

The HRM UN Safe Cities & Safe Public Spaces Program

Scoping Study

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Content advisory: this report contains discussion of sexual and gender-based violence and other intersecting systems of oppression in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Canada more broadly.

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Executive Summary

Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces- a Global and Local Initiative

In 2019, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) became a partner city of the United Nations Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces (UN SC SPS) Global Flagship Program Initiative (FPI), joining a community of approximately 50 cities globally. This initiative supports cities around the world to develop locally relevant and owned solutions to gender-based and sexual violence in public spaces.

In the HRM, this program is coordinated by the UN Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Program Coordinator in the Public Safety Office and supported by various partners: HRM's Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office, Nova Scotia Status of Women, an Implementing Committee made up of representatives from various HRM business units and other stakeholders, and the Women's Advisory Committee of Halifax.

HRM's Scoping Study

The first outcome of each local UN SC SPS program is to produce a scoping study—a process that explores what a municipality knows about sexual and gender-based violence in its public spaces, who is doing work to respond and prevent this violence, what the municipality doesn't know, and, as a result, where it needs to go next.

Through a review of local, provincial and national data, interviews with several key stakeholders, and conversations with the program's guiding committees, we have learned more about the current prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM, who is impacted by this violence and what next steps we can take to respond to local priorities and continue to learn more about the HRM's role in preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces.

What We Learned

Sexual and gender-based violence and experiences of safety in public spaces are not stand-alone issues. Historical and present-day systems of racism, colonialism and other intersecting oppressions shape and impact how women, girls and non-binary people access public spaces in the HRM. Addressing sexual and gender-based violence also means centering decolonization, anti-racism, a commitment to housing as a human right and addressing other systems of oppression and discrimination.

To better understand issues of sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces, as well as women's, girls' and non-binary people's feelings and experiences of safety, it is necessary to consider the root causes of the issues, such as social and economic circumstances, inequity, and the built and natural environment.

In HRM, Nova Scotia and Canada, many diverse voices have been calling attention to the realities and systems that put some people at disproportionately higher risk of experiencing sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces.

We know women, girls and non-binary people are most impacted by sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces and that youth, Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, racialized, newcomer, 2SLGBTQ+, women, girls and non-binary people and women, girls and non-binary people with disabilities and experiencing homelessness are all made more at risk of experiencing sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces because of racism, xenophobia, ableism, colonialism, homophobia and transphobia. It is important that the HRM SC SPS program responds to both the diverse and unique needs of all women, girls and non-binary people when addressing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces.

The threat of sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces greatly impacts women's, girls' and non-binary people's sense of belonging in a city, shapes their behaviours (e.g. having to change their routes home or not accessing necessary community spaces because of fear of violence) and often limits their ability to freely and safely access services that should be available to all people.

Fostering public spaces that are safe for everyone requires initiatives that aim to both prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. Many organizations in the HRM are doing work focused on education to shift social norms *and* directly supporting victims/survivors and perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence. It became clear that it is necessary to support both approaches when designing the next steps of the HRM SC SPS program.

Women, girls and non-binary people know best the solutions to making public spaces and services safer for everyone. As affirmed by the principles of the UN Women Global FPI, building meaningful relationships and partnerships at the grassroots level must be a central and guiding tenet of the HRM SC SPS program. The program must centre the lived experiences of women, girls and non-binary people in this work, while also respecting and working within the boundaries of the

risks that still exist for women, girls and non-binary people who have or are still experiencing violence.

What's Next?

The scoping study process has made clear several priority areas that will shape the next steps of the HRM SC SPS program, specifically creating a theory of change for the program and establishing a project plan.

The following were identified as priority areas for the program:

- Working across HRM Business Units to centre women's, girls' and non-binary people's experiences of safety in all plans, projects, strategies and services, ranging from transit, to parks and recreation, to planning.
- Collaborating with grassroots and community organizations, networks and groups to ensure our understanding of issues of safety and sexual and gender-based violence are informed by women's, girls' and non-binary people's lived-experiences of these issues.
- Addressing sexual and gender-based violence on public transit and other public transportation options, making it easier, safer and more accessible for all women, girls and non-binary people to move around the municipality. Being able to access transit and mobility options are integral to women's, girls' and non-binary people's wellbeing and safety.
- Ensuring women's, girls' and non-binary people's right to safe and affordable housing is a central piece of the work of the HRM SC SPS program and working towards integrating a gender-safety lens to the municipality's affordable housing efforts.
- Supporting work to prevent and respond to human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth in the HRM.
- Prioritizing education as an avenue for addressing misogynistic social norms, empowering bystanders to safely recognize and respond to instances of street harassment and supporting all people, especially men and youth, in developing healthy understandings of gender, sexuality and healthy relationships.
- In response to the lack of information available about diverse women's, girls' and non-binary people's experiences of safety in public spaces in the HRM, seeking out opportunities to gather both quantitative and qualitative data that tells the stories of all women, girls and non-binary people and sheds light on actions we can take to support them.

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Safe Cities & Safe Public Spaces: a Global Response

United Nations Women Safe Cities & Safe Public Spaces (UN Women SC SPS) Global Flagship Program Initiative (Global FPI) is a multi-stakeholder, global initiative that supports cities to develop local approaches to preventing and responding to gender-based and sexual violence in public spaces (UN Women, n.d.).

UN Women SC SPS builds on over 40 years of sustained efforts by grassroots organizations, international networks, and local city governments around the world working to create safer, more inclusive, and sustainable cities for women, girls and non-binary people impacted by gender-based and sexual violence in public spaces (UN Women, n.d.).

UN Women SC SPS Global FPI was launched in 2011 in five cities in the Global South but has since expanded to almost fifty cities worldwide. Halifax is one of six Canadian municipalities involved in the initiative, along with Edmonton, Winnipeg, Vancouver, London, and Montréal (UN Women, n.d.).

The HRM's Safe Cities & Safe Public Spaces Program

In August 2019, the Halifax Regional Municipality's (HRM) Regional Council unanimously approved a motion by Mayor Mike Savage and Councillor Lorelei Nicoll to join the UN Women SC SPS Global FPI. Nova Scotia Status of Women joined the HRM as a supporting partner to help align municipal and provincial interventions to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the municipality.

The HRM SC SPS initiative is coordinated by the municipality's Public Safety Office, with key support from the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office. The UN Women SC SPS Program Coordinator is the main staff person responsible for overseeing and managing the program.

Guiding Committees

The work of the HRM SC SPS program is guided and supported by two committees:

Implementing Committee

The Implementing Committee consists of representatives from HRM Business Units, the RCMP and Nova Scotia Status of Women. The committee guides and supports the development and implementation of the HRM SC SPS program.

Currently, the committee includes representatives from the Office of the CAO, Parks and Recreation, Planning and Development, Transportation and Public Works, Transit, Halifax Regional Police, the RCMP and Nova Scotia Status of Women. are the HRM Business Units. As the initiative develops and evolves, other Business Units and stakeholders may be engaged in the committee.

The Implementing Committee is responsible for:

- Supporting the development of the initial scoping study
- Helping to inform the design of a locally relevant UN Women SC SPS program
- Championing the implementation of recommendations that arise from the program
- Contributing to the collection of baseline data and monitoring outcomes of implementation

In January 2020, the Implementing Committee met for the first time to develop a shared understanding of the UN Women SC SPS Global FPI, their roles as a committee and as individual committee members. The committee also identified some key partners and potential sources of information to inform the scoping study, such as existing research, programs and strategies.

Women's Advisory Committee of Halifax

The Halifax Regional Council approved the creation of the [Women's Advisory Committee](#) (WACH) on November 26, 2019. The WACH is a committee of community members that advises HRM council and staff on gender-based+ issues, including the municipality's participation in the UN Women SC SPS Global FPI. The WACH will play a key role in reviewing the HRM UN Women SC SPS program outputs, identifying gaps and monitoring progress.

In October of 2020, the Public Safety Office delivered a presentation on the HRM UN Women SC SPS initiative at the WACH's inaugural meeting. This presentation

included information about the committee's involvement in the initiative, key milestones to date, and next steps.

On January 7th, 2021, the WACH reviewed a first draft of the scoping study and committee members contributed their insights about sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM. They provided input on the following questions:

- What do you think HRM's UN SC SPS program needs to address?
- Where do your priorities lie with regards to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in Halifax?
- What would you like to see come out of the HRM's participation in the UN Women SC SPS Global FPI?

The themes that emerged from this discussion informed both the content of this scoping study and the program's understanding of women's experiences of safety in the HRM.

The WACH provided feedback on the final draft of this scoping study, prior to its review by the Implementing Committee and public release.

