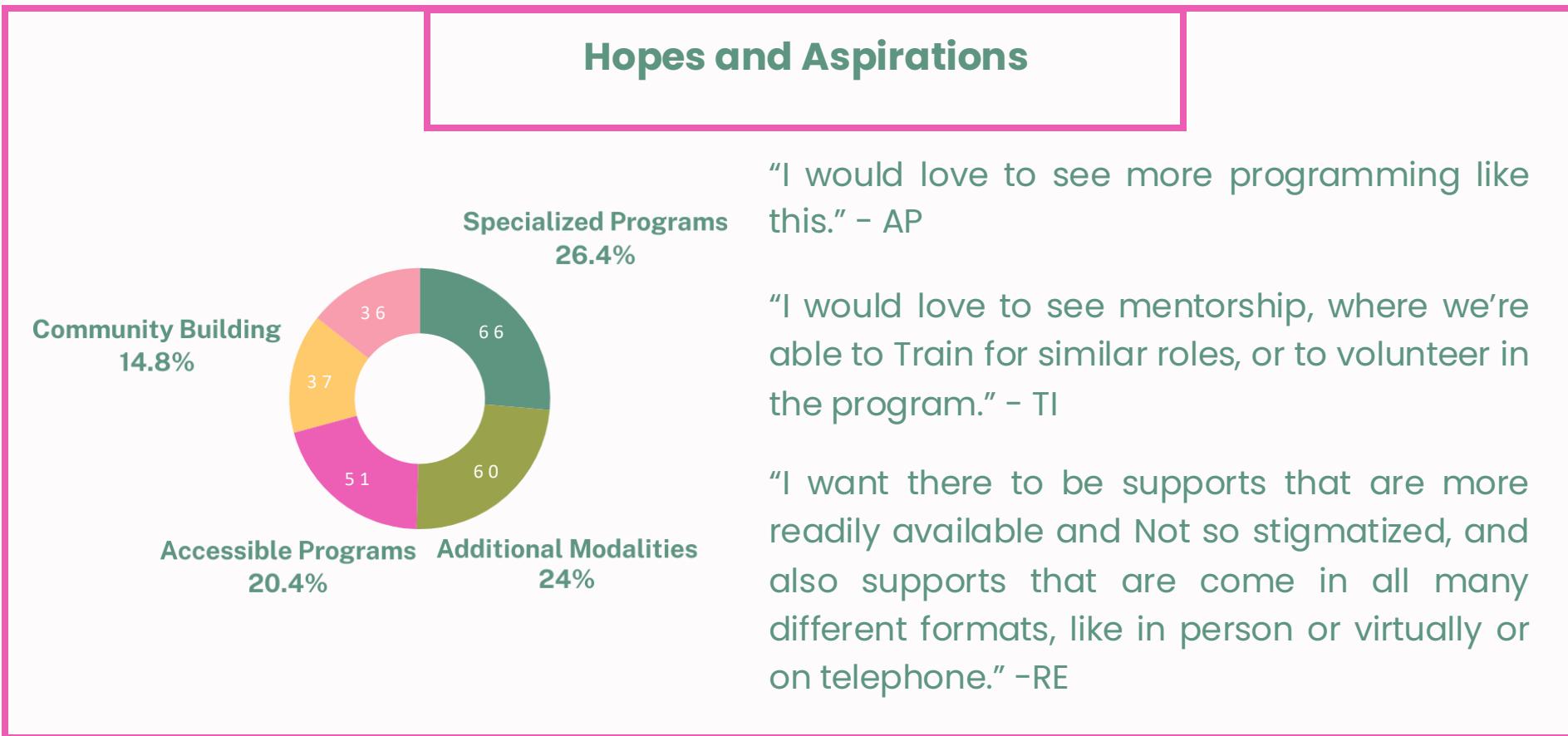


"We were able to find effective ways to relieve the symptoms due to the traumatic brain injury. Earplugs to reduce noise, dimming the screen lights. Physiotherapy for neck pain. Reorganizing my lifestyle for healthier care. Better confidence and self-esteem." -MD

"you guys make me feel that I have a voice and that I do matter the person, and you guys gave me back my self-confidence, which I didn't have before." - RE

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Research Findings: Qualitative



On this page, each parent code is shown, including the top 5 subcodes within each one and quotes to demonstrate the parent code.

