

A photograph of a person wearing blue denim jeans, sitting on a large, dark, textured rock. The person is holding a camera, and their hands are visible. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall tone is natural and candid.

2021 COMMUNITY REPORT ON GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE IN NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY

Monitoring the
community health,
safety and well-being
of women and children
experiencing violence,
assault, abuse and
trafficking

THRIVE

Northumberland Coalition to End Violence

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this annual report is to provide the community with a snapshot of the response to the issue of gender-based violence (GBV) in Northumberland County, Ontario.

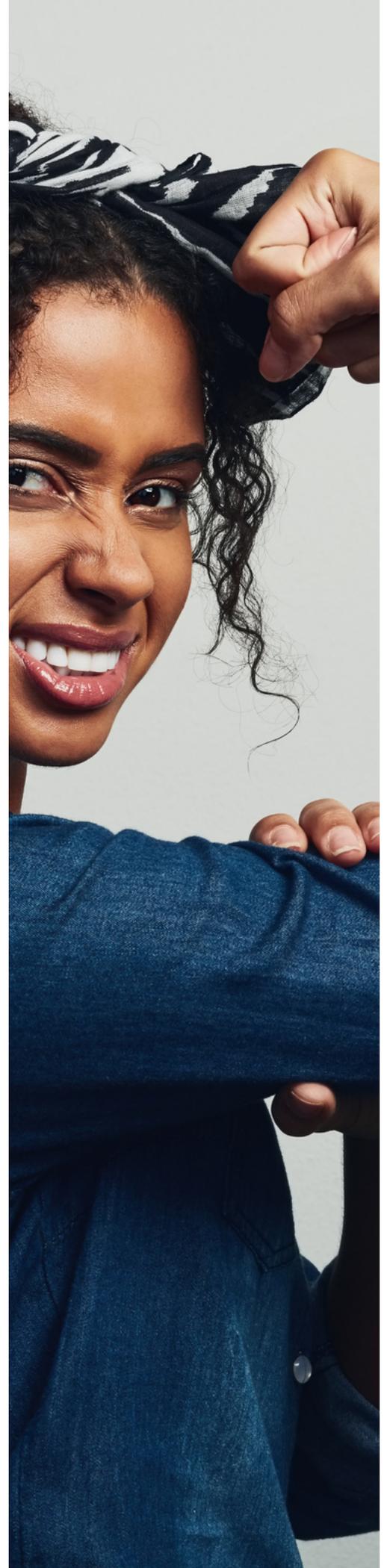
The research examines data and insight from April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2021 collected by 14 Thrive: Northumberland Coalition to End Violence Against Women (Thrive) member agencies and one provincial resource. This information was used to determine the occurrences of gender-based violence, demand for services and opportunities for enhanced service coordination in Northumberland County. Finally, the data provides an assessment of GBV trends before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research and analysis was completed by the Thrive Coordinator and reviewed by the Thrive Coalition, which is a community network of over 20 organizations that provide services and supports to women and children with lived experience.

WHAT IS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?

It is the types of abuse that women, girls, Two Spirit, Trans and non-binary people are at highest risk of experiencing. It can take physical and emotional forms, such as: name-calling, hitting, pushing, blocking, stalking/criminal harassment, rape, sexual assault, control, and manipulation. Many forms of abuse are against the law.

Gender-based violence can happen in any relationship or setting including between romantic partners, in families, at work, between friends, or between strangers. Typically, gender-based violence occurs in private places between people who know each other.



Anybody can be abused, no matter their background, identity, or circumstance. However women, girls, and gender-diverse people are at high risk of gender-based violence. Some are at even higher risks, due to the additional discrimination and barriers they face. This includes women with disabilities, Indigenous women, racialized women, Trans and non-binary people, and women who are homeless or under-housed. People facing abuse may not have access to services that meet their needs (e.g. people in rural or remote areas). [1]

ABOUT THRIVE: NORTHUMBERLAND COALITION TO END VIOLENCE

Thrive Northumberland is dedicated to breaking the cycle of gender-based violence. We are one of 48 community tables in Ontario funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services with a mandate to improve local systems so that women and their children can live without the threat of violence. Our strategic focus areas include monitoring systemic issues, public education and outreach, and connecting women and children with community resources.

We operate a weekly in-person and virtual drop-in centre where women can receive immediate help from various service providers at one time. Thrive Northumberland is comprised of over 20 organizations who meet regularly throughout the year to share information, provide updates and coordinate a strong community response to preventing gender-based violence.

