

Strong Allies, Stronger Communities: Engaging Men in Allyship to End Gender-based Violence in Workplaces and Communities

**Sarnia-Lambton County
Community Needs Assessment Study**

July 2026

Welcome to 'Strong Allies, Stronger Communities'

The Strong Allies, Stronger Communities (SASC) project is a community-based initiative between the Centre-Sarnia, Lambton College, and the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC) at Western University. The project aims to address and prevent gender-based violence (GBV) across Sarnia-Lambton workplaces and communities, with a particular focus on engaging men and young men in allyship within the skilled trades.

Gender-based violence remains a significant public health and safety issue across Canada, disproportionately impacting women and gender-diverse people, while also affecting individuals, families, workplaces, and communities more broadly. In Sarnia-Lambton, this issue is further shaped by the region's strong presence of male-dominated industries, where workplace culture, gender norms, and structural barriers can influence both the occurrence of violence and responses to it.

The SASC project was developed in response to a growing recognition that preventing gender-based violence requires engaging men as active participants in change. By promoting allyship, the project seeks to build safer, more inclusive workplaces and communities, while supporting men in developing the knowledge, skills, and confidence to recognize and respond to gender-based violence.

SASC Collaborators

The Centre-Sarnia Lambton has been a local leader in gender-based violence education, treatment, and prevention since 1982. Since its inception, The Centre has provided inclusive services for survivors (ages 12 and older) of gender-based and sexual violence, regardless of gender. The Centre is home to the region's first and only Male Ally Coalition, which is comprised of male-identified volunteers who actively contribute to creating a safer community through education, participating in awareness events, addressing systemic barriers, and supporting male survivors of sexual violence. The Centre is the founding member of the 'Strong Allies, Stronger Communities' collaboration, and provides expertise to the project in gender-based violence education and prevention. For more information about The Centre, its services, or the Male Ally Coalition, you can visit www.thecentresarnia.ca, or phone 519-337-3154

Lambton College's Centre for Community Health and Social Impact (CCHSI) is a leading hub for collaborative, applied community-focused research. Dedicated to advancing overall standards of living, the CCHSI unites academic, industrial, and community partners to solve highly complex health and social challenges. Through this dynamic, cross-sector collaboration, the CCHSI empowers communities, translates research into actionable real-world solutions, and provides students with invaluable experiential learning, ultimately driving the meaningful social impact needed to grow and sustain healthier, more resilient populations

The Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children (CREVAWC) at Western University was established in 1992 in response to a federal study on the problem of violence against women, prompted by the 1989 murder of 14 women at École Polytechnique in Montreal. For over 30 years, CREVAWC has been committed to the development and application of knowledge for the prevention of violence against women and children across Canada through promoting innovation, collaboration, and equality. For more information about CREVAWC and the work we do, please visit: www.learningtoendabuse.ca

Executive Summary & Key Recommendations

This report presents findings from a community needs assessment study conducted as part of the Strong Allies, Stronger Communities (SASC) project. The assessment explored awareness of gender-based violence, perceptions of allyship, access to services and education, and opportunities to strengthen engagement in gender-based violence prevention across Sarnia-Lambton County.

Overall, findings indicate moderate to high levels of awareness of gender-based violence within the community, alongside a strong interest in learning more. While many participants identified as allies to women and gender-diverse people, there remains a clear need for additional education, skill-building, and opportunities for engagement, particularly within the skilled trades sector.

Participants identified several key barriers to engagement, including limited access to targeted programming, workplace cultures that may discourage intervention, and gaps in services supporting men's health and well-being. At the same time, the community demonstrates significant strengths, including existing support for gender equity, interest in developing allyship, and opportunities for collaboration across sectors.

Based on these findings, several key recommendations emerged:

- Expand accessible, community-based education on gender-based violence and allyship
- Develop targeted programming for men and young men, particularly within the trades sector
- Increase opportunities for in-person, interactive learning and dialogue
- Strengthen partnerships with local organizations, unions, and community leaders
- Promote visible allyship and diverse models of masculinity within workplaces and communities

These findings have informed the next phase of the SASC project, which focuses on developing and implementing programming to build knowledge, skills, and capacity for allyship across Sarnia-Lambton County.

