



The CWC-IDEA group (COMP Women's Committee – Inclusion Diversity Equity and Accessibility) on behalf of COMP acknowledges that gender-based violence affects millions of people around the world, including Canadians. The statistics are stark, with *one in three women* experiencing physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. As we go through the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence campaign (November 25 to December 10), it is important to recognize that this campaign is not merely a symbolic gesture. It is a call to global action against all forms of violence and discrimination against women, girls, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. During these 16 days, we also observe the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women to remember the lives of 14 women who were murdered at the École Polytechnique in Montréal (December 6, 1989).

The impacts of gender-based violence remain prevalent to this day, with a noted increase in violent, misogynist acts over the Covid-19 pandemic [1,2]. In April 2020, this reality was brought to the forefront of Canadian consciousness with the horrific mass shooting in Nova Scotia that left 22 people dead, one of whom was expecting a child. Recent revelations from the Mass Casualty Commission's Final Report ['Turning the Tide Together'], unfolds the brutal realities of gender-based violence [3]. The report proposes recommendations to address gender-based violence that include: creating safe spaces to report violence; countering victim blaming and stopping the hyper-responsibilization (holding of an individual to higher standards than what would typically be expected of the average person) of survivors; implementing women-centered strategies and actions; and developing a stronger culture of bystander intervention.

Within our medical physics institutions, we can act by educating our community on gender-based violence and adapting the commission's recommendations and strategies into our organizational values. Advocacy for funding and promoting an accountability framework are steps towards prioritizing prevention of gender-based violence and providing women survivors with paths to safety [4].

As a society we must recognize the epidemic of gender-based violence, and work intentionally towards its eradication. The Montreal and Nova Scotia tragedies are a reminder of the consequences of ignoring this issue. We must stay vigilant and increase our efforts to strive towards a world where everyone can live free from fear, violence and discrimination.

On December 6, you can honour the victims of the École Polytechnique massacre by wearing a white ribbon (a symbol condemning violence against women), observing a moment of silence at 11:00 am, and/or attending a vigil in your community. You can also add your voice to the online conversation using the hashtag: #16Days.

December 2023

[Communicated with the permission of the COMP Board]

December 6, 2023

References:

[1] The National day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women (2022, December 5), Retrieved from <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/commemorations-celebrations/16-days/national-day-remembrance.html>

[2] COVID-19 & Gender-based Violence in Canada: Key Issues and Recommendations, Retrieved from https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/backgrounders/covid19gbvcanada/covid19_genderbased_violence_in_canada_key_issues_and_recommendations.html

[3] Turning the Tide Together - The Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission (March 30, 2023), Retrieved from <https://masscasualtycommission.ca/updates/turning-the-tide-together-the-final-report-of-the-mass-casualty-commission/>

[4] The Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission Recommendations (March 30, 2023), Retrieved from <https://masscasualtycommission.ca/files/documents/Turning-the-Tide-Together-List-of-Recommendations.pdf>