Thrive Northumberland is also a co-founder of Period Promise Northumberland, a partnership with Northumberland United Way that provides people with free access to necessary menstrual products.

The 2021 GBV Community Snapshot is our third publication. To access Thrive reports and other community resources visit <https://thrivenorthumberland.com/community-snapshot/>.

Period Promise
A partnership of Northumberland United Way & Thrive Northumberland

MAY 2021 Collection

5,763 products collected from 8 drop-off locations across Northumberland County

\$2,945 was raised through financial donations that will be used to purchase menstrual hygiene products for individuals and clients accessing non-profit organizations in our community

2,409 tampons collected

1,158 other products collected including liners, menstrual cups & reusable pads

2,194 pads collected

Menstrual Hygiene Day

May 28, 2021 was proclaimed as Menstrual Hygiene Day by Northumberland County, the Township of Alwicks/Haldimand, Municipality of Brighton, Hamilton Township, and the Municipality of Port Hope

Thank You to all those who have stepped up to help tackle period poverty in our community.

Cobourg Public Library
Community Care Northumberland
Cobourg Fisher's Foodland
David's No Frills
Nurturing Health Naturopathic Clinic

Nourish Boutique Spa
The Salvation Army
Domino's Cobourg
Shoppers Drug Mart Cobourg
& our many generous donors and supporters

United Way Northumberland

THRIVE
Northumberland Coalition to End Violence

ALMOST ONE-QUARTER OF CANADIAN WOMEN SAY THEY HAVE STRUGGLED TO AFFORD MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS FOR THEMSELVES OR THEIR CHILDREN.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

This report is based on data collected between April 1, 2019 and March 31, 2021 from organizations who support women and children living in Northumberland County and whose services intersect with a GBV mandate. The organizational data used in this research include:

- 211 Ontario
- Cobourg Police Services
- Community Health Centres of Northumberland
- Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre
- Halliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit
- Highland Shores Children Aid Services
- Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre
- Northumberland County Community & Social Services
- Northumberland Hills Hospital Emergency Department
- Ontario Provincial Police
- Port Hope Police Services
- Thrive Drop-In Centre
- Women's Health Care Centre at Peterborough Regional Health Centre
- Victim Services Peterborough Northumberland
- Victim Witness Assistance Program

KEY OBSERVATIONS

This community snapshot compares service provision trends of gender-based violence supports in Northumberland over a two year period: a pre-pandemic year and the year COVID-19 was declared a global health crisis. An analysis of service data from April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2021 indicates that

- COVID-19 significantly impacted service levels
- Number of Indigenous women and children being served by a non-indigenous shelter was increasing pre-pandemic
- Transitional support provided to women and children in shelter remained relatively the same pre/post COVID-19
- Community and sexual assault counselling appointments nearly tripled pre-pandemic

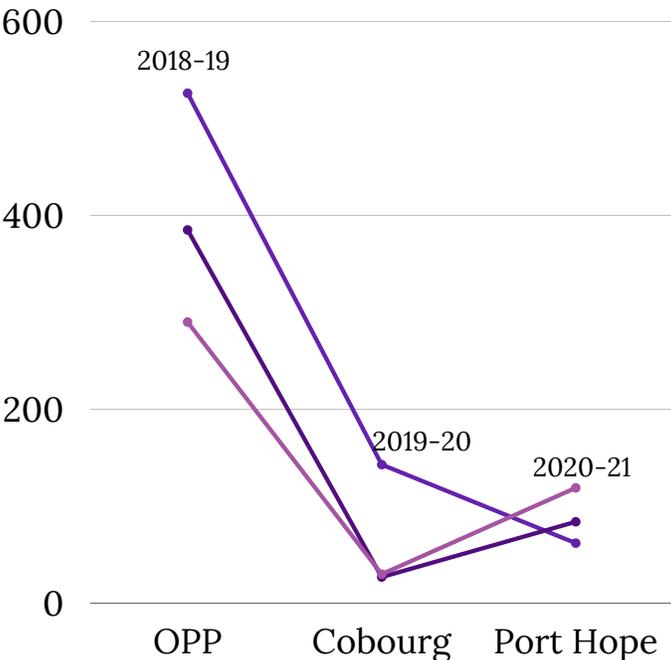


DURING THE TWO-YEAR TIME PERIOD 1,761 INDIVIDUAL SEXUAL ASSAULT COUNSELLING HOURS WERE PROVIDED AND 191 INDIVIDUALS WERE SUPPORTED THROUGH GROUP SESSIONS

- Inquiries for GBV services through 211 increased during the first year of the pandemic
- Appointments with the Domestic Violence Sexual Assault (DV SA) nurse examiner increased during the pandemic
- Male visits to Northumberland Hills Hospital Emergency Department (NHH ED) related to assault by bodily force was more than twice the amount visits by those who identified as female
- The most frequent reasons for ED visits were rape and/or seduction
- Women aged 26-40 accounted for the most visits to the DV SA nurse examiner
- The number of domestic occurrences reported by the three Northumberland-based police services (Ontario Provincial Police, Cobourg Police Services and Port Hope Police Services) significantly decreased in the both the year before and the first year of the pandemic except for in Port Hope where occurrences increased year over year
- During the first year of the pandemic, OPP and Cobourg Police saw significant decreases in reports of domestic occurrences.
- During the first year of the pandemic, Port Hope Police saw an increase in domestic related calls for service.
- The most frequent charges laid by police in relation to domestic violence occurrences were assault, assault with a weapon, domestic mischief, sexual interference and sexual assault
- Domestic violence was the leading reason for accessing Victim Services
- Approximately three quarters of victim witness assistance files were related to domestic violence charges.
- Phone calls to VAW 24/7 crisis lines increased significantly during the start of the pandemic.

Based on this summary of key observations it is clear gender-based violence has not been spared from the negative impacts of the pandemic. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging data and reports from those on the front lines, have shown that all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has intensified. This is the Shadow Pandemic growing amidst the COVID-19 crisis and we need a global collective effort to stop it. As COVID-19 cases continue to strain health services, essential services, such as domestic violence shelters and helplines, have reached capacity. The prioritization of violence against women related supports needs to be at the fore-front of COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.[2]

Domestic Occurrences by Police Service in Northumberland (3-Year Comparison)



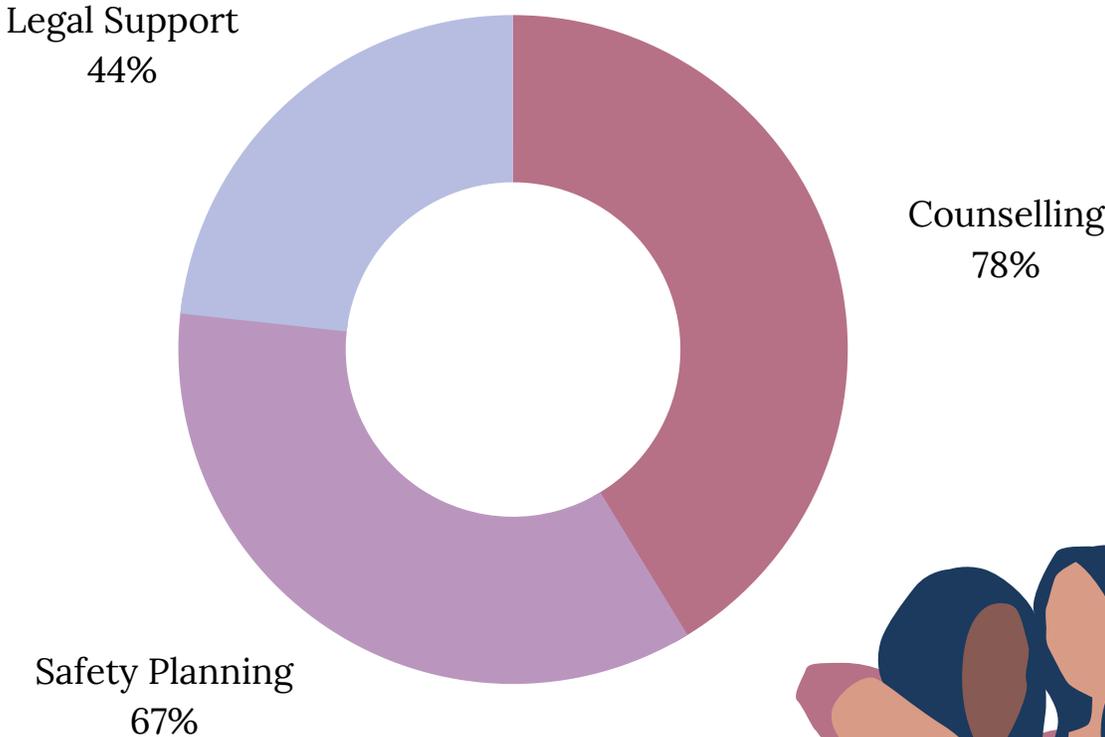
GBV TRENDS PRE-PANDEMIC

For the purpose of this report pre-pandemic refers to the April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020 fiscal year. Analysis to determine an increase/decrease in service levels and occurrences is based on comparing data from 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