Study Methods & Participant Demographics

This community needs assessment study used a mixed-methods approach to explore perspectives on gender-based violence and allyship across Sarnia-Lambton County. Data were collected through an online survey and a series of focus groups with community members, individuals working in the industrial and building trades, and other key stakeholders. The survey gathered information on participants' familiarity with gender-based violence, perceptions of allyship, access to services, and workplace experiences. Focus groups provided additional depth, allowing participants to share experiences, perspectives, and recommendations for engaging men in allyship.

A total of 144 individuals completed the survey, with participants representing a range of ages, gender identities, sexual orientations, and employment backgrounds. 80% (n = 115) of survey respondents were above the age of 24, with most (56%) being between 25 and 34 years of age. 55% of the survey sample identified as women, 30% identified as men, and 15% identified as either non-binary (6%), gender queer (6%), or gender questioning (3%). In addition, approximately 37% (n = 53) of respondents identified as being part of the project's target audience, including individuals currently working in or training for the skilled trades sector.

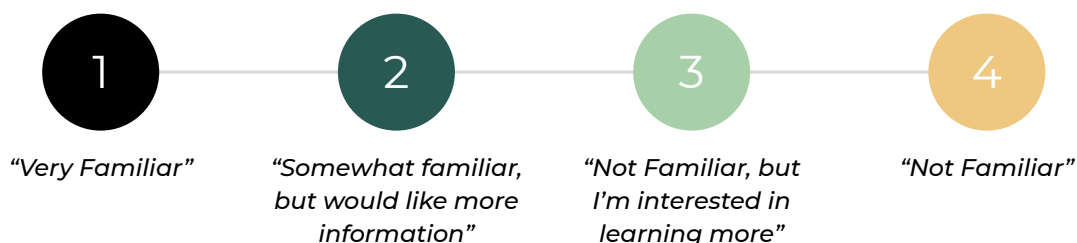
A total of two qualitative focus groups and one interview were conducted, involving 18 individuals from diverse backgrounds. Approximately 61% (n = 11) of these participants were working as a skilled trades person within Lambton County, with the other seven individuals working within a skilled trades organization as operational support staff.

Data from surveys were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns and trends. In contrast, qualitative data from focus groups were analyzed thematically to identify key themes related to barriers, facilitators, and opportunities for gender-based violence prevention and allyship.

Study Results

Familiarity with Gender-Based Violence & Allyship

This section asked about people's familiarity of gender-based violence (GBV) and allyship. The first question asks participants to reflect on their level of familiarity with gender-based violence, on a scale from 1 ('very familiar') to 4 ('not familiar'):



Overall, 43% of people who completed the survey reported that they were ‘very familiar’ with the issue of gender-based violence. 52% reported that they were somewhat (40%) or not at all (12%) familiar with gender-based violence but were interested in learning more about the topic. Only 5% of people selected option four, reporting that they were not familiar with gender-based violence. These results highlight that many across Lambton County have an awareness of gender-based violence but would like additional opportunities to learn more about the topic.

Survey participants who identified as working or training in the skilled trades (n = 53) reported being less familiar with the concept of gender-based violence, compared to other respondents, however, the skilled trades group reported a greater interest in learning more.

Familiarity with Gender-Based Violence	Community (Non-Trades) Participants (n = 90)	Skilled Trades Participants (n = 53)
“Very Familiar with Gender-Based Violence”	48 (53%)	14 (26%)
“Interested in Learning More about GBV”	37 (41%)	37 (70%)

Allyship for Women & Gender-Diverse Peoples in Sarnia-Lambton

The following section explored whether individuals across Sarnia-Lambton identify as allies for women and gender-diverse peoples, including those who are transgender, Two-Spirit, non-binary, or gender queer. We were interested to learn the prevalence of allies in the community, as well as the community’s opinions on:

- How to support allyship practice across Sarnia-Lambton County
- How to recruit more allies in workplaces & communities to stand up against GBV
- How to develop & offer effective allyship education that engages men in violence prevention

We first asked participants to report whether they, and their inner circle of people (e.g., family and friends), “support the rights and freedoms of women and gender-diverse people”:

Overall, we found moderate-to-high levels of support for the rights and freedoms of women and gender diverse peoples across Sarnia-Lambton. Members of the skilled trades group reported higher-levels of personal support (73%) compared to their inner circle of people (43%); whereas the non-skilled trades group reported slightly lower personal support (68%), compared to both their inner circle of people (71%), and the skilled trades group.

