Precarious Employment, Gig work and Gender-based Violence in Canada:

A Knowledge Synthesis and Recommendations for Policy Decision-making

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Emploi précaire, travail à la demande (ou micro-travail) et violence fondée sur le genre au Canada:

Une synthèse des connaissances et recommandations pour la prise de décisions politiques

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Executive Summary

Background

Gender-based violence (GBV) may be defined as violence that is based on gender norms and unequal power dynamics, perpetrated against someone based on gender, perceived gender, gender expression or identity. While employment can represent a safe and stable refuge, it can also present difficulties in the form of lack of support for or access to childcare, and problems in managing domestic responsibilities, for example. In addition, women experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) often experience employment instability through workplace disruptions, poor attendance, or declining performance associated with abuse. Finding flexible, informal work or gigs is one way that individuals at risk for or experiencing violence balance the need for employment with the need for the flexibility to access work. However, while flexible, gig work is often temporary, short-term, part-time, low-paying, and lacks access to services, or protections regular employment may provide.

Report Summary

This report presents an in-depth examination of precarious employment, the gig economy, and its relation to GBV in Canada. The study employed a critical interpretive synthesis approach to exploring current publications, focusing on the experiences of women in gig work (a form of precarious employment) and their risk for or experience of GBV. Explorations of published literature were supplemented by knowledge exchange and practice-based information gathering undertaken with our integrated community partner, Women's Centres Connect, Nova Scotia.

The process of knowledge synthesis revealed a growing prevalence of precarious employment, particularly via platform-based or digitally mediated gig work, and a corresponding rise in independent contracting or self-employment, which appears to have significant impacts particularly for women and young adults both at home in Canada and globally.

In addition, women from marginalized groups such as BIPOC women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, immigrant women, and mothers are at a severe disadvantage in terms of working conditions and are most likely to be engaged in precarious or non-standard work. However, relatively few publications approach the study of precarious employment (including gig work) using an intersectional lens, so there is relatively little information available that examines the complexity of experience for women engaged in gig work – particularly for women who identify as Indigenous or who reside in rural/remote contexts.

Project Objectives

This project explores the link between precarity, economic insecurity, gender, and violence and attempts to understand how identity factors (such as ethnicity, ability, age, and gender) intersect with precarious, non-standard or gig employment relationships and the risk for GBV. A partnership with Women's Centres Connect of Nova Scotia served to provide insight from the context of service and support the creation of policy recommendations to inform future decision-making in the development of research, policy and programs to support economic stability and risk mitigation for GBV.

The global health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in remote work overall, often in the form of precarious part-time, short-term contract or gig jobs. Additional pressures were placed on women working from home, as a resurgence of traditional gender roles required mothers to assume responsibility for domestic duties, childcare and find flexible ways to continue to stay connected to the labour market, earn an income, and maintain their professional development. In the COVID-19 "she-cession", women have been disproportionately impacted due to job losses and economic insecurity experienced within feminized labour sectors. Moreover, conditions within the pandemic also aggravated the

risk and instances of GBV, as lockdown measures and increased economic pressures created (or contributed to) stressful home environments.

Digital platforms have contributed to the proliferation of gig work. While these app-driven environments claim inclusivity and gender-neutrality, their control algorithms function in the abstract and do not take into consideration the lived context of workers. Although platform companies offer flexibility and decision-making autonomy, lived experience within the gig economy is often far more complex as they do not account for gender-specific challenges and vulnerabilities. The mismatch between algorithmic neutrality and worker context coupled with asymmetries of power within the platform systems exacerbate worker vulnerabilities resulting in increased risk for violence, discrimination, and poor working conditions for women. Classification of platform-based gig workers as independent contractors or self-employed rather than as employees is a significant issue. This practice effectively removes the worker from the workplace – removing access to the benefits, supports, and protections that come with employee status, such as minimum wage guarantees, overtime pay, and unemployment insurance. Moreover, (mis)classification can undermine the ability of workers to collectively organise, form communication and support networks, and negotiate better working conditions. This issue contributes to the asymmetry of power found within digital platforms, and increases the vulnerability of workers, particularly women, in these roles.

Creating recommendations for policy decision-making

A summary of the knowledge synthesis and of the practice-based information scan along with a set of proposed recommendations was shared with the integrated partners and discussed to create a set of decision-making recommendations that reflect priorities identified by our community partners and supported within the current literature. The result of this knowledge exchange process revealed two significant areas of policy decision making that could have substantial and immediate positive impact on women's participation in the gig economy are 1) a change to the way in which gig workers are classified with a view to supporting access to worker rights, supports and protections and 2) facilitating access to universal child and dependent care (see below).

Priority areas for Policy Decision-making

Overall, policy decision-making should be responsive to group or social location. Social policy and protections should be gender-responsive and place-based, considering the unique experiences and challenges faced by specific groups within the gig worker population. Gig work is disconnected from both workplace and co-workers resulting in increased isolation. Addressing vulnerabilities associated with loss of workplace will serve to mitigate risk as would strengthening social policy related to child and dependent care, and provision of longer-term, stable investments in funding for policy and programs aimed at the reduction of social and economic barriers experienced by women.

1) Address worker classification and provide support for improved accessibility to rights, supports, benefits and protections to mitigate vulnerabilities associated with loss of workplace, including:
    - Support for equitable access to worker supports, benefits, compensation, and protection.
    - Options for access to extended supports and benefits.
    - Access to income supplementation
2) Child and Dependent Care: Access to universal child and dependent care helps women reconcile the demands of care provision and other traditional domestic roles within the household with the demands of employment. In addition to easing isolation, access to child and dependent care supports women in engagement in both training and skills development, facilitates participation in job searching and labour market participation.
    - Parental and Family Leave: Adoption of family-friendly leave policies (not tied to workplace classification), including harmonised parental leaves support women's professional and economic empowerment.

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Introduction

According to Women and Gender Equality Canada (2021), Gender-based violence (GBV) may be defined as:

Violence based on gender norms and unequal power dynamics, perpetrated against someone based on their gender, gender expression, gender identity, or perceived gender. It takes many forms, including physical, economic, sexual, as well as emotional (psychological) abuse.

The relationship between work, financial stability, and the risk or experience of GBV is complex (77, 118, 124). For women at risk for, or experiencing violence, work can provide a stable and safe refuge, support from co-workers and supervisors, and access to counselling or other support programs via employment or government-based services, in addition to facilitating improved financial stability and self-efficacy (77, 118). However, perpetrators may also harass survivors and their co-workers at their workplace, exercise control over finances, attempt to undermine occupations that remove the survivor from the home, and the place of employment may not be a source of sympathy or support, either formally or informally (77). Employment can also create other difficulties which must be overcome, including finding ways to support childcare needs, manage domestic work and/or other responsibilities, and maintain or establish access to other support services outside the employment context (77).

Precarious Employment and Gig Work

Gig work is a category of precarious employment (63, 76) that can be described as an unconventional or non-standard work arrangement that "*fills a need by providing access to labour (for employers) and flexibility and access to the labour market (for workers)*" (138, p. 9). It is temporary, usually short-term, and is characterized by an emphasis on project or task-based, on-demand labour (138). Digital platform intermediaries sell "*flexibility and opportunity as part of the worker experience*" (138, p. 10). Engagement in non-standard employment relationships, like those offered through gig work, may be one way that individuals (especially women) experiencing violence have addressed issues, like the need for flexibility or childcare that impact their ability to access the labour market. Unsurprisingly, women are more likely to be employed in low-income, part-time, precarious work than men (OR=3.08, CI=1.85-2.19, $p<0.0001$) (4). This shift toward the feminization of temporary, short-term and contract work has often been attributed to a reported need for flexibility -- primarily to accommodate childcare and other traditional gender-based, domestic responsibilities within the home or family (4, 63, 133).

There is no standardized and accepted definition in use for 'gig' work. Indeed, variations in definition make it difficult to assess the extent of participation in precarious, non-standard employment relationships that might exist within this category. In Canada, estimates of participation in 'alternative' or non-standard work arrangements that include temporary, short-term or freelance contracts, as well as unincorporated self-employment, range from 22.3% in 2016 (63) to more than 30% (73).

Further, Jeon and colleagues (63) reported that from 2005 – 2016, the share of gig workers in Canada's labour market (based on non-standard and unincorporated self-employment) was higher for women than men every year and that the gap between them continues to widen – particularly in highly feminized employment sectors, such as healthcare and social assistance where 20.2% of identified gig workers were women compared to 6.5% men (63). According to Wenham and colleagues (133), most (91%) women who are precariously or self-employed work within the care and service sectors (e.g. hospitality, education, retail, childcare, domestic and social services). Privatization and for-profit operationalization in the care sector has proliferated as governments seek to increasingly engage in corporate partnerships (12). Reorganization and restructuring of service delivery has resulted in an increasingly temporary, contracted workforce that is highly gendered,

racialized, and has no benefits or protections associated with employment (40).

Loss of the workplace

Like all forms of precarious employment (PE), gig workers typically lack access to workplace rights and protections, such as labour unions, and all costs, risks, and responsibilities associated with 'employment' must be borne by the workers (54, 74, 76, 138).

While some may consider the flexibility of gig or short-term work as a benefit, people who experience IPV or GBV offer a different perspective (1, 77). Experiencing IPV or GBV can instill fear and shame of being blamed, both in one's personal life but also in one's work life (1, 78). Standard office employment that occurs in-person can often serve as a safe escape for women experiencing GBV at home, or an opportunity for increased observation outside of the home (1, 14, 77, 78). When engaged in short-term gig work, the option for the workplace to act as a safe haven in which to escape the IPV or GBV at home is removed, putting the woman experiencing GBV at a greater risk for experiencing violence, but also at a greater risk of feeling guilt or shame associated with reporting the violence (1, 77, 129).

Though increased observation in the workplace can be beneficial for women who are at risk for or are experiencing GBV, it is not guaranteed that every workplace will be supportive or even take note of the risk (14, 77, 130). Support in the workplace is essential; inadequate support from an employer or colleagues, in addition to fear of judgment or blame, can be detrimental to the health and safety of women experiencing GBV (77, 78, 130). If a woman falls behind in their work or is frequently absent due to experiencing IPV, she is more likely to be fired or miss work opportunities than receive appropriate supports and services (1, 77, 129). Further, lack of direct support or available services may encourage the tendency for women experiencing GBV to individualize or internalize their problems (130).

MacQuarrie and colleagues (78) discussed the need for "*workers and workplaces to be able to recognize controlling, degrading, emotionally and physically abusive behaviours, have skills to speak out against these behaviours, and have programmes and policies in place that can prevent and respond to those perpetrating the abuse*" in the context of workplace GBV (p. 96). It is equally important for workplaces to recognize behavioural changes that may be associated with GBV or IPV experienced outside of the workplace setting (77, 78). It is, however, unclear, whether these recommendations for programs of education, awareness, support and response have been translated to non-traditional employment arrangements, like gig work.

Precarious Employment, Gig work and GBV: Impacts of COVID-19

Enactment of social distancing measures (e.g. stay-at-home directives or lockdown) had profound and early economic consequences for women, many of whom were already employed in part-time or temporary, low-paying, contact-intensive jobs within the service sector and experiencing financial precarity (7, 40). In Canada, total employment fell by 15.4% for all workers from February – June 2020; however, 68.5% of all job loss during this period was among women (19). Significant losses were noted for individuals with lower levels of education (22.4%) and for landed immigrants (20.4%). For women characterized as "self-employed", there was a 43.46% reduction in hours worked from February – May 2020 when compared to the same period in 2019 – far greater than the 27.28% reduction experienced by self-employed men (20). In a series of global case studies, Smith and colleagues (119) noted that the financial effects of COVID were distributed unequally across various groups of women based on race, ethnicity, immigrant status or type of work, leading to increased financial instability. While employment conditions seemed to rebound for men following the first lockdown, the same was not true for women (19, 30, 66). Women, especially those who were precariously employed prior to the pandemic, were more likely to be forced out of the workforce to assume the burden of domestic and childcare duties (51, 66, 133).

Financial instability has been linked to risk of GBV, both of which tend to increase during times of disaster (51, 133) and job loss may represent not only a loss of resources and independence but a loss of access to supports and services (51). In addition to the lack of supports, services and protections, gig work can also be anonymous,

isolating and 'de-contextualized' (14), creating an environment where women at risk for or experiencing violence are not seen, or connected and supported, rendering them more under threat of GBV. Loss of social ties associated with work may create a sense of isolation, reduce social visibility, and increase concerns about the possibility of domestic violence during lockdown conditions (21). In Canada, financial instability, job insecurity, inability to meet financial obligations and to provide for essential needs were all found to be related to concerns about family stress and risk for violence in the home (21).

Objectives of the Knowledge Synthesis:

1) **Address knowledge gaps.** In the existing literature that explores employment and GBV, there has been little work summarizing the experience of individuals at risk for or experiencing violence who are employed in precarious or gig work (77). There has also been little focus on the importance of social location and identity; how identity factors such as race, ability, age, and gender identity interact with employment precarity and GBV. A need has been identified for more research aimed at understanding how at-risk groups such as "women, immigrants, youth and older workers" (14, p. 22) experience gig work. The following questions address these knowledge gaps:

What does the current literature tell us about informal or gig work (i.e., precarious employment) among individuals at risk for or experiencing GBV in Canada? What are the perceived benefits, barriers, or risks? What does the current literature tell us, if anything, about patterns of gig work in urban, rural and remote settings?

2) **Explore the existing public and institutional policies and programs.** To be able to advocate effectively for public policy and programs that support all women at risk for or experiencing violence, it is important to understand which policies and programs intended to support financial stability are currently available and accessible for women employed in gig work. Therefore, this synthesis included an environmental/information gathering exercise focused on the policies and programs currently available within a specific practice-based context (community-based, women-serving organizations in Nova Scotia, Canada) was completed with our integrated knowledge partner (Women's Centres Connect, Nova Scotia).

3) Develop recommendations to support decision-making for future policy and programs. Given the higher prevalence of gig work among women in Atlantic Canada, we will engage with our community partners to create recommendations based on 1) the results of the knowledge synthesis process, 2) the policy/program scan as 3) informed by stakeholder experience of service delivery and provision of support for women experiencing GBV and financial instability.

