



Exploring the intersections  
between violence against women,  
access to justice and technology.

A Review of Literature



## About this literature review

This literature review explores the intersections found in literature between violence against women, access to justice and technology. The purpose of the literature review is to gain an understanding of the existing research and knowledge on these three areas and help us inform our community-based research.

The literature review is part of WomanACT's Tech for Women's Justice project funded by the Law Foundation of Ontario. While financially supported by The Law Foundation of Ontario, WomanACT is solely responsible for all content.

## About WomanACT

Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT) envisions a world where all women are safe and have access to equal opportunities. We work collaboratively to eradicate violence against women through community mobilization, research, policy, and education.

The organization has been operating as a community-based coalition since 1991 and became a registered charity in 2010. Working closely with the anti-violence against women sector, governments, industry leaders, communities, and survivors, we strive to promote knowledge sharing, build capacity and generate public discussion to advance women's safety and gender equity. Our research aims to promote public dialogue, transform practice, and shape policy to advance women's safety and gender equity.

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## Introduction

Access to justice is a human rights and equality issue that is significant to all Canadians and disproportionately impacts marginalized populations, including women experiencing intimate partner violence (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2017; Status of Women Canada, 2019). Intimate partner violence (IPV), which refers to violence perpetrated against spouses and dating partners, accounts for one in every four violent crimes reported to police in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013). Women are overrepresented as victims of IPV with Statistics Canada (2019) finding that women account for almost 8 in 10 (79%) of the victims in police-reported IPV.

In 2012, half of all female victims of homicide were killed by their intimate partner or a family member, compared to 6% of male victims of homicide (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2013). These figures are reflective of Canada where women make up 78% of domestic homicides, with a rate 4.5 times higher than men (Statistics Canada, 2015). Some populations of women are at greater risk of experiencing IPV and face unique barriers to safety. For instance, women living in rural communities in Canada are at greater risk of IPV (Northcott, 2011; Skinnider and Montgomery, 2017) and the rate of reported violent victimization among Indigenous women is three times higher than the rate of violent victimization reported among non-Indigenous women (Statistics Canada, 2011). IPV victims often have to engage with multiple actors and areas of the law simultaneously, including criminal, family, immigration, human rights, and property law, to ensure their safety.

In the last decade, technology has been identified as a potential mechanism to address the barriers to justice that communities face (McGill, Bouclin, and Salyzyn, 2017; Mosher, 2015; Canadian Bar Association, 2013). The rapid incorporation of technology has changed how organizations and sectors deliver legal services, information, and support. While there is a common narrative around technology in literature as a tool to perpetuate violence (Sinha, Shrivastava, and Paradis, 2019; Douglas, Harris, and Dragiewicz, 2019), it is beginning to be recognized for its role in connecting people with information, decreasing geographical barriers, and increasing people's awareness of their legal rights (Bailey and Burkell, 2013). A consultation conducted by Legal Aid Ontario (2016) found that people wanted technology to be used as a means for survivors to access legal services and supports related to domestic violence. Exploring how IPV survivors experience the use of technology to improve their access to legal information and support, facilitate their safety, and contribute to holding perpetrators accountable is essential in a time when technology continues to permeate multiple facets of society and service delivery.

## Methodology

This literature review is part of WomanACT's broader community-based research project, Tech for Women's Justice: Exploring the intersections between intimate partner violence, access to justice, and technology. The purpose of this review is to help inform the project's research direction and activities.

The project's target audience is governmental and non-governmental stakeholders who seek to better understand the justice needs of women experiencing IPV and the role of technology in advancing women's access to justice. These stakeholders include legal services and education providers, policymakers, researchers, technology developers, and community organizations engaged in providing or linking women with legal support and information.

An advisory committee informs the project and consists of diverse individuals, including women with lived experience of violence, anti-violence organizations, public legal educators, legal service providers, and researchers. Key activities of the project include partnership building, a literature review, community-based research with survivors of IPV, and the bringing together of stakeholders to develop solutions.

The literature review will analyze the existing knowledge on the use of technology by women experiencing IPV to find legal information and help in Canada. The following questions guided the literature review:

- What are the relationships between women experiencing IPV, access to legal information and help and technology?
- What are the experiences of IPV survivors in using technology to access legal information and help?
- What are the experiences of different groups of survivors using technology to access legal information and help, including Indigenous women, immigrant women, LGBTQ2 women, women with disabilities, and women living in rural and remote communities?