Support for Women & Gender-Diverse People	Community (Non-Trades) Participants (n = 90)	Skilled Trades Participants (n = 53)
"I personally support the rights and freedoms of women & gender-diverse peoples in my family, friend group(s), and community"	61 (68%)	39 (73%)
"My inner circle of people (family, friends, peers) supports the rights and freedoms of women and gender-diverse peoples"	64 (71%)	23 (43%)

DID YOU KNOW?

Gender-Based Violence Affects Everyone!

According to a recent study on gender-based violence in workplaces, 82% of gender-diverse people, 76% of women, and 67% of men reported experiencing gender-based harassment and violence at a Canadian workplace.

For more information, see: www.itsnotpartofthejob.ca

Do you Consider Yourself an Ally?

When asking whether individuals in Sarnia-Lambton County identified as an "Ally" we provided the four following response options to understand both the prevalence of allyship, as well as the interest in learning more about the topic:



According to our survey results, 87% (n = 36) of skilled trades participants identified as an ally, with 21% selecting option one (indicating that they actively stand up to gender-based violence) and 66% selecting option two (indicating that they would like some additional support with their allyship development). An additional 13% of skilled trades participants selected option three, indicating that they do not currently identify as an ally, but would be interested in learning more about what it means to be an ally.

These findings suggest that although most skilled trades participants identify as allies (87%), only a small number (21%) reported actively standing up to gender-based violence, with many (79%) expressing an interest in further allyship education.

Do you Consider Yourself an Ally?	Community (Non-Trades) Participants (n = 89)	Skilled Trades Participants (n = 53)
"Yes, I consider myself an ally, and stand-up to gender-based violence."	32 (36%)	11 (21%)
"Yes, I consider myself an ally, but it would be helpful to learn more about how to be a better ally for women and gender-diverse peoples."	35 (39%)	35 (66%)
"No, I don't consider myself an ally, but I would like to learn more about what it means to be an ally."	22 (25%)	7 (13%)
"No, I do not identify as an ally."	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