Methods summary

A critical interpretive synthesis was carried out and focused on understanding the experiences of women in gig work as a form of precarious employment and GBV. Both peer-reviewed publications and grey literature reports were included for this synthesis, and a research librarian helped our research team develop a search strategy based on our research questions. Through the available literature, the connection between precarious employment as a social determinant of health, and how the recent COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the experiences of women in GBV and PE was made.

118 articles were extracted from our initial search, and this study applied the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) to describe the quality of the study (56). Literature met the inclusion criteria if it discussed PE, a discussion of gender and/or gender-based or intimate partner violence. Further, we limited our scope of literature to the Global North to maintain consistency with our project. The term "women" used throughout our report encompassed any person that identifies as a woman – regardless of the group(s) to which the woman belongs.

Our analysis was an iterative and ongoing process, included over three rounds of coding. Emerging themes and patterns were identified and compared among all coders. Coding summaries, including emerging recommendations for policy decision making were shared with our integrated community partner(s) for their valued input. Results from the practice-based scan and information gathering process were discussed as well – and used to inform the development and prioritization of recommendations for policy decision making. The approach that was used in this project allowed us to critically review the available literature based on our research questions and provide information to further develop our understanding of the experiences of women in gig work who are experiencing or at risk for GBV. A brief description of the knowledge synthesis process is provided in Table 1 (below). For a more detailed account, please refer to Appendix 1.

Table 1: Synthesis in stages

Stage	Description
Review and Synthesis: Search Strategies and Seed Citations	We engaged the services of a research librarian to develop keyword strategies based on our synthesis goals and to conduct an initial search of both the peer-reviewed and grey literature, using multiple online databases. In interpretive syntheses, searching and sampling are guided by the exploration of the research question(s), rather than the need to be exhaustive. Therefore, selection of articles/studies/reports to use as seed citations to facilitate snowballing search strategies (forward citation searches and hand searching citation lists) was guided by a set of relevance criteria (see Appendix 1). From an initial pool of 1173 possible citations, 30 articles and 12 reports were identified as relevant "seeds". These formed the foundation for our process of snowball searches.
Review and Synthesis: Sampling (inclusion and exclusion)	All identified articles were considered for inclusion in terms of their relevance to the guiding questions, concepts, and context, rather than adherence to a rigid checklist of inclusion and exclusion criteria determined *a priori* (please refer to Appendix 1). Although the focus of the review and synthesis is Canada, we did not limit initial searches and selection processes to a single geographic location; instead, we chose to maintain a broad, international search strategy, using our guiding questions and a focus on studies originating from the broader Global North to consider contexts and experiences that may be transferable to the Canadian experience. However, inclusion was restricted to documents produced between 2014 – 2022 (dates that reflect the emergence of precarious employment as a social determinant of health in 2014 (23) as well as the most recent studies examining nonstandard, precarious employment, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and GBV. Relevance criteria continued to guide the process of abstract and full text review resulting in a final pool of 118 articles/studies and reports selected for inclusion in the synthesis process (see Appendix 1). Please note that relevance criteria shifted as reviewers collaborated in a discursive process throughout selection and knowledge/understanding about this specific body of literature continued to evolve.
Review and Synthesis: Data extraction and quality appraisal	The studies identified for inclusion, the data and the author's interpretations therein provided the raw data for our process of interpretive, thematic analysis. The analysis process for all documents identified for inclusion was conducted using the NVivo qualitative data management software (QSR, Version 1.7.1, 2021). Full texts of all selected articles/reports were imported into NVivo for this purpose. Quality Appraisal: This study applied the Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT). This tool allows the reviewer to describe study quality without placing the studies within a predetermined hierarchy of evidence (56, 103). Use of the MMAT does not produce a summed score; rather, it creates a basic description of study quality. In this synthesis, studies will not be excluded based on quality. To do so would risk the loss of findings that could potentially offer

	important and relevant explanatory insights (88). Results of our assessment of between-rater agreement and the Quality Appraisal for this knowledge synthesis are described in Appendix 1.
Review and Synthesis: Analysis	Grounded in an iterative and ongoing approach to content analysis, coding was conducted over three rounds – by two coders in all thematic areas. Codebooks were created following an initial round, and using processes of constant comparison, reviewing emerging patterns against both the guiding questions and primary texts (36), thematic groupings continued to be refined over time, as new understandings and patterns emerged. Thematic summaries were then generated and reviewed to support processes of knowledge synthesis that included acknowledging areas of dissent within the literature, questioning who is represented and who is missing, and highlighting important gaps in the literature. Results of this analysis process were shared with our community partner and input received from this valued source incorporated into the synthesis process.
Environmental Scan: Identification of programs/policies and Information gathering	Our local, community partner was the central organization in this practice-based scan. To identify the policy, programs and services used, the experience of practice in using or administering these programs (including barriers and facilitators to access) and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we worked with Women's Centres Connect to create an information gathering tool that was distributed by our partner to the Executive Directors within their organization (see Appendix 1). Data collection continued throughout April and May 2023.
Environmental Scan: Summary	Responses provided by 9 organizations located in Nova Scotia and serving women at risk for or experiencing violence were collated and summarized. The results of this process were reviewed with the Women's Centres Connect executive directors at a meeting where they were also asked to provide any further feedback that they wished to include about policies and programs delivered within their organizations in addition to recommendations for policy decision making in the future. The knowledge synthesis and evidence brief to-date were also reviewed at this time. The results of this knowledge exchange process were used to prioritize and clarify the recommendations made within this document.

Knowledge Synthesis: Results

How prevalent is the problem of precarious employment in a Global and Canadian Context?

Precarious employment (PE) – work characterized by instability and insufficient protection – is a serious and growing concern worldwide, notably in developed Global North countries. The growth of PE is striking in the U.S. and Canada, with nearly half of the workforce engaged in precarious work. Over the past two decades, Canada has seen an alarming rise of nearly 50% in PE (106), paralleling similar increases in the U.S. (2).

Internationally, nonstandard employment – a category that includes PE – has become a norm for over 60% of workers, indicating a considerable shift towards unpredictable labour (69). Temporary employment, a specific type of PE, exhibited a global average prevalence of 11.4% in 2020, disproportionately affecting young adults and women (8). This gender disparity is consistent across the U.S. and Canada, pointing toward shared global trends (2, 4).

The confluence of PE and the gig economy presents a significant area of concern. This economy, prominent in Global North countries, typically offers low-paid, unpredictable jobs with limited benefits (50). Within a short period from 2015 to 2016, 9.5% of Canadians were involved in the gig economy (14), and by 2018, this had escalated to 36% in the U.S. (55). This growth in the gig economy, along with the unequal 'barbell' pattern of income distribution it generates, mirrors the broader rise of PE in these nations.

The dynamics and disparities of independent contractors

Precarious employment (PE) and the rise of independent contractors are reshaping labour markets, leading to a complex mix of opportunities, insecurities, and disparities. The "sharing" economy, as seen in Barzilay and colleagues' study (16), shows significant growth, with over 22% of U.S. adults participating in this type of labour platform. Although U.S.-based, this trend likely mirrors globalization in digital platform development associated, in part, with the growth in self-employment.

However, while approximately 44% of workers globally may be self-employed, there are significant variations across developed and developing economies and 'self-employment' is not a

How important are the issue of precarious employment, nonstandard employment relationships and gig work?

Globally, the prevalence of precarious employment has been increasing across industries, as the labour market continues to shift away from traditional work arrangements (2). The driving forces behind this transition away from stable, formal work environments to precarious work reflect broader structural changes in the economy rather than individual employment choices (e.g., widespread adoption of neoliberal economic policies, technological advances and declines in sectors supporting traditional employment relationships) (50). For women, who are over-represented in precarious forms of employment, these shifts are particularly concerning. PE often lacks benefits and job security, leading to significant socioeconomic impacts on their wellbeing, social security, and overall quality of life.

Given the substantial consequences, there's a growing urgency to address the challenges posed by PE. This necessity involves not only creating and enforcing policies that protect workers in nonstandard relationships but also rethinking the broader economic structures that push workers into these precarious positions (50, 136).

homogeneous construct (25). Each type of possible self-employment may represent a variation in potential security and stability, thereby highlighting the uncertainty that typifies this category of work.

Khan et al. (69) and Wilson (136) further the narrative on the precarious nature of self-employment. The former emphasizes the darker aspects, including unemployment pressures, limited alternatives, and financial hardships, which often force individuals into self-employment. Moreover, lower earners in self-employment risk poverty and social exclusion. Wilson (136) extends this by suggesting that self-employment's rise may be driven more by PE than entrepreneurial motivation, signaling the escalating insecurity within the labour market. Gender disparities in precarious employment become apparent in Gołaś' (48) research, showing involuntary engagement in non-employee forms of work, disproportionately impacting women. This emphasizes the urgent need to probe the structural factors fostering such inequalities.

The Complex Landscape of Informal Labour: Precarity, and the Digital Influence

Precarious employment and informal labour present a complex, multi-layered issue involving deeply entrenched gender disparities, harsh working conditions, and challenges from emerging digital labour platforms.

Informal labour, untracked by taxation or other record-keeping mechanisms, comprises a significant portion of global employment. Bonnet et al. (25) illustrates this with a staggering statistic: 61% of the world's working-age population, or approximately 2 billion workers, are engaged in informal work. Yet, this massive body of workers, presented as a single statistic, harbours complexities linked to the underlying conditions of informal labour.

A thread of gender inequality weaves through the informal labour landscape. In developed nations, the service sector particularly underscores gender disparities with women holding a higher percentage of informal jobs (83% vs 61%) (25). This implicates socio-cultural, economic, and political factors in shaping these gendered landscapes. Echoing the theme of gender disparity, Williams and Gashi (134) present a concerning wage gap. Men in formal employment earn 26% more than in informal jobs, while women earn 14% more when employed formally. Additionally, women earn less than informally employed men. These findings illustrate the gendered nature of economic precarity.

Multifaceted impact of temporary, part-time, or short-term contracts

Temporary part-time or short-term contract work, zero-hour contracts, and underemployment, are characterized by high levels of job insecurity, unpredictable schedules, low wages, and limited benefits (26). Of particular concern is the issue of underemployment, where individuals are forced into part-time or casual work despite seeking full-time employment. In the United States alone, underemployment affects 7.7% of all workers and an alarming 37.8% of part-time workers (71). Its effects are far-reaching and multifaceted, affecting not only job security and wages but also personal and social aspects of workers' lives.

Hall et al., (2006) and Silla et al., (2005) as cited in Bosmans et al. (26) point out that temporary agency work epitomizes this form of precarity, and is fraught with insecure work conditions, limited training opportunities, and potential social isolation. These vulnerabilities are further heightened in certain populations, such as migrant workers or newcomers, who might lack a full understanding of their employment rights, providing an opportunity for employers to take advantage (26).

The transitory nature of this work often exacerbates job insecurity. Workers on short-term or zero-hour contracts face inherent uncertainties due to fluctuating schedules and the potential for abrupt termination. Zero-hour contracts, offering no guaranteed work hours weekly, represent a particularly harsh form of casual employment, further contributing to underemployment (26, 29).

Women, and particularly mothers, bear the brunt of these precarious employment conditions. They are disproportionately represented in part-time, temporary, and short-term contract roles, for which they are often under-compensated (57, 71). Moreover, they face higher unemployment rates and are under-represented in secure, high-paying occupations (57).

Economic instability and other issues related to precarious employment

Precarious forms of employment, whether involuntary part-time, temporary, informal, or non-standard gig work are associated with uncertain working conditions, financial instability and a variety of other negative issues related to both mental and physical health, and well-being (4, 38, 130). Precarious employment tends to be both insecure and lower paying; however, individuals already experiencing economic deprivation are most at risk for experiencing precarious working conditions, which in turn may promote increased financial instability, thus, setting in motion a destructive cycle of ongoing insecurity (4, 5). Job insecurity, driven by unpredictable work and income conditions, creates and amplifies stress plunging individuals into a state of constant worry about meeting basic needs (6). Consequently, the cycle perpetuates itself: financial instability fosters job insecurity, which in turn exacerbates financial instability, culminating in chronic stress and deprivation. The advent of microwork in the gig economy further amplifies these concerns. Microworkers, subjected to extremely low rates of pay and intense global competition, experience severe financial hardship and job insecurity, casting a grim outlook on their economic stability (130).

Workers in precarious employment face significant obstacles to accessing essential resources, which can directly affect their health. Research by Eisenberg-Guyot et al. (38) has shown that precarious workers often lack access to essential resources such as employer-based health insurance and union membership. This lack of access and lower income levels can have adverse long-term effects on their well-being. The study also highlights the cyclical nature of precarious employment, with higher rates of unemployment leading to more precarious work. Lack of job security and financial stability can also create significant challenges for individuals attempting to secure and maintain stable and adequate housing. Caroz-Armayones and colleagues (28) demonstrated a large and significant, positive association between employment and housing precariousness suggesting that employment precarity may predict housing instability. Thus, precarious employment perpetuates a harmful cycle of instability and deprivation, severely impacting workers' health, and long-term well-being.

Perceived health status and well-being

The intersection of precarious, non-standard, or gig work with self-rated health status forms a complex and concerning pattern, significantly impacting the health of young workers, women, and marginalized populations. While the existing research casts valuable light on the issue, it also indicates the need for more in-depth explorations to unravel the processes linking employment precarity to perceived health. The detrimental effects of precarious employment and non-standard or gig work on self-rated health status were reported by several authors, across a variety of demographics and work contexts (8, 38, 80, 117). For instance, high prevalence of poor self-reported health was demonstrated among young women (aged 18-31) moving from permanent to precarious positions, working in precarious positions over a sustained period and moving from precarious to permanent positions. Interestingly, the highest rates of poor health were reported during the periods of transition, including movement into permanent positions. Further, employment precarity has been associated with requests for extended sick leave, particularly among women, which threatens ongoing employment opportunities and financial instability (80). The life-course perspective used to study long-term effects of poor working conditions and precarious employment by Eisenberg-Guyot and colleagues (38) highlighted the association between poor self-rated health, moderate mental illness or distress and engagement in what were classified as the worst employment quality ‘clusters’ over time. Individuals with lower levels of education or who identified as belonging to racialized populations were the most likely to experience these effects (38).

