

Social Services Workers on the Frontlines of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Response

Frequently Asked Questions

We created the below set of questions and answers so you can easily find information about the project. If you have any questions not yet answered, please get in touch with us via email at researchfellow@vafcs.org. We will continue updating this document based on questions we receive.

What is the purpose of the project?

This research project aims at understanding and documenting experiences of social services workers supporting survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) in Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley regions. The goal is to use the research findings to inform policy recommendations that better support those on the frontlines of GBV response and the anti-violence sector as a whole.

Why is this project relevant?

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how essential social services workers in the anti-violence sector are. They responded to increasing cases and severity of gender-

based violence in a context that was made more challenging by public health measures. These workers play a critical role that is often lifesaving yet there is little research on their experiences, particularly in the Metro-Vancouver and Fraser Valley regions.

This project seeks to bridge a gap in the available knowledge by centering experiences of social services workers providing care to GBV survivors, and to contribute to improved services for survivors. It builds on knowledge to help address the needs of workers who are sometimes made invisible in the GBV sector narrative. We acknowledge systemic challenges faced by the GBV sector as a whole and believe that addressing barriers faced by the social workers has significant implications on the level and quality of support subsequently extended to those affected by GBV.

How was the project developed?

The project was born from a partnership between the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society (VAFCS) and researchers at Simon Fraser University. The project proposal was developed by Benedicta Bawo (former Policy Analyst at the VAFCS Violence Prevention Program) and Alice Mūrage (Researcher at Simon Fraser University). The proposal secured funding through Women and Gender Equality Canada's (WAGE) Gender-Based Violence Program research grant stream in 2023.

How is the project funding utilized?

Most of the project funding supports the full-time work of two research fellows on the project. The funding also supports community-engagement and research activities. This includes providing honoraria to the project's community advisory committee and social services workers who take time to contribute to the project.

Who is implementing the project?

The project is implemented by a dedicated group of researchers with the support of a community advisory committee. The core research team currently entails Alice Mürage as the project's research lead and Grace Kwan as the research fellow. The project also benefits from the academic advisory of Dr. Julia Smith, an assistant professor at the Simon Fraser University's Faculty of Health Sciences.

What does the community advisory committee do?

The community advisory committee is made up of six individuals who work in the anti-violence sector. While the committee members do not necessarily represent organizations they work for, we draw from their expertise working with the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society, the Surrey Women's Centre, the Ishtar Women's Resource Society, the Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre, the BC Society of Transition Houses, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Having worked in the sector for many years and in varied capacities including in service provisions and management, the committee provides insights into the sector context as well as offering advice on the implementation of the project. The community advisory committee meets at least once every three months for such consultations.

How can other people interested in the project be involved?

We would like the project to be engaged to the extent possible with organizations, groups, and individuals who work in the GBV sector. We have identified over 70 organizations who work in the anti-violence sector in the Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley regions, and we will continue contacting them and finding ways to engage them further in the project. The link below shows the organizations we identified, please let us know if we missed anyone: <https://rb.gy/0y1vr9>

On May 8th, 2024, we hosted a webinar where these organizations were invited to learn more about the project. The feedback we received at the webinar will be integrated in our work, including the engagement of peer workers and government representatives. We will reach out to these organizations as we seek individuals who are interested in participating in the research. Through the research, we hope to engage approximately social services workers in the anti-violence sector through focus groups, management-level staff working with nonprofit organizations, and government representatives through interviews. We will continue updating and engaging those interested in the project through our project webpage and newsletter. We also plan on organizing two other public events- one sharing our research findings and another for consulting on an action plan based on the findings.

If you would like to receive the project's periodic email newsletters or have suggestions on how we can engage you further, please email us at: researchfellow@vafcs.org.

How will the research be conducted?

The research will primarily be conducted through focus groups discussions with approximately 60 social services workers who directly support survivors of gender-based violence. To understand the context of the anti-violence sector from the perspective of service providers and policy makers, we will conduct interviews with representatives of nonprofit organizations and government representatives. We are also conducting background research through a review of literature and policies relating to the anti-violence sector in Canada.

What is the timeline of the project?

The project began in January 2024 and will be completed by January 2026. We have been working on building the project team and developing protocols of the project implementation and research activities. Focus group discussions and interviews will take place between August and October 2024. Following data analysis, we will re-engage with participants on the findings before finalizing on the project report. We hope to publish the project report by May 2025. We will organize a public event

shortly after to share the project's findings. We will also work on an action plan based on these findings. Again, we will host an event to consult on the action plan before it is published. While the project concludes by January 2026, we hope these outputs will contribute to positive change that will support workers and organizations in the anti-violence sector to continue with the important work of supporting survivors of gender-based violence.

Am I eligible to participate in the focus group discussions?

You are eligible to participate in the focus groups if you are a social services worker who directly supports survivors of gender-based violence. This includes different work settings and job titles including shelter worker, transition house worker, crisis center worker, crisis line worker, peer worker, community health worker. You could be working with a non-profit, grassroots community group, community center, health care center, or a neighbourhood house among other worksites. If in doubt, please don't hesitate to contact us using the information at the end of this FAQ.

What is a focus group discussion?

For this project, a focus group will involve about six participants sharing about their knowledge and experience as social services workers in the anti-violence sector. A facilitator from among the project team will guide the group discussion through a series of questions but will ensure there is room to let participants share what is important to them. The discussion takes about 60 to 75 minutes. You can choose to participate either in-person or virtually.

We will provide you with detailed information about your participation ahead of time so that you are able to provide informed consent.

How will I be supported to participate in a focus group?

In acknowledging the expertise you will be providing the project and time you will take from other activities, we will offer a honorarium of 50 CAD to each participant via e-transfer. If you have childcare responsibilities, we will offer an additional 30 CAD so that you can make childcare arrangements during the focus group discussion. If you choose to participate in-person, we will provide an additional 20 CAD to facilitate your transportation.

We understand that these discussions can trigger difficult memories and feelings. For this reason, we have arranged for the in-house counsellor at the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society to be available for a debrief if needed. We will also provide information on additional counselling resources that are available at no cost ahead of the focus group.

What will happen after participation?

With your permission, we would like to keep in touch even after your participation. After we analyze all the data collected, we will reach out to share the findings and seek feedback on what we see from the data. Your feedback will support us in the writing of the project report. We will inform you once the report is published and invite you to a public event where we will share the project findings with other people who work in the anti-violence sector. You will also be welcome to a consultation meeting that will support the development of an action plan based on the project report.

What outputs will come out of this project?

In addition to preparing the project report, an action plan, and public events, our team will work on other outputs such as policy briefs, OP-Eds, academic articles, and presentations. You will be welcome to use these outputs for information sharing with your networks or advocacy work. If you need support with this within the timeline of the project, please reach out to us.

All outputs of this project will be made available on the project webpage within the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Center Society website, here: <https://vafcs.org/vavpp-research-project>