

# ISCI 2022: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN AN UNEQUAL WORLD:

RESEARCH, POLICY AND INTERVENTION

**Theme:** Child-focused indicators of social trends, policies, and child well-being;  
Children's rights indicators

**Sub-theme(s):** Maltreatment, violence and bullying; Sexual identity and gender orientation

**Title:** Gender inequalities in violence exposure among adolescents: A population-based study

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**Thematic importance:** Every child and young person has the right to live free of violence. Yet, many adolescents experience physical, psychological, and sexual violence, with girls and young women being disproportionately affected.

**Introduction and objectives:** Protecting the basic human rights of adolescents necessitates that we eliminate violence perpetrated against them. This study investigated the prevalence and gender inequality of several indicators of violence, the potential impacts of these experiences on well-being, as well as ways to support adolescents.

**Method:** The study involved a cluster-stratified random sample of 38,015 public school students aged 12 to 19 in British Columbia, Canada. Students completed the BC Adolescent Health Survey, a paper-and-pencil self-report of youth health indicators that has been conducted cross-sectionally every five years since 1998. For the first time, the 2018 survey included gender identity response options of male, female, and non-binary (identified neither as male nor female). Descriptive analyses were performed to look at gender differences in the prevalence of various forms of violence, as well as associated harms and protective factors. SPSS Complex Samples software was used to account for the study design's stratification, cluster sampling, and data weighting.

**Results:** When asked about their experiences of 13 types of victimization, non-binary youth reported a mean of 3.5 types of violence, females experienced 2.8 types, and males experienced 1.7 types ( $F(2,1776)=925.09, p < .01$ ). Sexual abuse, physical sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and gender discrimination rates increased for males and females from 2013 to 2018; and for females there was also an increase in physical abuse, physical assaults, and verbal sexual harassment. Experiencing early sexual violence was associated with subsequent experiences of violence, including males and females being more than twice as likely to have experienced recent intimate

partner violence (33% vs. 15% of their peers who did not experience early sexual violence;  $F(1,1777)=29.51, p < .01$ ). Violence exposure was associated with poorer health and well-being including serious injury, substance use, poorer sexual health, and challenges at school. The more types of violence youth experienced, the more likely they were to report having anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder; and to have self-harmed and attempted suicide in the past year. However, youth who had been victimized reported better health and well-being when they had a supportive family and school, and had someone they knew they could turn to for help, including friends' parents, coaches, and school staff, as well as online supports and friends.

**Conclusions and implications:** Using an updated indicator of gender identity, data from the population-based survey highlighted gender differences in numerous types of sexual, physical, and psychological victimization, with non-binary and female youth more likely than males to experience most types of violence. However, youth of all genders experience violence, and the negative impacts are present for all young people who are targeted. The findings indicate that a considerable amount of work needs to be done to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) to achieve gender equality and eliminate gender-based violence.