



Canada Excellence
Research Chair in
Health Equity &
Community Wellbeing



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COSP 19, UNCRPD

Safe Spaces, Everywhere

*Advancing Practical Solutions to End Gender-Based Violence Against Women
and Young Persons with Disabilities in Physical and Digital Spaces*

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11:30 – 12:45pm

Prepared & Presented by:

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CERC HECW Program Information: <https://www.torontomu.ca/cerc-health-equity/>

Thank you, my fellow co-organizers, Excellencies, and delegates.

The experiences we have just heard remind us that gendered-disability violence and digital exclusion is never simply a technology issue—it is fundamentally a justice and human rights issue.

Representing Toronto Metropolitan University as the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Health Equity & Community Wellbeing, I am here to respond directly to our core research themes regarding intersectionality, age, cognitive disability, digital literacy, and access to justice.

Through the ongoing research that my centre undertakes in relation to technology-facilitated gender-based violence, in partnership with women and girls with disabilities, we have identified three interconnected themes.

First, understanding the intersectional barriers that women and girls with intellectual and cognitive disabilities experience in digital environments.

Our research demonstrates that digital harms cannot be understood through disability, gender, age, or digital exclusion in isolation. Rather, these factors intersect and compound. Young women and girls with intellectual and cognitive disabilities experience heightened exposure to technology-facilitated gender-based violence while simultaneously facing significant barriers to protection and justice. Reporting mechanisms are often inaccessible, digital literacy initiatives frequently fail to accommodate diverse cognitive and communication needs, and pervasive assumptions about credibility can result in disclosures being questioned or dismissed. These barriers do not simply increase vulnerability; they can actively exclude women and girls from seeking support, reporting harm, or accessing justice.

Second, co-design with women and girls with intellectual and cognitive disabilities in research, evidence generation, and solution design.

A key lesson from our work is that meaningful engagement requires moving beyond consultation. Women and girls with intellectual and cognitive disabilities must be recognised as experts in their own digital lives. We therefore utilise co-design and participatory approaches that position them as advisors, collaborators, and knowledge holders throughout the research process. This includes accessible communication methods, plain-language resources, iterative feedback processes, and long-term partnerships with disability-led organisations.

Importantly, our work extends beyond documenting exclusion to transforming how evidence itself is produced. Through our **Accessible Digital Survey Research** training program, we have developed practical guidance for researchers, institutions, and community organisations to design research that is accessible from the outset. This work directly supports implementation of CRPD Articles 9 (Accessibility), 21 (Freedom of expression and access to information), 31 (Stats and data collection), and 33 (national implementation and monitoring) by advancing accessibility, access to information, disability-inclusive data collection, and meaningful participation in monitoring and implementation processes. If women and girls with intellectual and cognitive disabilities are excluded from research, they remain invisible within the evidence that informs policy and practice.

Third, translating evidence into digital safety, access to justice, and CRPD implementation.

Digital safety is fundamentally a human rights issue. The challenges we identify sit at the intersection of accessibility, equal recognition before the law, access to justice, freedom from violence, and participation in society.

To address this gap, our team has also developed **Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence Safety Training** resources.

These translate research into practical tools for women and girls with disabilities, service providers, and community organisations. This work contributes to the implementation of CRPD Articles 6 (women with disabilities), 13 (access to justice), and 16 (freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse) by strengthening responses to gendered disability-based violence, improving access to justice, and supporting the right of women and girls with disabilities to live free from violence and abuse across all spheres of social life.

Ultimately, the CRPD calls upon us not only to include women and girls with disabilities in existing systems but to transform those systems so that they are designed with, by, and for them.

When we centre their knowledge, leadership, and lived experience, we create stronger evidence, more effective policy, and more equitable digital futures.

Thank you.

About CERC HECW

The Canada Excellence Research Chair in Health Equity and Community Wellbeing (CERC HECW) program is a transformative research initiative that applies a critical disability lens along with an engaged community partnership approach to expand our understanding, practice, and delivery of health outcomes for all members of our communities.

Recognizing the critical significance of disability – as both production and outcome of health inaccessibility – is core to this research program and cuts across all dimensions – research design, project advisory, discrete scientific lines of inquiry, data collection methods and analysis, communities of engagement, and knowledge sharing and implementation strategies.

This eight-year program is funded by the Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat on behalf of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and is housed at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU).