

# The AIM Study: Supporting Women in Midlife and Older who Experienced Intimate Partner Violence

Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario Virtual Learning Series  
Gender-based Violence among Older Adults: Supportive Interventions

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The AIM Study





# Acknowledgements

**Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. We are all treaty people.**

There are three key components to the statement. The first is particular acknowledgement that the land Dalhousie sits on is part of Mi'kma'ki, the territory of the L'nu'k. The second is the acknowledgement of the territory as both ancestral and unceded — recognizing that the Peace and Friendship treaties signed between the British Crown and the Mi'kmaq (unlike many other historic treaties in Canada) did not involve surrender of land. Finally, “We are all Treaty people” reflects that the Peace and Friendship treaties apply to all parties involved, Indigenous and settler alike.

**We recognize that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose histories, legacies and contributions have enriched that part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia for over 400 years.**

Having resided in the region for over 400 years, African Nova Scotian contributions to Nova Scotia and Canada began over 150 years before Canada became a country. African Nova Scotians came to the province through enslavement or through fleeing enslavement elsewhere, and continue to experience all manner of structural, systemic and individual discrimination. Until 1961, more than half of all Black people in Canada were African Nova Scotian. The Province of Nova Scotia identifies African Nova Scotians as a founding culture.

## Lead Investigators & Staff

- Lori Weeks (Dalhousie)
- Cathy Holtmann and Danie Gagnon (UNB)
- Kathleen Allen, Research Coordinator
- AIM program facilitators

## Co-Investigators

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- Marilyn Macdonald, Elaine Moody, Christie Stilwell (Dalhousie)
- Colleen MacQuarrie (UPEI)
- Heather Helpard (Saint Francis Xavier)

## Partners, Collaborators

- Government of New Brunswick
- Government of Nova Scotia
- PEI Family Violence Prevention Services
- Beausejour Crisis Centre
- Advisory Board Members

# Research Team



## The AIM Study

# Outline

Older women and IPV



The AIM Program &  
Evaluation



AIM Program Facilitator  
Training

# Older Women and Intimate Partner Violence



The AIM Study

# Intimate Partner Violence Among Older Women: Overarching Concepts

- ▶ There is less emphasis/research/services devoted to older women experiencing abuse vs. younger women experiencing abuse
- ▶ There is ageism in domestic violence/family violence research and services
- ▶ There is sexism in elder abuse research and services



- ▶ Abuse of all forms is underreported, including the abuse of older adults
  - ▶ Older women may be less likely to report abuse than younger women
  
- ▶ Abuse can occur in many forms, and often a person experience more than one form
  
- ▶ For older women, intimate partner violence could be experienced in many ways:
  1. A long-term abusive relationship
  2. Abuse in a new relationship that began in later life
  3. Abuse experienced throughout many different relationships
  4. A long-term relationship that became abusive over time