Feelings of insecurity or instability and lack of control in the employment relationship may also affect sleep, which in turn compromises individual well-being (79). In their 2019 study, Mai and colleagues (79) demonstrated that men experienced more sleep disturbances associated

with precarious or uncertain working conditions than women. The authors suggested that women may feel less insecure in precarious employment given their longer history or lived experience with poorer working conditions and generally have lower expectations. In their study, women reported equal or even higher job satisfaction, despite being engaged in less desirable and lower paying employment. Similarly, Aletraris (2010) as cited in Mai et al. (79) found women to be more satisfied with nonstandard work than men, implying a gender difference in the subjective perceptions of working conditions.

Individuals who are engaged in precarious forms of employment may experience negative impacts on their overall sense of physical well-being and life satisfaction. This may be associated with a sense of instability, and a lack or loss of control (5). Similarly, workers on digital platforms whose short-term, task-based gig work is characterized by uncertainty, may also experience lower levels of perceived health and well-being when compared to established population norms (117).

Mental health

Based on the data included in the present synthesis, the experience of working in precarious, non-standard or gig work environments may be associated with various, negative effects associated with mental health and well-being. Specific risks and experiences vary across social and employment contexts; however, the frequency with which these effects were referenced within the identified data sources suggest both the need for continued research into the links between non-standard employment relationships and mental health and the need for improved employment conditions as well as the creation and implementation of supportive measures, especially for the groups of individuals most at risk for these negative experiences.

Overall, unstable employment trajectories, such as non-standard employment, involuntary part-time, temporary work, unemployment or job loss, and periods of subsidized leave or furlough, pose significant mental health risks, particularly for women and those transitioning to self-employment (6, 14, 15, 65, 93). A particular area of concern is the mental health impact on women engaged in low-quality employment and those transitioning to self-employment, as they face a heightened risk of developing a mental health-related disability (15). Notably, such unstable work conditions increase the risk for various mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, and substance use disorders (65). These risks are amplified by factors such as income instability, feelings of precariousness or failure, and social exclusion (65). Furthermore, Ziersch et al. (139) reported that symptoms of distress have the potential to develop and persist over long periods of time, with the severe distress associated with job loss, prolonged job-seeking, and unemployment leading to increased experience of suicidal ideation among refugee women.

In the context of job insecurity and precarious employment, research has shown that women experiencing employment insecurity tend to experience higher levels of stress when compared to women in secure employment (28, 80, 139). It's important to note that this comparison isn't directly pitted against men but rather against women in more secure positions. Women who are at risk for or already experiencing gender-based violence may find their feelings of depression, anxiety, trauma, and low self-esteem exacerbated by job insecurity or precarity (124).

Moreover, both single and partnered mothers have been identified as experiencing depression, a mental health concern tied to the instability of part-time work (111). However, Roxo and colleagues (2022) made an intriguing observation regarding the differential impact of job complexity on partnered and lone mothers (111). Specifically, higher job complexity was found to increase the likelihood of depression among partnered mothers, while it provided some mental health and self-rated health protection for lone mothers. This suggests that the effect of job complexity may have divergent implications depending on the mothers' familial situation, and it underscores the need for further research to elucidate these relationships.

Furthermore, precarious employment situations disproportionately affect specific groups, exacerbating mental health challenges. Owens and colleagues (93) highlighted this, showing that LGBTQ workers, especially those earning low incomes, in low-wage service sectors, or identifying

as cisgender women or trans individuals, faced higher odds of poor mental health when employed in precarious work environments.

Work-to-family conflict

Unstable, non-standard working conditions seem to act as a catalyst for increased work-to-family conflict (WFC), disproportionately impacting self-employed, underemployed individuals, and those grappling with unpredictable work. Annink and colleagues (10) reported a relationship between self-employment and WFC due to the demands associated with self-directed work including extended working hours, increased work intensity and heightened stress. WFC was most pronounced among self-employed individuals with negative perceptions of their household income and those experiencing reduced job satisfaction and security (10). Part-time, underemployed (i.e., part-time workers who would rather have full-time employment) workers may also experience high levels of WFC (71). This was most evident among part-time, underemployed workers from single-earner households; however, the authors noted no significant differences between men and women in the experience of WFC (71). It is worth noting that they did not consider the impact of children within the household on WFC. The characteristics of non-standard or precarious work, including the instability of income and unpredictability of hours, tend to aggravate WFC in addition to worker health and well-being (136).

Gender-based Violence

While gender-based violence (GBV) (including intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV)) is an acknowledged issue of concern within the context of financial or economic instability, the intersections between GBV, and precarious forms of employment such as gig work (often characterized by financial instability) has not been well studied. The complexity of GBV extends beyond its impact on traditional workplaces and appears within the blurred boundaries of precarious employment and gig work sectors (124, 135). Insights drawn from limited studies, such as Tarshis (124), indicate that, as for traditional workplaces, the effects of IPV or GBV, could affect working conditions for women engaged in precarious or gig work making women less able to complete tasks on time, or reduce their availability to compete for short-term, on-demand work. However, there is a scarcity of direct research within this space to confirm these interpretations.

Notably, the few existing studies largely focus on specific populations like migrant and seasonal farmworkers. Wilson's (135) research reveals that women within these contexts are particularly vulnerable to GBV and IPV due to cultural beliefs, environmental factors, and additional challenges associated with their migratory lifestyle. Language barriers, job insecurity, legal status, and financial constraints were identified as specific stressors aggravating the risk for IPV within in this population. This focus, though crucial, reveals a considerable gap in understanding the broader population of precarious and gig workers.

The differentiation between workplace GBV and IPV or DV in personal spaces becomes more complex within the context of precarious employment and gig work. Gig workers, for example, tend to be socially isolated, with no regular workplace to go to where they are seen and observed by others, and, by virtue of their classification as “self-employed” or “an independent contractor”, have no access to benefits, protections or services granted within the workplace as employees. These unique challenges and vulnerabilities experienced by women engaged in precarious, nonstandard employment relationships could increase their risk for or experience of violence, in part due to their loss of workplace and employee status as well as their financial instability and social isolation.

The intersection of GBV, particularly IPV, with the complexities of precarious employment and gig work remains underexplored. Insights from limited studies suggest nuanced intersections that have significant impacts on survivors' employment-seeking processes and work experiences. These findings, although from narrow perspectives, signal the need for comprehensive research to effectively address GBV within the context of precarious employment (124, 135)

Representations of women in precarious, non-standard, gig work

Women are disproportionately overrepresented by precarious employment (PE) in Canada. The negative impacts associated with PE are most notable among marginalized groups of women, women with children, and women with lower levels of education compared to their male counterparts (5, 32, 40, 57, 111, 136).

Marginalized groups such as BIPOC women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, immigrant women, and mothers are at a severe disadvantage in terms of working conditions, and are most likely to be engaged in precarious or non-standard work (2, 40, 71). It should be noted that the literature to inform observations around women in non-standard or precarious employment is not substantial. Most literature reports outcomes with limited disaggregation and much of the current literature fails to discuss the complex relationships between many variables regarding the experiences of women, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ women, mothers, migrant, and newcomer women in Canada. While the experiences of women in rural and remote areas is of particular interest in the Canadian context, these were represented in only a few studies that suggest that women are limited to PE due to geographical factors such as spatial labour immobility, factors related to childcare, and transportation (4, 106, 135).

Newcomer and Immigrant Women. In Canada, only 21% of women are identified as racialized, and occupy 30% of home support jobs, or other jobs that are deemed "low-skill" (40, 106). Canada's immigration system is not set up to adequately support women as workers, and often leaves immigrant women deprived of their fundamental rights, and prevented from accessing quality employment opportunities (87, 106, 110).

Newcomer and immigrant women are often forced to rely on government services and supports for employment funding and housing leads, with little to no guidance when it comes to applying and interviewing for jobs (63, 87, 139). Rather, women are often viewed as an appendage to their husbands, expected to sacrifice their independence (87, 116). While newcomer and immigrant men are more often encouraged to obtain accreditation of their foreign training and seek career employment, women are expected to take on domestic, household, or "survival" roles (40, 87). If a newcomer woman is fortunate enough to obtain employment, her positions are usually subsidized - the employer pays half, and the government pays the other half (115). The issue with employment subsidization is that is typically dismissive of requests for promotions or advancements in employee roles (37, 115).

Precarious or non-standard work arrangements are used as strategies by employers to minimize company costs, which deprives workers of protections and benefits such as sick leave (116). Often, women in PE do not have a labour contract, which eliminates the option to renew for residency and makes them even more vulnerable (110). This marginalization has significant mental and physical health impacts on immigrant women – their credentials, skills and experiences may be rejected, and they face ongoing barriers to accessing stable employment such as discrimination, racism, communication barriers, citizenship or immigration status, and a lack of knowledge and access to professional networks (131, 139). In addition to limiting professional development and career choice, these barriers may result in feelings of isolation and social exclusion (37).

Mothers. Women with children are more likely to be in PE compared to their male counterparts, with single mothers being more likely to have multiple jobs to support living expenses such as housing and food (2, 4, 111). Having more than one child reduces a mother's likelihood of stable employment by over 30%, and as of 2020, the average annual earnings of mothers decreased by 11% (57, 136). Moreover, motherhood emphasizes the domestic roles that women are expected to undertake - caring for the children, minding the home, being flexible in every aspect of their being to manage her family, whereas this is not the expectation for men (4, 111).

Impact of Education. Education levels are negatively correlated with income levels, and women with low education levels are more likely to experience PE (4,

28). Only 35% of women with no education qualifications are in permanent, full-time jobs (5). With the same level of college education, BIPOC and immigrant women are more likely to get lower quality jobs and lower wages compared to white women (5, 28, 64).

What is 'gig work'?

We understand gig work as something arising from the traditional concept of a "gig" – that is, a job or task performed as part of a short-term, contract or transaction with no commitment for an ongoing relationship (14, 31, 50, 138). Gig work is similar, in many ways, to what has commonly been referred to as casual work, in that it is provided "as needed" or "on demand" (31, 50, 138). "On demand" labour may be attached to a project, task, or even micro-task (14, 55) and is viewed as a separate commodity (50) rather than as part of a complex project or job/position associated with some combination of time, skill, or experience provided by a qualified individual. Task-based gigs break down or "unbundle" projects or jobs into series of small component tasks each of which may be completed by various gig workers each working short-term 'gigs' paid by task not by the hour (14, 31, 50), a process that may be facilitated using digital platforms. Gig work is often reported to be low-paying, financially unstable, and unpredictable with poor working conditions that result in high rates of turnover especially among women (14, 31, 50).

Definitions offered within the literature emerge from a range of perspectives including labour market statistics and research, reporting of economic indicators and predictors, and employment classification related to taxation, for example. However, traditional labour statistics or economic indicators that assess participation in a labour market based on standardized employment relationships or number of hours worked may not be well suited to understanding or assessing gig work (14). Similarly, definitions created to facilitate classification for taxation purposes may not capture the extent or nature of participation in the gig economy (14, 63). In Canada, for the purposes of taxation, gig workers, who have neither a predictable work schedule nor income, are considered "unincorporated self-employed individuals" (63). However, the classification of gig workers as self-employed may also serve to augment specific vulnerabilities experienced by individuals working in this type of non-standard employment.

In their report entitled, Understanding the Nature and Experience of Gig Work in Canada, Ziegler and colleagues (138) proposed the following definition of gig work that avoids the use of economic indicators or taxation classifications:

"A category of work, or work arrangement, deemed to be non-standard or informal compared to a standard employment relationship. This alternative work fills a need by providing access to labour (for employers) and flexibility and access to the labour market (for workers). While people at all socioeconomic levels can participate in gig work, it is characterized as having uncertain future business activities, being minor or casual in nature, lacking options for career or personal advancement, and lacking in formalized protection for the worker and employers."(138, p.9)

Understanding the Platform-mediated experience

Platform-based gig work

Short-term, casual work that fulfills the definition for gig work provided by Ziegler and colleagues (138) does not require the worker to use a digital platform for participation. Platform-based gig work is only one type of possible gig work (50); however, digital platforms have contributed to the proliferation and availability of task-based gig work opportunities (138). Within the broader sharing economy, digital platforms function to facilitate specific types of transactions. In the case of gig work, digital platforms sell labour as a commodity (50). While labour-based platforms vary depending on the tasks provided, the target markets for services and other technological and legal factors, in the simplest of terms, they all function to mediate a relationship between the client and the labour (50, 138). The platform may act as mediator in all aspects of work including hiring, client matching,

What is micro-tasking?

Micro-tasking refers to a type of online gig work in which tasks have been fragmented to the smallest possible unit and are managed through platforms that specialize in accessing the global labour market through crowdsourcing (e.g., Upwork or Amazon Mechanical Turk) (130). Workers bid for task-based jobs and, if accepted, establish a contract between the person requiring the service and the labourer only the length of time it takes to complete the micro-task for the agreed-upon price (130). Work, therefore, comprises a series of extremely short, temporary contracts that may be no more than minutes in length. All resources required for task completion, usually a digital device connected to the Internet, are provided by the worker, meaning that micro-taskers often compete globally for contracts that can be completed anywhere (130).

setting terms and conditions, supervision & discipline, and payment (50, 138). Platform mediation does not typically extend to management of the client/labour relationship, which may promote flexibility in task completion and hours worked thereby, seemingly offering some worker autonomy (110, 138). However, the flexibility and decision-making autonomy available to workers is dependent upon the degree of platform management or control imposed throughout the labour transaction (110).

It is also worth noting that specific types of platform mediators have dominated research and discussion in the context of gig work and the sharing economy. Ride and delivery services like Uber, for example, have dominated both public and academic discourses examining the workings of the gig economy (125). However, like many transport and delivery services, Uber is a male-dominated service (117, 125) that is not representative of the experiences of women with active profiles listed on platforms that offer a broad range of services within highly feminized labour sectors (e.g. domestic or care work, customer service, translation, administration, sales & marketing) (61). Although specialized platforms operating within spaces offering domestic care services, such as Care.com, list substantially more active profiles than Uber (5.3 million vs. 160,000 in 2014) (125), there is very little published literature specific to the experience of the mostly female gig workers participating within those spaces (61, 75). As James (61) noted, in an extensive literature addressing the gig economy including more than 9.7 million articles, less than 1% were female-centred leaving gendered experiences of platform-based gig work grossly under-researched.

