



**Jean  
Augustine**   
Centre for Young Women's Empowerment

# EMPOWERED REPORT 2021

HIGHLIGHTING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES  
OF CANADIAN GIRLS

# THE EMPOWERED REPORT

The Empowered Report provides data focused on the lived experience of girls 18 years and under living in Canada. With in-depth information about Demographics, Education, Employment & Volunteerism, Arts, Recreation & Culture, Self-Esteem & Body Image, Menstrual Hygiene, and Safety & Violence Against Girls, organizations are better able to determine the needs of girls and enhance programs that support their development.

## Prepared By:

### **Jean Augustine Centre for Young Women's Empowerment**

The Jean Augustine Centre for Young Women's Empowerment (JAC) is a charitable organization committed to building the self-esteem and self-worth of young women and girls by positively influencing their outlook on life, broadening their horizons, and helping them to empower themselves.

Located in South Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada, JAC has been supporting girls and women since 2014. JAC offers in-person and online after-school programs, camp programs, workshops and events. Additionally, the charity offers services that address food insecurity and hygiene needs of women and girls.

JAC works with various community partners, including the University of Toronto's Community Action Group, to ensure that the charity is continuously working to understand and address the needs of girls and women both nationally and internationally.

### **Community Action Groups**

The University of Toronto's Community Action Groups consist of undergraduate and graduate student volunteers working together to support a local community organization. With weekly meetings, Community Action Groups engage in dialogue related to equity and social justice while completing a final project alongside a local community organization. The Empowered Report was completed over 8 weeks, during which students researched, composed, and designed this report for the Jean Augustine Centre. Contributing members which designed, edited, and authored the Empowered Report are listed below.

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# DEMOGRAPHICS

The socio-economic status of Canadian girls is influenced by a variety of factors including household income, parent employment, and place of birth. All of which can significantly influence the outcome of their lives. The below information includes important factors to be considered in the planning and implementation of empowerment programming for girls 18 years and under.

## Income and Its Effect on Girls

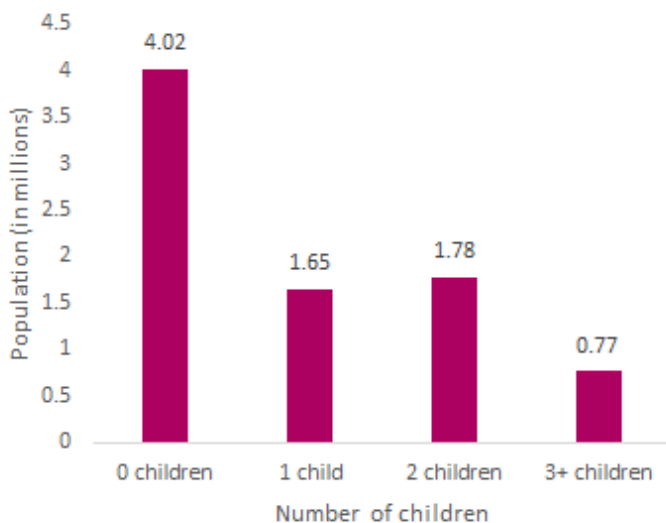
Canada's 2016 Census reports the total income for a two-parent household with children to be approximately \$113,000 before taxes and \$96,000 after taxes. In contrast, single-parent households have a total income of approximately \$53,193 before tax and \$48,856 after tax. This is important because single-parent households disproportionately identify as women; 1.26 million single parents identify as women, whereas only 350,000 identify as men.

Women age 15 and older who are not living with economic families have a median total income of \$29,801 before taxes, and \$27,495 after taxes. In Canada, over 3.3 million girls under 18 years of age are from low-income households.

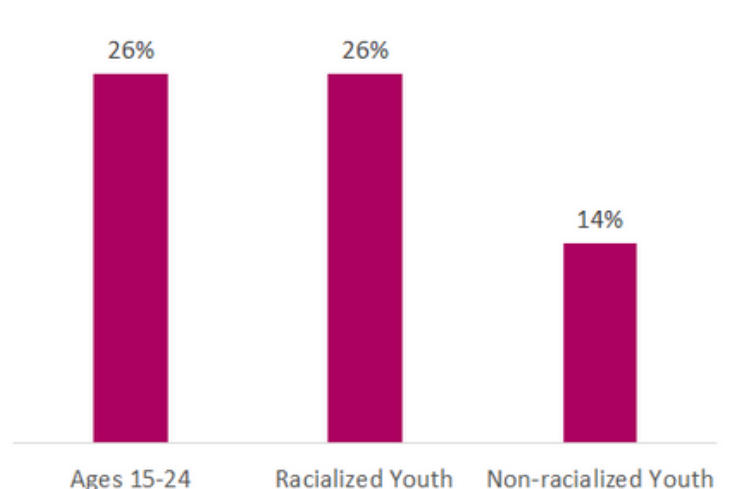
## Economic Families

Refers to a group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law union, adoption or a foster relationship.

