



Announcing the Alliance against Violence and Adversity (AVA): a new Canadian Institutes of Health Research Training Platform

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Dear Editor:

UNICEF's recent health rankings reveal that Canada's children are in "crisis", ranking 31st of 38 among high-income nations in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and European Union (EU) on mental health, 35th on suicidality, and 30th on physical health (UNICEF Canada, 2020). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as family violence—which affect approximately one third of Canadian children and disproportionately impact girls and women (Yoon et al., 2015, Letourneau et al., 2019, Winstanley et al., 2020)—are likely culprits for Canada's dismal international rankings (Bhushan et al., 2020). For nearly 30 years, combatting violence against girls and women has been a policy and research priority across Canada (Statistics Canada, 1993). Yet, this social problem persists with rising family violence rates and declining girls' and women's health and wellness outcomes (Government of Canada, 2017). Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, and gender-diverse people may be at even greater risk (Baumle, 2018, Winstanley et al., 2020). In response, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) funded the Alliance

against Violence and Adversity (AVA), a \$2.55 million health research training platform to train the next generation of community-based research scholars to address this public health crisis. AVA is a collaborative, innovative, cross-disciplinary training platform that engages more than 200 academic and community partners from across Canada. AVA is led by the Alliance of Canadian Research Centres on Gender-Based Violence and their networks of not-for-profit community agencies, serving girls, women, and gender-diverse people at-risk for, or exposed to, violence and adversity.

Through enhanced training of AVA Scholars (i.e. graduate and post-doctoral trainees), AVA aims to transform the delivery of population health and social services for girls, women, and gender-diverse people to prevent and reduce negative impacts of violence and adversity across Canada. AVA Scholars have access to online educational opportunities focused on (1) health impacts of adversity and gender-based violence, (2) implementation of science and knowledge mobilization strategies to transform practice, (3) understanding impacts of adversity on brain development and health (i.e. Brain Story Certification) (Gagnon, 2022), and (4) equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA). AVA Scholars attain micro-credentialing badges as they progress through various online learning modules. Scholars also engage in Triadic Mentorship, Community Internships, and Developmental Strategic Planning. AVA provides mentorship and community-engaged internship experiences focused on individualized learning plans and translational research career goal setting. The core competencies attained by AVA Scholars include (1) comfort and experience working with community partners, (2) understanding of issues of adversity and violence affecting girls, women, and gender-diverse people, (3) understanding of how to implement and sustain evidence-based solutions, and (4) understanding of EDIA principles. There is also an expectation that AVA learning will enhance research and practice, and that the scholar's career goals align with AVA's goals.

AVA's primary focus on training the next generation of Canadian scholars to undertake research in partnership

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with community agencies and collaborate with practitioners, community agencies, and individuals with lived experience to identify evidence-based innovations and interventions stands to make a transformational impact on health and social service delivery. With a unique focus on both research excellence and breaking barriers between academia and community, AVA is poised to reduce both the incidence and effects of family violence and adversity and to improve Canada's UNICEF rankings for girls', women's, and gender-diverse people's health, with optimistic lifespan, intergenerational, and population impacts.

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