Exploring the gendered experience of platform-mediated gig work

Despite the increasing number of women reported to be engaged in gig work via digital platforms, very few studies have focused on the experiences of women within the context of platform-mediated work (61, 75). Although the number of profiles registered in many online platforms may be split fairly evenly between men and women overall, there remain clear differences associated in gendered patterns of participation (16). Women tend to engage in different types of work, or tasks than men – participating more frequently in customer service, administration and clerical support, legal work, translation tasks, writing services, and sales & marketing, in addition to domestic and care services (16, 61, 117, 125). Women appear to register a greater number of hours worked, but earn less per hour than their male counterparts, even when comparing the same work or tasks performed by individuals with similar reported educational backgrounds, previous work experience and feedback scores recorded by the platform (16, 43). This remains true, even for those types of work that typically employ more women than men or when women themselves set their hourly rates (16, 43). Tasks from within traditionally male-dominated environments may actually pay more for completion than tasks typically associated with women or considered women's work. For women who have experience in male-dominated work environments, completion of "male tasks" results in increased pay (75).

If women still make less money for more work, why are increasing numbers of women engaging in platform-based gig work?

Gig work is often framed in positive terms, as an opportunity to provide flexible and accessible means to generate income that supports worker autonomy (16, 55, 69). For mothers responsible for the care of young children, the option to choose your own work, hours and even location supports their efforts to balance the need to generate income with fulfilling domestic and childcare roles and responsibilities (61, 117). Mothers who choose to engage in gig work for this reason may not otherwise have been able to access affordable childcare options (61). While one might understand the utility of platform-based work flexibility in this context, it does little to support movement away from social constructions that position mothers as the primary caregivers within a traditional framework of domestic roles.

Apart from the 'flexibilization' of employment, for some women who have been unable to find stable full-time employment, or who need extra income to supplement earnings from low-paying jobs, platform-based work is an increasingly common solution (16, 55, 73, 117, 138). Reported reasons for engaging in non-standard or informal labour have included lack of stable employment opportunities, need to compensate for loss of work or reduction in pay, personal illness, separation from partner, or previous job-related stress, bullying or harassment (61, 73). Newcomer or refugee women who may need quick access to a source of income might find platform-based work appealing as platforms often have minimal requirements for information pertaining to residency, qualifications, or background on sign-up and, in the case of micro-tasking, can be performed anywhere with relatively minimal equipment or resource requirements to be assumed by the worker (110, 130).

Gender neutrality in platform-based work

Platforms, or those who create and maintain them, claim that platform environments are intended to be inclusive and are gender neutral or "gender agnostic" (75). This claim, however, does not reveal anything about the experiences of women working within these so-called gender neutral mechanisms and how gender impacts important elements of the worker experience including the triadic relationship between the person requesting the job (client), the mediating platform (with its gender neutral algorithms) and the woman seeking to provide labour and generate income, or who gains access to more, better or higher paying tasks or gigs and how this is achieved (61).

So-called gender-neutral or gender-agnostic platforms do not acknowledge existing gender inequities within their systems. Platform algorithms routinely generate key, management-style decisions (e.g. matching client to worker, dispatching, rating systems, visibility on the platform) that do not take into consideration the lived experience of gender in context and, therefore serve to reproduce inequity and marginalize women gig workers (16, 75). Platform algorithms work within a system of information that includes worker profiles, worker visibility and availability, and client ratings and recommendations, all of which have the potential to be affected by women's gendered realities. For example, gendered roles and responsibilities for child or family care shape women's ability to compete for gigs posted on a platform (61, 131). While platform gig work may offer flexibility to accommodate these demands, women who assume traditional familial roles may also have less time to spend both competing for and completing gigs. With less available time and fewer ratings being generated, their online visibility decreases as does access to gigs and women are effectively penalized for the need to balance gig work with other, more traditional, gendered roles (61). It has been suggested that, within the gender-neutral platform environment, the ideal worker remains the able-bodied male worker, whose time is flexible, and unencumbered by caring responsibilities (131).

In addition to the experience of racial discrimination, newcomer or migrant women employed as domestic workers via care-based platforms may be placed into situations that pose a risk to their health and safety. Working conditions are often poor, and no training is provided to workers who may be asked to provide specialized care for clients with illness or reduced mobility (110). Care-based platforms are responsible for paying workers, often bi-weekly, to which they may apply penalties if the client reports the worker has defaulted on a service or been late for a job. The penalties applied could include pay deductions or

restricting access to jobs for a period of time (110). Workers have little recourse if the client does not offer acceptable working conditions, refuses to pay, or submits a bad review and carework platforms tend to discourage worker complaints. Complaints to the platform about harassment or poor working conditions or missing pay could not only jeopardize access to income, but also their residency status and work permits (110).

Assumptions that platforms function as inclusive, gender-neutral environments may further augment women's marginalization by increasing the risk for bias and harassment (50, 75). In a recent Australian study of 1,015 platform-based gig workers (59.9% women), the authors reported that overall, 36.9% of respondents experienced a "safety incident" over the past 12 months the most common of which fell into the category of "violence and aggression" (18.7%) and 9.7% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment during the performance of gig work perpetrated by clients, customers, or passengers (117). Respondents who identified platform-based gig work as their main source of income were more likely to report having experienced sexual harassment (14.2%), compared to those whose main source of income was non-gig

Commodifying latent resources: Making unpaid labour pay.

Digital platforms may provide opportunities for women to translate their unpaid, often invisible, domestic skills and experience into a marketable commodity, while having the flexibility to negotiate a balanced schedule between paid and unpaid labour within their households and sustain their gendered domestic roles on their own terms. Although high valued, this balance is often difficult to achieve (110, 131) especially if gig tasks cannot be incorporated directly into the things women already do within the home (83). For newcomer women working on a food app in Sweden, providing home-cooked "ethnic" food items, food preparation (in addition to creating a professional kitchen and a scaled-up food production environment in the home) blurred many of the lines between the private spaces of home and family and the professional work environment. Similarly, Rodriguez and colleagues (110) reported perceived advantages home care and domestic work for recent migrants – offering immediacy and ease of access to work in addition to flexibility and autonomy to support the ability of women in maintaining their expected roles within their families. Unfortunately, platforms often require an on-demand availability pushing workers to accept multiple jobs that place additional strain on worker time and resources (e.g., travel time & costs, or training) (110).

Platform-mediated gig work does little to make women's productive labour more visible. Workers and their labour remain largely invisible to either the client (131), the platform (110) or both (83). While platforms claim inclusivity and neutrality, gender, race, immigrant status, and class inequities are still experienced by workers (110, 83). The "ethnic" home-cooked food app described by Webster and Zhang (131) is marketed to newcomer women as a business opportunity based on the assumption that newcomer women have a certain level of expertise in cooking and that they can balance this high level of expertise with "entrepreneurship". The "exotic" or "ethnic" other is then used to advertise the value of this food on the app (131). However, the food app (called "Yummy" for the purposes of the case study) also featured some important differences that address a few of the issues arising in platform-mediated gig work:

- The platform invests significant resources into training "chefs" (e.g., marketing, business planning, food testing, health and safety).
- Provides a mix of virtual and face-to-face interaction with platform representatives/management and facilitates networking between Yummy chefs.

The platform "management" view their work as a "training school". The intent is that chefs should graduate and move on as independent entrepreneurs. While the learning environment associated with this food app is highly valued by participants, and interaction with management is crucial to the chefs' success, there were still aspects that were experienced as problematic. Most of the platforms' costs were borne by the home chefs – the most significant of these were associated with creating and sustaining professional kitchens at home as well as those associated with testing and scaling up recipes for production (131).

work (8.7%). This difference was statistically significant (p = .009) (117). Overall, the authors noted that full-time platform workers are more vulnerable to "safety incidents" including injury, illness, violence and aggression, sexual harassment, and racial vilification (117). Workers experiencing sexual harassment "generally did not report" the incidents and those few who did report received no support from the platform mediator (117). A recent report of survey results focusing on gig workers in the United States revealed that non-White workers were more likely than those who identified as White to experience unwanted sexual advances during the completion of a gig (24% vs. 13%) (47). Unfortunately, the authors do not offer an analysis of the survey responses around sexual advances or harassment on the basis of gender.

Lack of supports or protection built into the platform design increases the risk for violence and exposes women as easy targets (75). In the absence of information, formal supports, or official guidelines from the platform mediator around what to do should harassment occur during the completion of a gig, women report either creating their own set of personal guidelines to use within the client/worker relationship or minimizing the encounter, "brushing off" the harassment (75). Ma and colleagues (75) noted that creating personal guidelines leave workers feeling vulnerable. Without the official endorsement of the mediating platform, clients do not necessarily feel the need to comply with worker-based guidelines and may attempt to pressure the worker or challenge the use of these personalized measures. In a system where the platform business wields the power of the client-based surveillance and rating system and can change the rules of engagement and compensation at any time, rather than risk poor ratings, women may 'brush off' harassment (14, 75), thereby compromising personal safety in exchange for access to income.

Overall, the creators of platforms do not seem to include features, such as options for between-worker communication, formal guidance, procedures or supports for workers experiencing violence or harassment, options for worker protection, or access to other resources (e.g. training) that could promote inclusion and help women to be safe and supported within the system (75). In some cases where women platform workers act independently to create improved between-worker communication or find and create resources to support worker and client safety, their efforts are not valued, and they may find themselves at a further disadvantage in the system as the time taken to create resources makes them less visible to potential clients (75). For workers on a single platform (See Box: Commodifying Latent Resources), interactions, including face-to-face encounters were crucial in building strong team relationships and trust between platform-based workers and management (131).

Vulnerabilities associated with (platform-based) gig working

As a type of precarious, non-standard employment relationship, platform-based gig workers share similar risks and vulnerabilities with individuals engaged in other forms of precarious employment (14). These include vulnerabilities related to the precarity of short-term, temporary gig work, including those related to worker classification and loss or lack of workplace, lack of access to formal benefits and support, and demands placed on personal resources. In addition, workers experience vulnerabilities related to the structure, function and balance of power established within platforms as well as the nature of platform-based gig work itself (e.g., socially dispersed, isolating, invisible).

Loss of workplace through (mis)classification

An important source of vulnerability for all gig workers is the way in which workers are classified, in terms of employment relationships, for the purposes of policy, taxation or research. Gig workers, whether they work within the sharing economy via platform mediation or are precariously employed in other contexts, are most often classified as "independent contractors" or as some version of "self-employed" worker (14, 30). They are not considered to be employees working within a standard employment relationship (SER). The classification "self-employed" is a very ambiguous label that is applied to a diversity of workers from a wide variety of contexts. However, anyone classified in this way is generally excluded from

benefits, compensations or protections made available to individuals as part of an SER, as well as any workplace-employee benefit agreements (14, 69, 130). Given the ambiguity in the definition of self-employment, and its application, it is often difficult to determine exactly who is counted within each category of self-employment or independent contract work and the impact this has on access to rights, protections, and compensations across various jurisdictions (2, 69).

However, for the most part, self-employed, or casual, temporary, part-time (precarious) workers are not eligible to collect from the Employment Insurance (EI) system in Canada (either provincial or federal), as they do not pay into the EI program and rarely meet other eligibility criteria based on length of employment or hours worked (29). In addition, they are rarely entitled to any social benefits or protections offered through workplace plans (29) (e.g., health care plans, sick leave, labour protections offered through union membership, planning/providing for future security). In Ontario, there is an EI special benefits program available to self-employed persons, which can provide access to benefits in return for paying a premium; however, for many gig workers classified as self-employed, the high premium rates are simply too expensive relative to their income (29, 69). The majority of gig workers are not highly paid and report making less than workers who have stable employment (55).

With no access to EI benefits, or planning/provision for future security (e.g., retirement plans and savings), low-income, precariously employed gig workers have little resource capacity to support them if/when their unstable, short-term employment comes to an end (87). Additionally, for women gig workers, the absence of maternity and other paid leaves places additional strain on limited personal or familial resources (61). In the absence of access to a social safety net, self-employed or independently contracted gig workers must rely heavily on informal support systems, such as extended family members and friends and many may struggle with material deprivation, limiting their abilities to maintain secure housing, meet food costs, care for their health and plan for future security (69).

By (mis)classifying gig workers as self-employed or independent contractors, businesses (like platform mediators within the sharing economy) create a non-standard employment relationship in which the cost and risk for participation is borne by the worker (106, 130, 135, 138). The use of this classification serves the interests of the platform business in that it reduces legal commitments & responsibilities as well as costs associated with employment (2, 50, 69, 110, 135, 138). The business can use this nonstandard relationship to contract labour on a short-term, as-needed basis and is not held accountable for worker protections including those associated with minimum wage, workplace safety and antidiscrimination (14, 135). Independent contractors or self-employed gig workers must bear most of the expense associated with doing business and they bear the losses should their engagement in gig work be unsuccessful (14).

Structure, Function and Balance of Power in Platform-based Gig Work

Worker vulnerability is further complicated by the triadic nature of the relationship between the platform business, the platform client and the self-employed or contracted worker which is almost entirely under the control of the platform business (61, 130, 138). Platform businesses may reject requests for information or proposals from workers, change their algorithms, or even withdraw their services entirely at any time (50, 83, 138).

Access to platform-based work is generally governed by sets of metrics that are outside of the skills and experiences required to perform the tasks for which workers are contracted. While platform-based gig work is socially dispersed, isolating and often invisible (14), platforms do create a type of limited and very individual within-program visibility for the purposes of getting the worker noticed by both potential clients and the platform algorithm(s) (125). Workers are rewarded not only for the effectiveness, polished appearance of their profile and efforts in self-marketing to create within-system visibility, but also their degree of responsiveness, for always being connected/reachable, being comfortable in digital environments including private messaging, having a high degree of personal flexibility to accommodate "on-demand" requests, and the online ratings that they receive for jobs completed (125, 130).

