Women RISE: Women’s health and economic empowerment for a COVID-19 Recovery that is Inclusive, Sustainable and Equitable

The COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to control it have threatened livelihoods, introduced new workplace risks and made unstable work relationships even more precarious, especially for women.

To address this, Canada’s International Development Research Centre, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council have launched Women RISE (Women’s health and economic empowerment for a COVID-19 Recovery that is Inclusive, Sustainable and Equitable) to support global action-oriented, gender-transformative research by teams of researchers from low- and middle-income countries and Canada.

An externally reviewed, open, two-stage competitive Call for Proposals was launched on March 8, 2022. Projects were recommended for funding by the External Scientific Review Committee on July 21, 2022, and they were approved by the Women RISE Steering Committee on July 28, 2022.

The following projects are funded under Women RISE.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No.</th>
<th>110011</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Title</td>
<td>Strengthening preparedness for future pandemics among working women and factory workers living in urban informal settlements in Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead applicant</td>
<td>Sohana Shafique</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead applicant institution</td>
<td>International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canadian Co-PI</td>
<td>Zulfiqar A. Bhutta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canadian Co-PI institution</td>
<td>Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-maker PI</td>
<td>Tahmina Shirin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation amount (CAD)</td>
<td>987,800.00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Abstract**

Using mixed-methods implementation research, the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research (ICDDR), Bangladesh and SickKids Hospital Toronto will conduct this study in Dhaka and Gazipur in Bangladesh. Through a situation analysis, the drivers of women’s work and health related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh will be explored. Formative research will identify barriers and enablers to co-create an intervention involving working women, the community and relevant stakeholders. Implementation research will then test the intervention at the micro, meso and macro level using systems thinking. The Research Team aims to influence policy toward regulating the work environment relating to pandemic preparedness.

**Expected results**

Expected results include:

- An effective context-sensitive intervention using a system-thinking approach to address gender inequality at the structural and political level.
- Evidence to facilitate formulation of policies to prevent future infectious disease outbreaks and pandemics in Bangladesh and similar settings.
- Policy-relevant information that can be beneficial to regulate working conditions and the private sector.
### Abstract

Illegal artisanal small-scale mining of gold is on the rise in Uganda and Ghana. While all people involved are vulnerable due to the often informal and unpaid nature of the work, cultural practices and gender subscribed roles mean that adolescent girls in these communities are especially marginalized. Using mixed qualitative and quantitative methods, Makerere University and McMaster University, together with their partners, will assess the economic and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent girls living in unplanned mining communities in Uganda and Ghana. The project aims to influence the reduction of gender-based inequalities resulting from the economic and associated health impacts of COVID-19 and future similar crises on the last mile adolescents working in illegal mining communities in both countries. The project will provide policymakers and programmers with a proto-type process and outputs of a co-developed intervention on which to base future policies and interventions to address existing inequalities.

### Expected results

Expected results include:

- An understanding of the economic and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent girls living in unplanned mining communities in Uganda and Ghana, how this varied between girls and boys and the coping mechanisms adolescent girls used to support their economic and physical well-being, during the pandemic.
- A detailed list of empirical and literature-based interventions for strengthening the coping skills and fostering resilience of the adolescents living in unplanned communities during the COVID-19 pandemic recovery.
- A proto-type process and outputs of a co-developed intervention on which to base future policies and interventions to address existing inequalities.
**Abstract**
Using a parallel case study design in two sites, Kisumu, Kenya and Mukono, Uganda, that employs an innovative methodology that privileges the voices of women from all socio-economic backgrounds, COHESU and the University of Waterloo will explore how women’s health and work have been impacted by the pandemic. The research will discern women’s needs to address their health and well-being issues and to feel more empowered. The knowledge gained will inform policy and practice to empower women and address the socio-economic and health inequalities sharpened by the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya and Uganda.

**Expected results**
Expected results include:

- Increased participation of women in economic activities and education in Kenya and Uganda through improved policies and practices that benefit women of all ages, particularly in the education, health and employment sectors.
- Increased access, for women in Kenya and Uganda, to reliable pensions and geriatric health care services.
- Improved South-South collaboration and strengthened capacities for 3 post-doctoral fellows and 6 graduate students.
Project no. | 110015
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**Project title** | Post-COVID-19 Recovery: Overcoming Economic Hardship and Violence Against Women in Southern Benin

**Lead applicant** | Jacques Saizonou

**Lead applicant institution** | Centre de formation et de recherche en matière de population (CEFORP), Université d’Abomey-Calavi (UAC)

**Canadian Co-PI** | Anne Emmanuelle Calves

**Canadian Co-PI institution** | Université de Montréal

**Decision-maker PI** | Mèdessè Véronique Tognifode

**Allocation amount (CAD)** | $992,598.00

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**Project abstract**

Early in the pandemic, in addition to the recommended barrier measures, Benin introduced a *cordon sanitaire*, which separated the south from the hinterland and was intended to reduce the widespread transmission of the virus. These measures had the effect of slowing down economic activity and disrupting social relations at all levels. Women were particularly affected, as they were subjected to an upsurge in gender-based violence. The project is led by the Centre de formation et de recherche en matière de population at Benin’s Université d’Abomey-Calavi, and by Canada’s Université de Montréal. The overall objective of the project is to study the differential effects of COVID-19 and the *cordon sanitaire* by gender and among socio-economic categories of women by shedding light on the increased risks of various forms of violence that women have faced. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the project will use primary and secondary data sources and various collection techniques such as surveys and individual and group interviews.

**Expected results**

They include helping to formulate policies and guide government interventions for gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence. In addition, the project will help build the capabilities of the next generation of women in research and intervention by providing scholarships to women for training in Benin and Canada.
Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to control it have threatened livelihoods, introduced new workplace risks and made unstable work relationships even more precarious, especially for women. In this context, Women’s Aid Organization and University of Alberta plan to study the experience of women performing paid and unpaid work during the COVID-19 pandemic and assess the effectiveness and relevance of existing policies that govern their working conditions during the pandemic. They will utilize qualitative and quantitative mixed methods to study the burden of care work, formal and informal, paid and unpaid, considering social identifiers, using an intersectional lens (considering combined variables such as race, gender and class) in Malaysia, across Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia. These identifiers include ethnicity, gender and class across a spectrum of essential care workers residing in varying household and familial configurations (e.g., single mothers, intergenerational households). Data generated will be participatory, guided by feminist research principles, collected through in-depth interviews, quantitative surveys, focus group discussions, and policy assessments, including engagement with key government stakeholders to inform gender-transformative care policies and infrastructure moving forward.

Expected results
- Government policymakers and the public have an improved understanding of the gendered impact of COVID-19 on the care sector.
- Policymakers are equipped with evidence-based policy options on how to ensure resilience and sustainability of the care sector in times of crisis.
- Community-based researchers are equipped with the necessary skills to conduct, analyze and interpret research for use in policy processes.
Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to control it have threatened livelihoods, introduced new workplace risks and made unstable work relationships even more precarious, especially for women. In this context, the Centre for Population and Environmental Development and the University of Windsor will generate robust policy-relevant evidence on rural women and girls’ lives before, during and after COVID-19 periods in Nigeria and the impact on rural women’s inequality status. Their key research question is: What are the context-specific challenges which impact women’s lives before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic? The data will be collected using mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, including life histories and photovoice methods, and will be used to generate robust policy-relevant evidence and to promote the integration of context-specific innovative strategies on gender equality and women’s access to essential health into gender-transformative policies on COVID-19 response and recovery. The research will be carried out in the Edo and Delta States of Nigeria.

Expected results

Expected results include:

- New knowledge on women/girls’ lives and status in rural communities and the impact on their access to essential health services before, during and after COVID-19.
- A tested framework of community-led initiatives to promote rural women’s economic and health empowerment ready for scaling up.
- At least 50,000 women experience improved access to/use of essential health services.
- At least 2,000 policymakers and non-state actors empowered on the integration of gender equality in COVID-19 recovery programs.
**Abstract**
This project will be carried out by the South African Medical Research Council and Canada’s Simon Fraser University. It will evaluate a cash transfer plus a gender-transformative economic livelihoods intervention for improving psychological well-being and gender equality among woman caregivers of children and adolescents living with HIV (CALHIV) in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The mixed-methods research approach will consist of a cluster randomized trial among HIV clinic caregivers of CALHIV. Intervention clusters will receive a monthly cash transfer and the gender/livelihoods intervention while the control clusters will only receive the monthly cash transfer. Qualitative interviews on economic evaluation will assess the feasibility, acceptability and cost-effectiveness of the intervention.

**Expected results**
Expected results include:
- Pre- and post-intervention impacts on outcomes of psychological well-being, intimate partner violence, depressive symptoms, gender attitudes and earnings will be assessed.
- Results will improve understanding of economic livelihood-based interventions in strengthening caregivers’ psychological well-being.
- Evidence generated will inform and strengthen the current government’s COVID-19 recovery efforts.
Abstract

Using a community-based participatory action research approach, the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia (Peru), St. Michel’s Hospital, Unity Health Toronto and the Socio-Economic and Labor Research Directorate of the Ministry of Work and Employment (Peru), will involve women domestic workers unions to examine the working conditions and access to healthcare of women domestic workers in three cities of Peru (Lima, La Libertad and Piura).