## Gender-Based Intersectional Analysis (GBA+)

GBA+ ensures the inclusion of women, men, and gender-diverse people while drawing on different identity factors and systems (Status of Women Canada, 2018). Although anyone can experience IPV, women and girls, LGBTQ2S and non-binary people have a greater risk of domestic violence/IPV, sexual assault, harassment, and sex trafficking.

Access to and confidence in the Canadian legal system is vital for women fleeing IPV, whose needs are directly related to safety and well-being. The GBA+ process allows us to examine how interacting inequalities impact women experiencing IPV and how different populations of women experiencing IPV, such as rural or racialized women, have a combination of factors that impact their experience of accessing legal support.

## Scope

The literature review includes literature from 2005 to 2020, and the geographical scope of the review was confined predominately to Canada. However, some of the literature refers to studies and practices outside of Canada. While some research in this area was available from other regions, it was not necessarily applicable to Canada's context due to

differing legal systems, technology being regulated differently, and the backdrop of different socio-political and economic climates.

The approach to the review of literature consisted of manual searches on Google, government and organizational websites, and journal portals. Keywords and their variations (i.e., intimate partner violence, the legal system, technology) were used separately and in conjunction with manual searches. Consistent with a GBA+ lens, these terms were also searched in conjunction with Indigenous women, women in rural communities, immigrant women, non-status women, refugee women, LGBTQ2S communities, women with disabilities, and racialized women.

This literature review is not exhaustive and does not purport to be a complete reflection of the experiences of survivors in using technology to access justice in Canada.

## Limitations

### *Under-explored area of research*

The intersection between IPV, access to justice, and technology is an under-explored research area. While there is literature that has examined women's access to justice or the relationship between IPV and technology, there is limited literature on the three points of interest central to this research project.

### *Limited consideration of gender and intersectionality*

There was no deliberate gender-lens applied to the view of technology within most access to justice literature, despite a recognition that women face unique barriers to accessing justice. In addition, literature lacked an intersectional analysis and very little data was available on different groups of women including women with disabilities, immigrant women, and racialized women.

### *Complex terms*

The three areas of exploration in this project are individually complex concepts. Concepts of violence against women/IPV, justice, and technology are interpreted differently across literature and have different meanings for survivors and professionals working in these different sectors. This review applied narrow definitions of IPV (violence perpetrated against spouses and dating partners) and technology (mobile and web-based applications and tools), and viewed justice only in terms of formal legal systems. There is a need to deepen this exploration to understand access and justice from survivors' perspectives and needs.

## Intimate partner violence and access to justice

Literature supports the idea that Canada is experiencing an access to justice crisis (Bailey and Burkell, 2013). A common challenge described across literature in conceptualizing this crisis is that access to justice can mean something different to different groups of people, including women and marginalized women, who face difficulties accessing justice (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017; Canadian Bar Association, 2013; Bailey, Burkell and Reynolds, 2013).

UN Women defines women's access to justice as:

"access by women, in particular from poor and disadvantaged groups, to fair, effective, affordable and accountable mechanism, for the protection of rights, control of abuse of power, and resolution of conflicts. This includes the ability of women to seek and obtain a fair and just remedy through formal and informal justice systems and the ability to influence and participate in law-making processes and institutions". (2018, p. 17)

Across literature, many argue that a meaningful definition of access to justice must go beyond the viewpoint of the formal legal system and explore an understanding of what it actually means to access and realize justice for a person (Mosher, 2015; Farrow, 2014; Action Committee on Access to Justice in Civil and Family Matters, 2013). Also highlighted across literature is the need for an understanding of access to justice that explores the historical discrimination in legal institutions as well as recognizes the intersecting barriers faced by diverse populations of women (Mosher, 2015; UN Women, 2018, Status of Women Canada, 2019).

Given the complexity of the legal system and the intersections of different law matters in IPV cases, access to legal advice and representation is critically important and often required by survivors (Mosher, 2015). The literature described various issues faced by survivors when trying to engage with the legal system, including ongoing engagement with the perpetrator, a lack of representation, intersecting different legal systems and navigating complex processes (Status of Women Canada, 2019; Mosher 2015). Language, limited legal services and transportation are also identified as barriers to knowledge about the justice system and available resources. (McGill, Bouclin, and Salyzyn, 2017).