As noted previously, digital platforms are not employers with employees. Instead, platforms are mediators that function via application or messaging service and usually have no direct relationship with either clients or workers. Information provision is lopsided (110, 138). Workers provide information to the platform to register and to complete profiles and potential clients receive information to assess and filter potential worker matches on the basis of their profile, past ratings, or logged performance metrics (e.g., digital evidence such as keystrokes or mouse clicks). Workers, however, lack the information to assess and filter potential clients in the same way (130). In addition, workers usually have no opportunity for training or professional development and may be thrust into situations for which they are unprepared and unsupported (110, 130). There are often conflicting and excessive demands placed on the worker, problematic issues around worker health and safety and little recognition or support for worker rights (26). Even when workers are aware of their rights and can file complaints or raise concerns, they may be discouraged from doing so as complaining could affect ratings, impact their ability to access tasks, or threaten the status of already vulnerable workers (26, 110, 139).

The asymmetries of information within the digital platform are not easily countered from other sources, such as networking between platform workers or organizing groups to support worker rights within the system (50, 138). Gig workers are mostly invisible to each other, and to clients (14, 138). Workforces attached to digital platforms tend to be dispersed with individuals working in isolation, at many different tasks, for multiple clients, and lacking the community or sense of belonging created within the traditional workplace (14, 130, 138). Working alone and being isolated is normalized in platform work, as is the creeping spread of work engagement throughout the lives of workers, encompassing all possible places and times in support of on-demand availability (130). Gig work, particularly micro-task work, may be trivialized as frivolous or meaningless (just a side gig), while remaining largely invisible, with very little sense that there is a real person providing the labour required to complete many digitally-mediated tasks (30,

Asymmetries of Power in Platform-mediated Gig Work

The classification of gig workers as self-employed creates an essential power shift by denying workers access to benefits and protections commonly available under standard employment relationships while simultaneously subjecting them to a new set of digitally-imposed rules (64). Rules imposed by the platform can be changed without notice or explanation and often result in fluctuating or reduced pay (52, 83). The goal of a platform company is not simply to match a supply of independent contractors with demand for labour over time. It is also to control the supply to meet demand by regulating the behaviour of workers. To accomplish this goal, platforms use some version of algorithmic management systems to shape worker choices and allocate the flow of work (52, 64). One of the key features of algorithmic management systems is the asymmetric provision of information to workers. For instance, gig workers may not know what information is used to create pricing or pay systems, the value of a gig, specifics about gig location or accessibility, or client information before they accept (52, 64). Workers who attempt to "game the system" and track which postings lead to better jobs, clients or locations are often unsuccessful as "gaming the system" takes place within the technical control of the algorithm which monitors rates and patterns of job acceptance (51).

The platform company- contractor relationship is further complicated by the presence of a third party to which the platform has granted special significance using reputation or reward systems (64). Worker-client interaction is mediated by a surveillance system of client ratings or reputation, sometimes supplemented by other strategies such as online activity monitoring (52). Platforms may employ behavioural control strategies borrowed from gaming environments, including badge and level reward systems as well as incentives or sanctions to encourage desired behaviours from workers (52). However, it is not clear exactly how client ratings are incorporated into algorithmic control systems. It should be noted that clients are not subject to ratings and workers have no way to influence worker/client matches recommended by platform algorithms. Therefore, gig workers could, over time, receive repeated recommendations to work for clients who rate them well, but treat them poorly and should they refuse, they may be penalized for doing so (52).

50, 61, 130). Workers in the study by Rodriguez and colleagues (110) reported that the lack of any direct relationship with a real employer left them feeling anonymous, like ghosts, who were invisible and unprotected. One noted, "*it's like having disposable workers, if anything happens to you, it's your problem*…" (110, p.629). In addition, within the largely invisible spaces of platform-mediated gig work, vulnerabilities associated with intersectionalities or marginalizing identities (including the risk for bias, harassment and violence) may be replicated or amplified (110, 131).

Employment impacts and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it notable changes to women's employment status globally. Early in the pandemic, a general trend emerged showing women experienced a more pronounced employment decline compared to men (7), and this appears to have persisted throughout the crisis. UN Women and ILOSTAT data revealed a considerable loss of employment among women, with 29.4 million women aged 25 or older losing their employment between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2020 (3, 128). Of note, however, is that more women shifted from being employed to being outside or detached from the labour force, which contributed to a 1.7 times greater proportionate loss for women than men in various countries (3). While some researchers observed substantial loss in employment among men – even in excess of losses recorded among women -- they also reported significant changes in the ways in which women engaged in the labour market (27). For instance, there were substantial increases in the demand for part-time work or for paid/unpaid leave, especially among working mothers, thereby potentially affecting their professional productivity, efficiency, and progression (27). In general, women were over-represented in low-paid, part-time and temporary employment types, as well as in "unsafe jobs" within feminized employment sectors (e.g. healthcare, domestic and caring services, retail, hospitality and entertainment) (13, 18, 19, 49). Overall, employment and income loss were notably highest in those labour sectors with a significant representation of women (3, 32).

Understanding patterns of employment and economic impact

As more women moved into lower paying part-time, short-term work (STW) (or disengaged from the labour force entirely), the risk for financial instability and poverty increased (3, 32). More women, seeking flexibility and options for remote work, engaged in non-standard employment; however, these types of employment relationships often fall outside the protections afforded by social safety nets including those programs created specifically to alleviate the economic impacts associated with the pandemic. Case studies from Germany and Italy spotlight the exclusion of women from these schemes, unmasking gendered assumptions ingrained in these policies. These assumptions typically presume that women are secondary earners, their jobs merely supplement household income, and they shoulder primary caregiving responsibilities, all of which can disadvantage them in terms of coverage (32). As STW schemes concluded, women, especially those burdened with childcare responsibilities in sectors still affected by the crisis, faced a higher risk of unemployment, rendering their economic position increasingly precarious (32). Many workers within the gig economy had to choose between income and risk of exposure to the virus (138), while struggling with the effects of increasing isolation and financial uncertainty.

In addition, effects of job loss, or changes in employment type or status were experienced by women within a complex set of intersecting conditions or contexts. Single mothers, for instance, showed significant declines in employment (7, 45), a pattern echoed among married women with children, particularly in Japan (46). This trend suggests that increased caring responsibilities associated with the pandemic led to considerable employment declines for women, especially mothers. Geographical disparities also added to the complexity of employment changes for women. Jobs most adaptable to remote work were predominantly situated in metropolitan areas, leaving women in rural locales, particularly single mothers, in an increasingly precarious position (18, 45). Struggling to balance income generation and

childcare responsibilities, women in rural or remote areas faced additional challenges due to limited resources and poor internet connectivity, which restricted their ability to pivot to remote or digital work (45).

Women who identified as belonging to groups experiencing marginalization, such as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) mothers, for example, experienced increased economic and financial instability, and were more likely to face higher rates of poverty and unemployment (45). For these mothers, the financial stress from job losses or layoffs intersected with the struggle to meet basic needs and the need to balance income and childcare (45). Racialized and newcomer or immigrant women, who were already disproportionately represented in temporary and unstable roles, found themselves facing increased job insecurity and a lack of employment continuity (40). Frontline, "casual" roles within the caring sector, often filled by migrant and ethnic minority women, were associated with increased risk for exposure to the virus, highlighting the critical intersection of precarious employment and health risks (18). Overcrowded living conditions and reliance on public transit, conditions often experienced by migrant or refugee women, further increased risk for COVID-19 (19).

Furthermore, the interplay of race and education added another dimension to these shifts in women's employment status. As an example, Black women were found to be significantly more exposed to the disease while also being less likely to work remotely, resulting in a higher rate of job instability (22). Less-educated women and newcomer women encountered severe job losses, signalling an uneven brunt of economic hardship (19). Similarly, less-educated women, often employed in essential roles, faced an increased exposure risk, suggesting a gradient of COVID-19 risk across different demographic groups (19).

Issues related to health and well-being

The shift to remote, digital, part-time, and often nonstandard work during the COVID-19 pandemic has been associated with increased risk for decreases in physical and mental health and well-being, particularly among individuals who are most susceptible to stressors associated with income instability (35, 44, 53). The sudden and widespread transition to remote work has exposed many to physical health threats, such as suboptimal diets and harmful behaviors, while concurrently sparking an upsurge in mental health issues (15, 64). Negative impacts on mental well-being have been observed more acutely among individuals with either pre-existing health conditions or who are engaged in precarious employment situations, and include increasing feelings of strain, concentration difficulties, and negative emotional states (39, 53). These effects are notable among women who are experiencing unstable employment conditions, including those who have been furloughed or have turned to telework as a means of supplementing income (39).

Women have experienced amplified pressures associated with balancing employment and economic-based responsibilities with their responsibilities as caregivers and mothers. The tension created around these conflicting sets of responsibilities has contributed to escalating levels of stress, decreases in perceived mental health, and has fostered feelings of inadequacy (3, 35, 39, 44, 45). In addition, remote work carries with it an inherent sense of isolation and limited social interactions, exacerbating feelings of anxiety and alienation, particularly among women (35).

The risk for and experience of violence

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound societal impacts, with significant implications for precarious employment, gig work, and gender-based violence (GBV). With the implementation of lockdown measures, a surge in GBV, specifically intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV), was observed, often associated with enforced cohabitation and economic stressors (3, 11, 13, 20, 21, 24). Albrecht et al. (3) and Arenas-Arroyo et al. (11) noted that women were particularly susceptible to IPV, spending more time with potentially abusive partners under lockdown. This scenario was further complicated by financial stress, with job losses and decreased income escalating domestic violence instances. Women who reported significant financial impact were more likely to report higher levels of domestic violence and family stress, an effect that financial transfers were unable to mitigate (20, 21).

While the exposure to increased domestic violence was initially associated with changes in employment or decreased financial stability, studies by Béland and colleagues reported (20, 21) no direct correlation. Instead, it was financial insecurity and concerns around maintaining social ties during lockdown that were significantly linked to increased GBV (20, 21).

Bhalotra et al. (24) highlighted an alarming paradox: while lockdown led to an increase in DV-related distress, it decreased reporting to the police. The reasons for this include isolation, mobility restrictions, and proximity to the perpetrator. Moreover, both male and female job losses played a role, with male job loss triggering violence, and female job loss reducing the likelihood of reporting the abuse. These findings were in contrast with the common belief that job loss would lead to an increase in economic violence; instead, the primary manifestations were physical and psychological, potentially due to the increased stress and lower income associated with the pandemic (24).

The dynamics of GBV were not confined to households alone. Precarious employment conditions during the pandemic, including gig work, were associated with an increase in GBV incidents. For women working remotely, the change in working conditions did not alleviate the situation; instances of bullying, stalking, and mobbing translated into the virtual workspace, further highlighting the pervasive nature of GBV under the pandemic conditions (35, 42).

Gender inequity and the 'she-cession' of COVID-19

The employment and related economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted existing (and in some cases worsening) gender inequities within the labour market in Canada and elsewhere in the Global North. Job loss and/or weakening ties to standard employment relationships within the job market, in addition to an exacerbation of the gender wage gap, may have undermined any progress made toward gender equity or women's economic empowerment (7, 13, 32, 34). Lockdowns, travel restrictions, and social distancing strategies have led to significant job losses in feminized sectors, such as caring, service, education, tourism and hospitality, where women's employment is highest (3, 13, 34, 49). Self-employed women were a third more likely to experience an income loss due to the pandemic than their male counterparts (49). Moreover, women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which make up more than 30% of SMEs worldwide, have faced substantial challenges, including downsizing or complete shutdown (13). The disparity in pandemic impacts between self-employed men and women could widen the gender gap in self-employment, reflecting the systemic shock of the pandemic (49).

The term 'she-cession', coined to describe the COVID-19 pandemic recession, is intended to highlight not only the disproportionate burden of job loss and economic instability experienced by women, but also the conditions that support the experience of these inequities (3, 7, 13). The 'she-cession' is characterized as a multifaceted crisis that has compounded systemic inequities within our economic systems, hitting women in precarious employment and gig work especially hard. While it mirrors the patterns of previous recessions in some ways, its distinct impact on women, especially in terms of increased household responsibilities and the severe blow to feminized sectors, marks it out as a unique downturn (7, 13, 19). Stay-at-home directives, coupled with school closures and the loss of dependent services for many has been accompanied by a resurgence of traditional domestic roles, often imposing upon women an expectation to adjust their professional commitments to meet household demands arising from public health directives (*see discussion below*). The resulting impacts on women, particularly those experiencing unstable or precarious employment, are unique to the conditions created within the COVID-19 pandemic (19, 42).

Working from home and the gendered experience of domestic burden

The advent of this global health crisis has substantially reshaped both employment dynamics and domestic responsibilities with women bearing the brunt of these changes. With the shift to work-from-home (WFH) and closure of schools and social services due to social distancing measures, an uneven distribution of unpaid labour and domestic responsibilities became more pronounced

underscoring pre-existing gender disparities (3, 19, 42).

One such systemic gender disparity is the unequal distribution of childcare responsibilities. The sudden increase in childcare needs, brought on by widespread school closures, severely hampered women's capability to buffer familial job losses, a role they've also been compelled to play in past recessions (7). This is amplified by the weight of traditional gender norms that position women in the role of primary caregivers (3, 35, 41, 42). The division of childcare and household labour remains skewed, with mothers more often interrupting their paid work to support gendered domestic roles, than men (3) and either reducing work hours or exiting the labour force entirely in order to fulfill these increased caregiving responsibilities (7,57). These progressively more unstable or precarious employment conditions have been exacerbated by an erosion of employment rights for pregnant women and new mothers during the pandemic (35).

On the surface, WFH arrangements appeared to support a combination of paid and unpaid work that would facilitate a balance between domestic and childcare responsibilities and the need to continue in paid employment; however, the transition to remote, at-home, working conditions created a "double burden" for women, leading to higher levels of stress, longer working hours and significant challenges to productivity (3, 27, 34, 35, 39, 41). This psychological burden was particularly pronounced among women who had to navigate the blurred boundaries between professional responsibilities and private life, with the pressure to perform domestic duties during work hours (35, 39). For many women, WFH arrangements, or teleworking, was perceived as a necessity to balance traditional caregiving roles with the need for employment. But, working from home also created issues with productivity, efficiency, reduced engagement with the labour force, reduced employment opportunities and issues with career advancement (7, 19, 27, 32). The perpetuation of traditional gender roles and the inequalities of unpaid labour division within households highlighted "time poverty" as a significant obstacle to women's full participation in the economy and exacerbated socio-economic disparities (13, 45).