# Applying an Intersectional Lens to Violence Against Older Women

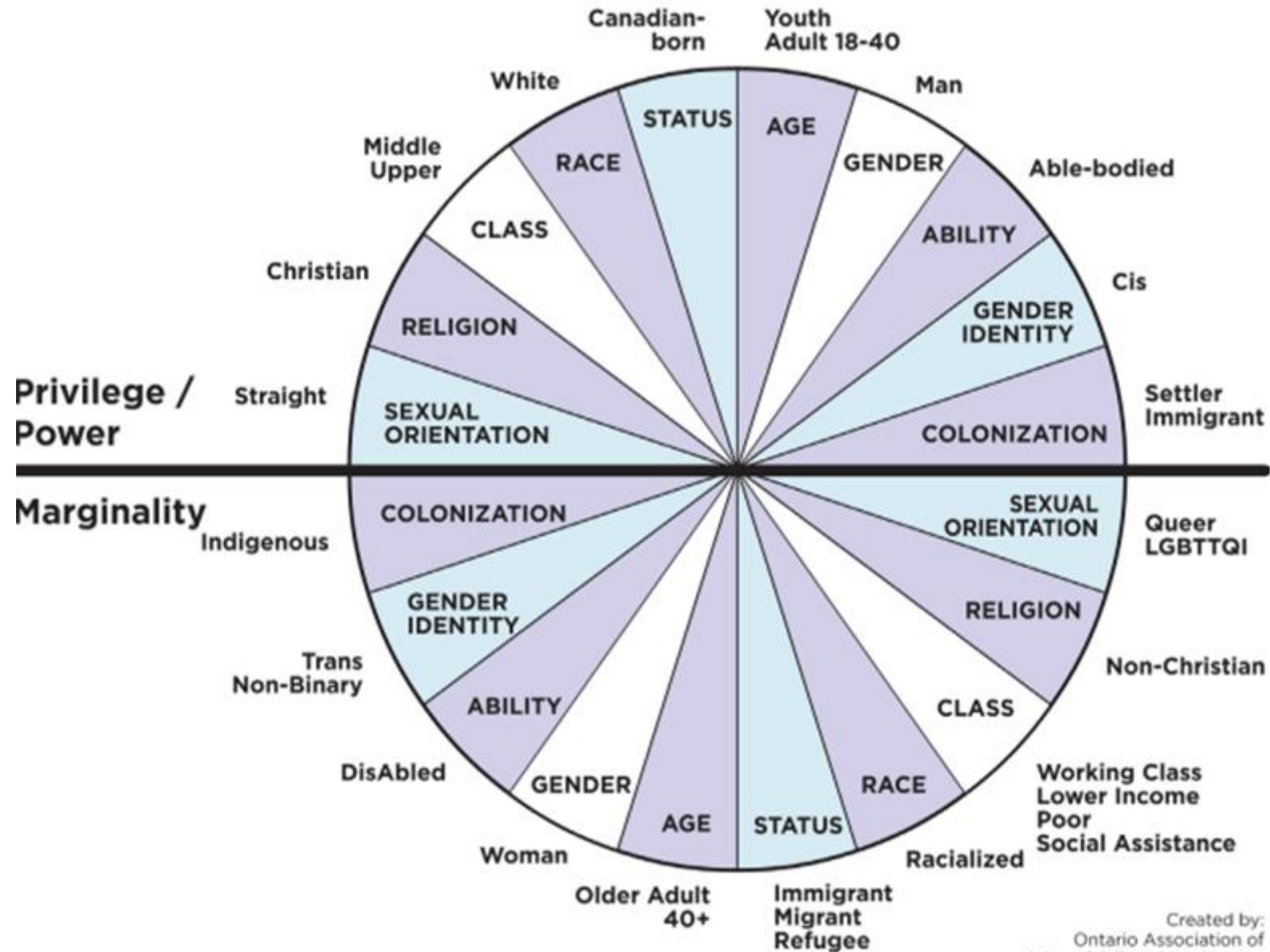
Older women belong to different communities and hold multiple social identities which intersect to shape diverse experiences of systemic oppression and privilege.

Older women's intersecting identities impacts their experiences of violence, their ability to access services and to seek help, and their overall quality of life.

The intersectionality wheel on the next slide shows how different social identities intersect and relate to systemic privilege or marginalization. It was created by the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses as part of their 'Aging Without Violence' project.