Alignment with other Municipal Policies and Strategies

The HRM SC SPS program is aligned with and informed by key municipal strategies, policies and frameworks including, but not limited to:

- [The Public Safety Strategy](#)
- [Diversity and Inclusion Framework](#)
- [Anti-Black Racism Framework](#) (and eventual Anti-Black Racism Strategy and Action Plan)
- [Social Policy](#)
- HRM's commitment to Gender Based Analysis+

Community Guidance

Designing, implementing and measuring the impacts of the HRM SC SPS program will require broad collaboration, working with various stakeholders and communities to identify and prioritize issues, develop shared ownership of the program, and implement effective responses to the causes and effects of sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the municipality.

It is crucial that the design, implementation, and measurement of the outcomes of the HRM SC SPS program are shaped by the people whose lives are most impacted

by sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the municipality. At the core of this program is a commitment to do this work in relationship: to seek to work alongside and support residents, community members, local networks and grassroots organizations so that the lived experiences of people most impacted by sexual and gender-based violence shape and inform all elements of the program.

As a city partner of the UN Women SC SPS Global FPI, the HRM commits to:

1. **Identify gender-responsive, locally relevant and owned interventions.** Conducting a scoping study is essential as it provides specific data to inform an initial understanding of local forms of sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces. Multiple stakeholders reflect on the findings to develop programs with a specific set of results based on the local context, fostering joint accountability.
2. **Develop and effectively implement comprehensive laws and policies to prevent and respond to sexual violence in public spaces.** Through capacity building, awareness raising, community mobilization and other strategies, stakeholders, grassroots and community partners are equipped to advocate, develop, and monitor the effective implementation of laws and policies, and to make sure that accompanying resources are in place to support this action.
3. **Investments in the safety and economic viability of public spaces.** A gender approach to urban planning ensures that gender-based analysis+ is considered across all municipal departments' planning. This includes public infrastructure (i.e. investments in safe potable water, improved sanitation, lighting, creation of market stalls, provision of training on financial literacy) and economic development.
4. **Change attitudes and behaviors to promote people's rights to enjoy public spaces free from violence.** People are engaged in transformative activities in schools and other settings to promote respectful gender relationships, gender equality, and safety in public spaces.

(Husain, Capobianco, & Posadska, 2017)

Intersectional Approach

At the UN Women's Fourth Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Leader's Forum in Edmonton in October 2018, intersectionality was established as a core value of the UN Women SC SPS Global FPI (Watanabe, Capobianco, & Soria, 2018).

Intersectionality—a concept coined by Black feminist, activist and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw—refers to the ways in which different parts of a person's identity overlap, shaping how they experience the world and how they are impacted by different systems of power, oppression and marginalization. Intersectionality also

recognizes the unique knowledge and agency embedded in these intersections of identity (Watanabe, Capobianco, & Soria, 2018).

Sexual and gender-based violence intertwine with many systems of oppression, including sexism, racism, colonialism, xenophobia, ableism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia. These systemic forces intersect, meaning that folks who are most impacted by multiple forms of discrimination are often identified as being at heightened risk for sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces.

The HRM SC SPS program aims to approach its work, relationships and outcomes through an intersectional lens, recognizing that race, Indigeneity, ethnicity, immigration status, ability, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, age and income are all important factors in how a person experiences safety in public spaces, as well as how they resist violence, exercise power and demonstrate agency.

We know, for instance, that women are most often the targets of sexual and gender-based violence. However, when a woman who is trans and Black is subjected to sexual or gender-based violence, she might not only be resisting against sexism and misogyny, but also racism and transphobia. These intersecting oppressions not only increase the risk of a person experiencing violence, but also their ability to safely report this violence and access needed supports.

To ground this program in the value of intersectionality, we must understand and respond to sexual and gender-based violence in a way that honours the unique experiences of different women, girls and non-binary people. This will mean approaching this work with openness, flexibility and humility —to listen when we may not understand something from our own lived experience, to shift our approaches as we learn and to pause, re-evaluate and seek to move forward in a good way when we get it wrong.

What is a public space?

The HRM UN SC SPS program considers a public space to be an area or place that is open and accessible to the public, including gathering places such as libraries, schools, community centres, squares and parks and connecting spaces, such as sidewalks, roadways and streets.

Public transit and other forms of transportation regulated by the HRM, such as taxis and rideshare services, are also considered public spaces for the purposes of this program. Places that are privately owned/operated but are frequently accessed by

the general public, including restaurants, bars and cafes, will also be considered within the scope of this program.

Finally, online spaces and social media have, particularly in the last 20 years, become a greater extension of physical gathering spaces. Many people socialize and build community online. Research shows, however, that online spaces have also become a key site for the perpetration of harassment and violence against women, girls and non-binary people. Because online spaces are public spaces in and of themselves, and because they are linked so closely with physical spaces in our communities, they will also be considered in the HRM's UN SC SPS program.

DRAFT

The HRM Scoping Study

What is a scoping study?

The scoping study is one of the first requirements of a city's involvement in the UN Women SC SPS Global FPI. It is an initial step towards localizing the global program and providing insights into key local stakeholders, priority groups, pressing issues and necessary areas of focus for the partner city (Husain, Capobianco, & Posadska, 2017).

UN Women identifies four key objectives for the scoping study:

- To provide a starting evidence base for stakeholders to identify next steps in program design, implementation, and measurement
- To provide valid and, as much as possible, local data to inform an understanding of the local context of sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces
- To begin to build local ownership by creating multi-stakeholder partnerships through inclusive and participatory processes
- To inform the development of a local theory of change
(Husain, Capobianco, & Posadska, 2017)

The scoping study will help those involved in the program's design, implementation and measurement to better understand the nature and impacts of gender-based and sexual violence in public spaces in the municipality and how the HRM can meaningfully contribute to making public spaces safer for all. The scoping study serves as an informed starting point—a place from which we can form a better understanding of what we know, what we don't know and where we must go next.

Methodology

As set forth by UN Women, the scoping study is intended to be completed within a relatively short time frame, making use of data and knowledge that are easily accessible. UN Women recommends focusing on information from local, provincial and national reports, with supplemental primary and qualitative data, typically gathered through interviews and focus group discussions.

As such, this scoping study consisted of reviewing existing research, particularly grey literature and statistical data from police-reported crimes and victimization surveys; conducting interviews with several key stakeholders; consulting the program's guiding committees; and gathering insights from a group of local women through a training on a participatory action research tool known as a Women's Safety Assessment.

Semi-directed interviews

During the summer of 2020, the HRM SC SPS program conducted seven interviews with eight individuals responding to and preventing gender-based and sexual violence in the municipality. In selecting interview participants, consideration was given both to their professional role, and the populations they serve.

The scoping study coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus, plans for first-person data collection had to be reconsidered. Because interviews had to be conducted virtually, we could not guarantee a private space for interviewees to take part in interviews. We felt speaking with people about their lived experiences of sexual violence and/or gender-based violence without guaranteeing a private, safe space to do so could potentially cause undue harm to the participants.

The following questions guided the scoping study and are explored in this document:

- What do we know about sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM?
 - Who is impacted?
 - What are some of the most pressing local issues?
 - Who is already speaking up about these issues in our communities (locally, provincially, and nationally) and what are they telling us?
 - Who in the HRM is responding to, preventing, and educating about sexual and gender-based violence?
- What don't we know? What more information do we need to better understand the issues and solutions?
- Based on this information, what are some priority areas of focus that should shape the design, implementation, and measurement of the HRM SC SPS program?

For this reason, we decided to prioritize speaking to service providers who serve and work alongside survivors/victims of sexual and gender-based violence, with a focus on organizations who support populations believed to be at an increased risk of gender-based and sexual violence, including women, girls and non-binary people who are Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, African Nova Scotian, 2SLGBTQ+, have disabilities, and who are young. The semi-structured interviews took approximately one hour each and consisted of 8 standard questions. (See the appendix for interview guide and consent form).

It should be noted that the questions were designed not to ask the interviewees about their personal experiences of sexual and gender-based violence, but rather, to gain a better sense of the issues their clients or communities their organizations serve are facing.

The interviewees included representatives from the following fields/organizations:

- A law enforcement agent from the Nova Scotia RCMP
- A representative from an organization providing resources for people affected by sexual violence
- A representative from a youth-serving organization
- A community engagement coordinator at a family resource centre
- Partners on a project researching the prevalence of domestic violence faced by women with disabilities
- A social worker with experience working with both survivors and offenders
- A representative from an organization serving Indigenous people living in the urban context

While some of the organizations we spoke with have a very clear and obvious link to sexual and gender-based violence, it became evident that many organizations working to address sexual and gender-based violence in the HRM are not necessarily mandated to do so.

It is often because the communities these organizations serve are affected by sexual and gender-based violence that their work necessarily intersects with these issues. For the youth-serving organization we spoke with, this often looks like empowering 2SLGBTQ+ youth to make more informed decisions about their bodies, sparking broader conversations about self-autonomy and consent. At the family resource centre, sexual and gender-based violence prevention work may come in the form of teaching youth about healthy interpersonal relationships.

It will also be important for us to consider the nuances of mandate and reality in the HRM's SC SPS program, particularly when it comes to the intersections of violence happening in public spaces and private spaces. For instance, interview participants from the team researching the prevalence of sexual violence faced by women with disabilities in private spaces told us that women they spoke with often shared difficulties navigating their communities and accessing different forms of transportation upon leaving situations of domestic abuse, demonstrating the close linkages between sexual and gender-based violence in private and public spaces.

Women's Safety Assessments

The Women's Safety Assessment (WSA) is a participatory tool used to build safer neighbourhoods, schools, campuses, workplaces, transit systems and other public spaces. It brings together community members and other important stakeholders to assess and make safety recommendations for public spaces, grounded in expertise from their daily lived experience of using, or choosing not to use, the space.

The WSA is based on the belief that the design of physical environments affects people's safety. Research shows that when women, girls, and non-binary people, particularly women, girls and non-binary people who are 2SLGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, racialized, newcomers, have disabilities and experiencing homelessness are involved in the process of identifying safety concerns in public spaces and developing potential solutions, these spaces are made safer for everyone.

The safer a space feels, the more people will use it, and thus, the safer it will become due to increases in natural surveillance and community stewardship.

Safety assessments were first developed in 1989 by the Metro Toronto Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC). The tool builds on the best practices of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and incorporates culturally competent, community development, and gender-based approaches. The WSA tool has been adapted for use all over the globe and endorsed by leading organizations worldwide (METRAC, n.d.).

In January 2020, the HRM's Public Safety Office hosted a training in which twenty-five women learned how to use, and train others to use, the WSA tool. We recruited participants through community-based organizations, post-secondary institutions, libraries, recreation centres and other public spaces.

The group of women and youth who participated in the training consisted of diverse residents in terms of age (participants ranged from roughly 18 to 60+), race, income, and geography. Some participants had moved to Halifax recently, while others had roots spanning generations.

The WSA training activities included piloting the WSA, mapping specific locations based on perceptions of safety, identifying key stakeholders preventing and responding to women's safety, and training in how to apply an intersectional lens to the WSA tool.

Insights gathered at the WSA training are included in this scoping study and helped guide us in choosing which resources and issues to explore further in the scoping study process.

Although the use of the WSA in the HRM is in its infancy, the assessments the Public Safety Office has organized/facilitated have already served as a valuable tool to learn about how women perceive safety in public spaces in the municipality. So far, they have also proven to be a process through which the women, girls and non-binary people involved can contribute to and see tangible changes towards safer public spaces, which at its core, is the objective of the HRM SC SPS program.

What We Learned

Limits to what we know

It is difficult to understand the true extent of sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces for reasons that are complex and often intersecting.

The data we have doesn't tell us the whole story. Normalization of sexual and gender-based violence, lack of police and government statistics that can be disaggregated for race, gender, disabilities and other identities, failures in systems meant to recognize and respond to violence, and the many barriers women, girls and non-binary people face when reporting sexual and gender based violence and/or seeking help all lead to underreporting of the issues.

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre asserts there is an average of one sexual assault reported to police each day in Halifax, with only 1 in 5 sexual assaults reported to police in total (Avalon Sexual Assault Centre, n.d.). The 2019 General Social Survey (GSS) affirms this trend as well—stating that in 2019, only 6% of self-reported incidents of sexual assault came to the attention of police, with women being half as likely as men to report instances of violent victimization to police (Cotter, Criminal Victimization in Canada, 2019, 2021).

Perhaps one of the most significant challenges to understanding the extent of sexual and gender-based violence in our communities is its normalization. One recent study noted:

Measuring gender-based violence is complex. The victims—and even the perpetrators—may not perceive the motivations for the incident as being rooted in social structures and systems, which can serve to produce and reproduce gender inequality and gendered violence across many dimensions (Cotter & Savage, 2019, p. 4).

Further, some forms of sexual violence are not reflected in the Criminal Code, but nevertheless can have profound impacts on women, girls and non-binary people, restricting their mobility and ability to participate in public life without fear:

Unwelcome comments, actions, or advances while in public—despite not meeting a criminal threshold—may cause individuals to withdraw or to not otherwise fully engage in their daily activities or access spaces in which they have the right to freely use and enjoy. These behaviours can

also serve to normalize, create, or support a culture where certain individuals feel targeted and discriminated against (Cotter & Savage, 2019, p. 4).

Further, a lack of both national and local data disaggregated for different populations and identities means we don't fully understand who is most impacted by sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces and the nuances of how they are impacted.

Many of the available data sets, for example, do not have enough information to draw conclusions about the experiences of women, girls and non-binary people in public spaces who are racialized, immigrants or have disabilities.

Notably, much of the data available through Statistics Canada is drawn from surveys that conflate sex and gender (giving survey participants the option to choose "man" or "woman" as their gender) and only provide limited options for self-identifying gender identity and sexual orientation, thereby greatly limiting our understanding of experiences of sexual and gender-based violence along gender and sexuality spectrums. In 2018, the SSPPS included questions on both sex assigned at birth and gender, making it the first large-scale Statistics Canada household survey to ask more inclusive and accurate questions around gender and sex (Cotter & Savage, 2019).

Further, most provincial and national surveys do not allow people to specifically identify as Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian in their responses and, therefore, large data sets about gender-based and sexual violence do not provide an understanding of the experiences of Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotian women, girls and non-binary people in public spaces in the HRM.

Because of these limitations, it is important that, as we move forward with the HRM SC SPS program, we prioritize understanding the stories of women, girls and non-binary people that are often not captured in large-scale surveys and data collection methods. As such, it is critically important for us to value various approaches to understanding and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces: layering data from surveys and studies upon meeting women, girls and non-binary people where they are—in conversation, dialogue and by working alongside communities and stakeholders who are experiencing these issues (and solutions) at the grassroots.

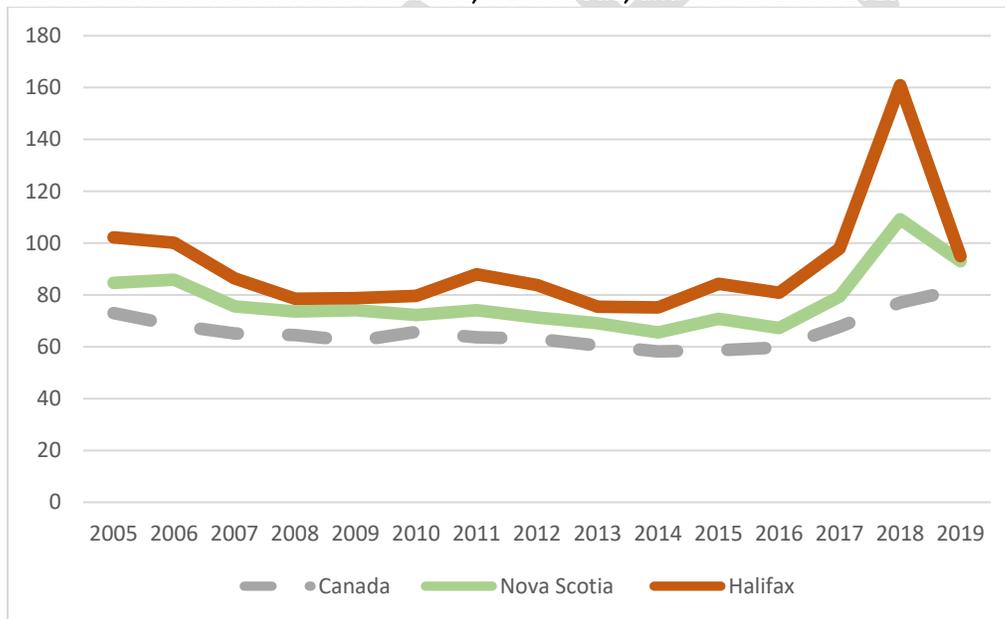
What do we know about sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM?

Who is impacted?

Data suggests that sexual assault rates in Halifax have been consistently higher than in Nova Scotia and in Canada. In Halifax, while rates of violent crime declined between 2005-2019, sexual assaults did not (Conroy, Rotenberg, Haringa, & Johnston-Way, 2020). In 2018, over half (54%) of victims of violent crime in Halifax were women and girls (Conroy, Rotenberg, Haringa, & Johnston-Way, 2020).

Table 1 below compares rates of sexual assault (levels 1-3¹) for Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Canada between 2005-2019.