Of course, the experiences and impacts of the pandemic vary according to cultural, social, and economic contexts. For instance, there was a significant difference in time spent on childcare by women in different European countries, indicating that the impact of the pandemic on gender equality varies across nations (3). Therefore, responses and solutions to these issues must be context-specific and tailored to address the unique needs of different groups.

Looking past the pandemic crisis

While the pandemic has posed significant challenges, it also offers an opportunity for critical reassessment of societal norms and structures. It presents a watershed moment to implement more equitable, inclusive, and resilient systems that recognize and address the gender inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic. Women have disproportionately borne the burden of caregiving during the pandemic, emphasizing the need to change societal attitudes towards women's roles (42). In addition, it is critical to note that changes to women's employment status, particularly shifts from full-time to part-time work, increased instability in employment (including engagement in non-standard or precarious forms of employment) and job loss, could have long-lasting effects on women's economic status. These changes may not only affect women's immediate income and employment relationships but also long-term career progression and economic empowerment.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the public health strategies implemented to contain it heralded a ubiquitous shift to teleworking or working-from-home, a trend anticipated to endure in the post-pandemic world (3, 7). As women have disproportionately borne the burden of childcare and domestic labour within the home, this flexible work arrangement might seem to ease the struggle of balancing competing demands (7), and unsurprisingly, a higher preference for telecommuting among women has been observed (3). Yet, research cautions that this change can be a double-edged sword. While telecommuting does offer a certain degree of flexibility, it is also linked to intensified feelings of isolation and has been associated with negative impacts on mental well-being (53). Consequently, there is a call for supportive measures like peer support groups and

access to work networks to mitigate these potentially adverse effects (53). Policies to protect mental health and provide stable assistance during crises are needed, along with labour market reforms to minimize the vulnerability of people in precarious jobs (44).

Women who lost employment during the pandemic are more likely to leave the labour force permanently or shift to part-time work (7). This significant departure from the workforce could have long-term repercussions, as the research suggests that it takes almost two decades for women's relative wages to return to their pre-recession level (7). Post-pandemic recovery plans need to consider these long-term impacts on women's career progression and earnings, to mitigate widening income inequalities and promote gender equality (7, 42). Mitigating policies must be implemented, including initiatives that focus on skills development and training opportunities for women, and promoting their empowerment and equality within the labour force (42).

Practice-Based Environmental Scan

As part of the environmental scan, we received responses from eight organizations included in our integrated knowledge partnership. Information was provided by individuals holding a variety of positions within each of these community-based organizations. The organizations themselves are located in a mix of urban and rural-based areas and serve urban, rural, and remote areas of Nova Scotia. The policies and programs they identified support survivors of GBV, all women and self-identifying women aged 16+, families, gender-diverse people, and youth.

Policies and programs identified include MORPH (mapping our road to power and healing), Starting Point, Support Work, Short-Term Contracts, A Step-up Program, an Age Advantage Program/Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, grocery and fuel cards, supportive counselling, direct financial support, Advocacy within Community, Systems Navigation, and Trauma Informed Therapy. Some policies were described as stop-gap measures to address emergent needs, whereas others were intended to be longer-term sustainable programs. (A description of policies and programs identified are provided in Appendix 2)

Key services from these programs include supportive counselling, divorce kits, drop-in resources, accompaniment, advocacy, information/referrals, pre-employment, personal empowerment, sexual violence interventions and women's economic independence, short-term employment, skills building and strengthening, employment re-entry skills building, self-employment, entrepreneur skills development, grocery, drug store, and/or fuel cards, system navigation, purchase of home heating oil vouchers, direct payment of some utility bills (power, cell phone), payment for glasses, minor home repair, substantial need for food, a high power bill facing disconnection, and help with completing applications for a host of federal and provincial programs that may help address their economic needs (EI, CPP, OAS, GIS, Worker's Compensation, CERB). Most programs rely heavily on successful applications to funders. Program funding is not considered to be stable in most cases, which makes sustainability of benefits problematic. More funding is required for skills development over longer periods of time and should be accompanied by additional (intersectional) supports to promote success (e.g. housing support workers to assist program participants in employment programs). Funders should be more willing to support the experience and expertise of non-profit organizations when it comes to developing and implementing programs to serve local communities.

Identified barriers to accessing services included transportation, childcare resources, internet/mobile access, secure/stable housing, language (non-English speaking), recent immigrant status (non-landed/non-citizen), no local service office (re: program administration), and lack of dependent care (for older people).

While none of the previously identified services were created specifically to address COVID-19 and pandemic-related impacts, many programs were altered (e.g. more online services, remote services, appointment-only service, pre-registration, work from home, and virtual training). Pre-existing services, including systems navigation, had to deal

with the implementation of new policies like CERB. One of our partners who contributed information to the scan described some of the challenges of navigating this new program and the unintended consequences on women in the community. This included navigating eligibility, fuelling existing addictions, and experiencing the stresses of having to repay CERB payments when no improvements in material circumstances had occurred. However, having access to CERB did highlight the benefits of having access to a steady income at a livable level.

Government funding of direct support to individuals varied throughout the pandemic. Increases in direct support initially caused requests for service to decline, which then increased the amount of supports available and the frequency that clients could access supports. The requests for service rebounded dramatically when direct government supplements were removed. Many other service agencies (e.g., Legion, Lions Club) had their fundraising activities severely curtailed by the no-gathering policies of the early pandemic, causing a major disruption of their stream of revenue and money available to provide community support (i.e., leading to less money available for community requests).

Creating Policy Recommendations

A summary of the knowledge synthesis, a set of proposed policy recommendations together with a summary of the environmental scan exercise was shared with the integrated partners and discussed to create a set of policy recommendations that reflected priorities that were identified by our community partners and supported within the current literature.

Two significant areas of policy decision making that could have substantial and immediate positive impact on women's participation in the gig economy are 1) a change to the way in which gig workers are classified with a view to supporting access to worker rights, supports and protections and 2) facilitating access to universal child and dependent care.

Address worker classification and provide support for improved accessibility to rights, supports, benefits and protections.

The loss of a formal workplace and employee status precipitated by the classification of gig workers as self-employed or independent contractors is a growing problem – one that effectively deprives workers of access to labour rights and protections including reasonable working hours, overtime pay, minimum wage, family or parental leave, and unemployment insurance as well as the right to organize (16, 50, 69). As the debate around gig worker classification has increased, companies (e.g., digital platforms and other temporary employment agencies or providers) have been challenged to change their practices. While some companies have voluntarily changed their policies and hired workers as employees, others refuse and may even withdraw from markets where workers insist that changes be made (14, 50, 138).

Governments should work to reduce the ambiguity associated with the classifications relating to self-employment and independent contract work. In Canada, for the purpose of data collection and "*properly tracking gig work within the self-employment economy*", gig workers are labelled as "*unincorporated self-employed*" (138) – one of the many possible self-employment labels identified in the recent literature (69). To foster improved understanding of the need for equity in policy for all workers, decision makers should also examine the links that are created or removed between these applied labels and access to basic worker rights, supports and protections (69).

Equitable access to worker supports, benefits, compensation, and protections

Non-standard workers, many of whom are women, have no access to the same supports and protections as workers classified under the umbrella of a standard employment relationship (SER) (31). This is true whether the work is mediated via a digital platform or not. The absence of regulation along with reduced access to rights and protections increases worker vulnerability (138). As per our community partner, for women at risk for or experiencing GBV, loss of workplace contacts, along with loss of supports and protections is particularly concerning. Employment status and form of employment relationship should not be linked to access to worker rights, supports and protections (14). If both the employer or client and the worker want improved flexibility, it should not come at the cost of employment quality, security or worker rights and protections (31, 136). To support labour equity and help counter the asymmetry of power present within the

platform environment, gig workers (and others working in non-standard employment relationships) require access to the same supports and protections available to all workers, regardless of the label imposed on them, their relative job flexibility, or the technology used to access or perform work (2, 30, 136, 138). As flexibility in working hours and location is increasingly normalized, governments should consider introducing improved measures that support women in maintaining employment, promote skill development and facilitate both professional and economic empowerment (31).

Addressing rights, supports and protections for individuals engaged in flexible, nonstandard forms of employment like gig work, supports an evolution in creating non-standard employment relationships that support a more secure and stable workforce in lieu of severing connections with the workplace or with employee-related protections (136). During the pandemic, as some types of gig work became more visible and were recognized as essential, temporary changes were made to the supports and protections that were accessible to individual gig workers (i.e. improved access to employment insurance, emergency income benefits and sick leave) (30, 138). Measures to ensure access to unemployment insurance (2, 18, 26, 30), medical or sick leave (2, 26, 30, 38, 75, 93) and compensation or income supplementation schemes should be expanded and made permanent (30). Moving forward, additional rights and protections should include access to family and parental leave (26, 30), fair and transparent wage structures including minimum wage guidelines that are current and appropriate to a living wage and regulations guiding number of hours worked (2, 4, 30, 40, 71, 93), the right to refuse unsafe work (40), access to worker's compensation schemes (69), resources to address work-related discrimination and harassment (30), and the right to organize and join a union (30). Guidance should be provided to both employees and employers on best practices within flexible working arrangements, including how to provide training and ensure ongoing professional development (92).

At the present time, many individuals who work, but are not considered employees and therefore have no workplace, are not aware of what rights, supports and protections are available for them. Our integrated community partner noted that many people are unaware of what policies are in place and what programs may be available to serve them unless they do become a client of a community-based organization or agency. As the issues of gig worker classification and worker access to rights, supports and protections evolves, there should be improvement made in public information provision so that gig workers can access supports as needed to protect themselves against recognized vulnerabilities.

Provision of extended supports and benefits

Worker supports and extended benefits, often accessed through a formal workplace, provide valuable assistance in meeting individual needs and supporting families. Resources to support access to health services and systems including mental health supports, dental and pharmacare, planning for future security and training or skills development opportunities could all work to support the health and well-being of Canadian gig workers (6, 14, 29) by mitigating some of the negative risks/consequences associated with precarious employment. Provision of education, training and skills development programs can help workers to navigate the process of finding their way out of precarious employment, for example (6, 14, 116).

The problem of provision and access to benefits for gig workers has been the subject of some debate. The most commonly-proposed solution, within the reviewed literature, was some version of "flexicurity" – that is, a portable, universal system of benefits that is attached to and moves with the individual and is aligned with the needs of the worker rather than being tied to a specific workplace (14, 26, 55). Others suggest an expansion of existing government-funded support and social protection that would include a greater range of benefits including mental health services, improved future securities planning and greater accessibility to employment insurance benefits (93). Existing government-based benefit systems currently in operation could be revised to be more comprehensive and accessible to unincorporated self-employed or independently contracted gig workers (69). For example, the Employment Insurance Special Benefits program in Ontario allows individuals to access temporary supports for parental, medical, or compassionate leave;

however, the high individual premiums required to access these benefits present a barrier to many "self-employed" gig workers (69). Nonetheless, it does represent an example of an existing coverage system that could be expanded should decision makers choose to examine the issues of personal premiums, accessibility, and portability for gig workers.

Income supplementation or stimulus programs

Many workers classified as self-employed are poorly paid and require access to income supports or supplements if they must be absent from work for medical, parental or other compassionate reasons, including the need to recover following episodes of work-related harassment or violence (69, 75).

Emergency income supports could be introduced for self-employed gig workers when facing extraordinary circumstances (e.g., illnesses, injuries, family deaths, pandemics, fires, etc.). We have recently witnessed the implementation of an emergency benefits program in Canada (i.e., CERB) which was successfully amended to incorporate protections for self-employed workers (69). Additionally, follow-up payments to single parent families and households with dependent children could help to accelerate post-pandemic recovery (7).

Direct income supplementation or "stimulus payments" can also work to mitigate the risk for domestic partner violence through the provision of a stable and predictable economic environment. It has been observed that the provision of income supports, during the pandemic, were associated with reduced calls to domestic violence helplines, reductions in shelter use and fewer criminal reports of domestic abuse, "*irrespective of lockdown status*" (24, p. 10).

As receiving a stable and predictable monthly income helps individuals experiencing precarity or job loss access goods and services needed for survival, policies that support basic universal income may also provide a solution for the problem of creating a safety net for self-employed (or individually contracted) gig workers (29, 31, 69). One advantage of this approach over the extended benefits program initiated in Ontario is that it would be funded from the general tax fund rather than relying on contributions made directly by low-wage self-employed individuals already experiencing precarity (69).

Address universal access to child and dependent care

Gender inequalities in work continue to be exacerbated by adherence to traditional gender roles, inadequate access to affordable, high-quality child and dependent care, lack of supported parental, medical and compassionate leave as well as support for increased flexibility within standard working relationships to support women in full-time stable employment (136). Access to universal childcare helps women reconcile the demands of care provision with the demands of employment (10, 106), eases isolation experienced by mothers, especially single mothers living in rural communities (45), and helps to support women's health (3). Making childcare more accessible and affordable strengthens labour market participation (57) and engagement in formal training and skills development opportunities (124). In addition, as more women engage in gig work and are classified as self-employed, the availability/provision of childcare that supports flexible, on-demand, online gig working requires attention (31, 69).

In Canada, there have been surges of interest in the notion of universal childcare and proponents have stressed the positive impacts of such programs on women's labour market participation (106). Childcare plays an essential role in our society and should be universally accessible (40). In Nova Scotia, our community partners identified that women are struggling to stay connected to the job market following the stay-at-home mitigation strategies initiated during the pandemic. The resurgence of traditional, gender-based roles within households, particularly around childcare, has increased steadily and has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. In addition, due to the recent financial downturn, there has been a notable increase in multi-generational family living and need for adult dependent care within the home. One of the participants in our discussions gave the following example,

"These duties are, of course, assumed by the wife or mother. Even when the economics make no sense. Even if the husband lost his job and the wife was working online, from home, she was still expected to take on all the extra care-related duties"

Public investment in child and dependent care should increase to ensure women and parents of all genders can return to work and to stimulate GDP recovery (40). Child and dependent care are particularly important in rural areas and would assist women to engage more effectively in programming being offered – to pursue training, advancement and full-time, stable employment positions.