# Intersectionality Wheel



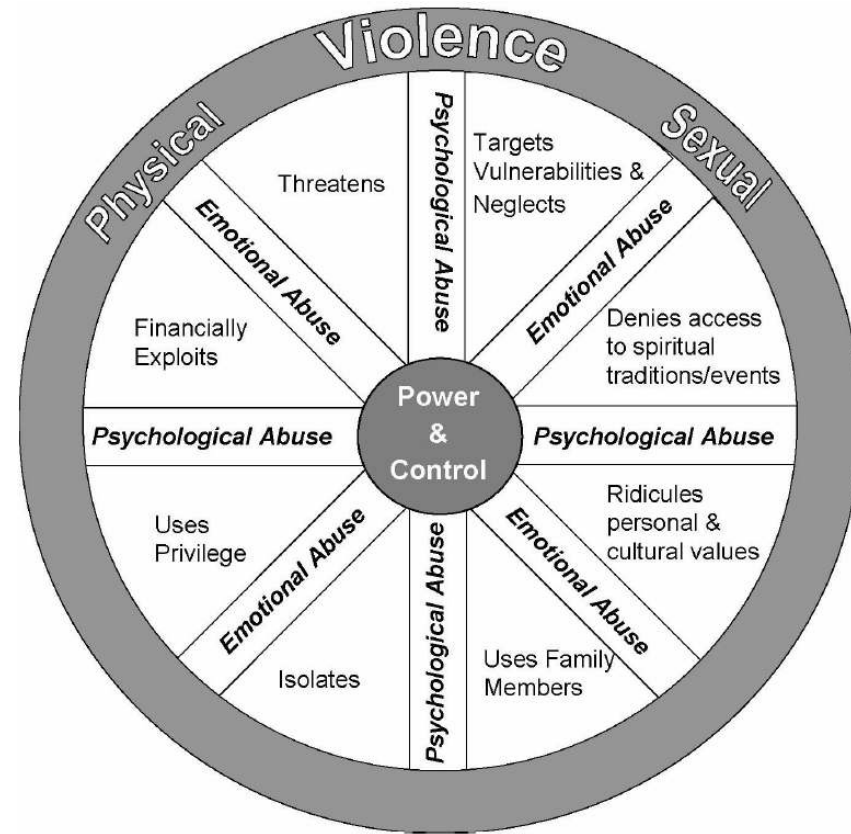
How does this help you think about the support needs of older women experiencing IPV?

# Wheels of Power and Control



Duluth Model: Domestic Abuse Intervention Project

[www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org)



Wheel Developed for Older Women

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life  
(NCALL, 2006)

In many ways, the dynamics of abusive relationships are similar among younger and older women, but there are some differences as illustrated in these diagrams. The one on the right focuses specifically on older women.

## Because of various life course and cultural factors older women may have different beliefs and responses to IPV than younger women:

- They may believe that in order to receive IPV services, they have to both exhibit physical signs of violence and be of childbearing age.
- They may have had less opportunity to be employed and be more financially dependent on an abusive partner than younger women.
- Older women often were raised in an environment that reinforced traditional gender roles including the submissiveness of women, marriage as a permanent bond, the importance of secrecy and privacy in families, and not seeking help from a professional.
- Being a member of a religious community may be a source of refuge for older women, but religious beliefs and members of that community will likely encourage couple to stay together.

# WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST OLDER WOMEN?



“What is Violence Against Older Women?” developed by Woman Act, the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, about 20 minutes.

<https://womanact.thinkific.com/order?ct=9of242c8-ea34-4547-aab6-35a5de02900a>

# The AIM Program & Evaluation



The AIM Study

# An Overview of the AIM Study: The Advocacy Intervention for Women In Midlife and Older



The AIM Study

- Call for proposals from the Public Health Agency of Canada in the summer of 2022: preventing and addressing elder abuse.
  - Deliver and test health promotion programs and interventions designed to address elder abuse in the context of family violence
- While completing a systematic review (Weeks et al., 2024), we identified a promising program developed by Tiwari and colleagues (2010) that we modeled the AIM program after
- The AIM program is highly individualized and tailored (e.g., Doherty, 2017; Ford-Gilboe et al., 2017) to meet the the diverse needs of older women in the Maritime provinces



Public Health  
Agency of Canada

What are the characteristics of the women eligible to participate in the AIM Study?