Table 1: Rates of sexual assault: Canada, Nova Scotia, and Halifax 2005-2019



While these numbers give us some important information about the prevalence of sexual assault in Halifax, it is not possible to make the conclusion that higher reported rates mean sexual assault happens more in Halifax than other Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) (Conroy, Rotenberg, Haringa, & Johnston-Way, 2020).

¹ Sexual assault level 1 involves minor physical injuries or no injuries to the victim under circumstances of a sexual nature such that the sexual integrity of the victim is violated. Sexual assault level 2 involves sexual assault with a weapon, threats, or causing bodily harm. The most serious offence, is level 3, aggravated sexual assault, which involves wounding, maiming, disfiguring or endangering the life of the victim (Conroy, Rotenberg, Haringa, & Johnston-Way, 2020).

As we know, there are many factors that contribute to rates of reported sexual violence—rates may be higher in Halifax, not necessarily because of higher prevalence, but for many other reasons, including increases in survivors/victims reporting instances of sexual violence to police.

Available data is, nevertheless, a critical piece of the puzzle in understanding who is most impacted by sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces.

Based on results from the 2019 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization, which measures self-reported instances of sexual assault (meaning that survey respondents have not necessarily reported these assaults to police), Canadian women were five times more likely to be victims/survivors of sexual assault—with a rate of 50 incidents of sexual assault per 1000 people, compared to men at a rate of 9 incidents per 1000 people (Cotter, *Criminal Victimization in Canada*, 2019, 2021).

While people from all demographics can and do cause harm, there are some commonalities among the profiles of known perpetrators of sexual violence – for example, 94% of known perpetrators of sexual violence are men (Perreault, 2015, p. 18). Additionally, perpetrators of sexual assault were most likely to be young (under 35), more likely to work alone, and there was a perceived link between sexual assault incidents and the perpetrator being under the influence of drugs or alcohol (Conroy & Cotter, 2017).

#MeToo and Reporting Sexual Violence

The term #MeToo was first used by Tarana Burke in 2006 as a means for women to share their experiences of surviving/being victims of sexual violence and to know they were not alone (Gordon, 2020).

In October of 2017, however, the hashtag went viral as millions began using #MeToo on social media to indicate that they too had been victims of sexual assault, violence or misconduct (Rotenberg & Cotter, 2018).

Across Canada, police-reported sexual assaults in 2017 rose higher than in any year since 1998, with reports peaking in October when the #MeToo movement was at its height (Rotenberg & Cotter, 2018). In Halifax, police-reported incidents of level one sexual assaults (by far the most common type reported to police), increased 21% between 2016-2017 (Allen, 2018).

Local data also reflected this trend. In 2016-2017, Halifax's Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program (SANE) had the highest caseload in its history—a 68% increase over the previous year (Avalon Sexual Assault Centre, n.d.).

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre continued to experience an unprecedented demand for its services in the years following the height of the #MeToo movement, and in April of 2019, had to freeze its waiting list for the first time (McPhee, 2019).

The #MeToo movement provides a striking example of how social movements that aim to shift public perception around sexual and gender-based violence can have very real impacts on the number of people who disclose and report these experiences.

In 2018, 44% of women nationally who experienced sexual assault in the previous 12 months affirmed that the perpetrator was a stranger or someone who they knew by sight only, while another 44% said the perpetrator was a friend or acquaintance (Cotter & Savage, 2019, p. 20).

For victims/survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the offender was often a member of the immediate family (18%) or extended family (20%), though some victims identified a stranger (21%), acquaintance (12%), neighbour (8%), friend or teacher (6% each) (Perreault, 2015, p. 14).

The 2018 Statistics Canada Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS) provides some of the most recent and detailed large-scale statistics regarding experiences of sexual violence in public spaces. In fact, it is the first national survey to explore safety in public spaces, online and in the workplace. The survey also looks at unwanted behaviours that, while they may not be included in the Criminal Code, can still have significant negative impact on those who experience them (Cotter & Savage, 2019, p. 4).

The SSPPS measures self-reported incidents of the following unwanted behaviours in public in Canada:

- unwanted physical contact (such as touching or getting too close in a sexual manner);
- indecent exposure;
- unwanted comments about sex or gender;
- unwanted comments about sexual orientation or assumed sexual orientation, and;
- unwanted sexual attention (such as comments, whistles, gestures, or body language).

According to the SSPPS, approximately one in three (34%) women 15 years of age or older living in the core of a Canadian CMA experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in a public place in the 12 months preceding the survey—more than double the number of men (15%) (Cotter & Savage, 2019, p. 8). These numbers were on par with the experience of people living within the core of the Halifax CMA (Cotter & Savage, 2019, p. 8).

Nationally, the most common types of unwanted sexual behaviour experienced by women in public were unwanted sexual attention (25%), unwanted physical contact (17%), and unwanted comments about their sex or gender (12%). These were also the three most common types of behaviour experienced by men, though at a considerably lower rate (each 6%) (Cotter & Savage, 2019, p. 3).

The SSPPS also found that 45% of women who had experienced unwanted sexual attention in the past 12 months said it happened at least three times (Cotter & Savage, 2019, p. 7).

Finally, one study observed that women are more likely than men to make use of victim services. In addition to or in lieu of police services, crime victims may seek assistance from other formal services such as crisis centres, victim services, women's centres, psychologists or social workers. 14% of violent crime victims contacted at least one such source of support, most often a psychologist or social worker. Women who were victims of violence were more than twice as likely as men to make use of one of these services (19% compared to 7%) (Perreault, 2015, p. 26).

How are diverse women, girls and non-binary people impacted?

Literature and statistics, key stakeholder interviewees, WSA participants and the HRM's SC SPS program's guiding committees (the Implementing Committee and the WACH) all highlighted that some people are made more at risk of experiencing sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM.

Women and girls; young people; racialized women; Black and Indigenous women; women with disabilities; 2SLGBTQ+ people, particularly trans women and trans feminine people; unhoused or precariously housed people; and those living below the poverty line were all named as people who are at an elevated risk of experiencing gender-based and sexual based violence in public spaces.

These insights are affirmed by other data and literature we explored: specifically that women living in poverty, Indigenous women, women living with disabilities, racialized women, women living in isolated communities, immigrant women and young women are all more at risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

These populations and demographics are, of course, not discrete, meaning that individual people may, and often do, hold more than one of these identities or backgrounds. As noted previously, because there is overlap between systemic forms of oppression, there is also often overlap of populations that are identified as being at heightened risk for sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces.

Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people

Incidents of sexual assault committed against Indigenous people in Canada are three times the rate of non-Indigenous people, and 94% of Indigenous people who experience sexual assault are women (Conroy & Cotter, 2017, p. 8).

Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people in Canada are facing a genocide in the form of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls crisis (National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). Between 1980 and 2012, 16% of all women murdered in Canada were Indigenous (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2017). Given that Indigenous women only make up 4% of the female population in Canada, this means that a hugely disproportionate number of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people are dying because of intersections of colonialism, misogyny, and racism.

Many of the interview participants we spoke with mentioned that, in particular, Indigenous women, girls and non-binary people may feel unwanted or unwelcome in public spaces in Halifax because of a long and continued legacy of displacement, erasure and racism against Mi'kmaw people in Halifax and Nova Scotia. This feeling can be amplified for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ people, for whom sexual violence is often racialized. Being able to see oneself reflected and welcomed in public spaces is a key factor in experiences of safety.

Racialized women, girls and non-binary people

Systemic issues such as racism, colonialism, anti-Blackness, and xenophobia also contribute to sexual violence against racialized women and newcomer populations. These forms of marginalization are often reinforced through healthcare, education, and justice systems which may negatively impact the likelihood of women reporting experiences of violence.

During the WSA training, most participants reported feeling the most comfortable in public spaces close to where they live and in areas where they are familiar with their surroundings. This sense of comfort in familiar spaces was underlined with a discussion in which a few women shared feelings of being ostracized when they left their communities because of their race and/or ethnicity. Black women in particular noted feelings of hyper-visibility or being under extra surveillance when further away from home.

For example, one woman from Halifax's North End, a historically African Nova Scotian, working class community said she felt like people perceive her as a safety threat around the South End, a predominantly white and wealthier area. Historically, conversations around women's safety have centred white, able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual women, often to the exclusion of other women.

This exclusion is caused by and contributes to the marginalization of racialized and Indigenous women, 2SLGBTQ+ people, and women with disabilities—groups that have been found to be at increased risk for sexual violence when compared to other women (Conroy & Cotter, 2017).

Creating Communities of Care through a Customary Law Approach, a project that supports urban Indigenous and African Nova Scotian women who have experienced violence, explains that limited state responses to well-documented historical and inter-generational trauma and ongoing institutionalized racism and marginalization are serious barriers to African Nova Scotian and Indigenous women trusting and accessing mainstream support services (Creating Communities of Care, 2021). They also call attention to the impact that a criminal justice system that has been unresponsive and disproportionately punitive towards members of racialized communities has on African Nova Scotian and Indigenous women's ability to safely report instances of violence (Creating Communities of Care, 2021).