Expected results

Expected results include:

- The assessment and comparison of health and working conditions of women domestic workers before and during the pandemic.
- The identification of the barriers that affect their access to social protection policies in the formal and informal economies.
- The co-design of context-adapted recommendations to improve access to health services and social protection among women domestic workers.
- Specific recommendations to respond to the specific needs and context of certain groups (by age, ethnic/race identification, migration status),
- Strengthened multidisciplinary research team capacities including early career researchers and women scientists.
Project No. 110021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Improving the involvement of women and adolescent girls working in informal sector in the development of response measures to pandemics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead applicant</td>
<td>Madeleine Wayack-Pambe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead applicant institution</td>
<td>Université Joseph Ki-ZERBO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Co-PI</td>
<td>Eric Tchouaket Nguemeleu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canadian Co-PI institution</td>
<td>Université du Québec en Outaouais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-maker PI</td>
<td>Mamadou Cisse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation amount (CAD)</td>
<td>829,316.00</td>
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Abstract
Using a mixed-methods participatory implementation research methodology, the consortium of Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo and Université du Québec en Outaouais will address the involvement of women and adolescent girls in informal sector in the development of response measures to pandemics. To achieve this, the team will first conduct a situational analysis to assess the degree of inclusion of adolescent girls and women in the informal sector in the definition of economic and mental health response measures to the pandemic. Secondly, the team will co-develop and implement, with all stakeholders, more inclusive strategies in response measures. Thirdly, the team will assess the implementation and costs of the co-constructed strategies.

Expected results
The project will result in a better understanding and integration of the basic needs and interests of adolescent girls and women in the informal sector according to the diversity of their profile, in post-pandemic COVID-19 response strategies in particular, and programs to respond to health crises more generally. A series of outputs, including scientific papers and policy briefs, will be also produced.
Abstract
The Co-operative University of Kenya and the University of the Fraser Valley seek to explore how COVID-19 has impacted women’s work, participation and health within the agricultural cooperative ecosystem in Kenya. Using a quasi-experimental research design, with both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study will investigate the factors that underlay impacts of COVID-19 on women’s work, participation and health in agricultural cooperatives in three counties of Kenya - Kiambu, Kajiado and Taita Taveta. The Research Team aims to enhance knowledge on how economic changes resulting from COVID-19 disproportionately affect women and women’s health, and how recovery strategies can be inclusive, gender transformative and health promoting for women. The findings of the study will inform the design of a health-financing intervention in cooperatives.

Expected results
Expected results include:
- Increased women’s membership and access to credit by 20% through cooperative membership.
- Increased women’s access to healthcare services by 20%.
- Strengthened capacity of 10 local organizations supporting cooperatives.
- Strengthened institutional and human personnel capacity of cooperatives to enhance their performance.
Project Title
Innovation in Resilience to Trauma Programming for Fostering Women’s Post-Pandemic Recovery in El Salvador

Lead applicant
Erica Olson

Lead applicant institution
Asociacion Programa Velasco

Canadian Co-PI
Maria Liegghio

Canadian Co-PI institution
York University

Decision-maker PI
Annie Boyd-Ramirez

Allocation amount (CAD)
831,334.00

Abstract
Using a participatory research action approach, Asociacion Programa Velasco and York University will explore women’s resilience to trauma as an organizing framework for fostering post-pandemic recovery and addressing violence, gender inequalities, and social and economic development in El Salvador. The mixed-methods study includes an environmental scan of trauma and resilience-focused programs, policy and practice analysis, in-depth interviews and focus groups.

Expected results
The expected outcomes include a strengthened network of government, practitioner and academic representatives that is well positioned to influence policy and practice change to promote women’s resilience and health and economic well-being at the local, national and regional levels.
Abstract
The American University of Beirut and Simon Fraser University will co-lead research to answer the question of what efforts are needed to attract women to the workforce, protect their health and prevent female labour market attrition during 'shocks'. Through analysis of existing surveys in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region with a specific focus on 11 selected low- and middle-income countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen; policy analysis; and updated regional literature reviews the team will examine changes in female labour force participation and impacts on health and well-being, before, during and after COVID-19. Using mixed methods, data collection will examine the education, health and early childhood development sectors where women predominate, using Lebanon as a case example.

