

**INTERSECTIONS
BETWEEN
EMPLOYMENT
AND SAFETY
AMONGST
RACIALIZED
WOMEN
IN TORONTO**

**WHAT WE HEARD:
PERCEPTIONS FROM
SERVICE PROVIDERS**

PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE PROVIDERS ON BARRIERS TO ENTER AND SUSTAIN EMPLOYMENT FOR RACIALIZED WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

ABOUT WOMANACT

Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT) envisions a world where women are safe and have access to equal opportunities. WomanACT has been providing planning and coordination in Toronto since 1991. Today, WomanACT is a charitable organization working collaboratively to end violence against women through research, policy, education and community mobilization.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Intersections Between Employment and Safety Among Racialized Women project seeks to understand the experiences of racialized women in employment who have experienced gender-based violence. The project will undertake research and engage community partners to build capacity, raise awareness and advocate for system-level change. The project consulted service providers on their views into the unique barriers faced by racialized survivors in gaining and sustaining employment.

WHO WAS CONSULTED?

The project consulted organizations that serve survivors of gender-based violence, including organizations that specialize in employment services for women. The consultation centered on identifying barriers to entering and sustaining employment, as well as best practice solutions. Service providers were requested to identify overarching themes which will influence the main research of the project.

BARRIERS TO OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT

Impact of abuse: All service providers consulted identified abuse as a barrier for racialized survivors to enter into employment. In particular, service providers discussed the role of isolation and control as a barrier to employment. For example, service providers discussed cases in which abusive partners do not allow survivors to work. Another impact of abuse discussed as a barrier to obtaining employment included financial dependence on the abusive partner. This is particularly a concern for women with precarious immigration status who have added barriers to enter the employment market. Mentally taxing and time consuming legal proceedings as a result of the abusive relationship create additional barriers for survivors. Service providers highlighted that survivors of intimate partner violence often get charged for violence when defending themselves, and racialized survivors tend to have higher rates of police involvement. This can impact their future prospects of employment.

Hiring practices: Racism in the hiring process was mentioned by some service providers as a barrier. For example, a service provider shared that her racialized clients were only being hired by employers of the same community as them. The employers were more understanding of language issues and cultural practices such as flexibility around children being in the workplace. A lack of accommodation by employers in their hiring practices for women recovering from trauma was highlighted as a further barrier in hiring practices.

Impact of trauma: Most service providers identified a lack of confidence and low self-esteem as a barrier for racialized survivors to enter into the job market. Impact on survivors' mental health due to an abusive relationship in general was identified as a barrier, as was the lack of affordable resources available to deal with trauma.

Gaps in skills and training: Many service providers identified gaps in workforce skills, work experience, and employment gaps as barriers for survivors. Particularly for non-Canadian born survivors, a lack of Canadian certificates or recognized certificates was highlighted. For example, a service provider shared that a survivor they were working with who was a newcomer, was offered employment only in the service sector in Canada although she was trained and experienced as a nurse.

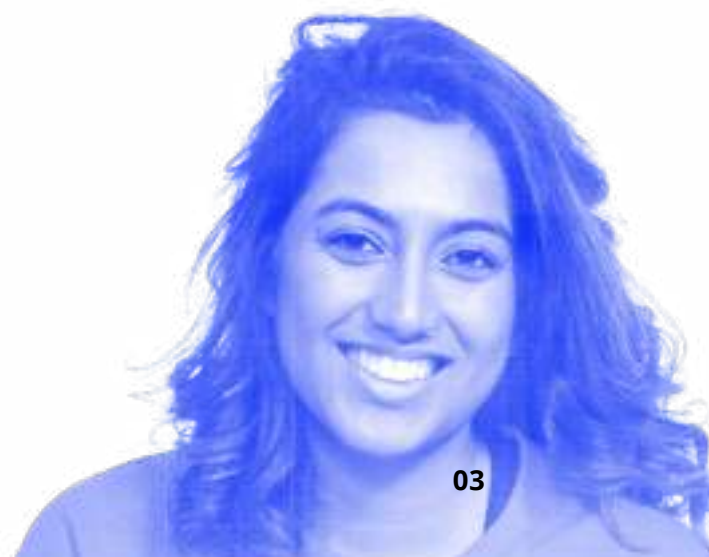
Other: Issues with language when trying to access employment services and employment was identified as a barrier for racialized survivors. Transportation to services and employment was also highlighted as a barrier for survivors. This is due to isolation which is common in abusive relationships.

