**PEER SUPPORT FOR WOMEN LABELLED WITH AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CANADA: FINDINGS FROM A SYMPOSIUM FOCUSED ON CO-CREATING TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR FUTURE WORK**

**Carolyn Elias1, Kelly MacDougall1, Sandra Tavares1, Tammy Bernasky2, Alexis Buettgen3, Ann Fudge-Schormans3, Veronica Schiariti4, Janice DuMont5, Robin Mason5, Jennifer Gordon6 & Maria Huijbregts1,5**

**1Family Service Toronto, 2Cape Breton University, 3McMaster University, 4University of Victoria, 5University of Toronto, 6Pineapple Flags**

**Objectives**: Women labelled with intellectual disabilities (ID) experience significant barriers to social inclusion and high rates of sexual violence, yet there is limited research and very few services that address the needs of this group. Previous research suggests that peer support has many benefits, including valuing diverse lived experiences and non-professional vantage points. Peer support is based on a relationship between people who have lived experiences in common (Mental Health Commission of Canada, n. d.)[[1]](#endnote-1). It is therefore critical to ensure women with lived experience are meaningful participants in co-designing such programs and research. Currently, peer support programming for this group is not well understood due to a lack of knowledge and research. We developed a symposium to develop Terms of Reference (TOR), that could lay the foundation for future collaborative research and programming in this area.

**Methods**: The virtual symposium adopted an arts-based and co-design approach. There was a total of 34 participants from the larger community of interest: women labelled with ID, service providers, and researchers to develop the TOR. The symposium data was analyzed through content analysis.

**Results** Participants recognized that peer support provides benefits such as social support and companionship for both mentors and mentees. However, there are barriers to the development (e.g., location or cost), implementation (e.g., planned and ongoing facilitator support), and the process (e.g., the peer mentor and mentee relationship and meeting coordination) of such programs. These challenges also pertain to the implementation of research in this area. To overcome these barriers, possible solutions were identified. These included funding, developing an evidence base for programming, intra- and inter-collaboration, inclusive research, and addressing additional complexities due to intersectionality.

**Discussion/Conclusion:** The TOR highlighted the benefits, barriers, and solutions that arose in the discussions with an emphasis on “Nothing About Us Without Us” throughout the TOR. This was a central value in advocating, designing, implementing, training, and evaluating peer support programming for this population.

**Correspondence**:

Carolyn Elias, MSW

Family Service Toronto

355 Church St, Toronto, ON M5B 0B2

c.elias3187@gmail.com

1. Mental Health Commission of Canada. (n.d.). *Peer support*. Retrieved from <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/what-we-do/access/peer-support/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)