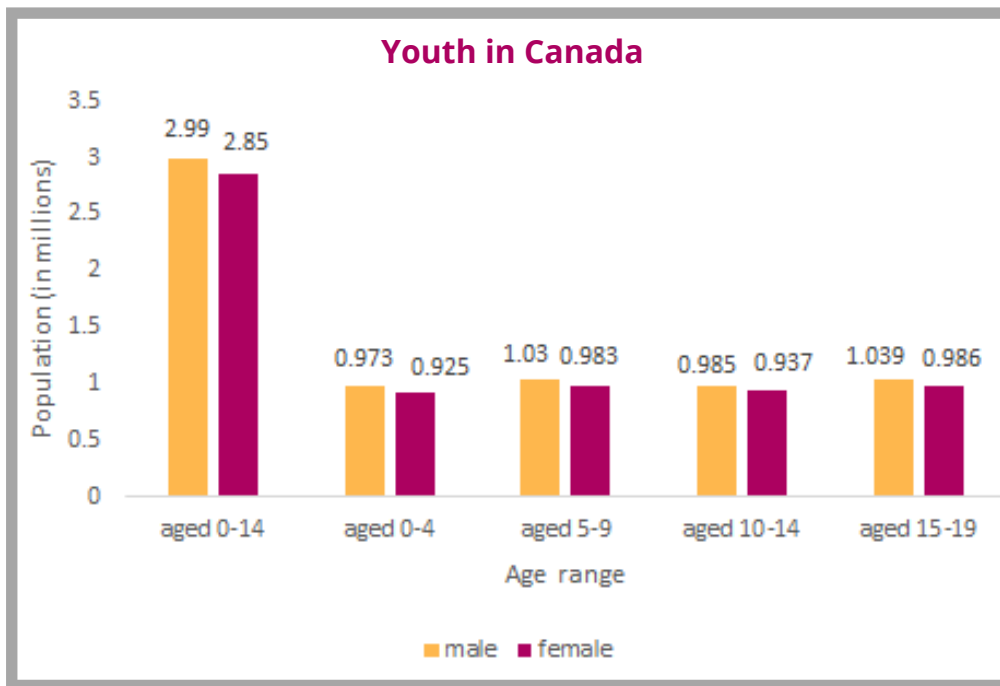
### Couples with Children



### Youth Living in Low-Income Households



## Demographics of girls in Canada

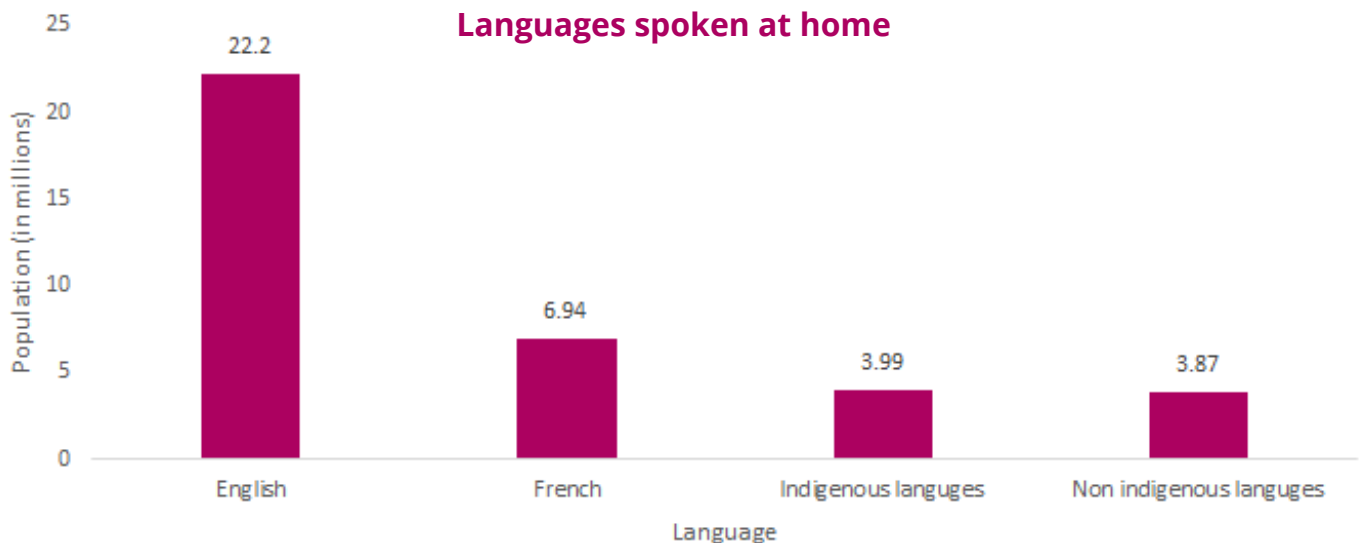


**Girls between the ages of 7-18 make up about 15% of the total Canadian population.**

A sizeable portion of girls ages 7-18 have immigrated to Canada, making the country's population incredibly diverse. Based on a census study that looked at 25% of households, Statistics Canada found that 645,945 girls were between the ages of 5-14 when they immigrated, and at least 800,000 were between the

ages of 15-24. Many young girls come from the United States, (~16,000 women), China and India (> 70,000), the Philippines (105,760), Morocco (>7000), and Egypt (>7000). This necessitates special consideration of the barriers faced by girls that immigrated at varying stages

of their life. For example, about 2 million women do not speak Canada's official languages, French and English. The top unofficial languages spoken at home are Indigenous languages like Algonquin languages, Austro-Asiatic languages (i.e. Vietnamese), and Slavic languages (i.e. Russian).