Newcomer women, girls and non-binary people

Many of the data sets we explored noted that they did not have enough information to make statistically sound observations about the impact of gender-based and sexual violence on newcomer and immigrant women, girls and non-binary people. This means that our understanding of newcomer and immigrant women's, girls' and non-binary people's experiences of sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces is particularly limited.

A recent report prepared for HRM's Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office by Engage Nova Scotia, based on the 2019 Nova Scotia Quality of Life Survey, shows that women in Halifax who answered the survey

who do not have citizenship reported lower levels of trust in strangers in their community, trust in people in their neighbourhood and confidence in police than both women who do have citizenship and men (Holland & Hill, 2021, pp. 52-53).

Interview participants and members of our guiding committees called attention to the fact that newcomer women, girls and non-binary people may be excluded from public spaces because of language barriers and lack of specific services geared towards newcomers. Further, newcomer women, girls and non-binary people might experience barriers to reporting instances of sexual and gender-biased because of fear and/or mistrust of authorities or fear and uncertainty about how reporting their experiences might impact their immigration status.

Women, girls and non-binary people with disabilities

Women with disabilities are made vulnerable to sexual violence in public spaces for reasons including ableism & negative stereotypes, inaccessible infrastructure, and unreliable means of transportation. Women living with disabilities are also at an increased risk for intimate partner violence, and often face increased barriers to accessing services and support (Not Without Us: A Report About Changing the Response For Women with Disabilities Experiencing Domestic Violence, 2019).

The 2019 GSS shows that, nationally, women with a disability were sexually assaulted at much higher rates, with rates of 94 incidents of sexual assault per 1000 women with a disability compared to 22 incidents per 1000 women with no disability (Cotter, 2021, p. 11).

Interview participants named women, girls and non-binary people with disabilities as people who are at an increased risk for sexual violence in public spaces and having to resist social and systemic barriers that can limit access to and participation in public life.

Youth

Young people are consistently identified as being at higher risk for sexual and gender-based violence. The 2014 GSS states that almost half (47%) of all sexual assault incidents in 2014 were committed against women aged 15-24, two times higher than the 25-34 cohort and eight times higher than women aged 35-44 (Conroy & Cotter, 2017, p. 7). Results from the 2019 GSS show that women 15-24 were sexually assaulted at a rate of 187 per 1000 and women 25-34 at a rate of 85 per 1000 (Cotter, 2021, p. 10).

The SSPS also identified that for both men and women, being younger, and specifically younger and of a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, increases

the odds of experiencing unwanted sexual behaviours in public (Cotter & Savage, 2019).

Key Issue Highlight: Human Trafficking and the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth

Human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth are prevalent issues within the HRM (Ibrahim, 2021). Based on results from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey, Nova Scotia has been overrepresented in police-reported instances of human trafficking in Canada over the past decade (Ibrahim, 2021). In 2019, Nova Scotia reported 51 incidents of human trafficking, accounting for 10% of instances reported nationally (Ibrahim, 2021, p. 14).

Among national census metropolitan areas (CMAs), Halifax has the second highest rate of reported incidents of human trafficking, after Toronto. In 2019, Halifax reported 10.2 human trafficking incidents per 100,000 population compared to the national CMA rate of 1.6 per 100,000 population (Ibrahim, 2021, p. 5).

Research conducted by the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking highlights the stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway between Halifax and Moncton as a primary route along which victims are trafficked (Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2021, p. 33). Trafficking and Exploitation Services System (TESS)—a province-wide partnership between YWCA Halifax, government, law enforcement officers, non-profit organizations, and survivors—affirms this assertion, noting that service providers across the country have, for many years, shared anecdotal evidence that many of the victims and survivors they work with are originally from Nova Scotia (Gagnon, 2020).

It is important to consider that results of the UCR Survey only represent incidents that have been detected and reported to police (Ibrahim, 2021). TESS posits that the actual number of cases of human trafficking in the HRM are much higher (Gagnon, 2020).

2SLGBTQ+ women, girls and non-binary people

Homophobia, transphobia, and harmful stereotypes all contribute to a higher risk of all forms of sexual violence for 2SLGBTQ+ people. Fear of violence in public

spaces, such as in public washrooms, may impact and impede trans and gender-nonconforming people's ability to fully participate in public life.

Nearly one in four Halifax residents experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in public in 2018, with women being more likely than men to experience unwanted sexual behaviour in public (35% versus 12%) (Conroy, Rotenberg, Haringa, & Johnston-Way, 2020, p. 18). For members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ population, the odds of experiencing unwanted sexual behaviour are even greater.

Not including violence committed by an intimate partner, more than 1 in 10 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians had been sexually or physically assaulted in 2018, compared to 1 in 25 cisgender, heterosexual Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2020).

Data shows that being younger and being a 2SLGBTQ+ person are among the factors that most significantly increase the odds of experiencing sexual violence in public spaces (Cotter & Savage, 2019, p. 3).

The 2019 GSS shows the odds of being a victim of violent crime were twice as high for people who identified with a sexuality other than heterosexual, compared to those who identified as heterosexual (Statistics Canada, 2020).

The survey also highlights a striking difference in rates of sexual assault reported by bi-sexual people: in 2019, more than 83% of all incidents reported by those who identified as bisexual were sexual assaults. This is a rate of 541 sexual assault incidents per 1000—nearly 29 times higher than the rate among heterosexual Canadians (Cotter, 2021, p. 10).

In a 2019 study, Halifax based Wisdom2Action engaged with over 500 2SLGBTQ+ youth across Canada to better understand their experiences of gender-based violence. Some of the most common themes in participants' experiences were a lack, or perceived lack, of safety in public spaces and the pervasiveness of street harassment. Participants emphasized the heightened risk of street harassment for gender non-conforming 2SLGBTQ+ youth and racialized 2SLGBTQ+ youth (Lachance, 2019, p. 15).

Women, girls and non-binary people experiencing homelessness

Many of the key stakeholder interview participants spoke about how, as Halifax sinks further into an affordable housing crisis, women and youth in precarious living situations are made vulnerable to violence in both domestic settings and public spaces.

The 2019 GSS also affirms the heightened risk of violence that women, girls and non-binary people who are homeless experience. 1 in 10 individuals in Canada stated that they had experienced homelessness (considered by the survey to be living on the street, having to live with someone else or in their car because of having no where else to go) at some point in their lifetime (Cotter, 2021, p. 13). Respondents who reported experiencing homelessness in the 12 months preceding the survey experienced violent victimization at a rate three times higher than those who had never been homeless (Cotter, 2021, p. 14).

Summary: What do we Know?

Through the scoping study process, we have learned that women, girls and non-binary people are made more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces.

We also know that Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, racialized, newcomer, 2SLGBTQ+, women, girls and non-binary people, women, girls and non-binary people with disabilities and women, girls and non-binary people experiencing homelessness are all made more at risk of experiencing sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces because of the intersecting systems of sexism, misogyny, racism, xenophobia, ableism, colonialism, homophobia and transphobia.

There is a great need for more localized data and research that sheds light on the experiences of all women, girls and non-binary people in public spaces in the HRM. The HRM SC SPS must serve all women, girls and non-binary people, and thus, must continually seek to understand both the commonalities and nuances in diverse women's, girl's and non-binary people's experiences of safety and of sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces.

As we move forward into the next stages of the HRM SC SPS program, it will be critical for us to respond to both the diverse and unique needs of all women, girls and non-binary people when addressing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces.

Important Themes

Feelings and Experiences of Safety in Public Spaces

Throughout the scoping study process, the link between built spaces and feelings of safety and well-being was frequently highlighted. A key piece of knowledge that was imparted by local women who have been working to advance the use of WSAs in Halifax is that perceptions of safety aren't always tied so much to geographical space, but rather features in spaces.

Participants in the WSA training pointed to both dangerous features, such as construction site debris, and less physically intrusive features, such as litter, as signs that a space is not well taken care of. In the WSAs the Public Safety Office has facilitated since the training, participants have prioritized increased lighting, clearing of garbage, and beautification efforts, such as installing murals and flower boxes, as key elements of making public spaces feel safe and welcoming.

These women also talked about how important other users of spaces are. In particular, the presence of children made participants feel more at ease and less unsafe in spaces, citing the feeling that children being present means there are people watching out for them, if not directly, then nearby.