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Self-identify as a woman

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Are in midlife or older (about age 45 or older)

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Live in the Maritime provinces

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Can participate in English or French

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Currently living with and/ or are in the process of leaving an abusive partner

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Includes diverse women e.g. Francophone, new immigrants, visible and racialized minorities, live in rural places

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Can be receiving other services



# The AIM Program



## The AIM Study

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### Information Sharing Component:

A 1-hour information sharing session by telephone or Zoom sessions focusing on:

1. information about older women and abusive relationships
2. awareness raising
3. safety planning
4. decision making, problem solving
5. information about local resources

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### Social Support Component:

Provided through weekly telephone or Zoom calls for 12 weeks (about 20 minutes per session).

These sessions are designed to provide encouragement and support and to answer questions the woman may have.

There are no specific or scheduled topics that are planned for each session. These are very individualized and based on the needs raised and questions that the woman wishes to discuss.



# WARNING SIGNS AN OLDER ADULT IS LIVING IN AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

"I thought this was something that happens to younger adults, not someone like me in their 70's - not a grandmother"

"My daughter removed my phone, refuses to allow me to see my friends or family members alone and always follows me around wherever I go - she is so controlling"

## Warning Signs - Abusive Behaviour



- Controlling behaviour
- Speaking for a family member, at medical visits for example, answering questions and not letting the older adult talk
- Making all the decisions without asking
- Preventing visits with family and friends
- Threatening to leave, neglect or hurt
- Often being short-tempered or angry with the older adult
- Not respecting privacy
- Putting locks in the house, such as bedroom doors, to keep the older adult in or out
- Reading or withholding mail
- Controlling finances without permission or legal authority
- Blaming the older adult
- Treating the older adult like a child
- Belittling and name calling
- Leaving a dependent person alone for long periods of time

## Unique factors or circumstances that may prevent accessing help:

- Older adult may feel dependent on the person who is the abuser, so they feel there are no other options.
- Older adults is unable to talk about their unhappy feelings with the abuser, or they don't speak in the same language as the person causing harm.
- Older adult does not feel they can tell anyone because they feel ashamed or embarrassed that someone they loved, such as a spouse or family member, has harmed them.
- Older adult does not know about any support services that can help, and is unaware of their options.

CREVAWC - It's Not Right

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CREVAWC - It's Not Right

## RED FLAGS OF POSSIBLE ABUSE BY FAMILY MEMBER, SPOUSE/PARTNER

*"You are not alone, abuse can happen to anyone at any age"*

*"All threats should be taken seriously, no matter how long ago they were made or if you think they are irrelevant. Help is available!"*

*"It's never too late for a change in your life, everyone has the right to live free from abuse and treated with respect"*