The number of women and children accessing community agencies mandated to provide GBV/VAW services continued to rise pre-pandemic restrictions. Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre shelter support for Indigenous women and children increased by 50%. Individual appointments at Cornerstone and Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre (KSAC) for community counselling for domestic violence and sexual assault increased by 178.5% whereas Victim Services Peterborough Northumberland (VSPN) experienced a 21% increase in the number of people receiving support.

Counselling, safety planning and legal support continue to be the most frequent requests for support by women accessing Thrive’s weekly women’s drop-in centre. Referrals to Highland Shores Children’s Aid Services related to occurrences where child and youth safety linked to adult conflict or intimate partner violence was reported also increased by 1.3%. While the number of women accessing shelter, counselling and victim services increased the number of occurrences where charges were laid by Cobourg and Port Hope Police Services decreased by 3%. The data submitted by Coalition member agencies did not provide any anecdotal information or narrative for reasons service level increases.

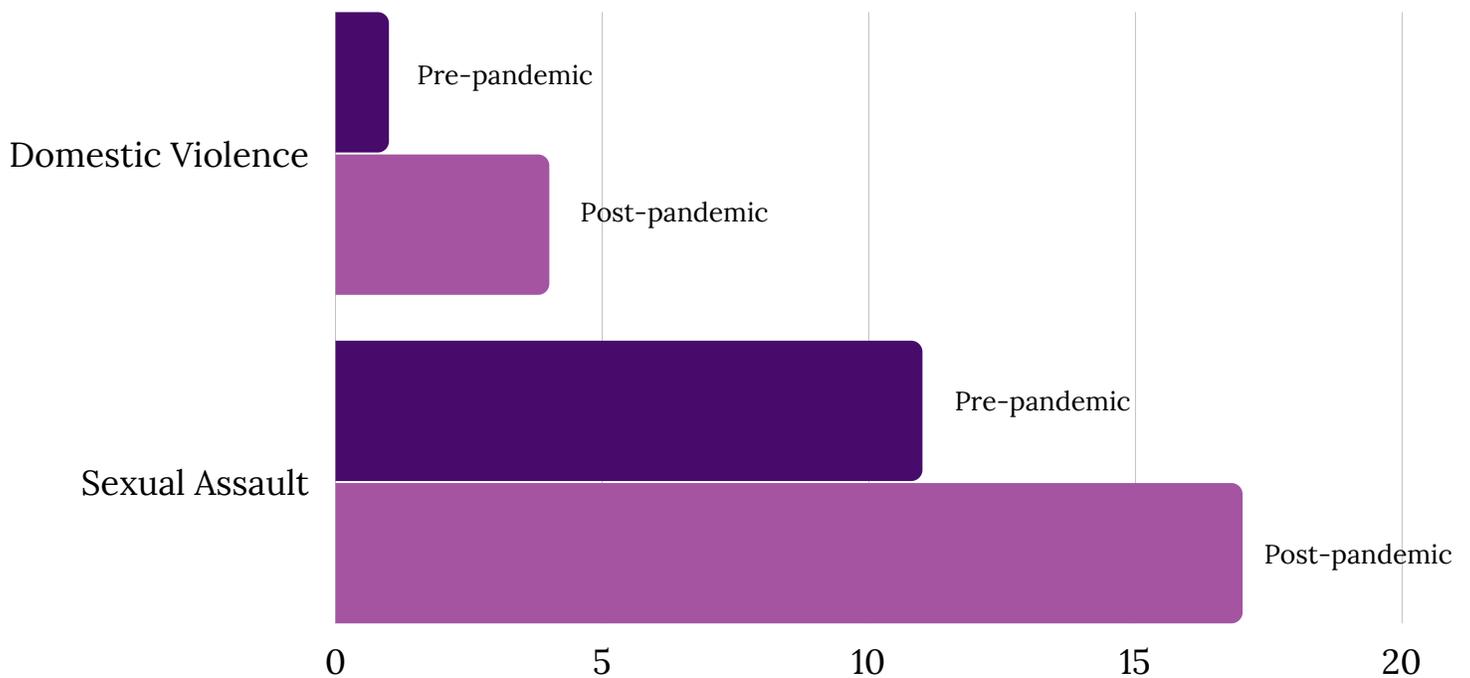
Most Frequently Requested Services at Thrive Drop-In Centre (2019-21)



