RURAL, REMOTE, AND INDIGENOUS (RRI) COMMUNITIES: CONNECTIVITY & GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN BC

What is meaningful connectivity?

Meaningful connectivity refers to digital inclusion through access to devices and services such as phone and internet coverage, as well as the quality of those services and devices, their reliability, and affordability. It encompasses equal opportunities to participate online and connect with others for safety, learning, recreation, building relationships, and access services. With connectivity, safe and equitable inclusion is essential to provide opportunities for participation that are accessible to folks across the spectrum and intersections of gender, sexuality, age, location, class, race, citizenship status, ability, etc. In this sense, meaningful connectivity promotes the quality of life, safety, and well-being of society members.

RRI WOMEN AND GIRLS FACE HIGHER RATES OF VIOLENCE

Compared to the national average, police-reported violent crimes are 56% higher for rural women, and police-reported intimate partner violence for rural women is 75% higher than the rate of urban women.

In the ten years from 2007 to 2017, 34% of "all young female homicide victims in Canada" were Indigenous women in the North. This is despite Indigenous women only making up about 4% of Canada's population, as of 2011 census data.

RRI WOMEN AND GIRLS HAVE ACCESS TO LOWER QUALITY CONNECTIVITY

94% of BC households have access to internet speeds that meet the 50/10Mbps targets set by the CRTC, but only 40% of BC's rural communities and 38% of rural Indigenous communities meet these goals.

Added barriers to meaningful connectivity

Anti-violence workers in small communities identify lack of consistent access to devices as a barrier to accessing services for women and youth at rates 16% higher than the rate in large cities.
Added barriers to accessing devices are distance to amenities and additional costs (transportation to the closest store, childcare while they make the trip, time off work, etc.).

Even if women and youth have access to a device, they may not be able to afford long term monthly internet and/or mobile phone data plans. Northern "high-speed internet is as much as 3 times more expensive" compared to the South. (Nonomura and Baker, 2021).

43% of anti-violence workers said lack of infrastructure for connectivity (e.g., no cell phone reception in the area) is a barrier to accessing services they provide.

Insufficient quality or reliability of signal: concerns include "dead zones;" Inconsistent internet and mobile phone quality within RRI communities (especially in areas outlying towns); low quality or overloaded internet; Internet that frequently drops for staff.

94% of anti-violence workers responded that in their opinion, lack of technology may lead to increased isolation- RRI women and girls may face complex isolation due to additional geographic isolation.

57% believe it may lead to increased intensity of violence other than tech abuse (eg. physical, emotional, financial, sexual abuse).

89% believe it may lead to decreased ability to seek support.

anti-violence workers in small communities are less likely to report feeling "very confident" in a variety of skills related to addressing TFGBV .

Anti-violence workers in small towns and small communities were more likely than those in medium and large cities to report that all support groups had been suspended rather than transitioned to remote delivery during the pandemic.

11% Anti-violence workers in small communities responded yes at a rate 11% higher than the average that in their experience, the service user's lack of technology made their program's service delivery more difficult.

Lack of connectivity negatively impacts professional development opportunities for RRI anti-violence workers.

Meaningful connectivity is an essential component of preserving women and girls' safety after disasters- this will be increasingly relevant as climate change-aggravated disasters increase.

Meaningful connectivity can help address transportation and childcare barriers that prevent RRI women and girls from accessing services.

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