Research Findings: Summarized

- 20-week survivor-led, cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary program for GBV-TBI survivors
- Focused on effective supports in survivors' healing journeys
- Emphasized peer support, trauma-informed care, and intersectional approaches
- Included flexible, buffet-style services and 1-on-1 peer navigation
- **Health Improvements:** Increased general/mental health, symptom relief, and overall well-being
- **Knowledge Gains:** Increased awareness around GBV and brain injury (BI), and how to cope with both
- **Peer Support and Peer Navigation:** including systems' navigation, seen as supportive for self-esteem, confidence, and autonomy
- **Program Demand:** Strong recommendation to extend the program for better long-term support





Cross Sectoral Solutions: Impact

Knowledge Mobilization

Contribute to evidence-base of “what worked” through reports, resources, & events, to support GBV-BI survivors, survivor needs & dreams, cross-sectoral needs, etc...



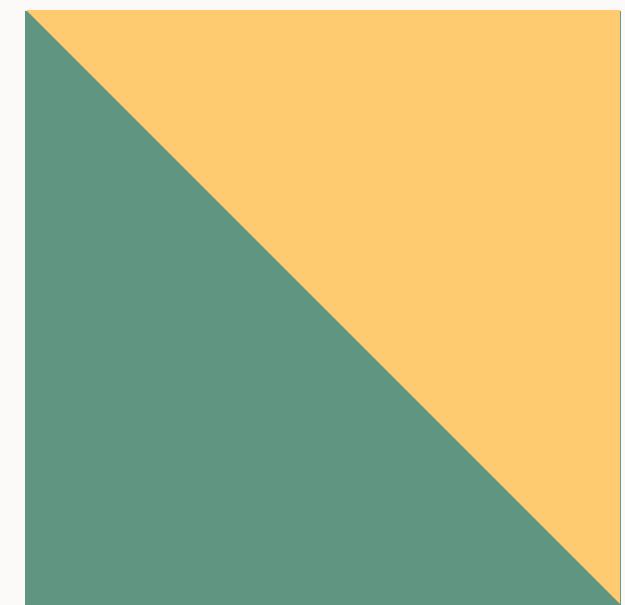
Capacity Building

Build individual, community, interdisciplinary, and system-level capacity through resources, campaigns & events, etc....



Awareness Raising & Advocacy

Develop greater awareness across survivors, service providers, community, decision makers, educators, etc... through social media, advocacy, resources, etc...





Cross Sectoral Solutions: Impact

transition when the program concludes. These steps can support the session closure process.

Set Clear Expectations
Transparently communicate any logistics about the support you are offering, including the duration, frequency, and time period of the program. Discuss and agree on these details to ensure mutual understanding and commitment. Establishing this early supports session closure later in the program.

Understand the Survivor
Take time to understand the survivor's situation, current challenges, and specific needs. It is important to slowly build trust and rapport. This supports effective relationship development, and safer session closure.



PRACTICAL STEPS for a Smooth Closure

(Weeks 1-10)

By following these steps, you ensure that the survivor is prepared for closure.

System Navigation

- Assisting survivors in accessing services, resources, and support within complex systems, e.g. legal, healthcare, social services, housing
- Survivors with intersecting identities face unique challenges in navigating these systems
- Survivor-centred approach
- Empathy, patience and cultural sensitivity
- Informed consent!

WESEC: WHAT IS THE WOMEN-SECTORAL SURVIVOR EXPERTS' COLLECTIVE?

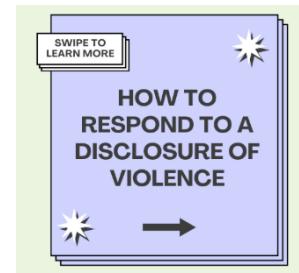
WHAT IS THE GOAL OF WESEC? WESEC is a group of women from gender-based violence and brain injury survivor experts who are at the heart of the Cross Sectoral Solutions Initiative. They are working together to support survivors in navigating the complex systems of GBV and BI.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS & BARRIERS OF TBI? Symptoms of traumatic brain injury (TBI) can be varied and complex. Some common symptoms include difficulty with memory, concentration, and problem-solving, as well as physical challenges like balance and coordination issues.

RESOURCES: Gender-based violence & Brain Injury Toolkit

Cross-Sectoral Solutions: Research Insights and Impacts from GBV-BI survivors

TOOLKIT: Gender-based violence & Brain Injury Toolkit



WOMENATTHECENTRE MARCH 2025

A BLUE-PRINT OF "WHAT WORKED"

Supporting Survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Brain Injury (BI) Through Cross-Sectoral and Survivor-Led Work



DISCLOSING YOUR DISABILITY
A Legal Guide for TBI-GBV Survivors in Ontario



INTRODUCTION

Deciding whether to disclose a disability during a legal process can have a significant impact on an individual's experience within the legal system. Women, in particular, face heightened difficulties in accessing justice and protection due to weakened justice systems or disrupted justice and service delivery, as well as low levels of trust in state institutions. This remains a crucial access to justice issue, as very little attention has been given to whether the court system itself adheres to equality requirements when administering justice.

This fact sheet takes into account the unforeseen consequences that may arise from disclosing a disability in the court system, and, accordingly, provides guidance on how to disclose a disability. It aims to empower people with disabilities to effectively advocate for their needs in order to participate fully in the court system and other legal processes. The guide begins by exploring the legal definition of disability in

Conseils aux intervenant.e.s pour la clôture des sessions avec les survivant.e.s de violence basée sur le genre et de lésions cérébrales

STRATÉGIES ET CONSIDÉRATIONS

01 Importance de la clôture de session
Les clôtures de sessions sont cruciales pour s'assurer que les deux participant.e.s comprennent pleinement ce qui a été discuté et que la session a été terminée. Elles peuvent également déclencher dans le respect du parcours du survivant et sont personnalisées pour s'adapter à la dynamique propre à chaque relation.

02 Bénéfices de la clôture de session
• Les limites sont évidentes et appliquées
• Les prochaines étapes sont suivies et clarifiées
• Cela marque le début d'un nouveau chapitre pour le survivant.e

VOIES INTERSECTORIELLES POUR LA VIOLENCE FONDÉE SUR LE GENRE ET LES TRAUMATISMES CRÂNIENS
Conférence Virtuelle

4 AU 6 MARS 2025
11:00H00 min - 17:00H21 min

Réservez la date!

Inscrivez-vous!

Survol de la Communication Cognitive

Qu'est-ce que la communication cognitive ?

Les troubles de la communication cognitive sont des difficultés de communication dues à des problèmes cognitifs sous-jacents.

Qu'est-ce que la cognition ?

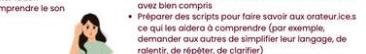
La cognition (c'est-à-dire les capacités de réflexion) est la manière dont nous recevons des informations du monde ou de notre corps, dont nous les traitons et dont nous les utilisons. Elle comprend les éléments suivants :

- l'écoute
- l'expression orale
- la lecture
- l'écriture
- la communication sociale
- la communication cognitive

Les Éléments de la Communication et les Stratégies

L'écoute implique les étapes suivantes :

- Entendre le son avec nos oreilles
- Préter attention au son
- Traiter le son
- Comprendre le son



L'expression orale implique les étapes suivantes :

- Réduire les bruits de fond et autres distractions
- Noter les mots ou les idées clés pendant que vous parlez
- Paraphraser ce qu'ils et elles ont dit et vérifier si vous avez bien compris
- Préparer des scripts pour faire savoir aux oreilleraises ce qui les aide à mieux communiquer (par exemple, demander que leur langage de rázient, de répéter, de clarifier)