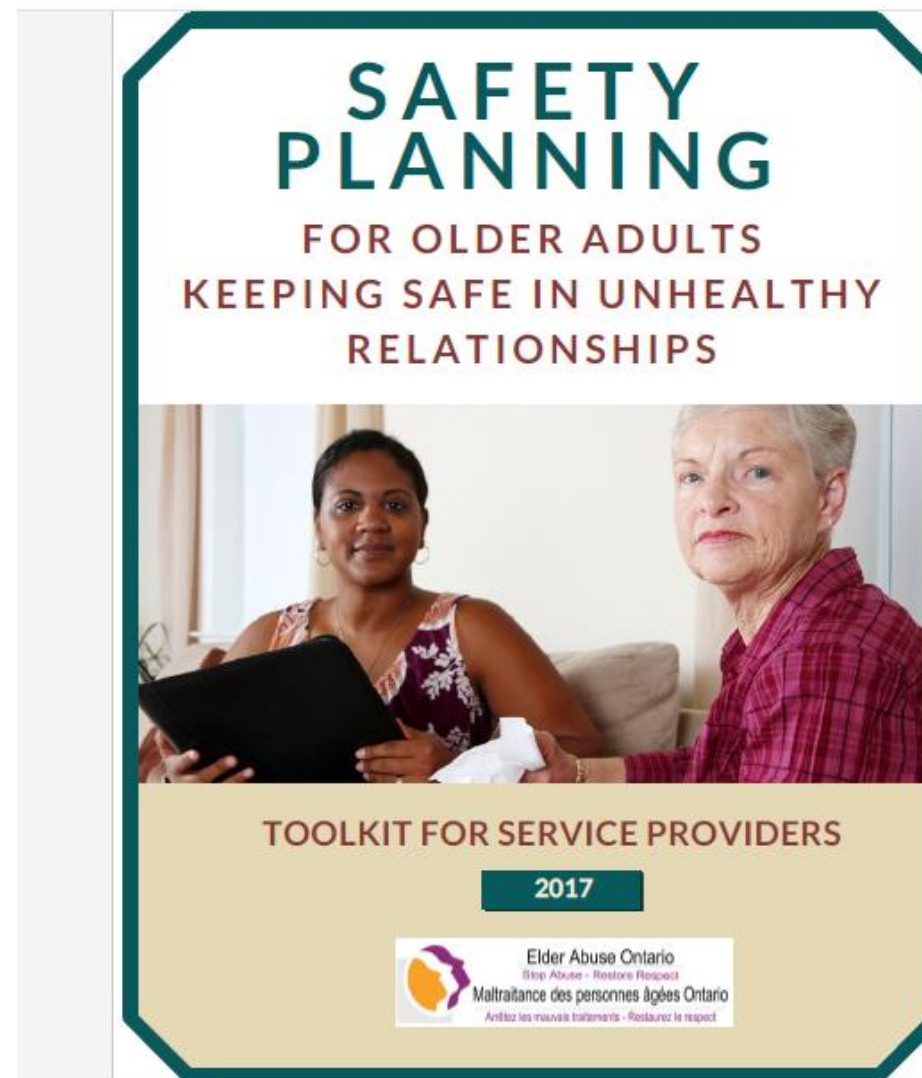
- Forces the older adult to sign over the legal control of their property or health when they are capable of looking after these things themselves; forced to change their will, or to sign over the ownership of their home, or add them to their bank / credit card accounts.
- The substitute decision maker or power of attorney for property and/or personal care is not acting in older adult's best interest, has not paid their bills or provided enough money for food and necessary items.
- Demeans older adult verbally or with gestures and/or calls names.
- Refuses older adult to have medication, food, water or personal care items.
- Limits use of assistive devices (walker, cane, glasses, hearing aids).
- Hits, pushes, slaps, kicks, burns, pinches and/or restrains or locks older adult in a room.
- Makes older adult fearful or nervous when they are present.
- Takes money, property or belongings without agreement or consent, lives with them and refuses to pay their share of the rent/ mortgage.
- Puts limits on their using the phone or having contact with other people.
- Forces older adult to take part in sexual activity, makes unwanted comments of a sexual nature, shows unwanted images of a sexual nature or forces you to watch others engage in sexual activities
- Yells, threatens, and makes fun of them.

# Safety Planning Resources

Elder Abuse Ontario (2017). Safety Planning for Older Adults Keeping Safe in Unhealthy Relationships: Toolkit for Service Providers. The full toolkit is available at Elder Abuse Ontario (2017). Safety Planning for Older Adults Keeping Safe in Unhealthy Relationships: Toolkit for Service Providers.

The full toolkit is available at:

[https://cnpea.ca/images/safety-panning-toolkit-full-document-eao\\_mar-29-2017.pdf](https://cnpea.ca/images/safety-panning-toolkit-full-document-eao_mar-29-2017.pdf)



“Safety Planning with Older Women Experiencing Violence” developed by Woman Act, the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto. Takes about 15 minutes to complete.