With respect to healthcare services accessed by victims of violence, assault and other forms of abuse, NHH ED and the DV SA nurse examiner at the Peterborough Regional Health Care Women’s Health Centre, which services Northumberland County, saw a significant increase in reported visits compared to a decrease at Community Health Centres of Northumberland (CHCN). Data comparison from 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 shows female visits to NHH ED increased by 300% and visits to the DV SA nurse examiner increased by 200% with 50% of women in those occurrences being accompanied by a police officer. Clients seeking a primary healthcare provider through a community health centre for a problem related to abuse, domestic violence or sexual assault declined by 75%. An assumption for the sharp increase in visits seen by the two healthcare providers could be attributed to the fact that since the last snapshot Thrive published it has been working to improve its working and reporting relationship with healthcare providers to increase referrals and tracking of occurrences.



Number of domestic violence and sexual assault cases seen by a nurse examiner (pre/postpandemic)



18 INDIVIDUALS AND/OR FAMILIES WHO SELF-IDENTIFIED AS VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE WERE SUPPORTED IN ACCESSING SHELTER BENEFIT FUNDING THROUGH NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COMMUNITY & SOCIAL SERVICES

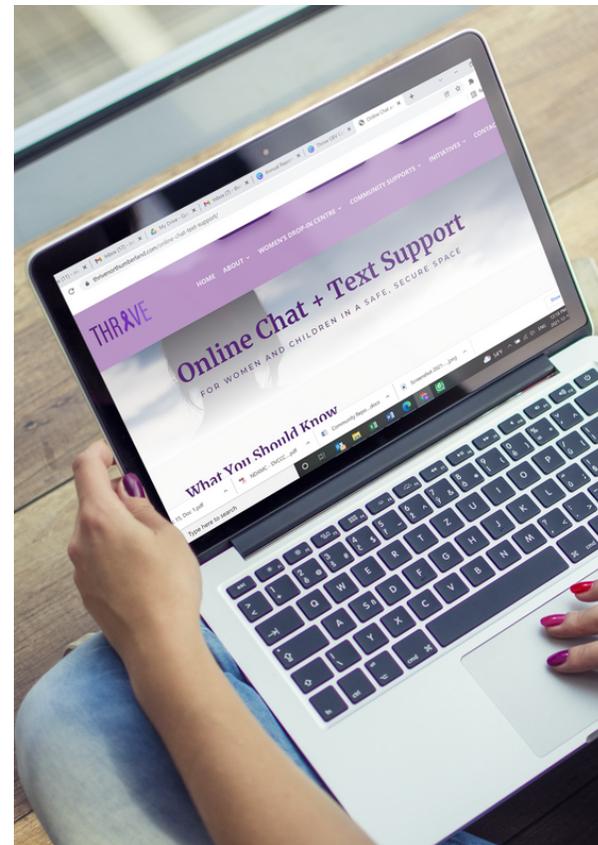
IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GBV AND SERVICE ACCESS

For the purpose of this report we have data for the first year of the pandemic April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021.

Every six days, a woman is murdered by her intimate partner in Canada. Tragically, this is simply the most extreme instance of the ongoing crisis of violence against women. Every single night, roughly 3,000 women – alongside their 2,900 dependent children – seek out emergency shelter to escape intimate partner violence. COVID-19 has only made this violence worse. The added stressors of the pandemic – lockdown, unemployment, uncertainty – have combined with sexism and financial inequality to create a Shadow Pandemic of violence against women.[3]

24/7 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS LINES RECEIVED 594 MORE CALLS IN THE FIRST YEAR OF COVID-19 THAN THE YEAR BEFORE

In Northumberland County, with women's shelters, sexual assault centres, victim services and other vital community services closing or working at reduced capacity during the early of days of the pandemic due to unknown risks and public health measures, COVID-19 forced women and children experiencing violence into further isolation, cutting them off from essential support. Many Coalition member agencies were quick to retool or reimagine their service delivery by implanting a hybrid model of care. In June 2020, Cornerstone and KSAC launched an online chat support platform connecting with 288 women. In January 2021, Thrive followed suit, transitioning to a virtual drop-in centre leveraging phone, video conferencing, and text and webchat technologies.