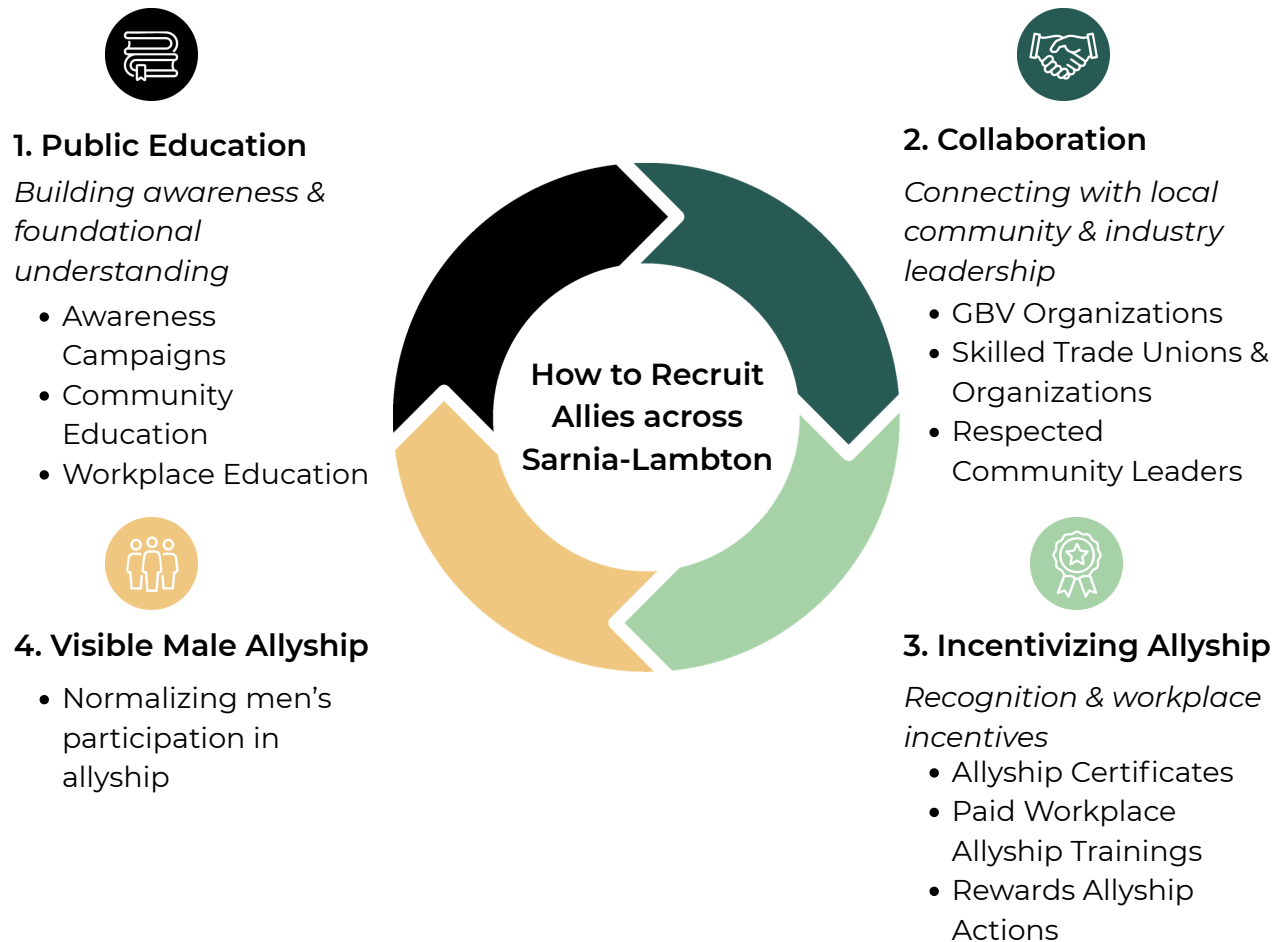
DID YOU KNOW?

The Male Ally Coalition (M.A.C) of Sarnia-Lambton County work towards creating safer communities through education, awareness events, investing in solution focused change, and supporting survivors of gender-based and sexual violence.

For more information on Allyship and how to get involved with the M.A.C., visit:
<https://www.thecentresarnia.ca/get-involved/male-ally-coalition>

How to Recruit Allies in Local Communities & Workplaces

Based on 92 responses to a survey question asking how to best recruit allies, recommendations from community members were organized into four major themes: (1) Public Education; (2) Collaboration with Local Leaders & Organizations; (3) Incentivizing Allyship Participation; & (4) Visible Male Allyship.



HOW TO RECRUIT ALLIES ACROSS SARNIA-LAMBTON (SUPPORTING QUOTES)

Public Education

“By combining education, empathy, and actionable steps, you can cultivate a community where allyship becomes a shared value, sustained by trust and collective responsibility”

“Community-led events where men hear firsthand from survivors & allies about the impacts of GBV”

“Listening circles & story telling events”

“Campaigns that normalize support and highlight allyship actions”

“Acknowledge intersectionality in gender-based violence advocacy”

“Host informal ‘coffee chat’ sessions at workplaces where men can ask questions without judgement”

“Highlight success stories of workplaces where allyship reduced turnover & improved team cohesion”

Collaboration with Local Leaders & Organizations

“Aligning with trade unions with shared interests in social justice”

“Seeing respected figures in the community speak up can shift mindset”

Incentivizing Allyship

“Launch gamified allyship challenges with rewards (e.g., badges, community recognition)”

