



Women and Girls' Eyes on the Neighbourhood: Feeling Safe in Public Space

Executive Summary

Everyone has a right to feel safe in their community. To create safe public spaces, we must identify and understand what makes people feel unsafe in their neighbourhoods. There has been limited focus on how women and girls experience safety at a neighbourhood level. To address this gap, Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre (PQCHC) and City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) worked with women and girls in four West end neighbourhoods in a community research project funded by Crime Prevention Ottawa, which is part of United Neighbours (funded by Trillium), and supported by many other partner agencies and individuals.

The central purpose of this research is to ignite a fresh dialogue on the gendered nature of safety and to map steps that residents, service providers, and decision makers might take to increase women and girls' ability to safely use public space within their neighbourhoods. This report presents the findings from a 10 month Participatory Action Research (PAR) project with women and girls in 4 neighbourhoods in Ottawa's West end who explore factors that contribute to their sense of feeling safe or unsafe in their communities. The research and subsequent findings have been informed by a literature review, an advisory committee, and employed the methodologies of Safety Audits, PhotoVoice, Workshops, Community Conversations, and Body Mapping as a means of deepening their own, and others' understanding of what safety feels like and how to be an active agent in accomplishing a sense of safety and connectedness to one's community.

Research findings demonstrate the strength, resiliency and knowledge-sharing that participants use to feel safer and create a strong sense of community in their respective neighbourhoods. We are happy to share these in the hopes that other Ottawa residents might share their own strategies and challenges, thereby deepening the discussion about women and girls' feelings and experience of safety at the neighbourhood level. Participants in this research use a wide variety of creative and collective strategies to make them feel safer. A major learning in this project has been to unearth what is *between* the lines. To get between these lines, to the interstices of the issue, means to come to the understanding that while women and girls may say they feel safe, their actions speak louder than words. Safety can be measured by *acting* as though you feel safe, not just saying that you are.

We have organized the recommendations under 5 themes: 1) Community Participation, 2) Reporting, 3) Environment and Beautification and 4) Training and Awareness Raising 5) Community Development Initiatives. Under each theme we list recommendations for partners followed by recommendations for residents.