A primary barrier to obtaining legal help is the financial costs of legal services (Zemans and Amaral, 2018). Despite an adjustment to the income threshold for legal aid eligibility in Ontario for IPV survivors, financial eligibility still excludes women on low to medium incomes. Studies show that women with higher incomes are more likely to access legal services (Barrett and St. Pierre, 2011). Self-representation is a common experience for survivors, one which is often a result of the financial barriers to accessing legal help (Dragiewicz and Dekeseredy, 2008). One report found that over half of all family law cases across Canada have one or both parties without a lawyer (Birnbaum, Bala, and Bertrand, 2012). Women face difficulties when representing themselves, including problems understanding the legal system, their rights and having to engage directly with their

abuser (Dragiewicz and Dekeseredy, 2008). In domestic violence cases where a victim or perpetrator is self-represented, victims often fear inadequate protection or experience fear or intimidation during the process (Birnbaum, Bala and Bertrand 2012).

Mosher (2015) examined the specific experiences of survivors in engaging with the legal system. A prominent barrier for women she described was the use of the legal system by partners or ex-partners as a tactic for control. Abusers may pursue legal proceedings to maintain contact with a partner. Furthermore, abusers may threaten to take legal action, such as calling the police or child protective authorities or withdrawing immigration sponsorship, in order to reinforce power over a partner. Because of these unique experiences of survivors, Mosher suggests that legal actors, including lawyers representing survivors and judges, require a greater understanding of IPV to ensure the justice system doesn't perpetuate violence against women.

## Intimate partner violence and access to justice across different populations

### Women living in rural communities

Although there is very little information available regarding IPV and access to justice in Canada's rural communities, literature does report that the rate of domestic violence is higher in rural communities than in urban communities in Canada (Northcott, 2011). IPV is also less likely to be reported in rural communities. Reasons for underreporting include cultures of self-sufficiency and victim-blaming, which can lead to a hesitation to seek help (Northcott, 2011; Skinnider and Montgomery, 2017). A feeling of a lack of anonymity or confidentiality in smaller communities can similarly prevent both survivors and perpetrators from seeking help or support (Banman, 2015; Skinnider and Montgomery, 2017). Other barriers to fleeing violence and accessing support in rural areas include a scarcity of resources and geographical isolation (Doherty and Hornosty, 2008). People may not have the transportation available to access a legal service outside of their community (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017).

### Indigenous women

Indigenous women are at a higher risk of IPV than non-Indigenous women in Canada (Arriagada, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2015). Indigenous women are also more likely to be criminalized, including when protecting themselves against violence, than non-Indigenous women (National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2019). Many inequalities experienced by Indigenous women can be traced back to Canada's colonial history of oppression and abuse of Indigenous people. Indigenous women have distinct needs and barriers based on colonization's historical context such as the forced removal of children (Skinnider and Montgomery, 2017). Ongoing injustice and discrimination have led Indigenous communities, including women, to have decreased trust in the justice system (National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2019). Indigenous women experiencing IPV are less likely to seek help from the police or legal system due to the lack of trust and confidence in these institutions (National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2019; Barrett and St. Pierre, 2011). In addition,

there is a lack of culturally competent legal services available for Indigenous communities (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017).

### Immigrant and refugee women

Immigrant and refugee women face unique barriers to fleeing violence and to accessing support and services. Immigrant and refugee women may face language barriers, fears over deportation, changes to their immigration status, cultural isolation and a lack of knowledge or awareness of laws and their rights (Rossiter et al., 2018; Barette and St. Pierre, 2011; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018). A review by Rossiter and colleagues (2018) found that recent immigrants to Canada are more likely than non-recent immigrants to report IPV to police. Another paper expressed that immigrant women who have been in Canada longer are more likely to seek formal help or access legal services (Barrett and St. Pierre, 2011). Furthermore, immigrant and refugee women often have to navigate an unfamiliar legal system while addressing immigration needs alongside safety needs (Skinnider and Montgomery, 2017).

### Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S) individuals

LGBTQ2S individuals face discrimination, stigmatization, and traumatic experiences motivated by intolerance or hatred based on their gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation (Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, 2019). Prevalence estimates for IPV within LGBTQ2S relationships vary and are inconsistent across the literature (Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, 2019). The prejudice and lack of knowledge around sexuality and gender identity can create an untrusting environment and discourage LGBTQ2S individuals from seeking help from the legal system.

