



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A Pandemic Within A Pandemic: Interim Place's Sexual Violence Support Program remains operational during COVID19.

JUNE 3, 2020-Peel Region, ON- As the month of May, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, draws to a close, Interim Place is sounding the alarm about an increased risk of sexual violence due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we collectively navigate the evolving circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that our response and recovery phase efforts consider the often-hidden consequences of the crisis. In fact, sexual violence is often made possible by situations of increased isolation and social marginalization. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities, leading to soaring rates of gender-based and sexual violence. Some communities are at particular risk due to pre-existing systemic inequities that have been amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some people are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual violence because they have been historically assigned less power and value in society due to their age, race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability and more. As a result of these structures and power imbalances in society, sexual violence against certain people is minimized or normalized. For these reasons, experiences of sexual violence will differ greatly.

Here are a few examples of lessons learned from survivors accessing Interim Place's services during the COVID19 pandemic:

- A survivor who is trans may experience barriers when accessing healthcare as there is systemic social exclusion of trans people within the healthcare system. For instance, these services may not understand and respect their lived gender identity and may instead be focused on sex assigned at birth.
- A survivor living with disabilities whose partner is also their caregiver may face increased impacts of violence as their partner may also have power over decisions around their health.
- A survivor who is undocumented may be worried about reporting an assault to the police as they may feel that it could negatively impact their immigration status. This fear can be compounded with the shame and fear of disclosing that sexual violence occurred while not practicing social distancing mandates.
- Several survivors shared that there is a rise in exploitation due to the increased use of technology as a form of connection. They shared that their children are also at higher risk for internet-based sexual exploitation due to being on devices more often.
- Systems of colonization devalue and hypersexualize certain bodies, and as a result, black and Indigenous women face greater rates of sexual violence. Survivors who are Indigenous and racialized shared that pandemic related concerns result in the minimization of their experience of sexual violence and its impacts.

"When it comes to sexual violence, anyone can experience it, and anyone can be a survivor. There is no one way of being a survivor. A survivor of sexual violence can be a person of any age, gender, race, class, sexuality or status," said Jenn Taborek, Sexual Violence Counsellor/Advocate at Interim Place.

Contrary to popular misconceptions, sexual violence refers to any sexual activity in which consent is not given freely. Anyone can experience sexual violence, and it can occur in any social context. Individuals of all genders, ages, and sexualities experience sexual violence in a variety of circumstances. However, we also acknowledge that gender-based violence and sexual violence impact women and trans folks disproportionately. If we are to provide accessible and equitable supports for all survivors of sexual violence, we must begin by disrupting narratives that discount the experiences of members of communities that have been marginalized. This can be achieved by creating opportunities for critical discourse around the nature of sexual violence and survivorship.

"If someone tells you they have experienced violence, listen, believe them, let them know they matter, and that violence is never their fault," said Rebecca Rogers, Manager of Programs and Services, Interim Place. "Ask them what they need from you. Remember they are always the experts of their own lives. If you are a survivor of violence – you are not alone. We are here."



Sexual Violence Centres, Sexual Violence Support Programs and Crisis Lines are vital services and even more so in times of crisis. Funding for sexual assault programs and services has always been limited and unstable. There is an urgent need to support local Sexual Violence Centres. The designated Sexual Assault Centre in the Region of Peel is Hope 24/7. Interim Place also provides supports through its Sexual Violence Support Program, launched in 2018.

If you or someone you know has been affected by sexual violence, we are here to support you. Please contact Interim Place's Sexual Violence Support Program at 905-676-0923 ext. 2222 or jennifer@interimplace.com. To reach Hope 24/7's Crisis Line please call 1-800-810-0180.

About Interim Place

Interim Place is an anti-violence organization providing shelter, counselling and advocacy supports for women, Two-Spirit, gender queer, trans and non-binary folks and their children experiencing any form of violence in the Region of Peel and beyond. Interim Place operates two Emergency Shelters, Crisis Support Lines, Community Support and Outreach Program, a Central Intake line, Sexual Violence Counselling Program, and Public Education Program.

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