Expected results
Expected results include:

- A pioneering study on the differentials in labour force attrition and a disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women vis-à-vis men and the underlying mechanisms.
- Region-wide and country-specific associations between employment and health, and gender-specific changes in these during the COVID-19 period.
- Informed efforts by the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health and the inter-sectoral Early Childhood Development Task Force to promote and sustain women’s labour-force participation and protect women’s health.
Abstract
The joint Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka and University of Ottawa research will study the relationship between government sponsored economic schemes to the COVID-19 pandemic and the unequal health and economic shock on female workers in the ready-made garment industry of Sri Lanka at the national level. This will help us understand the magnitude of the disproportionate pandemic shock, identify the existing best practices to mitigate the adverse effect and suggest a fiscally feasible and gender-responsive response mechanism in the future. The study will follow a participatory-research approach, comprising primary data collection using surveys, focus group discussions and key informant interviews to generate evidence for use in policy influence.

Expected results
Expected results include:

- Factory management teams that are better equipped to deal with pandemic situations and have more female workers.
- Industry and national policy response mechanisms effectively address women-specific structural issues in the garment industry.
- Policymakers, stakeholders and the Sri Lankan public are well informed about and adhere to regulations for improving pandemic readiness of factory floor designs and the need for responses to be gender responsive.
<table>
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<th>Project No.</th>
<th>110027</th>
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<tr>
<td>Project Title</td>
<td>Examining the Socio-economic and Health Vulnerabilities of Female Bushmeat Traders in the Context of COVID-19 in Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead applicant</td>
<td>Yaa Ntiamo-Baidu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead applicant institution</td>
<td>Centre for Biodiversity Conservation Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canadian Co-PI</td>
<td>Joseph Mensa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Co-PI institution</td>
<td>York University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-maker PI</td>
<td>Emmanuel Ankrah Odame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation amount (CAD)</td>
<td>892,297.00</td>
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Abstract
In Ghana, women faced serious socio-economic and health barriers prior to COVID-19, and there are clear indications that the pandemic has affected women more than men, especially those working in the informal sector. Women form the greatest portion of the informal sector in Ghana, where they sell various commodities, including bushmeat. Even though bushmeat trading has long been a major livelihood activity for women, there is a dearth of knowledge on the health hazards of the trade, including women’s exposure to zoonotic diseases. The project is led by the Centre for Biodiversity Conservation Research of the University of Ghana and Canada’s York University. The general objective of the project is to examine the interrelated factors that determine women’s livelihood challenges and opportunities in the context of COVID-19, drawing on the case of women bushmeat traders in Ghana. The methodology entails both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments and the participation of key stakeholders in Ghana's bushmeat trade.

Expected results
Expected results include:
- An improved understanding of an insufficiently known livelihood activity for women.
- An increased awareness of the issues among stakeholders and policymakers.
- A mobilization of efforts and resources to enhance the well-being of women participating in the bushmeat trade particularly and to promote gender and health equity in Ghana generally.
Abstract
The Makerere University School of Public Health and University of Waterloo co-led research will study the impact of COVID-19 on employment, economic status and HIV risk and vulnerability among women living in urban informal settlements in two major cities (Kampala and Mbale) in Uganda. Using a mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative) descriptive cross-sectional study, the project will explore the changes in employment (paid and unpaid) and economic status due to the pandemic, its impact on risk and vulnerability to HIV, and the strategies employed by women to cope with COVID-19 related work stress that exposes them to HIV risk and vulnerability. The evidence generated will inform inclusive, sustainable and equitable gender transformative solutions for COVID-19 recovery and future health emergencies.

Expected results
Expected results include:

- Increased understanding of the socio-economic and HIV-related impact of COVID-19 on women living in urban informal settlements.
- Increased understanding of the coping strategies of women living in urban informal settlements and how the existing COVID-19 recovery interventions have been or not been helpful to them.
- A context specific co-designed intervention package for COVID-19 recovery in urban informal settlements.
Abstract
The University of Ibadan and the Douglas Hospital Research Centre (Montreal) will study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other disruptive events on the work and well-being of self-employed young women vis-à-vis self-employed young men, using qualitative interviews, secondary data analysis and digital storytelling. The co-production with self-employed young women, using policy analysis, focus group discussions and theory of change workshops, will see the piloting and evaluation of the intervention planned to provide co-produced, actionable solutions to mitigate the effects of these disruptors on their work and well-being. The research will be primarily conducted in Oyo State in southwestern Nigeria.