Additionally, there remains a lack of specialized agencies with nuanced knowledge of IPV in the context of LGBTQ2S relationships to offer support from a trauma-informed lens. Risk of violence and discrimination increases within LGBTQ2S populations who experience multiple oppressions. Across the literature, there is an acknowledgment that there is a limited understanding within services of the help-seeking behavior of LGBTQ2S individuals experiencing IPV, stigma, and systemic inequities (Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, 2019; National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2014; Calton, Cattaneo and Gebhard, 2016).

### The role of technology in access to justice

Despite the prevalence of technology and the use of cell phones and the internet in people's everyday lives, the role of technology as a factor in IPV – as both a risk factor and a source of help-seeking – has been underexplored (Zaidi, Fernando and Ammar, 2015). There is a lack of understanding about the legal information needed by survivors and a lack of clarity around the accuracy of the increasing amount of information online for survivors (Westbrook, 2007).

Legal tech-based applications in Canada have predominately been developed to increase the efficiency of legal services by lawyers or to help members of the public connect to lawyers, access self-help legal information, or better understand their legal rights (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017). Available literature described the role of technology in increasing the efficiency of the legal system through digitizing processes such as recording, translation, online forms, and the use of online management systems (Bailey and Burkell, 2013). Literature primarily speaks to technology as a tool to achieve three possible aims for the public: to provide legal information; to increase access to and efficiency of legal processes; and to improve the legal experience through individualized supports. Across the literature exploring technology and access to justice, there is an emphasis on considering the digital divide (i.e., who has access to digital information and communication and who does not) when providing legal information, looking at legal processes, and improving the legal experience of individualized supports. Data on the use and impact of legal technology applications by victims of IPV is severely limited.

### Increasing access to legal information

A great deal of literature speaks about the role of technology in increasing access to legal information in the communities (Sinha, Shrivastava and Paradis, 2019). In 2015, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) released recommendations on utilizing technology to improve women's access to justice, including using technology to increase women's awareness of their legal rights and resources (UN Women, 2015).

Online legal information can allow individuals to increase their knowledge of their rights and the legal system (Bailey, Burkell and Reynolds, 2013). Online legal information is expressed as particularly useful for those who cannot access legal information elsewhere due to remoteness, the cost of legal advice, or those representing themselves in court (Skinnider and Montgomery, 2017; Bailey, Burkell and Reynolds, 2013).

Technology has provided greater access to information regarding IPV, allowing for assessment of individual risk and identification of corresponding services available for survivors (Zaidi, Fernando and Ammar, 2015). Technology can also increase survivors' connections and engagement with other survivors for support (Finn and Atkinson, 2008). Works have also highlighted the growing availability of online legal information as increasing the knowledge and capacity of organizations that may be advocating for people in the justice system (Bailey, Burkell and Reynolds, 2013).

One Canadian study (Zaidi, Fernando and Ammar, 2015) that explored the experience of IPV among immigrant women found that computer literacy was a barrier to the use of technology; 80% of the survivors had access to a computer, but only 56% reported a good knowledge of technology. The study found that survivors most likely used technology to call for help or to tell the abuser that they would call the police if the abuse did not stop. Technology, including phones, email, and social media, help survivors stay connected with their family and friends. A common barrier to women's use of technology in seeking help or services was the constant monitoring of their phone or internet by the abuser. Lastly,

the study found that immigrant women with more years of formal education were more likely to engage in technology to access support or plan for their safety.

### Increasing access to legal services and systems

Technology can be used to increase women's access to legal services and the efficiency of these services through the likes of mobile courts, videoconference functions, e-filing, virtual legal aid clinics, or legal helplines. Technology-based legal services are especially beneficial when they are located in a remote or rural area (UN Women, 2018).

Teleconferencing in courts can help limit a survivor's contact with ex-partners and provide less disruption to women's lives by allowing women to access services or support alongside their day-to-day schedule, such as work or childcare responsibilities (UN Women, 2018).

Technology can allow lawyers to conduct phone or video consultations with clients in remote communities (Skinnider and Montgomery, 2017; McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017). In considering a virtual legal clinic for survivors, Luke's Place (2015) discussed the potential security risks of videoconferencing and has presented various strategies to mitigate the potential risks. Their findings suggest that a virtual clinic can reduce travel time and enable the delivery of legal services to survivors in remote communities while ensuring visual contact with survivors and their lawyers can be maintained.