Parental and family leave

Normalization of flexible working and support for women's professional and economic empowerment – including part-time or digital options and opportunities for skill development – includes adoption of family-friendly leave policies including harmonized parental leaves (in addition to universal childcare) (31). Although adequate paid parental leave has been associated with improved participation in labour markets for both men and women (57), women whose employment is classified as 'self-employment' or independent contract work may not be entitled to maternity leave. For example, almost ½ of self-employed women in the EU have no access to maternity leave (31).

Policy should be responsive to group or social location

Lumping all self-employed gig workers together into a single category and looking at the larger group will not effectively address issues experienced by specific groups within it – by women, BIPOC women, or women who are newcomers or refugees in Canada, for instance. Social policy and protections should be both gender-responsive (42) and place-based (e.g., urban, rural, remote) (45). Ideally, policy action should be equity-based, inclusive, and work to counter bias and discrimination in labour practices (106). However, there exists relatively little research that explores the experience of women in the gig economy and even less that applies an intersectional lens. We have very little to inform our understanding of the experience of women in rural and remote contexts, or of women who identify as belonging to many equity deserving communities (e.g., Indigenous, LGBTQIA+).

In the context of GBV…

The recent pandemic and the rise in violence against women associated with distancing measures highlighted the need for a well-funded sector to foster violence prevention both in the home and in work-related contexts (40). Strengthening social policy related to child and dependent care, in addition to infrastructure investments to reduce social and economic barriers experienced by women (including those women who are precariously employed) will work to support advancements in gender equity and inclusion (40). This includes the provision of longer-term stable funding to policy and programs intended to support women's access to formal, secure employment. Organizations that provide services to women at risk for or experiencing violence should include or expand their services relating to employment to address barriers and issues related to gender within various work contexts (including those that do not acknowledge gender at all) and be inclusive to individuals with differing identities and experiences (124).

Temporary, short-term, gig work, and especially platform-mediated work is socially disconnected, and increases women's isolation, and connection to others. For women at risk for or experiencing violence, the lack of a formal workplace with regular connections to a network of co-workers, risk for violence is increased. Our community partners suggested that platform/telework/digital companies should be creating the means to connect with workers and for workers to connect with each other (e.g., a digitally-supported workplace), supporting worker well-being and providing options for women who are experiencing violence whether work-related or in the home. Women should not be penalized for the consequences of their gendered experiences in platform-gig work – rather they should have a means to report, and deal with the any harassment or violence experienced.

Programs that facilitate communication, connection or even co-working alternatives for women who would otherwise be isolated at home could be an important source of visibility and support (13). Opportunities to meet with other women with similar stories and experience is important in strengthening a sense of community and reducing the effects of isolation, while engagement in employment-related activities with others in similar positions would provide other practical job-related benefits (124). Our community partners identified a single, current program that offers access to (free) co-working spaces for women that provides an opportunity to share a regular workplace while doing online gig work and also creating in-person, protective relationships.

In the context of newcomer and refugee women in Canada

There is a need for settlement services that better support employment integration and economic independence for newcomer women in Canada (87, 115). Support services to facilitate improved economic integration include accessible and affordable childcare and improved settlement services for women.

Access to affordable childcare, that accommodates various cultural and religious groups, would free newcomer women from the competing demands of finding employment and managing childcare and other domestic responsibilities (87). In addition to language and integration services, support services should include employment-based skills and employment in Canada (including workplace standards and worker rights). Services should be trauma-informed, and consider women's context, background, professional experience, and level of education (139).

Support provided by trained personnel such as transition assistants, cultural mediators and employment counsellors has, in the past, been useful in helping newcomer and refugee women in the process of economic engagement in Canada; however, at the present time, due to funding limitations, these types of services are not readily available (115). Further, employment counselling services may be prioritized for individuals assessed as "job-ready" – a label that is rarely applied to refugee or newcomer women (115).

Integration programs for immigrants adopted in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway could be used as a model to support improved employment integration opportunities for newcomer and immigrant women in Canada (116). In those integration programs, women are provided with opportunities to demonstrate their experience and skill and prove themselves to be "job ready" through supervised practice. Integration programs generally include language education and civic orientation components combined with internships, workplace training and assistance with job placement (116).

Conclusions

Research on gig work has traditionally been centered on the technology of platform-mediated work and there has been a significant lack of attention towards the lived experiences of workers, particularly women. Our research collaboration with Women's Centres Connect of Nova Scotia has led to the creation of critical recommendations that reflect practice-based priorities and are supported by our synthesis of the existing literature. These recommendations aim to provide a comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable policy response to the multifaceted challenges facing women in the gig economy.

Central to these recommendations is the urgent need for a reassessment of worker classification within the gig economy. The current classification of gig workers often results in a loss of benefits, supports, and protections typically associated with traditional employment status. This practice significantly increases the vulnerabilities of women in the gig economy, and addressing it is of utmost importance. We recommend policies that ensure equitable access to worker supports, benefits, and protections for all workers, regardless of their employment status. Measures like more accessible unemployment insurance, medical or sick leave, and compensation schemes should be universal rights, not contingent on type of employment relationship. Another critical area we highlight is the necessity for accessible and affordable high-quality child and dependent care. Universal access to such services can significantly alleviate the pressures faced by women in the gig economy, enabling a more effective balance of work and care responsibilities. Temporary measures, such as income supplementation, first introduced during the pandemic should be re-evaluated not as stop-gap solutions but as foundations for more sustainable and inclusive policies.

Furthermore, our recommendations underscore the importance of inclusivity. Policies should be responsive to the unique contexts of different groups, such as rural dwelling women, newcomers to Canada, and those affected by violence. To date, the focus of much of the research in this area has remained on the workplace, covering experiences of violence relating to the workplace, and sometimes, how DV and IPV impact the workplace.

Given the ongoing shift to remote and to more flexible, short-term gig work following the COVID-19 pandemic, many women are increasingly working in ways that are disconnected from traditional workplaces, whether by choice or necessity. This new work context can have numerous potentially negative impacts, not least of which is a loss of benefits, supports, and protections, increased isolation, and loss of visibility, all of which can exacerbate experiences of violence. To counter these challenges, we have recommended policies that ensure equitable access to worker rights, supports, and protections for all workers, regardless of employment relationship type or the technology used to access or perform work. There's a pressing need to create robust support structures for maintaining engagement with the labour market. This can be achieved through measures such as accessible and affordable child and dependent care, resources, policies, and decision-making processes that account for individual social and geographical contexts. In particular, we urge policymakers and decision-makers to consider the unique vulnerabilities and challenges faced by women in gig work, particularly those experiencing DV and IPV. As part of this, measures to prevent and address violence should be integrated into employment-related policies and programs, ensuring that all workers, regardless of their employment status or the nature of their work, can work in safe and supportive environments.

Our analysis of the current research landscape reveals that while there is a wealth of studies exploring the technological aspects of platform-mediated gig work, there is a significant lack of research focusing on the lived experiences of workers, particularly women. Most existing studies are primarily centered on the technology of platform-mediated work, with little attention paid to the nuanced realities of those navigating this

sector. Moreover, the limited body of research that does focus on worker experiences often lacks an intersectional perspective. This approach is vital for a complex, textured, and contextual understanding of gig work, capturing the nuanced dynamics of gender, ethnicity, ability, and age that contribute to the complexity of this sector. This gap in research not only limits our understanding of the experiences of women in gig work but also overlooks the intersection of gig work and gender-based violence—an area that is critical for understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges women face in precarious employment. Furthermore, existing research largely fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of key groups and contexts that are crucial to the Canadian experience. The nuanced realities of different social, cultural, and geographical contexts are often overlooked, leaving key insights into the lived experiences of workers in diverse settings unexplored. Our research underscores the urgent need for more in-depth, intersectional, and contextual research in this area. Future studies should aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of women in gig work, particularly those at risk for or experiencing gender-based violence. We hope that our work will inspire further research and action in this critical area, with the aim of fostering economic stability and mitigating the risk of gender-based violence.

In conclusion, it is imperative to expand the current scope of research to better reflect the realities, experiences, and needs of women in gig work. This will require a commitment to intersectional, context-specific, and practice-based research that can inform policy and decision-making and ultimately contribute to a more equitable and supportive gig economy.

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**Please note: Articles/reports included in the knowledge synthesis are marked with an asterisk*.

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Appendix 1: Method

Review and Synthesis

To complete our exploration of gig work (as a form of precarious employment) and GBV in Canada within a short timeframe, we used a rapid, state-of-the-art critical interpretive synthesis approach. Use of interpretive synthesis methodology supported the inclusion of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method studies and the use of a critical interpretive lens (36, 68).

Search Strategies

Search strategies were developed in collaboration with a research librarian at Dalhousie University and applied to each of the SCOPUS (inclusive of PubMed and Medline), Proquest/Proquest Social Services and Sociological Abstracts databases for the purposes of developing our initial list of seed citations. After de-duplication, there was a total of 1173 database entries identified for review against our initial relevance criteria from the cited database sources.

Sampling

Initial relevance criteria applied to the identification of possible seed articles was as follows:

1. Does the article/study/report examine or discuss precarious or nonstandard employment? **AND**
2. Does the article/study/report consider gender-based differences in precarious or non-standard employment? **OR**

Include groups at increased risk for GBV (e.g. the experience of women, at-risk youth, 2SLGBTQIA+, racialized workers, etc. **OR** examine the experience/patterns/outcomes of nonstandard employment in rural and remote locations?

The first review of identified citations against these guiding relevance criteria yielded a list of 30 articles and 12 grey literature reports to be included as seed citations from which to generate our broader searches. For each seed citation, forward citation searches were performed using Google Scholar and Scopus databases and the results were reviewed against our high-level relevance criteria and then uploaded to Covidence review software for further consideration. Similarly, all reference lists were hand searched, reviewed and uploaded. During this process, seven (7) review articles were also identified. The reference lists for all review articles hand searched, reviewed against criteria and uploaded for further consideration. Overall, this process of backward and forward searching yielded a pool of 603 citations for the first review round.

To begin, reviewers read each abstract using the following queries to guide the assessment of relevance:

Does the article/study or report examine precarious, nonstandard or gig work? **AND**

Include gender or gender roles or gender-based differences or gender equity in precarious, nonstandard or gig work? **OR**

Did the study examine/explore the risk for or experience of gender-based violence (or include groups with greater risk for violence)?

Key Word Search Strategies.

The process employed multiple search strategies across multiple databases, followed by processes of forward and backward citation searching.

Search #1

(((TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Work* from home” OR telework* OR telecommut* OR gig* OR "Self-employed" OR ((remote* OR "short-term" OR "part-time" OR stable OR unstable OR "low-paying" OR precar* OR temporary OR "Non-standard" OR contract*) W/5 (work OR employ* OR labour)))))) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY (women* OR female* OR gender* OR lgbt* OR transgender* OR intimate OR domestic* OR famil*)) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY (violen* OR harm* OR abus* OR equit* OR inequit*)) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2023) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2015) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2014))

Search #2

(MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Home Workplaces") OR title("work* from home" OR telework* OR telecommut* OR (remote* W/5 (work OR employ* OR labour))) OR abstract ("work* from home" OR telework* OR telecommut* OR (remote* W/5 (work OR employ* OR labour)))) AND (MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("violence") OR (MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Abuse") OR title(violen* OR harm* OR abus* OR equit* OR inequit*) OR abstract(violen* OR harm* OR abus* OR equit* OR inequit*))) AND (MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Females") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Domestics") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("homosexuals Relationships") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Family") OR title(women* OR female* OR gender* OR lgbt* OR transgender* OR intimate OR domestic* OR famil*) OR abstract(women* OR female* OR gender* OR lgbt* OR transgender* OR intimate OR domestic* OR famil*))

Search #3

(MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Self Employment") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Temporary Employment") OR title((gig* OR "Self-employed" OR ("short-term" OR "part-time" OR stable OR unstable OR "low-paying" OR precar* OR temporary OR "Non-standard" OR contract*) NEAR/5 (work OR employ* OR labour))) OR abstract((gig* OR "Self-employed" OR ("short-term" OR "part-time" OR stable OR unstable OR "low-paying" OR precar* OR temporary OR "Non- standard" OR contract*) NEAR/5 (work OR employ* OR labour)))) AND (MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("violence") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Abuse") OR (title(violen* OR harm* OR abus* OR equit* OR inequit*) OR abstract(violen* OR harm* OR abus* OR equit* OR inequit*))) AND (MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Females") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Domestics") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("homosexuals Relationships") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Family") OR (title(women* OR female* OR gender* OR lgbt* OR transgender* OR intimate OR domestic* OR famil*) OR abstract(women* OR female* OR gender* OR lgbt* OR transgender* OR intimate OR domestic* OR famil*)))

Each citation was also considered in terms of contextual relevance through the selection process:

1. Was the article/study/report within the timeframe selected for the study (2014 – present, in keeping with the recognition of precarious employment as an important determinant of health)?
2. Was the article/study/report produced with reference to a geographic or political context that may be considered transferable to the Canadian experience? While we attempted to identify and prioritize Canadian and North American studies, we also included studies from the larger context of the global

North to take advantage of the larger pool of available studies coming from outside of Canada/North America.

Exclusion criteria: The following types of publication were excluded: books or dissertations, abstracts or conference proceedings (for lack of reporting detail), systematic or scoping reviews (reference lists were hand searched for possible inclusions). Inclusions were limited to English language publications except for French studies originating from a Canadian context.

During the first round of reading and review, there were several meetings between reviewers and additional relevance criteria were created to reflect an emerging understanding of the pool of literature:

Did the article/study/report discuss the impact of COVID-19 on employment (especially precarious, nonstandard, or gig work)? **AND**

Gender, gender roles, gender equity **OR**

Risk for or experience of gender-based violence.

