**DAWN Canada**

**Empowering Women and Girls with Disabilities:**

**How can intersectional research and policy development impact women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities in Canada and the world**

**UNCSW 63, New York**

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**Slide 2 : ABOUT DAWN CANADA - Mission**

* Our mission is to end the poverty, isolation, discrimination and violence experienced by Canadian women with disabilities and Deaf women.
* For more than 30 years, DAWN Canada has worked towards the advancement and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities and Deaf women by creating change at a systemic level. This includes building strategic partnerships, developing curriculum and educational tools, and addressing policy change.

**Slide 3: ABOUT DAWN CANADA – How we work**

* Grounded in the lived experiences of women with disabilities and Deaf women, and using an evidence-based approach, DAWN Canada works to create change at a systemic level in order to directly improve the quality of life for women with disabilities.
* We amplify the voice of women with disabilities and Deaf women by ensuring that they are represented at decision-making tables in the areas that matter most, including violence prevention, health equity, and access to justice.
* We work to increase the capacity of women with disabilities and Deaf women in their communities to support their leadership in articulating their needs.

**Slide 4: ABOUT DAWN CANADA – How we work**

RESEARCH: We work with community-based researchers and academic partners to shift the discussion around how research and community development can and should be done using an intersectional approach.

EDUCATION: We develop curriculum tools to expand the body of knowledge about women and girls with disabilities and to increase skill in the practice of inclusion.

POLICY: We continue to challenge and engage policy-makers in the review and development of policies so that they are informed by community-defined needs.

ADVOCACY: We are committed to ensuring that the voices of women with disabilities and Deaf women are represented at decision-making tables in the areas that matter to us most.

**Slide 5: RESEARCH**

MORE THAN A FOOTNOTE RESEARCH REPORT ON WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

* Women and girls with disabilities in Canada face unique challenges and barriers that call for gendered and intersectional approaches that inform research, education, policy, and practice.
* We have drawn from a number of diverse sources, with an emphasis on community-based research, to piece together a comprehensive understanding of the lived experience of disability for women and girls in Canada

**Slide 6:**

The importance of intersectional approaches to policy and data collection with respect to addressing compounding forms of discrimination against women and girls with disabilities

**Slide 7: The need for an intersectional lens**

Intersectionality

* **Intersectionality** takes into account how different kinds of discrimination work together.
* First used by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the principles of intersectionality have been present in Black feminist thought for centuries, as a way of understanding the complexities of Black women’s lives.
* Indigenous understandings of connectedness and ‘all my relations’ share many links with intersectionality.
* The diagram provides a way to think about intersectionality, with the innermost circle representing a person’s unique circumstances.
* The next circle from the inside represents aspects of identity. The following circle from the inside represents different types of discrimination/isms/attitudes that impact identity.
* The outermost circle represents larger forces and structures that work together to reinforce exclusion. Note: it is impossible to name every discrimination, identity or structure. These are just examples to help give a sense of what intersectionality is.

Source FACT SHEET 2: INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN AND PRECARITY <http://www.criaw-icref.ca/images/userfiles/files/FS%202%20FINAL.pdf>

**Slide 8: The need for an intersectional lens**

The need for an intersectional lens

For women with disabilities, the risk of violence increases when they are racialized, younger, Indigenous, LGBTQI2S, migrant workers, immigrants, non-status migrants or living in rural areas

In general, women with disabilities who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual experience 2.3 times higher rates of violence than among heterosexual women with disabilities.

Aboriginal women and girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable and thus bigger targets for sexual predators.

Indigenous children with disabilities remain one of the most oppressed groups in Canada

Where refugees are concerned, women and girls remain exposed to sexual violence due to long processing times and a lack of laws to protect them from human trafficking.

**Slide 9:**

The higher rates of gender-based violence, particularly childhood sexual abuse and sexual assault, committed against girls, particularly Indigenous/black girls and girls with disabilities

**Slide 10: Girls with disabilities & violence**

In 2018, the United Nations noted that girls and young women with disabilities face unique barriers based on both disability and gender.

Girls with disabilities are exposed to and victimized by a range of individuals including intimate partners, family members, caregivers and assistants, health professionals and service providers - all with varying power dynamics.