Expected results
Expected results include:
- Increased knowledge of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the working lives (including paid and unpaid work) and well-being of self-employed young women.
- A suitable and contextually appropriate gender-transformative intervention to improve income security and mental, physical and social health and social support systems for self-employed young women.
Abstract
This action-oriented research, led by the consortium of Centre d'Excellence Africain pour la Prévention et le Contrôle des Maladies Transmissibles (CEA-PCMT) of Université Gamal Abdel Nasser de Conakry and the University of Toronto, aims to design and implement strategies that result in centring women’s health and economic well-being in the COVID-19 recovery efforts and future emergency preparedness and response in Guinea. This project aims to analyze the underlying causes of current policy inertia, co-create a gender sensitive multi-sectoral policy framework and work with decision-makers to ensure the COVID-19 recovery and future emergency preparedness and response adopt a gendered approach in design and implementation.

Expected results
Expected results include:

- Scientific publications and training curriculum for decision-makers.
- Ensuring that institutional actors responsible for preparation, response and recovery from health emergencies proactively include gender-transformative and multi-sector measures in the design and implementation of health and economic policies.
Abstract
The Aga Khan University, Kenya and the University of Manitoba will study the gender equality and health equity gaps experienced by the female health workforce (paid and unpaid) in Kenya during the pandemic and how these experiences impacted their physical and mental health, well-being, socio-economic status and livelihoods. In Kenya, the face of the pandemic health workforce response was predominantly female. A majority experienced anxieties, because of limited disease knowledge, limited access to protective equipment, increased COVID disease exposure and infection, and a surge in domestic household responsibilities, including unpaid labour. Yet, the socio-economic and health impacts of COVID-19 on the paid and unpaid female health workforce remains neglected. Using participatory mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative), this project aims to improve understanding of the root cultural, structural, socio-economic and political factors that perpetuate gender inequities in the paid and unpaid health sector. These findings will inform the development of gender-sensitive and transformative health systems that can withstand future emergencies in Kenya.

Expected results
Expected results include:

- A gender responsive, inclusive and sustainable human resource policy and management good practice model that can be applied in a health crisis situation in the Kenyan context.
- A Community of Practice that will institutionalize the policy recommendations and provide platforms for capacity development.
- Strengthened research collaboration and learning exchange between researchers in Canada and Kenya.
- Build the capacities of emerging young female researchers in Kenya.
**Abstract**

Using participatory-action research, the University of Cuenca in collaboration with McMaster University, the Ministry of Social and Economic Inclusion and the National Network of Waste Recyclers of Ecuador will assess the health conditions, policy factors, productive and reproductive work affecting women waste pickers in the context of COVID-19 in three cities of Ecuador: Cuenca, Portoviejo and Lago Agrio. The project team, in partnership with local organizations and decision-makers, will co-design and implement intersectoral interventions based on an inclusive circular-economy approach and gender-transformative strategies that address women waste pickers’ health and work conditions.

**Expected results**

Expected results include:

- An in-depth understanding of labour (productive and reproductive work) and health conditions of a sample of 300 women waste pickers in the context of COVID-19.
- Changes in labour practices for women waste pickers such as improved urban routes and transportation.
- Interventions that improve the occupational health conditions of women waste pickers.
- Strengthening of the organizational practices and governance of the national network of waste recyclers (RENAREC).
- Enhanced capacities of the multi-institutional project team on equity, diversity and inclusion best practices.
- The involvement of strategic stakeholders and key decision-makers in the formulation of public policies that improve the living conditions of women waste pickers.
**Project No.** | 110045
---|---
**Project Title** | Sexual and Reproductive Health of Female Sex Workers in the Post-COVID Era in Argentina
**Lead applicant** | Valeria Fink
**Lead applicant institution** | Fundación Huésped
**Canadian Co-PI** | Sharon Walmsley
**Canadian Co-PI institution** | University Health Network, Toronto General
**Decision-maker PI** | Adriana Duran
**Allocation amount (CAD)** | 978,496.00

**Abstract**
Using a mixed-methods design, the project will describe the sexual and reproductive health status and income protection policies covering female sex workers (FSW) after the COVID-19 pandemic and analyze the feasibility of a comprehensive prevention and care package (e.g., STIs test and treatment, gynecological and proctological care, and gender-affirming services) in order to sustain health care strategies for FSW in the post-COVID era and for future health emergencies. FSWs were severely impacted by the pandemic and are one of the most marginalized and criminalized populations in Argentina.

**Expected results**
By working in collaboration with the local government and relevant community-based organizations, the study is expected to provide evidence-based data to promote strategies to improve the sexual and reproductive health of FSWs and income protection policies.