# EDUCATION

The growing tertiary sector of Canada suggests that education is increasingly an indispensable element of economic and social well-being. As such, it is important to investigate the trends amongst girls in high school and post-secondary education in Canada. Access to education is an important aspect of achieving gender parity and addressing the gaps in education between male and female youth. This section provides a close examination of the education of female youth 18 years and under within the Canadian context.



## Women are now more probable than men to have college or university qualifications.

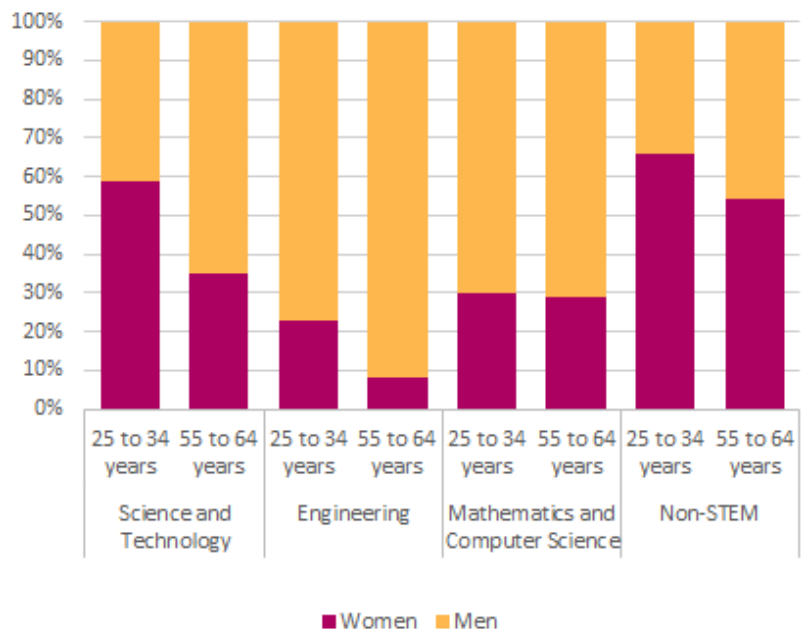
According to Statistics Canada, women are increasingly completing either a college or university education. The number of women with a high school diploma as their highest completed educational credential has decreased from 31% in 1991 to 23% in 2015. These numbers show the broad trend of more women embarking on higher education.

## Despite these promising numbers, a closer intersectional perspective reveals existing gender and racial inequalities.

Communities should be aware of the obstacles girls could face if they pursue higher education.

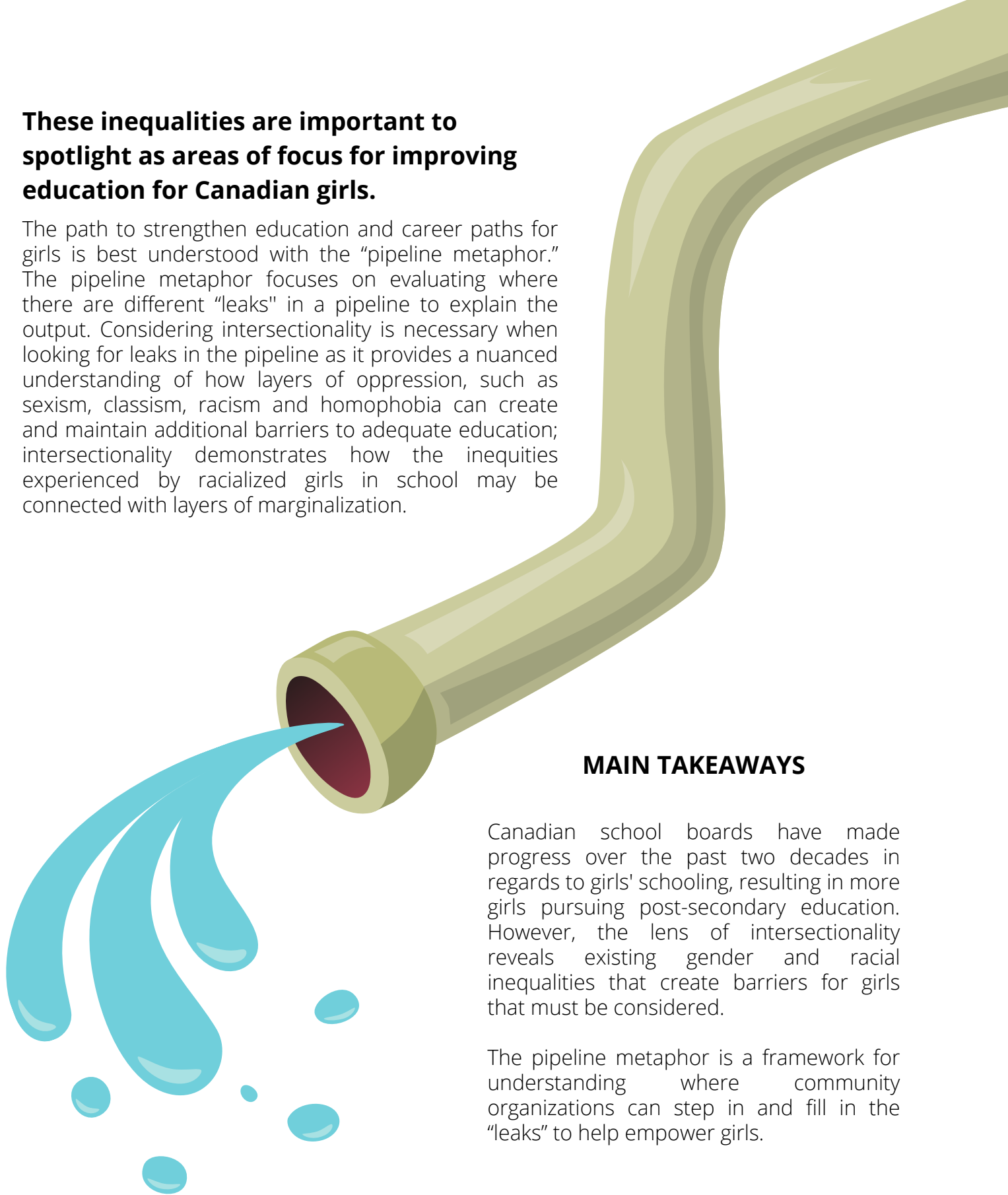
Although women are the majority of those with university degrees in nearly all fields of study, women are a minority in those with STEM degrees. Boys are twice as likely to pursue the STEM stream while at university than girls. This can be attributed to the lack of self-confidence of girls despite having greater mathematical intelligence (defined as mathematics proficiency levels 4, 5 and 6 at age 15). They were less likely to attempt STEM at the university level compared to boys with a lesser mathematical competence (proficiency levels 1, 2 and 3) due to various factors such as a lack of self-confidence.