Teenage girls with physical disabilities and/or with long-term health issues were more likely than girls without disabilities to be forced to have sex.

**Slide 11: Gender, disability & Violence: Canadian Context**

In 45% of all incidents of violence, including sexual assault, theft, physical violence, the victims were women with disabilities.

38% of women with disabilities report physical or sexual assault before the age of 15, and 18% report sexual abuse by an adult before the age of 15.

Women with a disability most often reported their perpetrator was a friend, acquaintance, or neighbour (44%) and 30% incidents of victimization occurred in the home.

Women with disabilities who experience violence as children are almost two times as likely as those who had not experienced physical abuse to be victimized in the last 12 months.

Women who experience mental health related disabilities and those with cognitive disabilities experience disproportionately high rates of sexual assault.

**Slide 12:**

The importance of celebrating resilience, building self-confidence and peer support networks in girls which are shown to be key pathways to social protection and self-empowerment

**Slide 13: Promoting positive spaces & relationships for girls with disabilities**

Benefits for girls who engage in sports & leisure

While girls with disabilities may experience few opportunities to acquire a positive image of their bodies, sports and leisure may provide help to counter this.

Participating in leisure activities can promote higher self-esteem.

Teenage girls who participate in sports and leisure may develop empowerment skills

One of the key motivations for participation in sports for disabled children are social, which can not only build peer support networks but also provide important opportunities to connect with mentors.

A lack of participation in leisure activities outside of school can lead to less overall enjoyment of social activities.

**Slide 14: An example from DAWN Canada: Girls without barriers**

This project is focused on creating peer support, empowerment and leadership opportunities for girls with disabilities between the ages of 9-13.

It seeks to identify and address gaps in research regarding the needs of girls with disabilities as well as to increase the participation of girls with disabilities and Deaf girls in girl-serving programs.

As part of this initiative, DAWN Canada partnered with Rock Camp for Girls and Gender Nonconforming Youth to create a one-week musical camp for girls and gender non-confirming youth with and without disabilities.

Funded by the Canadian Women's Foundation

**Slide 15:**

The dearth of research on girls with disabilities and the lack of girls-specific programming that targets or recruits Indigenous/racialized girls with disabilities to ‘mainstream’ programs

**Slide 16: Dearth of research on girls with disabilities**

While not specific to the Canadian context, there is research that indicates girls with disabilities have unique needs that require unique policy solutions. Indeed, girls with disabilities remain almost invisible in research.

It must also be acknowledged that disability studies itself has tended to focus on adult experiences of disability.

Conversely, within childhood studies, accounts of ‘normal’ development and ‘normal’ childhood experiences by many mainstream researchers have separated the needs of children from the social contexts that influence them.

This is particularly impactful for children and youth with disabilities as disability and childhood are still often understood through the lens of caregiving, which disempowers the unique voices, agency, and rights of children and youth.

**Slide 17: Indigenous/racialized girls with disabilities**

With respect to access to programs and services on First Nations reserves, funding is inequitable and discriminatory in relation to the funding for the same programs and services off-reserve, particularly when it comes to support for schooling and disability.

Jordan’s Principle is a child first principle to resolving jurisdictional disputes within and between federal and provincial/territorial governments. It applies to all government services available to children, youth and their families.  
Examples of services covered by Jordan’s Principle include but are not limited to: education, health, child care, recreation, and culture and language services.

Given that Jordan’s Principle is a child first principle, it is imperative that governments meet the needs of the child as a first priority. The obligation to meet the needs of the child first always supersedes government interests to establish jurisdictional dispute processes or policy implementation policies.

**Slide 18: CALL TO ACTION**

**What do girls with disabilities and Deaf girls need?**

Application of the intersectional lens (GBA+) to research, policies and programs that impact girls with disabilities and Deaf girls at each level of Government (Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Municipal).

* Access to information and services related to sexual and reproductive health;
* Access to peer support programs, and leisure and sports activities;
* Access to culturally sensitive services for Indigenous girls and Deaf girls;
* Access to inclusive education;
* Access to safe accessible housing and transportation.

**What can you do?**

Join us in supporting girls with disabilities and Deaf girls in Canada. Subscribe to our CALL TO ACTION list @ [morethanafootnote@dawncanada.net](mailto:morethanafootnote@dawncanada.net)