Another clear theme that emerged in the WSA training was concern over pedestrian safety – being able to see and be seen and to hear and be heard are particularly crucial in areas with heavy vehicle traffic. Participants pointed out areas where sidewalks abruptly end or do not exist, construction is common and poorly contained, and crosswalks are not clearly marked or easily accessible. During the WSAs conducted since the training, similar concerns have been raised concerning the need for clear pathways and accessible sidewalks.

Participants have also referenced nearby residences as a positive attribute of public spaces – there was a sense that if an emergency were to happen, people nearby may be able to see or hear and therefore offer help. Participants often emphasized how much safer they feel in spaces where they can easily perceive what is happening around them.

Engage Nova Scotia's Nova Scotia Quality of Life Survey considered women's experiences of safety within the larger category of community vitality, including sense of community, confidence in institutions, discrimination, safety and trust as important indicators of the well-being of women.

The survey produced insights that can act as a starting point of understanding some women's experiences in different areas of the HRM.

Women who responded to this survey in the Sackville, East Dartmouth and Spryfield/Armdale areas perceived low levels of support if they were to need help. Women living in the South end of Halifax and the Dartmouth waterfront reported high levels of perceived support if they were to need help. North Halifax and Dartmouth, however, showed moderately low levels of perceived help in case of need (Holland & Hill, 2021, p. 13).

Survey results show that the closer women live to the downtown core, the more common it was that they experienced gender discrimination (Holland & Hill, 2021, p. 13). Regarding reported feelings of safety walking after dark, women in Sackville area, North Dartmouth and Fairview/Clayton Park reported the lowest levels of feeling safe (Holland & Hill, 2021, p. 13).

Finally, notably, this survey provides some striking information about women in the HRM who answered the survey and reported mental health challenges. Women with mental health challenges reported lower levels of needs fulfillment, help in case of need, social climate and bonds, confidence in the police, sense of belonging to community and physical wellbeing (Holland & Hill, 2021, pp. 47-50).

It must be noted, however, that like many data sources, this survey's results do not allow for a robust analysis of the experiences of the full spectrum of identities that women, girls and non-binary people hold, notably gender identity outside of man and woman, sexuality, different abilities, races and Indigenous identities.

Violence against Women, Girls and Non-Binary People and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed further light on significant gender inequities. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic due to their roles as essential workers (health care employees, grocery store clerks, etc.) and as unpaid care providers for their families, including caring for the sick, elderly and children (OECD 2020).

Increased confinement and decreased mobility have resulted in increased risk of violence against women and girls (OECD, 2020). UN Women refers to this as "the shadow pandemic" (UN Women, n.d.). As numbers of reported cases of violence increase, hotlines are unable to respond to all of the calls and access to services such as shelters becomes more difficult or even impossible (UN Women, n.d.).

A recent Canadian study suggests that women may be more concerned about their safety during the pandemic. 10% of women, compared to 6% of men, shared that they were concerned about violence in the home during the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2020).

There has also been concern about women's experiences of violence outside of the home, which, as UN Women notes, continues despite confinement (UN Women, n.d.). Specifically, less than one third of women felt safe walking alone after dark in their neighbourhood since the pandemic, compared with almost half of men polled (Statistics Canada, 2020, p. 3).

When we consider intersectional impacts of the pandemic, young women were more likely to report feeling unsafe when walking alone after dark in their neighbourhood since the start of the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2020, p. 3).

In addition, "young female participants were also more likely to feel that crime had increased in their neighbourhood since the start of COVID-19" (Statistics Canada, 2020, p. 3). Indigenous (17%) and visible minority (14%) participants were more likely than non-Indigenous or non-visible minorities (both at 11%) to believe that crime had increased in their neighbourhood and expressed that they would not feel safe walking alone after dark in their neighbourhoods (Statistics Canada, 2020, p. 4).

Resources, Organizations, Networks and Supports

In the inaugural meeting of the Implementing Committee, members conducted an initial mapping activity to brainstorm the stakeholders they know of or are connected to who are working on issues related to the safety of women, girls and non-binary people in public spaces in the HRM. The chart below includes these stakeholders, as well as other stakeholders brought forward by interview participants, the WACH and through other scoping study research.

This list is by no means exhaustive, as there are, no doubt, many other people and groups impacted by and/or responding to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM. This stakeholder map does, however, provides a useful jumping off point to better understand the ecosystem of people and groups with a stake or role to play in these issues.

Grassroots Groups and Communities	
2SLGBTQ+ communities African Nova Scotian communities Disability communities Faith communities Hearing impaired communities Neighbourhood watch groups Newcomer communities	Residents associations School associations and groups Trans communities Urban Indigenous communities University good neighbours groups University communities Youth groups and youth serving organizations
Community Based Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations and Service Providers	
902 Man Up Avalon Sexual Assault Centre Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Family resource centres Heartwood Centre for Community Youth Development Hope Blooms Immigrant and Migrant Women's Association of Halifax Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) Leave Out Violence Nova Scotia Mainline Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre Mobile Outreach Street Health (MOSH) Native Women's Association Nova Scotia College of Social Workers Phoenix Rainbow Action Network	South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre The Association of Black Social Workers, Nova Scotia (NSABSW) The Youth Project United Way Various shelters Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender-Based Violence Prevention Project YWCA Halifax <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GirlSpace Nova Scotia Transition and Advocacy (NSTAY) Trafficking and Exploitation Service System (TESS) Partnership
HRM Departments, Business Units and other HRM affiliated groups	
Board of Police Commissioners Business Improvement Districts Community Mobilization Teams Diversity and Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office Emergency Services Halifax Libraries	Parks and Recreation Recreation/community centres Strategic Communications Street Navigators Transportation and Public Works Youth Advocate Program

Halifax Regional Police	
Other governmental and para-governmental departments, units and services	
African Nova Scotian Affairs Develop Nova Scotia Events Nova Scotia Halifax Regional Centre for Education IWK Health Centre	Mental health services Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) RCMP Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) Tourism sector

Stakeholder and asset mapping activities will continue to be integrated throughout the life of the HRM SC SPS to ensure the program is aware of, understands and responds to the ever-evolving network of people, communities and organizations involved and impacted by this work.

Summary: Important Themes

Natural, built and social features of public spaces all impact women’s, girls’ and non-binary people’s experiences and feelings of safety, wellbeing and belonging in the HRM. Feeling safe and comfortable enough to move around and spend time in public spaces is critical to women, girls and non-binary people being able to access the resources and services they need. Throughout the scoping study, it was affirmed that when women, girls and non-binary people have input into and shape public spaces in a municipality, these spaces are made safer, more comfortable and more accessible for everyone.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on women, girls and non-binary people. Confinement to private spaces and lack of access to public spaces has increased women’s, girls’ and non-binary people’s risk of experiencing violence. As we look to responses and solutions to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM and formulate next steps in the HRM SC SPS program, we must remember that we are still in the midst of the pandemic and, thus, must account for the additional challenges and barriers experienced by women, girls and non-binary people at this time.

Finally, through the scoping study process, we have learned more about the resources, organizations, supports and networks focused on responding to and preventing sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM. We better understand the assets that exist in our community and the stakeholders this program should seek to connect with in doing this work.

That being said, we still have a lot to learn—we know there is much more to understand about what services and programs these stakeholders offer, what support they require in their work and what other critical resources exist in our communities. Efforts to better understand the resources that already exist in the HRM will be a key element of our next steps forward in this program.

DRAFT

Conclusion: What's Next?

Priority Areas

Conducting this scoping study has given the HRM SC SPS program an opportunity to explore more deeply the realities of sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM. What we heard and learned in this process will help build the foundation of this program moving forward.

The priorities brought forward in this study are not exhaustive and do not necessarily reflect all the most important and pressing issues regarding sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM. Rather, these priorities provide both a compass to align the HRM SC SPS program in the right direction and a roadmap of what conversations, connections, collaborations and focuses we should pursue in this program.

As mentioned previously, the HRM SC SPS program is an iterative one. The priorities highlighted in this scoping study will help form the program, but we must be responsive and willing to incorporate new understandings and focuses if, in our work alongside community members and stakeholders, we are guided to other pressing and important priorities.

Informed by the guidelines provided by UN Women, conversations with interview participants and our guiding committees and the literature review, the following are values we will aim to apply to all the priorities we have identified:

1. Centering people who belong to communities and demographics who have been identified as being made most vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence in public places. This program must aim to be informed by these communities at each step along the way.
2. Considering which issues are persistent, emergent, or of a pressing nature in the HRM; responding to immediate needs but being flexible enough to shift plans and priorities as our understanding of issues changes.
3. Seeking connection and collaboration with work already being done by members of our Implementing Committee, the WACH, and other organizations and networks in HRM, considering the ways in which our participation in this program could build on, support and enrich this work.