“Incentivize participation through recognition programs (e.g., allyship certificates)”

“Integrate allyship education into accreditation programs”

Include allyship metrics into organizational performance reviews”

Visible Male Allyship

“Visibility of male allies in leadership roles modeling allyship behaviors”

“Use role models from popular culture to demonstrate allyship in action”

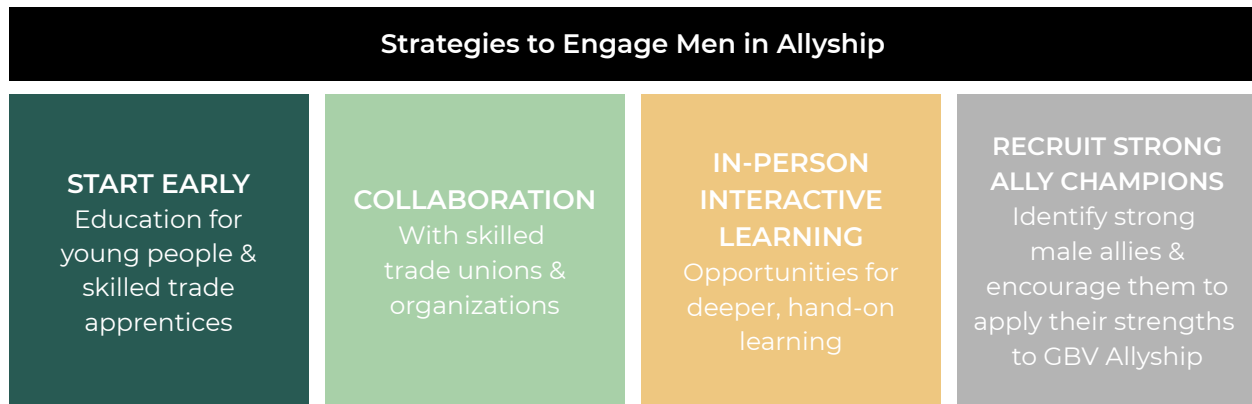
DID YOU KNOW?

Men's Engagement in Allyship Benefits Everyone!

Prior research has found that when men stand-up as allies in the workplace:

- Women report feeling more welcomed, supported, and in a better position for success
- Men report experiences of increased personal growth, social support, and more enriched family lives ([Warren & Warren, 2021](#))

Strategies to Offering Educational Programming to Engage Men in Allyship



1. Early Education for Young People & Skilled Trades Apprentices

Two focus group participants in different sessions discussed the importance of early education on gender-based violence for adolescents, young people, and those starting their skilled trades apprenticeships.

"If there was a class [or resources] for kids or boys that would be great, because they would grow up knowing what they are supposed to do when [they experience gender-based violence], because that does not necessarily come from home, so if you don't [learn about it at home], then how do you learn to be different and learn to respect differences."

2. Collaboration with Skilled Trade Unions & Organizations

Participants discussed the need for involving skilled trade unions and organizations to promote men's engagement in allyship education. One participant suggested that invitations from trades unions and organizations for gender-based violence education may be better received and make trades men feel more welcomed:

"The only way you'll actually get participation is if you get connections directly to either skilled trades groups or unions...[otherwise] they are not going to feel like they can go or that they should go. But, if it's in the trade group and there's an invitation where it's known that more men will be there, then I think you'll get more participation."

3. In-person, Interactive Learning Opportunities

Participants across focus groups discussed the importance of targeted, in-person, and interactive learning opportunities, noting a difference between in-person and online training:

"I can pay as much attention as I want to that computer screen. It's in my eyes and reflecting right back on the screen and then doing nothing with it, other than finishing the test at the end. It's when you have that actual engaged conversation and training and acting, right. That's going to be way more valuable to everybody, right?"