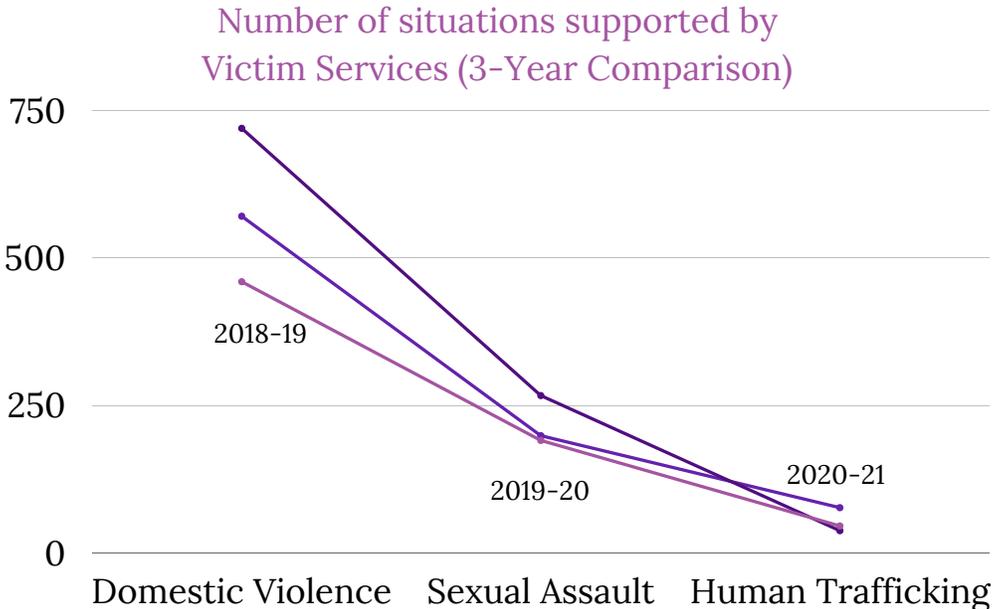


9.8%
**INCREASE IN WOMEN ACCESSING
FAMILY COURT SUPPORT**

Despite this innovation the first year of the pandemic drew a very different picture of service access despite the higher risk and occurrence of gender-based violence brought on by isolation protocols and mandatory closures. For instance, shelter capacity at Cornerstone reduced by 35%. The number of women and children served in shelter decreased 33.3% compared to the number of Indigenous women and children served in shelter, which decreased by 50%. Visits to Thrive’s women’s drop-in centre plummeted 82% due to it being shuttered for nine months. Access to counselling was also impacted with 164 less people being able to connect with one-to-one support due to the closing of in-person services; however, the number of children supported through community counselling increased by 45%. A concerning statistic is that the number of child protection referrals received by Highland Shore CAS decreased by 14.7% leading to the assumption that children and youth were at-risk of remaining in a precarious, vulnerable and even dangerous environment for a longer period of time.

INQUIRIES FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE INCREASED BY 133% COMPARED TO A 250% RISE IN REQUESTS FOR DROP-IN SERVICES AND CRISIS INTERVENTION SUPPORT

Over the two-year period of 2019-2021, there was a total of 13 female residents (15+) of the HKPRD Health Unit diagnosed at an Emergency Department with either a maltreatment syndrome, neglect and abandonment, other maltreatment, or problems in relationship with a spouse or partner. Over the two-year period, the annual number of identified occurrences fluctuated slightly. Female diagnosis fell by 37.5% during the first year of the pandemic. In comparison, female visitors 17 years old and younger to the NHH ED increased by 86.5% and visits to the DV SA nurse examiner increased by 50% with 94% of these women being accompanied by a police officer. The exponential rise in visits to emergency healthcare services correlates with the number of occurrences of sexual assault against adult women reported by OPP increasing by 33% compared to a 24% increase in occurrences of relationship violence against adult women.