The following are the priority areas that were identified:

A gender-safety lens across HRM Business Units & strategic interventions

WACH members noted that ensuring women's, girl's and non-binary people's perspectives are included in all HRM initiatives was a high priority, and they suggested looking at ways to embed a gender lens into all work the HRM does.

As we move forward in this program, alongside the members of the program's Implementing Committee, we should aim to see the ways in which most, if not all, HRM Business Units can integrate considerations for women, girl's and non-binary people's safety into their work and, thereby, be well positioned to take up strategic opportunities to improve women's, girls' and non-binary people's access to and safety in HRM spaces and services.

Working together

Interview participants, WSA participants, the WACH and Implementing Committee members and our literature review all pointed to collaboration as being critical to working towards preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM.

In the 2014 Mayor's Roundtable on Violence, cooperation, information sharing, eliminating silos, sharing expertise and knowledge exchange were consistently identified as necessary to remove barriers and improve services and resources to address gendered violence in HRM" (Clairmont, 2014, p. 88). Strengthened partnerships between the HRM and the province and the HRM and community organizations were also recommended (Clairmont, 2014, p. 89).

This priority also aligns closely with best practices provided by the UN Women SC SPS Global FPI—working with and supporting the people and organizations who are already doing the work to respond to and prevent sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces is a critical value of this program.

Addressing housing insecurity and homelessness

Those experiencing chronic homelessness rarely find refuge from public spaces and the social issues that emerge in them. In addition, women, girls and non-binary people who do not have safe, secure housing are at a higher risk of being sexually exploited in order to access supplies they need.

It is also critically important to consider the unique challenges that women, girls and non-binary people experience in accessing supports and housing options when experiencing homelessness. These barriers are only further amplified for women, girls and non-binary people who are Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, People of Colour, newcomers, and have disabilities, who may not only be contending with a shortage of appropriate supports, but also the systemic barriers of racism, xenophobia and ableism.

Transportation and mobility

In Halifax, among those who have experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in public, one in ten (9.5%) Halifax residents said the most serious incident took place on public transit, significantly higher than the rest of Nova Scotia (5.1%) but closer to other provincial numbers (11.5%) (Conroy, Rotenberg, Haringa, & Johnston-Way, 2020, p. 18).

Young people, lower-income people, newcomers, and people with disabilities are all less likely to have access to a vehicle and therefore more likely to rely on forms of active transportation such as public transit, biking, or walking. Buses and cabs were two of the physical spaces that interview participants acknowledged to be particularly concerning areas for sexual harassment and assault. Fear of encountering violence while trying to get from point A to point B may lead women to plan outings around factors such as time of day, which can mean less women, girls and non-binary people are present in public spaces at night, perpetuating a cycle of feelings of unease around mobility.

Members of the WACH spoke about how newcomer women often do not have access to cars, and therefore rely on walking or taking public transportation, increasing the likelihood of harassment due to an increased amount of time spent in public spaces. Increasing Halifax's walkability was a priority for some of the members as well, with a key aspect being making walking a safer transportation option.

Responding to and preventing human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of youth in the HRM

The HRM UN SC SPS program is a member of the TESS HRM Regional Group. The prevalence and impact of human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of youth in the HRM came through in the scoping study as a key area in which the municipality can act and support already ongoing work. This work will continue to be a priority of the Public Safety Office and the HRM SC SPS program.

Education

Key stakeholder interviewees, WSA participants and our guiding committees highlighted education as one of the ways to address and respond to sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces. Suggestions involved getting the word out about services and supports available to victims/survivors, teaching bystanders how to recognize and respond to sexual violence in all of its forms, unpacking and combatting misogynistic and harmful social norms thereby encouraging the development of healthier understandings of sexuality, gender, relationships and treating all people with respect.

Members of the WACH emphasized the importance of working with men and boys to combat ingrained misogyny, as well as working with women, girls, non-binary people and bystanders to be able to identify and respond to street harassment.

Understanding local experiences

It has become clearer to the HRM UN SC SPS program that we lack access to data on women, girls and non-binary people's experiences of public spaces in the HRM—whether that be quantitative data, or more qualitative sources based on conversations, interviews and working on these issues alongside folks in grassroots settings.

As we reflect on the content of this scoping study and plan a path forward for the program, we need to reflect on the ways in which the voices of local women, youth and non-binary people of all races, sexualities, gender-identities, ethnicities, abilities, immigration statuses, incomes and ages can shape this work. We should prioritize assessing already existing methods of data collection to include more opportunities for diverse women, girls and non-binary people to share their experiences and developing new systems to collect data in a way that will allow us to disaggregate for the diverse experiences of women, girls and non-binary people.

Recently, the HRM UN SC SPS program, in collaboration with the Diversity & Inclusion Office, was tasked by the WACH through Regional Council, to prepare a report exploring ways in which we can collect data and information regarding Asian women, girls and non-binary people's experiences of safety in public spaces. This motion, and others like it, move us towards collecting and seeking out data that tells us a more in-depth story about the ways in which different women experience public spaces in the HRM.

Possible Action Items

The following action items have been identified as possible next steps in the HRM SC SPS program:

Scanning the work of all HRM Business Units to better understand where the HRM SC SPS program can support HRM projects, policies and initiatives that impact women's, girls' and non-binary people's safety in public spaces and help build capacity for these spaces and policies to better serve women, girls and non-binary people.

Responding to the lack of data and information available about diverse women's, girls' and non-binary people's experiences of safety in public spaces in the HRM:

- Working with REES (Respect Educate Empower Survivors) (source) to develop a platform for HRM public spaces. REES is a secure online platform that people can use to report instances of sexual harassment in public spaces, helping the community and HRM to understand where strategic interventions are required to address sexual violence in public spaces and to support survivors/victims of sexual and gender-based violence. This platform can also act as a central information hub for survivors/victims looking for resources and support.
- Working alongside other HRM Business Units to gather more data on diverse women's, girls' and non-binary people's experiences of safety, wellbeing and belonging in public spaces in the HRM. This should include a mix of methods and tools for gathering women's, girls' and non-binary people's input. Possibilities include integrating a lens of safety from gender-based and sexual violence in already existing HRM surveys and engagement opportunities, designing new surveys and opportunities for people to safely share their stories and lived experiences in more in-depth, and oftentimes, more culturally appropriate ways.

Collaborating with TESS and YWCA Halifax to facilitate training for HRM staff on recognizing and responding to instances of human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of youth.

Continuing to develop the WSA tool as a means for women, girls' and non-binary people to contribute to shaping public spaces in the HRM.

- This will include working with different communities of women, girls and non-binary people and various HRM Business Units to use and continue to adapt the tool for the HRM context.
- In October, the Public Safety Office will be hosting a workshop with HRM planners to share the WSA tool and explore ways in which the tool could be

used and/or adapted to contribute to a community based, gender-safety lens in planning projects in the municipality.

Leaning on the resources and network the HRM has access to as a partner city of the UN Women SC SPS Global FPI, organize skill-sharing and learning opportunities between stakeholders in the HRM and people and global organizations who are implementing innovative initiatives for safer public spaces and services for women, girls and non-binary people.

These actions are by no means exhaustive, but rather, are items that have arisen over the course of working on the scoping study, as Public Safety Office staff have interacted with various stakeholders.

Next Steps

The next phase of the HRM SC SPS program will be focused on creating a theory of change and project plan, guided by input from the Implementing Committee, the WACH and various other community and grassroots stakeholders.

The project plan will focus on building a roadmap for establishing the necessary relationships to work in the priority areas identified in this scoping study, to address gaps in our knowledge and to continue to move forward in answering the questions we still have about sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM.

For example, to know how to best work towards making public spaces safer for youth, part of the project plan will be aimed at better understanding the experiences of young people in the HRM. This plan should include several elements:

- Coming to a better understanding of youth-focused initiatives already happening within HRM Business Units. We will connect with the Youth Advocate program and the Youth Section of Parks and Recreation, for example, to understand what youth have already told the HRM about their safety, belonging and well-being in public spaces.
- As we learn more about HRM initiatives focused on youth and the insights these projects have garnered, we will simultaneously build the HRM SC SPS program's capacity to work alongside these efforts and better understand what further connections to communities and organizations need to be fostered. In exploring these initiatives and insights, we will better understand what role the HRM SC SPS program is best suited to play in responding to sexual and gender-based violence against youth in public spaces.

For some of the priorities, we are well positioned to take some action immediately. For example, in aligning efforts across HRM Business Units, we have the knowledge and capacity—within the Implementing Committee, the WACH and in the Public Safety Office—to begin to identify upcoming projects, plans and policies that could integrate a lens of safety from sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces.

Of course, taking action related to these priorities will happen simultaneously to having conversations and building relationships with communities—in engaging with residents and communities at each step in the program process, we will better understand the services, programs and policies they encounter in their daily lives and will no doubt learn more about where efforts to integrate a lens of safety for women, girls and non-binary people in HRM policies, programs and services are necessary.