"I feel that there is a lack of understanding from the employers in their hiring practices as well. Few accommodations are put in place for women who are recovering from violence and trauma. Most of them do not even feel ready to go back to the workforce."

Structural barriers:

- Lack of child care: Child care was mentioned as a main barrier by all service providers. Survivors are often in single parent households and child care can be a full-time job in itself, especially if a child has additional needs. This barrier becomes more difficult if their partner sabotages child care arrangements which is often the case in abusive relationships.
- Lack of education.
- Lack of housing.
- Low paying jobs and lack of opportunities due to structural inequality in the labor market.
- Care responsibilities for elderly family members or children.
- Cultural or traditional beliefs and expectations around women and work.
- Poverty: Structural racism leads to cycles of poverty becoming a further barrier for racialized survivors. At times racialized survivors also have to navigate choosing between social security and employment due to low wage jobs, employment opportunities and lack of child care. In addition, this may include pressure from child welfare agencies to increase child care responsibilities or pressure from family court proceedings to ensure a stable income.
- Lack of trust of systems due to racism. This includes fear of being judged and not understood on the basis of their culture or ethnicity and their experiences of abuse.

"It seems that the general barriers survivors face are all worse impacted due to systemic racism."



BARRIERS TO MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT

Impact of trauma: The impact on mental health due to intimate partner violence was identified by service providers as creating additional barriers for racialized women to sustain employment. For example, feelings of shame because of the abuse and/or experiences of racism, fear of the abuse, and fear of disclosing the abuse. All of this combined impact a survivor's emotional and mental wellbeing. The lack of support for trauma in the form of free mental health resources or paid leave were seen by service providers as a further barrier.

Violence in the workplace: Service providers reported that intimate partner violence often spills into the workplace, making it difficult for survivors to maintain their employment. For example, service providers spoke about stalking of survivors by their partners or ex-partners as a common experience and barrier. This can take the form of the abusive partner showing up at a survivor's workplace. Abusive partners also disrupted survivors' transportation to work and child care arrangements. For example, one service provider reported that their client lost their employment because the client was relying on their abusive partner for transportation to work and was regularly late.

"I have had women quit jobs because of stalking."

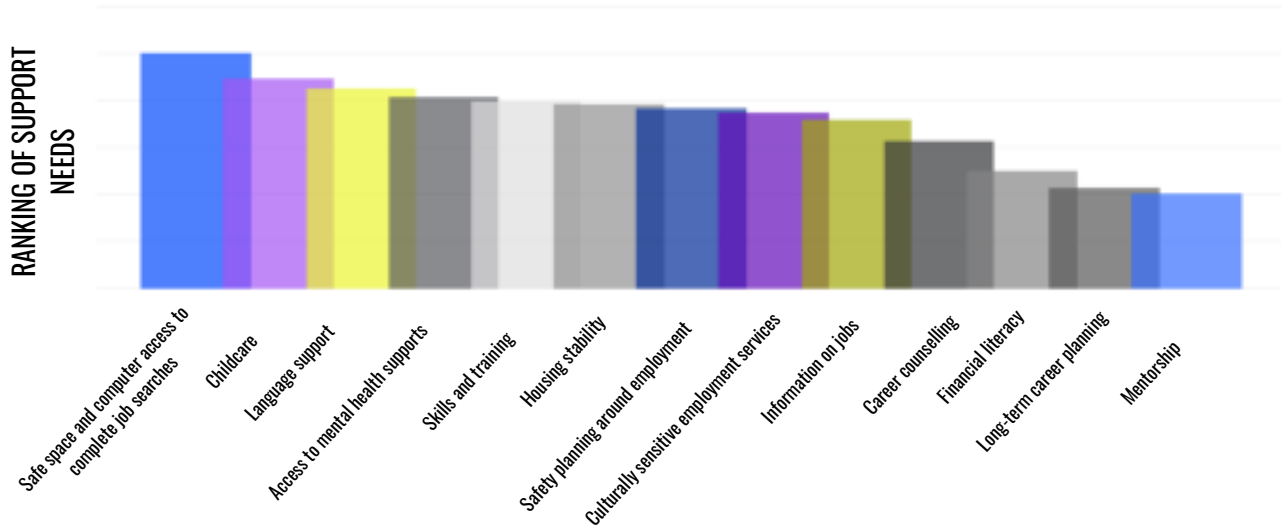
Employment practices and policies as barriers to sustaining employment:

- Lack of adequate paid leave from work to deal with impact of the abusive relationship.
- Lack of ongoing support at work such as counselling support and safety plans.
- Lack of access to flexible and remote work or ability to have a flexible schedule.
- Employers' lack of skills to address gender-based violence.
- Lack of diversity and inclusion initiatives such as Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).
- Lack of targeted leadership opportunities at work for racialized women.

Systemic barriers to sustaining employment:

- Pay inequities.
- Lack of child care.
- Lack of possibilities to grow and obtain higher positions for racialized women.
- Lack of better education opportunities for better jobs.
- Lack of housing and funding for shelters.
- Inadequate responses by the justice system to protect women.

HOW DID SERVICE PROVIDERS RANK THE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT NEEDS OF RACIALIZED WOMEN?



Service providers were asked to rank the support needs of racialized survivors in employment from a list of practical, structural and employment supports. The majority reported that safety to be able to conduct a job search and child care were the highest supports needed by racialized survivors. Language and access to mental health supports followed next. Mentorship and long-term career planning were ranked the lowest. Other structural, employment specific and safety related support needs were generally ranked in the same range.

"The system is too difficult and complicated to access! When it comes to childcare, housing, and other supports there is a very long waitlist and people are falling through the cracks."

WHAT DID SERVICE PROVIDERS THINK IS WORKING WELL?

"Cultural and racial sensitivity and understanding, helping in navigating the system to provide vital supports before we can even look at employment, one on one coaching and help with confidence."

"As more GBV survivors rise in the workplace, they will be excellent mentors and supporters for other survivors trying to thrive in the workplace."

"Job placements."

"Thorough one-on-one intake to access needs and barriers upfront; can understand if there are underlining issues and barriers to their personal and employment goals; can provide referrals based on individual needs."

"Knowledge of support resources."

"There are lots of employment support programs out there e.g. for women in trades. Though few of them include perspectives for racialized survivors."

"Sensitivity to domestic violence."

"Translation services."

"Mentoring programs are great."

"Employers who have specific training is helpful."

"Employers who are empathetic and have knowledge and wisdom [of gender-based violence]."

"Labor laws that are more supportive and compensate women if they need to be off."

CASE EXAMPLE:

An employer who themselves was a previous survivor was able to help an employee in an abusive relationship. They supported the employee to engage in safety planning including managing the risk to the employee when the abuser showed up at the workplace, additionally they found another branch location for the employee that was a safer option. The employer's insight from their own experience translated into an effective workplace response that increased the employees safety and allowed them to continue to work.

WHAT DID SERVICE PROVIDERS FEEL IS NEEDED?

"Childcare."

"Housing."

"More paid sick days and dependent days."

"Updated resources in the community and to share these."

"More meaningful support at the ground level and policies in hiring and career development that can make them feel safer."

"Certificate and training programs to skill up, on-going career training."

"Workplace safety."

"Benefits at work such as Employee Assistance Program so they can access counselling while at work."

"Equity instead of equality."

"More paid sick days and dependent days."

"Accessibility to counselling."

"To hire social workers (counsellors) in all fields."

"Special housing model for women experiencing GBV to process their trauma and recuperate themselves to go back to focus on their employment and financial stability."

"Systemic change is needed overall- break the cycle of poverty by giving more opportunities in school and in the workforce and educational and mentoring opportunities."

"Mandatory hiring numbers of women and racialized women."

"General understanding of trauma and a compassionate society that support women and families in struggle situation."





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