**Percentage of university STEM and non-STEM degree holders by sex and age group, Canada, 2011**



## **These inequalities are important to spotlight as areas of focus for improving education for Canadian girls.**

The path to strengthen education and career paths for girls is best understood with the “pipeline metaphor.” The pipeline metaphor focuses on evaluating where there are different “leaks” in a pipeline to explain the output. Considering intersectionality is necessary when looking for leaks in the pipeline as it provides a nuanced understanding of how layers of oppression, such as sexism, classism, racism and homophobia can create and maintain additional barriers to adequate education; intersectionality demonstrates how the inequities experienced by racialized girls in school may be connected with layers of marginalization.



### **MAIN TAKEAWAYS**

Canadian school boards have made progress over the past two decades in regards to girls' schooling, resulting in more girls pursuing post-secondary education. However, the lens of intersectionality reveals existing gender and racial inequalities that create barriers for girls that must be considered.

The pipeline metaphor is a framework for understanding where community organizations can step in and fill in the “leaks” to help empower girls.

# EMPLOYMENT & VOLUNTEERISM

Employment and volunteerism is a very important component of the healthy development of girls. This section provides information to empower girls about employment and volunteer opportunities, as well as choosing their future career paths. More specifically, this section highlights employment and volunteer opportunities available to girls in Canada, the challenges and opportunities for girls in the workforce, the top qualities employers seek in teen employees, and the general representation of females in various career fields and professions.

## Quick Facts

A 2018 survey conducted by Girl Guides of Canada found that of the girls in Canada aged 12-18

- ◆ **1 in 10 (14%)** volunteered during the summer;
- ◆ **1 in 3 (35%)** had a summer job;
- ◆ **1 in 3 (31%)** worked in an informal setting for family, friends, or neighbours;
- ◆ **1 in 4 (23%)** had a part-time job
- ◆ **1 in 10 (13%)** had a full-time job;
- ◆ Girls who identified as Black, Indigenous, or Asian were significantly more likely to be employed informally by family, friends, or neighbours.

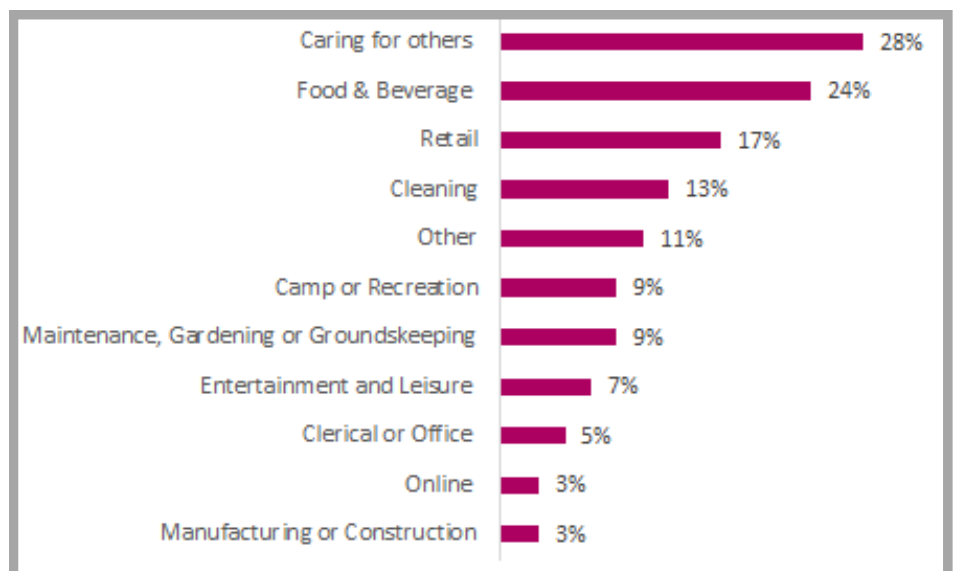
**More than half of the adolescents in Canada are employed or volunteer while in school.**

These pursuits, along with summer employment, are critical opportunities to gain real-world experience and begin building resume-worthy skills. The annual labour force survey conducted by Statistics Canada in 2019 showed that of the 9,014 female survey participants, 452 of them were young girls aged 15 to 19 years.

**The majority of girls had positive and rewarding experiences in their summer work.**

More than half of the girls (56%) said they made friends, more than half (52%) of girls who worked said they gained skills to help in a future career, and 2 in 10 (17%) said they met a mentor at work.

## Sectors Where Girls Were Employed in 2018





## Even with many girls entering the career force early, girls still experience gender-based challenges in the workplace.

From the previously mentioned survey by the Girl Guides of Canada (GGOC), the gender wage gap that exists in the Canadian workforce starts young. In full-time summer jobs, girls earned about \$3.00 per hour less than boys. This gap was said to widen to \$6.31 per hour for girls who worked in an informal setting for family, friends, or neighbours on a full-time basis. This wage gap from the GGOC survey is consistent with Statistics Canada data, which reports that girls as young as 15 already make as much as \$3.00 per hour less than boys across most industries and jobs.



### SUGGESTIONS FOR RECTIFYING GENDER INEQUITIES

#### Formal and informal employers can

- Provide fair and equal wages
- Create a safe working environment that does not tolerate any form of sexual harassment and assault
- Hire diverse candidates by recruiting widely
- Seek opportunities to support and mentor girls
- Intentionally provide meaningful work experiences for girls

#### Parents can also play their part by

- Talking to their daughter(s) about managing money and negotiating compensation
- Encourage them to speak up and advocate for themselves with employers
- Support the rights of their daughter(s) to feel safe at work
- Empower them to push themselves and try something new with their summer job in any sector of their interest

#### Finally, girls can also help the situation by

- Valuing their time
- Thinking about the benefits they want to gain from their summer
- Choosing summer opportunities that are important to their long-term goals
- Practice talking about wages and expectations
- Seeking mentorship opportunities
- Being aware of their rights to feel safe at work

## Most employers seek certain qualities in their employees.

Securing a job opportunity for the first time can prove to be challenging for teenagers. Summer jobs for young girls can be obtained through a variety of sources such as family, friends, networking or by directly applying for the opportunity. Regardless of the route taken, most employers seek certain qualities in their employees. While some of these qualities are personality-driven, most of them can be learned. Young girls can prepare for summer and teenage employment by seeking opportunities to develop the desired skills.

### Top 10 Qualities Employers Seek When Hiring Adolescents

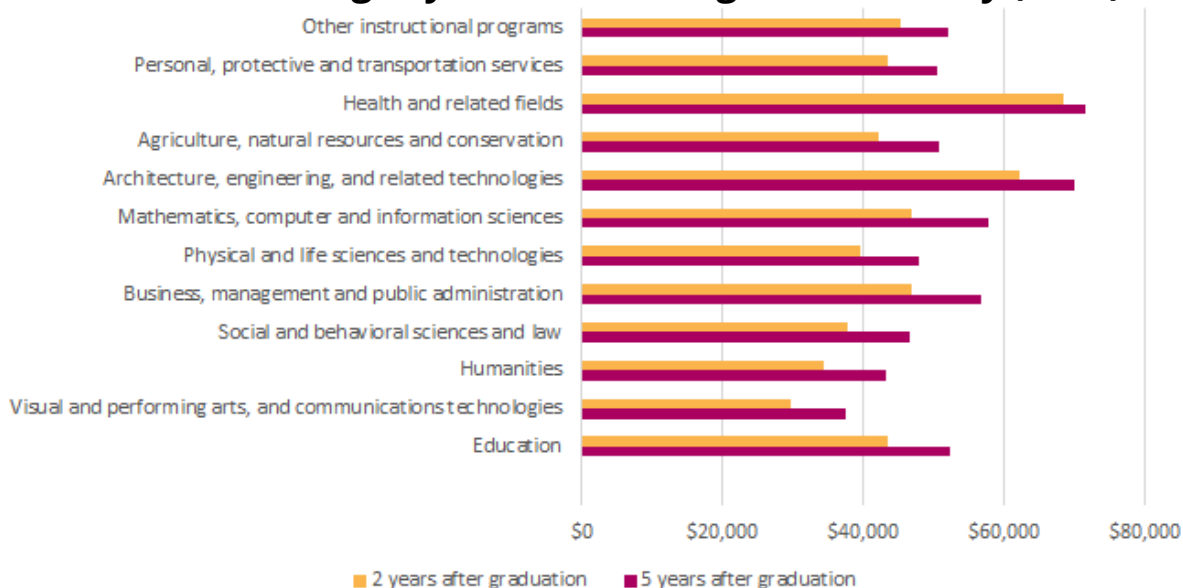
- 1 Reliability
- 2 Punctuality
- 3 A positive "can-do" attitude
- 4 Courteousness
- 5 Professionalism
- 6 Trustworthiness
- 7 Self-motivation
- 8 Ambitiousness
- 9 Willingness to learn
- 10 Strong oral and written communication skills

## Future Careers

Although there may be diverse career paths available for female people in Canada, some career paths are more pursued than others. According to the 2016 census in Canada, the following occupations are the top 10 occupations for women in Canada, which are compared with that of men to unveil the differences.