<https://womanact.thinkific.com/courses/VAOWsafety>

**SAFETY  
PLANNING  
WITH OLDER  
WOMEN  
EXPERIENCING  
VIOLENCE**



# Digital Safety Strategies

- Computer Safety
- Cell phone safety



<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/plan-your-safety.html#computer>

<https://www.techsafety.org/resources-survivors/cell-phone-safety-plan>





# Local Community and Legal Resources

This information includes an overview of the variety of initiatives identified in Canada that focus on supporting the needs of older women experiencing IPV (Weeks et al., 2021). While there are relatively few initiatives specifically for older women, many initiatives can be adapted to meet the needs of older women.

## Responding to the Needs of Older Women who Experience Intimate Partner Violence: The RESPOND Study



**STUDY PURPOSE:** To gain a better understanding of the needs, experiences and barriers to supports faced by diverse older women who experience intimate partner violence (IPV)

### What did we learn about programs for older women?

Through doing a web search, we found about 80 examples of programs that supported older women in some capacity. We also interviewed 9 administrators of these programs.

Type of Program Identified	Description
Individual in-person counselling and support	Counselors (e.g. social workers, therapists, etc.) provide various types of psychosocial and educational in-person supports
Individual help over the phone via crisis line or help line	Confidential and anonymous free services provided over the phone in real time, local and national services
Educational and/or therapeutic support provided in a group setting	Psychoeducational support groups or group counseling provided to small groups of older women at varying intervals of time (e.g. biweekly). Groups tend to be drop-in with flexible attendance. Examples include retreats, workshops, and community-based educational activities.
Shelters and housing	Provision of safe accommodation and support for older women for varying lengths of time (e.g. emergency short-term stays, longer-term second and third stage housing).

### What other resources are needed to support older women?

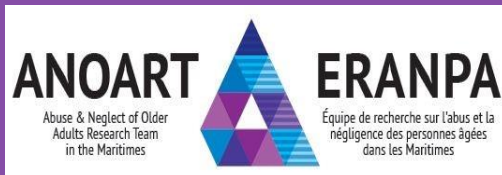
- "Housing"
- "Next steps when dealing with financial abuse, medication abuse, and pet abuse"
- "Legal aspects (matrimonial and division of property)"
- "Age-specific tools"
- "Caregiver support"
- "Hearing from members of different groups who can teach us better ways to serve them"
- "Navigating the legal system as an older woman"
- "Link between poverty and IPV vulnerability"

### Battling Ageism:

- These programs seem to be offered in isolation with not always a great deal of support for their existence
- Administrators are advocates for resources and champions for the existence of these services
- Sometimes there is tension with domestic violence programs serving younger women



# New Brunswick Resources



## The AIM Study

### Important numbers

- After-Hours Emergency Social Services: 1-800-442-9799
- Beauséjour Family Crisis Resource Centre
  - 506-533-9100 (daytime crisis line)
  - 506-312-1542 (evening crisis line)
- Crossroads for Women 24/7 Crisis Line: 1-844-853-0811
- Sexual Violence New Brunswick 24/7 Sexual Assault Support Line: 506-454-0437

### Links to services

[Adult Protection](#)

[Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Workplace Toolkit](#)

[Legal Aid New Brunswick](#)

[Love Shouldn't Hurt: End Intimate Partner Violence](#)

[New Brunswick Association of Family Resource Centres](#)

[Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick: Abuse and violence](#)

[Regional Violence Prevention Networks](#)

[Sexual Violence New Brunswick](#)

[Support services for victims of abuse](#)

[Victim Services](#)

[Support services](#)

[Violence Prevention and Community Partnerships](#)

These are some additional initiatives in New Brunswick to support immigrant women.

- The IMvisible NB/JeSuisVisible NB project that supports non-status, refugee, and immigrant (NSRI) women impacted by domestic violence.
- The New Brunswick Multicultural Council has successfully partnered with Crossroads for Women in Moncton, Second Stage Safe Haven in Saint John, and Liberty Lane in Fredericton to hire three (part-time) Intercultural Community Coordinators to support NSRI women, including international women students and temporary women workers impacted by domestic violence.