As aforementioned, the priorities identified in this scoping study will guide our next steps and remain as core focuses in our work; however, as we learn more and gain further insight into the questions we still have about sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces in the HRM, we will aim to be flexible and leave space in our work to respond to emerging and pressing issues.

For the coming months, the main work of the Program Coordinator and HRM SC SPS program will be to lead a process to create the program’s theory of change and develop a project plan, while also moving forward on the action items we have identified during the course of the scoping study.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of Acronyms

2SLGBTQ+ - Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer. The plus encapsulates other diverse identities along the gender and sexuality spectrum.

GBV - gender based violence

Global FPI – Global Flagship Program Initiative

GSS- General Social Survey

HRM - Halifax Regional Municipality

HRP - Halifax Regional Police

RCMP - Royal Canadian Mounted Police

SSPPS - Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces

UN - United Nations

UN Women SC SPS - UN Women Safe Cities & Safe Public Spaces

WACH- The Women’s Advisory Committee of Halifax

WSA- Women’s Safety Assessment

Appendix B: Key Terms and Definitions

Cisgender

A person whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth. Cisgender is a term that describes a person's gender identity, not their sexual or romantic attractions.

Femicide

Defined as the killing of women and girls, femicide is the most extreme form of violence on a continuum of violence and discrimination against women and girls.²

Gender-based violence

Violence that is committed against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender. Gender-based violence encompasses a range of behaviours, not all of which meet the threshold of criminal behaviour as defined by the Criminal Code of Canada, but nonetheless can have significant and long-lasting negative impact on the victims/survivor.

Non-binary

One term used to describe gender expression and gender identity that do not fall within the binary of male and female. Throughout this scoping study, we use the term non-binary to refer to the diversity of genders outside the strict binary identifiers "male" and "female". There are, however, many other terms that people may prefer to use instead when self-identifying, including, but not limited to, gender-diverse or genderqueer.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual comments, attention, actions, or gestures. As is the case for other forms of sexual violence, a key component to sexual harassment is that someone does these actions without the consent, permission, or agreement of the person or persons they are targeting. Sexual harassment includes non-contact forms, like: sexual comments about a person's body parts or appearance, whistling while a woman or a girl is passing-by, demands for sexual favors, sexually suggestive staring following, stalking, and exposing one's sexual organs at someone. Sexual harassment also includes physical contact forms, like someone purposely brushing up against someone else on the street or public transportation, grabbing, pinching, slapping, or rubbing against another person in a sexual way. Some elements of sexual harassment may

² Definition from the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. <https://www.femicideincanada.ca/about/types>

be covered within criminal law; however, many elements may require civic remedies, educational and administrative responses.

Sexual Violence

Refers to any sexual act committed against the will of the other person, either in the case when the victim does not give the consent or when consent cannot be given because the person is a child, has a mental disability, or is severely intoxicated or unconscious as a result of alcohol or drugs. It encompasses both sexual harassment and other forms of sexual assault such as attempted rape, and rape. It includes acts such as genital mutilation/cutting, forced sexual initiation, forced prostitution, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and other sexually motivated forms of violence.

Transgender

A person whose gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender is a term that describes a person's gender identity, not their sexual or romantic attractions.

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life.³ It is important to note that all forms of VAWG and SVAWG are underreported, so we cannot simply rely on official crime data to understand the scope and nature of the problem. It is also important to remember that the perception of safety - that is, how safe a person feels in a given time and place, shapes their urban experience, and it often guides mobility choices and can limit access to urban opportunities and services. There are thus real consequences on the daily lives of women and girls due to their perceptions of safety, even if they are not experiencing violence or sexual harassment at that specific moment.

³ United Nations General Assembly (1993) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. *Proceedings of the 85th Plenary Meeting*, Geneva, Dec. 20, 1993. United Nations: Geneva.

Appendix C:

Research project: UN Women Safe Cities Safe Public Spaces Programme.

Primary researcher: Brandy Whitford, on behalf of Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM)'s Public Safety Office.

Contact information:

Researcher: Brandy Whitford

Phone number: 902.430-6703

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Advisor: Amy Siciliano

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Interview Date:

Interview Location: Virtual interview via Skype.

Time commitment: Approximately 1 hour.

Purpose of interview: Information from interviews will be used to form the scoping study of the UN Women Safe Cities Safe Public Spaces Programme, which is a document produced to better understand the local context and issues surrounding gender inequity and violence in public spaces. To put it briefly, the scoping study will inform programme design.

Associated risks: Topics may be emotionally triggering.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed on the topic of sexual violence in public spaces in Halifax. Fear and experiences of sexual violence – from street level harassment to femicide – is a pervasive and long-standing issue. It happens on streets, parks, transit, workplaces, and homes and can deeply impact women and girls' ability to participate fully and equally in public life, restricting mobility, and access to essential services, education, employment and recreation. In Halifax, there is on average one sexual assault reported to police each day, but we know that this statistic only gives a surface-level glimpse at the scale of the issue, as survivors of sexual violence are less likely to report to police than those of other crimes.

In 2010, UN Women launched its UN Women Safe Cities Safe Public Spaces Flagship Programme. Since then, several cities across the world have joined the programme, including the city of Halifax. In joining the programme, Halifax is committed to identifying locally relevant and owned solutions, strengthening laws and policies, investing in the safety and economic viability of public spaces, and fostering transformative social norms that promote women and girls' rights to use public spaces free from sexual violence.

You have been asked to participate in this research project because of the work you do in the field of responding to and/or prevention of violence against women. The semi-structured interview will consist of 8-10 questions with the intention of helping the interviewer gain a better understanding of the views of those doing important work relevant to the research topic. Please carefully review this form and do not hesitate to ask for clarification on any part of the form if needed. By signing this form, you agree that:

- Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to stop the interview and/or withdraw your information at any time, including during the interview and up to a month after the interview is complete. You are also free to refuse to answer any question(s) and continue with the interview.
- The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed by hand.
- Recordings and transcriptions of the interview will not be shared with anyone other than the primary researcher
- The recording and transcription of the interview will be stored on a password-protected computer and destroyed within two years of the completion of the scoping study.
- Though identities will be obscured, it should be noted that given the nature of the study, there remains a risk of indirect identification.

Interview content, including direct quotations, may be used in the scoping study. By signing this form, you agree that:

- I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time; furthermore, I am free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
- The interview or extracts from it is for the purpose described above, and may be used for related purposes.
- I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.
- I waive any right that I may inspect or approve the finished product, which may include the use of my interview or extracts from it. if I have consented to such use.
- I hereby release HRM in respect of any claims arising from the use of the material as outlined above.
- I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain deidentified quotations by me for the intended purpose of the scoping study, as well as for related purposes (i.e. programming and/or communications).

- I have full and complete authority to permit the use of my interview or extracts from it, and no other person's authorization is required.

Participant's printed name

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's printed name

Researcher's signature

Date

In accordance with Section 485 of the Municipal Government Act (MGA), HRM is collecting your personal information in order to seek your consent for the use of your interview in content as outlined above. This personal information will not be used or disclosed for any other purposes. If you have any questions about the collection and use of this information, please contact HRM's Access and Privacy Office at 902-490-7460 or accessandprivacy@halifax.ca.

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Appendix D: Key Stakeholder Interview Questions

1. Situational questions

- a. Could you tell me a bit about your work? What is your organization, and what is your role within that organization? What does the geography of your work look like?
- b. Could you tell me about your work as it relates to sexual violence in Halifax?
- c. What are some of the challenges you've faced in either working to prevent, address, or respond to sexual violence in Halifax?

2. Stakeholders and plans

- a. What organizations or groups do you know of who are affecting change in Halifax around the issue of sexual violence?
- b. Could you tell me about collaborative work you do in the field? Are there groups or organizations you'd like to work alongside? Are there barriers preventing you from working with them?

3. Demographics

- a. Based on your experience, are particular groups of people (women/girls) more at risk for sexual violence? If so, which populations are more at risk in Halifax?
- b. What would you say your priorities are with regards to addressing sexual and gendered violence in Halifax? What priorities do you think the HRM should have regarding sexual violence against women?

4. What's missing?

- a. What kind of gaps in knowledge do you think we have about the issue of sexualized violence in Halifax? Can you think of reasons why those gaps might exist?
- b. Are there any particular areas geographically or activity-wise that you believe should be considered as priority areas for interventions (i.e. Halifax transit terminals, Argyle Street, festivals such as Halifax Pride, Jazz Fest, the Buskers)?
- c. How could Halifax's participation in the Safe Cities program help organizations like yours respond to and prevent sexual violence in public spaces?

5. Room to share any info the participant would like to, and to go over next steps re: research.