Top 10 Occupations By Gender		
Rank	Women	Men
1	Retail Salespersons	Transport Truck Drivers
2	Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses	Retail Salespersons
3	Cashiers	Retail & Wholesale Trade Managers
4	Elementary School Teachers & Early Childhood Educators and Assistants	Janitors, Caretakers, and Building Superintendents
5	Administrative Assistances	Construction Trades Helpers and Labourers
6	Food Counter Attendants	Automotive Service Technicians, Truck and Bus Mechanics, and Mechanical Repairers
7	Kitchen Helpers & Related Support Occupations	Material Handlers
8	Administrative officers	Carpenters
9	Nurse Aids, Orderlies and Patient Service Associates	Food Counter Attendants, Kitchen Helpers and Related Support Occupations
10	General Office Support Workers	Cooks

## Female Earnings by Field of Undergraduate Study (2013)



Although these above positions were reported to be the most common jobs for female people in Canada, data from Statistics Canada illustrates that for female bachelors degree holders, two and five years after their graduation, the highest earners were from health, IT and some engineering sectors. This information is particularly important since the expected earnings associated with a discipline is an important factor for students when choosing a career path.

Although some girls may aspire to pursue careers in fields where women are underrepresented, they may also feel discouraged by the dominance of men in the field. Providing resources on diverse career paths can empower women to enter their field of interest, irrespective of the gender that dominates the field. Additional knowledge of

women role models and their insight would help demystify the various career paths that are possible. Importantly, we must understand that girls and women may not prefer to work in fields where they are underrepresented and that pushing them to enter those fields when they are uncomfortable with it can be damaging.

# ARTS, CULTURE, & RECREATION

Arts, culture, and recreation is a good measure of how girls choose to spend their leisure time, and what activities they find the most engaging. Being involved in some sort of recreational or extracurricular activity is linked with feeling a greater sense of community and improved mental health. Studies show the clear benefit of engaging in artistic and athletic activities. For example, 82% of students who were actively part of a music program successfully graduated from high school. Considering the above, studying the trends and obstacles in extracurriculars for girls 18 years and under is important.

**Girls are more likely to be engaged in non-sport-centred activities and be part of community-related groups of all ages.**

This means that there are many opportunities to further engage girls with programs.



**Percent of Youth Participating in Extracurricular Activity by Gender and Age Group and Type of Activity**



## Dropping Out of Sports

Notably, girls tend to drop out from sports after the age of 9 and the decline is more heightened during their teen years as 1 in 3 quit playing sports through adolescence. Girls report feeling low self-esteem, negative body image, being perceived to lack skill, and finding sports an unwelcoming environment for girls. It is worth addressing this decline in participation since being involved in sports has been shown to produce many benefits.



### **BENEFITS OF INVOLVEMENT IN SPORTS:**

- **Boosts self-confidence**
- **Helps relieve stress and pressure from school or home life**
- **Teaches collaborative and problems solving skills**
- **Positively changes their perception of themselves**
- **Improves overall health and fitness**

Encouraging girls to stay in sports, exposing them to multiple sports from an early age and having the element of choice is important for girls. There is a positive feedback loop when girls enter sports, as they often play more than one. Having an active female role model, whether it be family members or celebrity athletes also has a positive impact on the likelihood of girls to participate in sports and reap its positive benefits.

## **MAIN TAKEAWAYS**

Girls have diverse interests and participate in diverse activities, some of which may be hostile towards girls. Creating a supportive environment for girls to participate in whatever they choose is integral. They reap positive benefits from such activities only if they support girls holistically.

# SELF-ESTEEM AND BODY IMAGE

Within society, unrealistic beauty standards affect the self-esteem and mental health of girls. Having healthy self-esteem—how one values and respects oneself—is a prerequisite for empowerment. It is important to discuss self-esteem and body image to highlight the causal factors and opportunities for intervention. This section highlights how the sexualization of girls and social media is damaging the self-esteem of young women. This is relevant to all stakeholders involved with girl's empowerment programs.

## The sexualization of girls in our society plays a major role in the deterioration of girls' mental health.

Sexualization occurs when a person's main value is attributed to their sexual appearance – rather than their intelligence or other qualities. Social scientists have found that exposure to sexualized images and messages can lead to body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, depression, and low self-esteem.

The source of sexualization has been the result of popular media such as television, Instagram, and other social media platforms. The amount of media exposure girls consume can lead girls to believe what they see in advertisements represent "normal" or "average" body types. But, fashion models are typically between a size 0-4 which is far smaller than the average Canadian woman.

Moreover, influential role models like celebrities reinforce the unrealistic standard of beauty. The inaccurate media representation makes many girls feel insecure and unhappy with their own bodies because they don't look like the images that are presented.