Exemples de stratégies

- Essayer d'utiliser des mots plus spécifiques au lieu de « chose » ou de « ça ».
- Utiliser des images
- Demander à l'auditeur de répéter (avec leurs propres mots) ce qui a été discuté et de clarifier les termes qui n'étaient pas clairs ou qui n'a pas été compris
- Demander du temps pour assimiler l'information et écrire les mots clés que vous souhaitez dire avant de prendre la parole.
- Utiliser un processus d'organisation des pensées

Ensemble d'Outils pour l'Utilisation Sécuritaire et Efficace de Soi

Navigation par les pairs.e.s avec les survivant.e.s de violence genre et de lésions cérébrales



Knowledge Mobilization:

Research Report

Recommendations

- **Prioritize Peer Support:** Use trained peer navigators to provide trauma-informed, survivor-led care
- **Tailor to GBV-BI Needs:** Adapt programs to address the specific causes and impacts of brain injuries from gender-based violence
- **Ensure Structured Closure:** Plan intentional program endings to prevent retraumatization and support both survivors and staff
- **Address Language & Cultural Gaps:** Improve accessibility through interpretation services and culturally responsive supports
- **Integrate Joy in Healing:** Include creative, social, and celebratory activities to support emotional recovery and resilience
- **Offer Flexible, Personalized Support:** Provide diverse, adaptable options that reflect each survivor's unique healing journey





Impact

Capacity Building: A Blue Print of “What Worked”

Recommendations

- **Flexibility, Adaptability and Tailoring:** must be embedded in the development and delivery the project and programs
- **Language is Powerful:** alongside individual, collective, nuanced, contextualized, political, and ever-changing
- **Value and Trust Based Work:** is expensive, and time, capacity, and resource consuming, but necessary, and it must be supported by the sponsor
- **Cross-Sector Gaps in Education and Training:** need to be met to ensure survivor, brain injury, and a trauma & violence informed projects, programs, services, policies, etc...

WOMENATTHECENTRE

MARCH 2025

A BLUE-PRINT OF “WHAT WORKED”

Supporting Survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Brain Injury (BI) Through Cross-Sectoral and Survivor-Led Work



DEVELOPED BY
THE CROSS SECTORAL
SOLUTIONS INITIATIVE

FUNDED BY
THE PUBLIC HEALTH
AGENCY OF CANADA



Capacity Building: A Blue Print of “What Worked”

Recommendations

- **Survivor-Led Work:** is essential to the development and delivery of the projects and programs
- **Community Building:** should be centred in project development, program delivery, survivor-led work, and cross-sectoral/multi-level work
- **GBV & BI Awareness:** requires continued attention, to support survivor self-knowledge, education, services, public awareness and policies

“The one thing that stood out for me is the importance of making the space survivor led! The survivors of GBV with TBI have a space to come to where they are not only learning new skills but they are teaching us new skills as well. I have learned so much here that school doesn't and cannot teach, which is the lived experiences and that is so important.” - **Student**



Impact

Awareness Raising & Advocacy

Social Media

- Responding to Disclosures of Violence
- WomenattheCentrE Survivor Expert Collective Campaign

Political Advocacy

- Brief to the Standing Committee on Health in support of Bill C-277: An Act to Establish a National Strategy on Brain Injury
- Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance for Pre-Budget Consultations
- Submission to the Department of Finance Canada for Pre-Budget Consultations
- Presentation to Ontario Office for Victims of Crime

The collage includes the following elements:

- WESEC Infographic:** A multi-panel infographic titled "WESEC: WomenattheCentrE SURVIVOR EXPERT COLLECTIVE". It features sections on "WHAT IS THE GOAL OF WESEC?", "WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS & BARRIERS OF TBI?", and "NEED TO RESOURCE". It includes a brain diagram and various text boxes.
- Booklet Cover:** A booklet titled "HOW TO RESPOND TO A DISCLOSURE OF VIOLENCE". The cover features a purple background with white text and a small "SWIPE TO LEARN MORE" button.
- Presentation Slide:** A slide from the Ontario Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) titled "Lessons Learned in Survivor-Led Work: 'Words don't teach. Experience teaches.'". It includes the text "WomenattheCentrE", the date "July 30, 2025", and the location "Ontario's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC)".



Questions?

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