# Nova Scotia Resources



## The AIM Study

### Important numbers

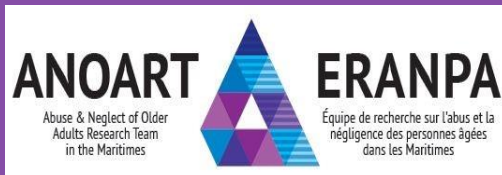
- Neighbours, Friends and Families (Abuse and Violence Support Line): 1-855-225-0220 (toll-free, 24/7)
- Adult Protection Services: 1-800-225-7225
- Avalon 24/7 Sexual Assault Helpline: 902-421-1188
- Eskasoni 24/7 Crisis Line: 1-855-379-2099
- Nova Scotia 24/7 Community and Social Services Helpline: 211

### Links to services

- [Break the Silence Nova Scotia: Sexual violence](#)
- [Child abuse and neglect](#)
- [Domestic Violence Court Program](#)
- [Domestic Violence Leave: Public Education](#)
- [Family and Domestic Violence Services and Resources](#)
- [Eskasoni Mental Health Services](#)
- [Intimate partner violence and sexual violence](#)
- [Legal Aid Nova Scotia](#)
- [Legal Info Nova Scotia: Family violence](#)
- [Nova Scotia Council for the Family](#)
- [Nova Scotia Domestic Violence Resource Centre](#)
- [Offices with child welfare services](#)
- [Sexual assault centres](#)
- [Standing Together to Prevent Domestic Violence](#)
- [Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault Training](#)
- [Transition House Association of Nova Scotia: Find a shelter](#)
- [Victim Service Centres: Contact information](#)

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/services.html#a1>

# Prince Edward Island Resources



## The AIM Study

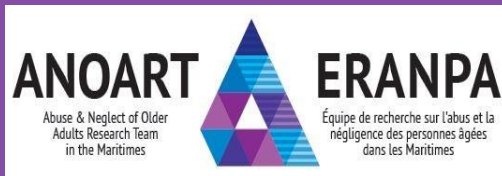
### Important numbers

- Island Help Line: 1-800-218-2885 (toll-free, 24/7)
- Adult Protection Services: 902-368-4790
- Chief Mary Bernard Memorial Women's Shelter 24/7 Crisis Line: 1-855-297-2332
- PEI Family Violence Prevention Services 24/7 Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-240-9894

### Links to services

- [Community Legal Information Association of PEI: Family violence and safety plans](#)
- [Elder abuse awareness](#)
- [Family resource centres](#)
- [Family Violence Prevention Resources](#)
- [Family Violence Prevention: Where to go for help](#)
- [Legal Aid PEI](#)
- [Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI: Programs and services](#)
- [Native Council of PEI: Family Violence Tool Kit](#)
- [PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre](#)

# National Resources



## The AIM Study

### Shelters

[Sheltersafe.ca](http://Sheltersafe.ca): Provides information and a [clickable map](#) to help connect women and their children across Canada with the nearest shelter for safety and support.

### For Indigenous People

Hope for Wellness 24/7 Help Line: Call 1-855-242-3310 (toll-free) or connect to the [online Hope for Wellness chat](#).

Services are available

- to all Indigenous people across Canada who need immediate emotional support, crisis intervention or referrals to community-based services
- experienced and culturally sensitive help line counsellors can help if you want to talk in English and French and, on request, in Cree, Ojibway and Inuktitut

### For Older Adults

[Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse \(CNPEA\)](#): CNPEA's web site features information and links to resources to get help if you or someone you know is experiencing abuse or neglect as an older adult.

### Legal help

For information about the laws relating to family violence and the kind of help that is available, please visit the Department of Justice Canada's [Get help with family violence](#) web page.