**Over  
60%**

**of girls say  
celebrities are  
their primary  
role models.**

**36%**

**of girls look up  
to their parents**

**Almost  
no girls**

**look up to  
professionals such as  
scientists or writers.**

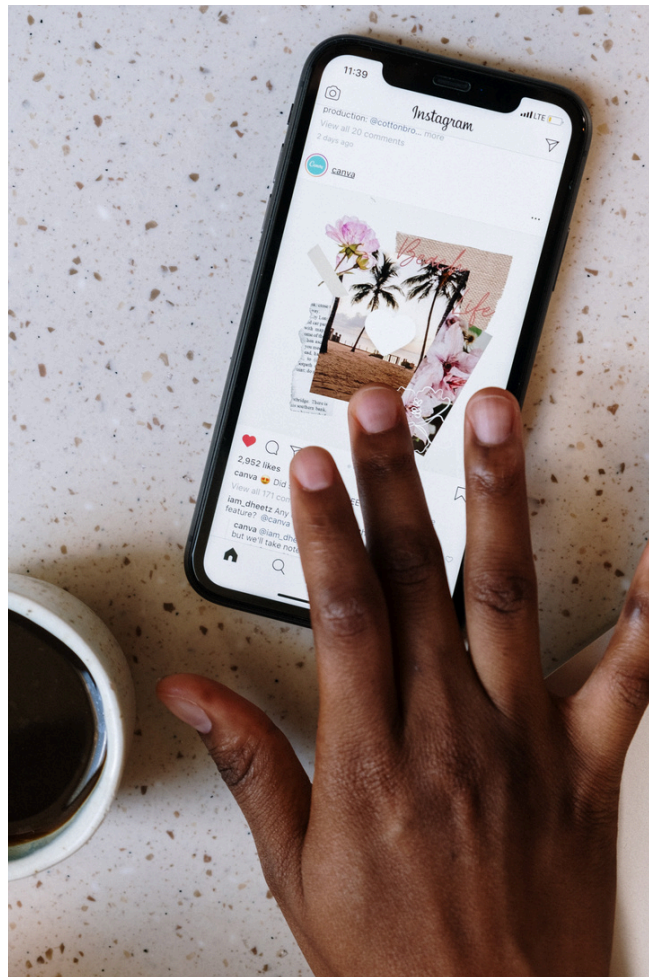
**Canadian girls are 15 times more likely to be hospitalized for an eating disorder.**

**Over half of female patients hospitalized for eating disorders in Canada are girls aged 10 to 19.**

girls that they are not good enough as they are and as a result, these apps help lower girls' self-esteem. The disconnect between the edited images and the inability to look "perfect" in real-life can lead to anxiety, frustration, and increased body-image issues.

**While generations of girls have dealt with the negative effects of popular culture, girls today face added pressure from the growing influence of social media.**

Visual social media networks allow users to filter and edit images of themselves before posting, helping to create a distorted image of what girls should "normally" look like. Girls not only compare themselves to "perfect" images of celebrities, but also to artificially perfected images of their friends and people they know. Popular photo-editing apps may reinforce the message to



## MAIN TAKEAWAYS

With the media's negative view of girl's bodies present virtually everywhere girls look, it is important to give girls a space to be comfortable and proud of themselves. They should be given an environment to be their most authentic selves and be encouraged to see more than just physical differences between themselves and those of other girls or females in the media. By educating girls and raising awareness about the edited images around, we give them the opportunity to be aware that not everything is as it's shown in advertisements, or on social media. Having data available which outlines the impact of self-esteem and body image help communities create resources for girls to feel more body positive and to raise their self-esteem.

# MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

Menstruation is a natural fact of life and most often a monthly occurrence for 1.8 billion menstruating people. Yet millions of menstruators across the world are denied the right to navigate their menstrual cycle in a dignified and healthy way. Consequently, this creates a barrier to empowerment. This section focuses on the menstruation-related barriers adolescent girls may encounter.

**\$6000**  
spent per  
lifetime

by Canadian  
menstruators on  
menstrual hygiene  
products

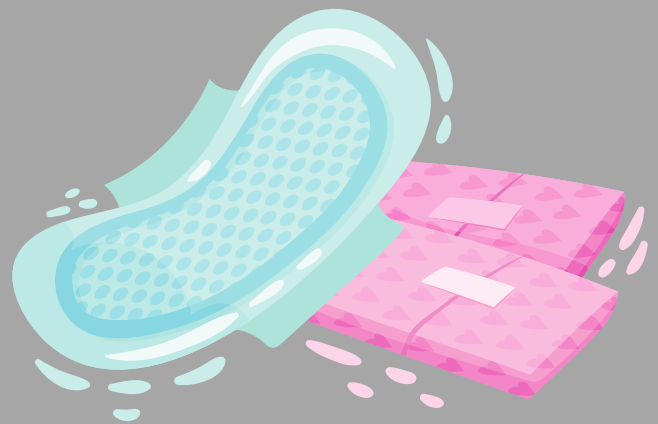
Girls in rural communities  
often

**pay double  
the price**

for the same products  
found in larger cities, such  
as Toronto.

**Gender inequality, discriminatory social norms, cultural taboos, and poverty may cause girls' menstrual health and hygiene needs to go unmet.**

These barriers fall under the problem of cost and stigma. Understandably, girls of lower socio-economic status may find it difficult to allocate money towards this necessity.



## **In addition to cost, adolescent girls may face stigma, harassment and social exclusion during menstruation.**

This has far-reaching negative impacts on the lives of those who menstruate by restricting their mobility, freedom and choices affecting attendance and participation in school and community life, compromising their safety, and causing stress and anxiety. Addressing these menstruation-related barriers is incredibly important as the onset of menstruation coincides with new opportunities—and vulnerabilities—that arise during adolescence.