Videoconferencing in courts in Canada has been used for a variety of reasons which include increasing efficiencies, providing safety for the testimony of vulnerable populations, and remote access for those who face challenges presenting themselves in person, such as women living in remote regions or who have disabilities (Bailey, Burkell and Reynolds, 2013). One study found that benefits of videoconferencing in domestic violence cases include allowing parties to participate safely, in a timely manner, and from safe locations such as a shelter (Yamagata and Fox, 2017). Furthermore, a more private experience with the court can ensure the survivor doesn't feel intimidated by an ex-partner or stigmatized by others in the court. However, the same study found that there were challenges presented when using video communication, such as a lack of personal connection or a limitation to the type of communication used, including body language. Other barriers to videoconferencing in Canada include a lack of standardization and universal availability (Bailey, Burkell and Reynolds, 2013).

While there is very little evidence to show that technology would reduce legal costs (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017), accessing a lawyer or court remotely can reduce costs related to travel for both clients and lawyers (Skinnider and Montgomery, 2017). However, it is important to recognize that internet data or phone minutes are still a cost for survivors to engage with video conferencing processes (Sinha, Shrivastava and Paradis, 2019). Some groups of women may be less comfortable with online legal procedures than others. A study from TAG (2017) found that single women, those with lower educational attainment, those from lower-income households and those living in rural communities were most uncomfortable with online processes such as uploading legal identification and sharing personal information with online legal focused software. The majority of participants that felt uncomfortable uploading legal identification expressed identity theft

as a concern while sharing personal information was seen more as a privacy concern (TAG, 2017).

## Customizing individual experiences with legal services and systems

Technology can also be used to improve different legal procedures based on the individual's needs and experience. Technology can help those representing themselves resolve legal issues without going to court and assist with complex legal procedures, such as a separation or wills, by providing self-guided processes or simplifying forms (Skinnider and Montgomery, 2017).

Applications have been developed to help improve survivors' safety or engagement with the legal system. For example, some applications operate as a personal alarm system for victims in which pre-determined contacts, including police, are contacted with emergency information when pressed (Department of Justice, 2014). Some applications that report violence to authorities are only used if the survivor can identify the benefits to reporting, like direct access to resources or information (Sinha, Shrivastava and Paradis, 2019). Other applications allow victims to register for notifications relating to an offender's status, such as the offender's custody release date (Department of Justice, 2014).

Applications have also been developed that help navigate the legal system, create documents, and collect evidence (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017). Legal Aid Ontario has developed an app that allows individuals to assess their eligibility for legal help and other legal clinics have developed applications to help marginalized communities identify legal issues (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017). Other applications, such as the Evidentiary Abuse Affidavit application, help survivors document and evidence abuse in ways that can be used in a legal case against perpetrators (Sinha, Shrivastava and Paradis, 2019).

The usability of applications or web pages is critical to their uptake. Information applications that can be customized to individual needs have the potential to reduce informational barriers to justice (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017). Mandating a specific type of information be completed to proceed with an online application means that if there is a piece of information a survivor does not want to share, they may be dissuaded from using the application altogether (Sinha, Shrivastava and Paradis, 2019). Applications and websites can also provide an opportunity to gather data on people's needs and the intersections between different legal systems and services (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017).

## Risks and considerations

When exploring the use of technology to increase women's access to legal information and services, risks posed to safety due to confidentiality, data privacy, and usage should be considered (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017). As a result of the intimate relationship and knowledge shared between partners, perpetrators can have easier access to devices, passwords, and security questions. In some cases, threats of violence or physical violence are used to gain control of a device (Freed et al., 2017). Women who have concerns about

the privacy and protection of their personal data or information are less likely to use mobile or internet-based technology to seek legal help (McGill, Bouclin and Salyzyn, 2017)

Women experiencing IPV are frequently advised to limit their time using technology, change phone numbers, or remove social media accounts (Freed et al., 2017). Not only can this be disruptive or costly, but it also adopts a victim-blaming approach to address technology-based violence. The design of technologies needs to take into account the possibility of IPV and the related access and control issues, including that control or manipulation through technology can continue after separation (Dimond, Fiesler and Bruckman, 2011). Westbrook (2007) suggests that survivors should be engaged in developing technological resources and tools to identify safety considerations and support justice systems resources/tools meeting the needs of those meant to be using it.