# SMART is an acronym that can be helpful in setting goals

- S- Specific, be specific about what you want to accomplish
- M – Measurable, how will you know if you met your goal?
- A – Achievable, focus on things you can change
- R - Relevant, what are the priorities for you?
- T - Time Bound, set realistic timelines

The form on the right may be useful for the women in the AIM Program to develop goals for the future.

<b>INITIAL GOAL</b>	Write the goal you have in mind
<b>S</b> <b>SPECIFIC</b>	What do you want to accomplish? Who needs to be included? When do you want to do this? Why is this a goal?
<b>M</b> <b>MEASURABLE</b>	How can you measure progress and know if you've successfully met your goal?
<b>A</b> <b>ACHIEVABLE</b>	Do you have the skills required to achieve the goal? If not, can you obtain them? What is the motivation for this goal? Is the amount of effort required on par with what the goal will achieve?
<b>R</b> <b>RELEVANT</b>	Why am I setting this goal now? Is it aligned with overall objectives?
<b>T</b> <b>TIME-BOUND</b>	What's the deadline and is it realistic?

## The AIM Study

Setting goals for the future can help survivors begin to move past the abuse and find closure. Some questions survivors can ask when figuring out what their future goals are on this slide.

- What do you need to do to stay safe? You might want to set a goal to find a new place to live, be it in a new home or a new location. This can also help you feel a better sense of getting a fresh start.
- What do you need to do to not return to the abusive situation? First off, you should cut off all contact with your abuser. Then, perhaps set a goal to continue with counseling or a support group so you can stay strong and feel supported as you venture out onto your own.
- Do you have a support system? You could set a goal to reconnect with old friends or make new friends. Just be careful that if you're concealing your location, you don't reconnect with someone who will tell your abuser where you are.
- How can you build back your self-confidence? This could be through finding a new ways to contribute through paid or volunteer opportunities, exercise or other activities you enjoy.

# Study/ Evaluation Overview

**Design:** Randomized controlled trial with a qualitative component

**Goal:** To test the effectiveness of the 2 components of a program for women in midlife and older who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) and to learn from the experiences of those who implemented and participated in the program.

## **Research Questions:**

1. What is the impact of the 2 components of the program on older women's knowledge about IPV?
2. What is the impact of the 2 components of the program on changes in behaviours (e.g., developing safety strategies)?
3. What is the impact of the 2 components of the program on IPV well-being (e.g., physical and mental health)?
4. What are the experiences of the community-based researchers who implemented the program and the women who participated in the program?

# AIM Program Facilitator Training



The AIM Study

# Working with community- based organizations

## Partnership 1

- Organizations appointed staff to recruit participants, complete the training program, and facilitate the AIM program.
- Organizations that chose this option were provided with \$3500.

## Partnership 2

- Organizations agreed to help with spreading awareness of the study and participant recruitment only
- Organizations that chose this option were provided with \$500.



**The AIM Study**



# AIM program facilitator duties



## The AIM Study

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Participate in the knowledge exchange/training process

---

Recruit women to participate

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Deliver the one-hour information-sharing session with all participants

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Deliver the social support component of the AIM program to the women randomized to the intervention group

---

Can choose to be interviewed about their experiences as a community-based researcher and provide feedback about any aspect of the program.

# Two-hour zoom knowledge exchange session for facilitators



## The AIM Study

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Introductions, honouring the knowledge and experience that each person brings to this project.

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Discussion about the AIM Program: Questions, suggestions, additional information or resources needed

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Exchange of ideas about supporting the needs of diverse older women who have experienced intimate partner violence

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Discussion about data collection tools and procedures, documenting the delivery of the AIM program

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Program communication with the research coordinator and support provided by the Research Coordinator

# Study Timeline:

Dates	Activities
October 2023 - May 2024	Knowledge exchange session with community-based researchers
October 2023 – June 2024	participant recruitment completed, baseline data collection
October 2024	All AIM program delivery completed
July 2025	3-month and 9-month data collection completed; qualitative interviews completed
August –December 2025	Data analysis, dissemination



**The AIM Study**

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