In the second round, full texts of articles/studies/reports (n=305) were considered for inclusion against the existing relevance criteria. A similar procedure was followed. As before, reading the full texts and applying relevance criteria sparked discussion and additional revision to criteria emerged:

What type of self-employment is defined within the article/study/report?

We found it necessary to differentiate between small business owners and successful freelance contractors and gig workers (often employed through short-term, low paying contracts, mediated by an online platform and classified as self-employed). Through the reading of full texts and discussion, we determined our interest for the purposes of this synthesis to be within the latter definition.

In each round of the review process, all entries were evaluated against relevance criteria by two reviewers who made detailed notes pertaining to the inclusion criteria and their assessment of relevance. Disagreements in assessment were resolved by a third reviewer.

At the end of the review process, 118 articles were identified for inclusion.

Quality Appraisal

Two reviewers evaluated each study selected for inclusion using the Mixed Methods Assessment Tool (MMAT). The MMAT is comprised of 15 criteria presented in 5 sets that are specific to 5 study design types (qualitative, randomized controlled trials, non-randomized comparative trials, quantitative observational studies, and mixed methods) (56, 103, 104).

Inter-rater agreement

The process for determining the level of agreement between the raters involved calculating the percentage of total agreement. This statistical method is commonly used to gauge the degree of consensus in research appraisal scenarios. It considers the number of instances where both raters' scores coincided as a proportion of the overall ratings.

The average percent agreement score across all categories was approximately 75%. This indicates a fairly-high level of consistency among raters in their evaluations of the studies.

Strengths

Categories with high agreement scores, which indicate consistency among raters, include: Screening questions, Randomized Controlled Trails, and Mixed Method studies

Our appraisal reveals good methodological quality in the reviewed studies. High scores in screening questions emphasize clear aims and relevant data. Reports describing randomized controlled trials presented sound randomization procedures, complete outcome data, and unbiased reporting, confirming their internal validity. Mixed Methods studies reported effective integration of qualitative and quantitative data, contributing to comprehensive understanding. Overall, these findings underline strong validity and applicability of the results, offering a reliable and robust evidence base within these specific study types.

Weaknesses

Categories with lower agreement scores, which indicate less consistency among raters, included: Qualitative Studies and Quantitative Description Studies.

The poorer agreement in MMAT ratings suggest that there may be inconsistencies or ambiguities in reporting within these study types or in how raters interpreted and evaluated studies within these areas. Lower between-rater agreement suggests that there may be room for improvement in clarity both within study reporting and within scoring guidelines provided.

Data Analysis

The texts of the articles/studies/reports identified for inclusion became the data for the interpretive synthesis process. Full texts were imported to NVivo qualitative data management software (QSR, Version 1.7.1, 2021) for analysis. Given the rapid nature of this synthesis, we focused our analysis mostly on the information gathered by studies/articles/reports, as well as the interpretation of this information and the contexts of their exploration. We used a process of iterative and ongoing content analysis to support "*the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns*" (58, p.1278). As themes or patterns emerged from the texts imported into NVivo, we began to engage in a process of constant comparison through which we reviewed the emerging themed groupings against our research questions, the guiding relevance criteria, and the primary texts themselves (36). By maintaining a dynamic approach, the coding team could allow for adjustments to sampling criteria (see above), content analysis, and synthesis throughout the project.

Coding was conducted over three rounds – all data was coded by two reviewers working sequentially. Codebooks were created following an initial round of quick coding to highlight similar areas of content and begin the process of classification to identify patterns in the text. On further rounds of coding, thematic groupings were compared to the relevance criteria and the research questions themselves creating further refinement in our approach to analysis. The production and review of the refined theme summaries allowed each coder to engage with the data again to create a synthesized narrative that could acknowledge dissenting views, question representation, address some underlying assumptions, and highlight important gaps in the literature. The evidence brief created for the project and a summary of the synthesis highlights was presented to and discussed with our community partner to ask for feedback and input from the perspective of women-serving community organizations, to enrich our own interpretations of the material with their specific contextual expertise.

Appendix 2: Summary of Policies and Programs

Summary of Environmental Information Gathering (Policies and Programs)

Policy/program name	Who is most likely to benefit from supports/services provided by this policy/program?	What are the key supports and services provided by this policy/program accessed by your clients?	What are the perceived barriers for your clients in accessing supports/benefits under this policy/program?	Documents (including links)
Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Health Centre				(http://womenscentre.ca/programs)
MORPH (mapping our road to power & healing)	The organization supports all women and self-identifying women from age 16+ MORPH is intended to benefit survivors of sexual violence	Supportive counselling, divorce kits, drop-in resources, accompaniment, advocacy, and information/referrals are provided. Organization's website: "MORPH is an initiative that aims to provide services and support for victims/survivors of sexual violence, educate individuals and communities about the multiple layers and effects of sexual violence, and to dispel myths and challenge societal norms." "a collaborative project between Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre, Pictou County Centre for Sexual Health, and Tearmann Society for Abused Women, and funded by the Nova Scotian provincial strategy to end sexualized violence. MORPH is overseen by the Pictou Sexual Assault Response Team (PSART), a group of 29 community service providers working with sexualized violence and dedicated to its eradication. Through the grant opportunity, PSART and the key partner agencies of MORPH sought to identify the assets available in Pictou County for survivors of sexualized violence."	- Private or public transportation services - Childcare resources - Language (non-English speaking)	http://womenscentre.ca/morph MORPH Evaluation Report (http://morphpictoucounty.ca/mt-content/uploads/2018/06/final-morph-evaluation-report-may-28-2018.docx.pdf) MORPH Summary Evaluation Report (http://morphpictoucounty.ca/mt-content/uploads/2018/06/final-summary-evaluation-report-morph-may-28-2018-.docx.pdf) Pictou Sexual Assault Response Team (PSART) Organizational

				Protocol (http://morphpictoucounty.ca/mt-content/uploads/2018/06/psart-protocol-update-2018.pdf) Asset Mapping Report for Survivors of Sexualized Violence in Pictou County (http://morphpictoucounty.ca/mt-content/uploads/2018/06/pictou-county-asset-mapping-report.pdf)
Starting Point	It benefits women who have a need to build skills and confidence discovering their strengths and talents and making plans practicing success. Funders set eligibility criteria, sometimes requiring a similar group of women either on social assistance or EI.	No current funding in place to support the program – the program has been successfully offered for over 15 years. Organization's website: "Starting Point usually offers life skills and personal development, information technology, literacy and numeracy improvement, employability and career planning, certifications, and training sessions." "A unique pre-employment program designed for women in need of the tools and resources to assist them in today's job market. The Starting Point is funded through grant opportunities whenever possible providing participants with an opportunity to gain insights, valuable skills and experience. Leading participants beyond a Starting Point to the next step towards employment."	- Private or public transportation services - Childcare resources - Internet/mobile access - Secure/stable housing - Language (non-English speaking) - Recent immigrant status (non-landed/non-citizen) - Supports to help out on days when children are sick or something else has created a barrier. Overcoming these are a challenge. This is where a diverse group of experiences	http://www.womenscentre.ca/Starting_Point.html News article (https://www.saltwire.com/nova-scotia/pictou-county/employability-program-for-women-starting-next-week-76689/) 211 (https://ns.211.ca/services/pictou-county-womens-resource-and-sexual-assault-

			can add so much to the program.	centre/starting-point-program/)
Programs/services identified from the organization's website: - Girls' day camp - Self-esteem groups - Sexual violence support - Women together walking group				
Tri-County Women's Centre				(https://www.tricountywomenscentre.org/servicesprograms.html)
Support work	Benefits women in economic disparity, women who have experienced gender-based violence	Provides supportive counseling, referrals, information, advocacy, and programs on a wide range of issues. The main foci of the programs are personal empowerment, sexual violence interventions and women's economic independence.	- private or public transportation services - Childcare resources - Secure/stable housing - language (non-English speaking)	https://www.tricountywomenscentre.org/ Annual report (https://www.tricountywomenscentre.org/uploads/5/7/6/6/57666610/2022_tcwc_agm_annual_report.pdf)
Programs/services identified from the organization's website: - Women moving forward/toolbox Tuesdays - Voices: a program of self-discovery an empowerment (under revision) - Strengthening families program - Options to anger (under revision) - Women's walkabout - Women's well-read book club/podcasts - Social circle/coffee talk - Breast pump loan program - Sexual violence intervention services - Specialized trauma counselling				

- Sexual assault nurse examiner program				
Women's place resource centre				http://wprc.ddns.net/joomla/
Short term contracts	Depends on the scope of the project the contract is designed for, but this program benefits women employed for contract and any family, organization benefiting from her skills and abilities.	short-term employment, skills building and strengthening	- Private or public transportation services - childcare resources - internet/mobile access	
A step-up program	This program is for any woman looking to re-enter the employment market, and benefits women hoping to gain employment and employers who may potentially hire This program is sometimes supported through core funding but is dependent on the number of other non-project funded programs are being delivered	Employment re-entry skills building	- Private or public transportation services - childcare resources - internet/mobile access - secure/stable housing - Sometimes dependant care is necessary if women are participating later in life	
Age Advantage program/targeted initiative for older workers	The program is for senior women 55+ interested in developing a plan to	Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship skills development Organization's website: "Age Advantage Plus targets people aged 55-64, and prepares older workers for employment in	- private or public transportation services - internet/mobile access - secure/stable housing	Nova Scotia link (https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20110118003)

	start their own business, and benefits Senior women and their communities	their communities. The Department of Labour and Advanced Education works with community-based organizations to develop and deliver Age Advantage Plus programs. The organizations plan, design and implement projects that respond to the needs of older workers and the community."	- dependent care	Canada link (https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/training-agreements/older-workers.html)
Grocery and fuel cards	Program is for women expressing/illustrating need for support and benefits women and their families	Supportive counselling and grocery and/or fuel cards	- private or public transportation services - childcare resources - secure/stable housing	
Supportive counselling/system navigation	The program is for women requesting assistance and benefits women, families, and community	Individual client support counselling, advocacy and system navigation	- private or public transportation services - childcare resources - internet/mobile access - secure/stable housing - no local service office (re: program administration)	

Programs/services identified from the organization's website:

- research
- space to gather
- resources
- programs
- projects
- peer support
- Frances Mills-Clements Bursary (awarded annually to a woman within the community (Weymouth, east to the King's-Hants line) desiring to move forward to post-secondary education, regardless of age)

LEA Place Women's Resource Centre				(https://www.leaplace.com/)
Direct financial support	Benefits Women with temporary financial need. The Centre must have resources to meet the demand from non-core funding (donations or specific grant programs).	Gift cards for groceries/drug store, Walmart, Amazon, fuel. Vouchers for the purchase of home heating oil. Direct payment of some utility bills (e.g. power, cell phone). Assistance with paying for glasses. Working with community service partners to address direct financial support beyond the means of the Centre. This might include minor home repair, substantial need for food, or a high power bill facing disconnection.	- public or private transportation - internet/mobile access - secure/stable housing	
Advocacy within community	Benefits Women who have temporary needs that might be adequately addressed with stop gap measures. The client must be willing to share some personal details with the community agency that LEA Place approaches on their behalf. Individual agencies have different criteria for assessing need.	Organization's website: "For some women, cultural issues, discrimination, fear, intimidation, and unfamiliarity with social service, justice, or health systems are roadblocks to getting the help they need. LEA Place works on a woman's behalf, and at her request, to move through the challenges presented by these systems to get the answers and help she is seeking." Also offers court accompaniment	- internet/mobile access - secure/stable housing	https://www.leaplace.com/coreservicesoverview.htm
Systems navigation	Benefits Women who have had a significant attachment to the labour market.	Assist women with completing applications for a host of federal and provincial programs that may help address their economic needs, including EI, CPP, OAS, GIS, Worker's Compensation, and CERB.	- private or public transportation services - internet/mobile access - secure/stable housing	https://www.leaplace.com/coreservicesoverview.htm

	Women must meet specific criteria for each program, as outlined by the funding source.		- no local service office (re: program administration)	
Programs/services identified from the organization's website: - support counselling and crisis intervention - advocacy and accompaniment - information and referral - programs (life skills, family and youth, sexual violence prevention and intervention, healthy relationships, health and wellness, economic development and self-sufficiency, legal, housing, and poverty relief) - outreach - community education - community development initiatives - social advocacy				
Every Woman's Centre				https://www.everywomanscentre.com/
Support	Anyone who identifies as female Women, middle to low income are eligible for this program Benefits women who are unemployed, under paid or cut back hours	food security, clothing, household goods, transportation, fax and copy machine, computer, information, supportive listening, some employment training	- private or public transportation services	
Programs/services identified from the organization's website:				

- supportive listening
- mentors for seniors
- income tax/government forms
- leisure programs
- socialization
- my sisters closet
- poverty relief
- small steps to big changes
- Back to school
- Adopt-a-family program

Antigonish Women's Resource Centre				https://awrcsasa.ca/
Trauma therapy program	Women, girls, Two-Spirit, trans, nonbinary and men	Organization's website: Narrative therapy Cognitive behavioural therapy Sensorimotor therapy Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) Trauma-informed stabilization therapy (TIST) Conversation, listening, information, education, and more "Our specialized sexual violence trauma therapists offer feminist-based support to people of all genders, 16 years of age and older, who have experienced sexualized trauma. Our therapists know that not all people who have experienced sexualized trauma will think of themselves as survivors. They offer first appointments where people can just talk about what's on their minds and learn about our program. From there, every person can decide with our therapists if the		https://awrcsasa.ca/support-services/specialized-sexual-violence-trauma-therapy/

		program is a good fit. Our therapists work to center people's own decisions about their own therapy and healing."		

Programs/services identified from the organization's website:

- General support
  - Supportive listening and problem solving
  - Systems navigation
  - Advocacy and accompaniment (medical, court, government office)
  - Referrals to supportive agencies
  - Emergency financial assistance based on identified needs
- Newcomer support
  - Settlement planning
  - Settlement navigation
  - Housing, schooling, and employment support
  - Language support
  - Networking and social engagement support
  - Building community around newcomers
- Income tax return support
- Lindsay's health centre for women
- Sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) program
- Specialized sexual violence trauma therapy