### Technology-based intimate partner violence

Technology has both helped survivors of IPV as well as disadvantaged them (Zaidi, Fernando and Ammar, 2015; Finn and Atkinson, 2008). Technology has provided perpetrators with new ways of abusing and controlling partners or ex-partners, including harassment and stalking (Zaidi, Fernando and Ammar, 2015). A common misconception of technology-based violence is one in which the perpetrator is a stranger online. However, research suggests that it is more common that technology-based violence is perpetrated by someone known to the victim (Association for Progressive Communications, 2015). Despite the scarcity of research into technology-based IPV (Duerksen and Woodin, 2019), there is broad acknowledgment that it is used by perpetrators to assert power and control over victims and to isolate and increase their dependence on the abuser. Perpetrators utilize technology as a tool to harass partners or ex-partners, for example, bombarding a victim with calls or text messages (Henry and Power, 2015) or stalking a partner or ex-partner's activity or location through global positioning systems (Southworth et al., 2007). Furthermore, technology has enabled abusers to overcome the physical distance barrier that may prevent other forms of abuse and makes it easier for abusers to find and continue to contact ex-partners after separation (Dimond, Fiesler and Bruckman, 2011). An abuser's control of technology can also directly impact a woman's ability to seek help, information, and supports (Douglas, Harris and Dragiewicz, 2019).

A Canadian population-based study that examined variations in women's help-seeking responses to IPV expressed the need for further research in this area. Exploring the help-seeking narratives of women experiencing IPV is needed to understand women's perceptions of various forms of help and their reasons for seeking or not seeking support from specific sources such as online resources and services (Barrett and St. Pierre, 2011).

### The digital divide

The term "digital divide" refers to those who have access to information and communication and those who do not. The digital divide encompasses many facets, including access to computers, internet connection fees, digital literacy, and ownership of digital devices.

Data from the Canadian Internet Use Survey expressed that overall, 94% of Canadians have home internet access, with 88% of internet users reporting having a smartphone for personal use. Demographic characteristics such as age, gender, household income, educational attainment, and geographic location details were collected but not about race, culture, or ethnicity (Statistics Canada, 2019a). Marginalized populations in Canada face a range of complex factors that reduce access to technology and potentially decrease access to services and information online. Individuals in rural communities and low-income families in urban areas are less likely to have access to the internet (Bailey, Burkell, and Reynolds 2013). Recent immigrants to Canada have less access to the internet than their Canadian-born counterparts, yet recent immigrants who do have internet access spend significantly more time online (Haight, Quan-Haase, and Corbett, 2014). Inequities also exist regarding internet speed in different regions. In 2017, only 37% of rural households and 24% of households in Indigenous communities had access to high-speed internet, compared to 97% of urban households (Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada, 2019).

The state of digital literacy in Canada is a challenge to understand because it lacks a common definition and there is insufficient data available for women or further marginalized women. However, what is emphasized is the increasing importance of basic digital literacy as an economic necessity for women's empowerment and independence in a time of digitization. Many community organizations, including violence against women organizations, offer digital literacy training. For example, Luke's Place provides trainings on how women can collect evidence of technology-based abuse or how to manage technology-based abuse with safety planning and family support (Luke's Place, 2020).

As noted above, a prominent suggestion to consider in preventing digital violence is that online platforms, such as web pages and applications, should include different groups in the development of digital tools/platforms to reflect its users and prevent a lack of engagement. For instance, technological designs often embed the view of a happy traditional family or friends. This can be seen reflected in the setup of social networking sites that do not account for the idea that a "friend" on a site may not always remain that way.

While some access to justice literature predicts technology can help narrow inequalities, some have expressed concerns about technology widening the divide without affirmative plans around accessibility put in place (Bailey, Burkell, & Reynolds, 2013). Literature has shown that vulnerable members of communities prefer to work with human intermediaries rather than technology alone (Bailey, Burkell, & Reynolds, 2013). There is a general consensus in the literature that technology has the potential to support improving the experience of people needing support from the legal system. However, it should not be presumed that technological remedies will enhance access to justice for all.

### **Digital disruption of COVID-19**

COVID-19 has catalysed rapid changes to how IPV services and legal proceedings are carried out in Canada. In response to the pandemic, both the violence against women sector and the justice system have needed to shift to new forms of digital delivery

(Emezue, 2020; Ministry of the Attorney General, 2020). While these changes are subject to the barriers identified in this review, they have also created opportunity and interest to further understand the intersections between IPV, access to justice, and technology. Monitoring and evaluation of new digital approaches to information sharing, service provision, and legal matters through an IPV and gender lens can help to fill existing gaps in the literature.

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