Despite Northumberland County services with a VAW mandate reporting decreases in client access during the first year of COVID-19 we know it's not because women and children didn't need help. It's because women and children couldn't access support. As reported by Western University's VAW Learning Network's COVID-19 & Gender-based Violence in Canada: Key Issues and Recommendations document, quarantines can exacerbate stress and other mental health issues for all partners, which may increase the risk of violence as well as impair one's ability to formulate or carry out safety plans.[4] In the wake of the pandemic services closed but within the span of a few months service delivery was reimagined as organizations leveraged technology to connect with women and children. Yet one key barrier remained: women and children remained isolated at home and in some situations in an unsafe environment where connecting virtually wasn't an option.

The Shadow Pandemic is a public health crisis within a public health emergency. In 2020, waitlists got longer, resources were stretched, crisis contacts increased and GBV inquiries spiked. Yet Thrive Coalition's commitment to ending gender-based violence and coordinating safe access to support for women and children experiencing violence did not waiver – it has only strengthened.

34 WOMEN REPORTED
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS DUE
TO EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL,
PSYCHOLOGICAL OR SEXUAL ABUSE
AND WERE ADDED TO THE
COUNTY'S BY-NAME-LIST



LIMITATIONS

This is Thrive's third community report on the issue of and responses to gender-based violence in Northumberland County. The analysis has helped us to understand the impact of COVID-19 on local service levels. It shows us how organizations retooled in the early days of the pandemic to ensure that connection to essential support although difficult to access was not disrupted.

It emphasizes the importance of coordinating access to multiple services under one roof: from housing and shelter support to family court support, counselling to safety planning, access to primary health care, child welfare and social services to harm reduction services. It encourages us to continue to work to close the gap, meet clients where they are, and streamline referrals so women and children who are experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking or other forms of abuse receive immediate, adequate and appropriate care.

It is important to note that there are some limitations with this snapshot, including:

- Some services reported being closed or operating at limited capacity from March to June 2020;
- No data or narrative was collected by service users and women with lived experience;
- Varied data tracking amongst service providers;
- Data restrictions due to services supporting both Northumberland and Peterborough not reporting separate statistics;
- No demographic-specific data to measure experiences of gender-based violence by race or sexuality;
- Absence of two emergency shelters, one harm reduction program, one local community hospital and transgender services/programs from the data collection;
- Some agency reporting is based on a fiscal year of April 1 to March 31 so data for the second year of the pandemic is not yet available.

CONCLUSION

Thrive Northumberland is committed to monitoring trends, enhancing prevention and addressing systemic issues related to gender-based violence at the local level. We are also committed to supporting Coalition member agencies and community partners as they continue to adapt to the ever-changing public health pandemic protocols.

- Enhancing the hybrid model for our VAW drop-in hub in an effort to return to pre-pandemic service levels;
- Monitoring the level of acuity of gender-based violence in Northumberland at the community table level as the pandemic persists;
- Reviewing how Coalition members are collecting data to enhance reporting details;
- Improving our referral processes to enhance service navigation and strengthen collaboration among Coalition members and VAW services;
- Engaging with survivors, in particular from equity seeking groups, to ensure that all voices with lived experienced are represented in our work and in our role in supporting the implementation of the Northumberland County Safety and Well-Being Plan.



Endnotes

- [1] Canadian Women's Foundation: The Facts About Gender-Based Violence. <https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/gender-based-violence/>
- [2] UN Women: The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19. Web page accessed on November 1, 2021. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>
- [3] YMCA Toronto: The Shadow Pandemic. Web page accessed on November 1, 2021. <https://www.ywcatoronto.org/takeaction/campaigns/theshadowpandemic>
- [4] Bielski, Z. (2020, March 23). Self-isolation directives increase risk for women facing domestic violence, experts warn. The Globe and Mail. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-self-isolation-directives-increase-risk-for-women-facing-domestic/>

WE ARE COMMITTED TO CREATING A
COMMUNITY FREE OF VIOLENCE.



THRIVE

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU

AVAILABLE MONDAY'S, 9AM - 12PM

**WOMEN'S VIRTUAL
DROP-IN CENTRE**

TEXT: 289.677.5510
WEBCHAT: THRIVENORTHUMBERLAND.COM
WALK-IN: 40 SWAYNE ST., COBOURG
(COVID-19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS IN PLACE)

Crisis Lines

24/7 Support:
Cornerstone Family Violence
Prevention Centre 905.372.0746
Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre
705.741.0260

Contact

Thrive: Northumberland Coalition
to End Violence
www.thrivenorthumberland.ca
thrivenorthumberland@gmail.com
[@thrivenorthumberland](https://www.instagram.com/thrivenorthumberland)