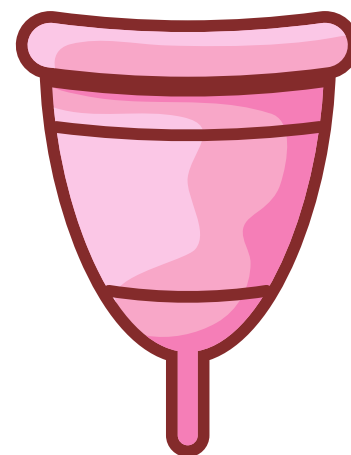
These barriers have real impacts on girls. Research from Plan International reveals almost two-thirds of females aged 14 to 55 in Canada have had to miss out on an activity because of their period and concerns about not being able to access menstrual hygiene products, while almost six in ten (58%) have felt the need to lie about being on their period or hide a menstrual product.



### **What can we do?**

Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) interventions are worthy investments to address the barriers listed above. It could also act as an entry point for other gender-transformative programs during this period like sexual and reproductive health education and life skills development.

By strengthening self-efficacy and negotiating ability, MHH programs can help girls build the skills to overcome obstacles to their health, freedom and development. Investments in adolescent girls' well-being yield triple dividends: for those girls, for the women they will become, and for the next generation.





# SAFETY & VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS

Violence against girls can take many shapes and forms, leaving young girls traumatized. These experiences must be highlighted to help educate girls about the potential dangers they could face and to mobilize resources to fight against the violence faced often by girls and young females, not just in Canada, but also worldwide.

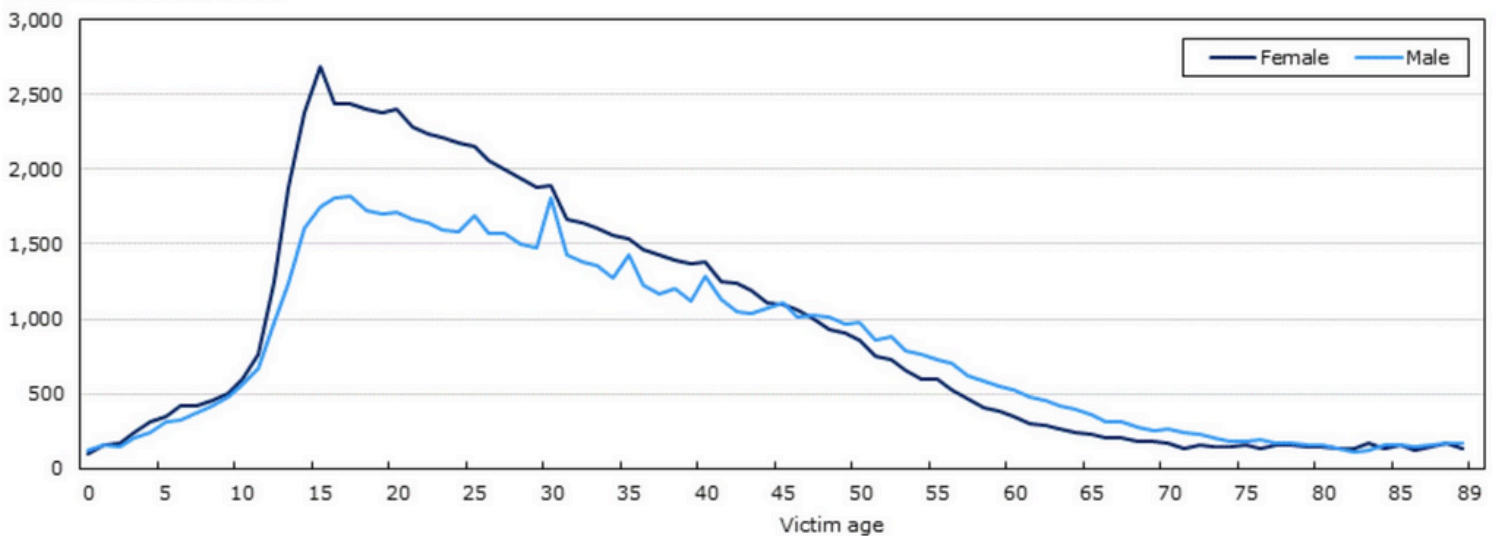
## The rate of police-reported violent crime is higher for female victims.

According to Statistics Canada, violence against female people peaks at the age of 15, with a rate of 2,684 victims per 100,000 population.



**Chart 1**  
Victims of police-reported violent crime, by victim age and sex, Canada, 2017

rate per 100,000 population



**Note:** Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population. Populations based on July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Demography Division. Victims refer to those aged 89 and younger. Victims aged 90 and older are excluded due to possible instances of miscoding of unknown age within this age category. Excludes victims where the age or the sex was unknown.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.



The rate of violence against older girls (aged 12-17) was 42% higher than older boys (2,181 vs.1,538).



The rate of violence against younger girls (aged 11 and younger) was 12% higher than younger boys (375 vs 333).



## MAIN TAKEAWAYS

Despite some of the initiatives taken by communities and cities, spreading awareness and informing governments that girls remain one of the main victims of violent crimes, and more initiatives and resources are needed.

Community groups focused on safety programming can help give these girls a chance to be in a safe place, learn skills and resources to keep themselves safe in their communities and connect with other girls.

# THANK YOU!

This report was created by the Jean Augustine Centre and the students from the University of Toronto's Community Action Group. Together they researched the experiences of girls living within Toronto and the rest of Canada. The Empowerment Report provides accessible information about multifaceted needs and barriers of girls 18 years and under in Canada. There are always ways to better empower diverse girls that have enormous potential. These insights aim to enhance programming to support the empowerment of girls nationally.



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