4. Recruiting Strong Male Ally Champions

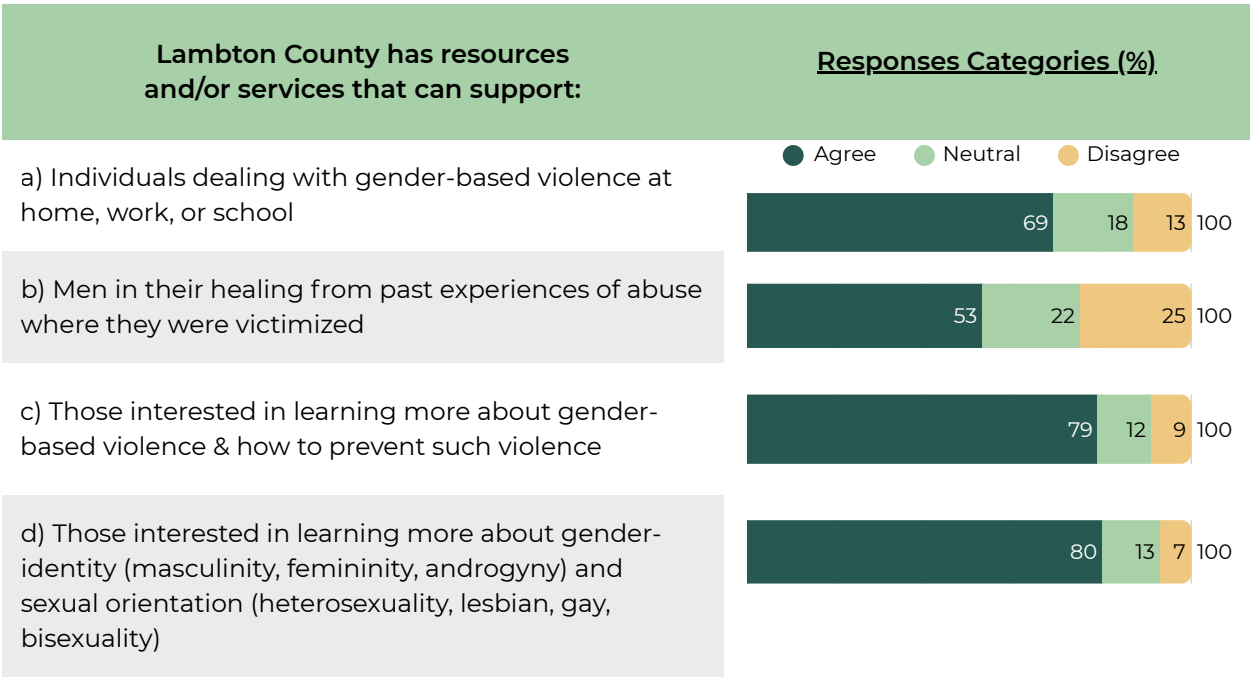
Participants also discussed the importance of recruiting strong male ally champions who can “speak from the heart”, “apply their strength to allyship for women”, and help encourage other skilled trades men to get involved:

“I think tapping strong males on the shoulder and saying ‘your voice matters and you speaking matters’ ...I would imagine that there’s way more men in our society who have a daughter, mother, aunt, teacher, someone that made a difference in their life... Like, imagine it’s them [who experiences gender-based violence], and speak from the heart.”

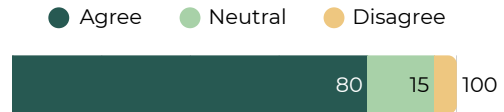
Access to Community Services & Education Opportunities

We asked survey participants to respond to the following statements regarding access to services across Sarnia-Lambton County, using a scale of 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. Responses have been converted to three categories “Agree”, “Neutral”, and “Disagree” for reporting purposes.

Participants reported high moderate-to-high levels of access to gender-based violence services and education, however, only 44% reported adequate access to men’s health and wellbeing services (ques. ‘g’), and 53% reported adequate access to men’s victim treatment services (ques. ‘b’). In addition, 58% reported having access to gender-based violence allyship programming (ques. ‘f’).



e) Those interested in learning more about healthy relationships to maintain connections with friends, family, intimate partners, & community



f) Those interested in becoming an ally to women and gender-diverse peoples (non-binary, transgender, and Two-Spirit).



g) Men and their health and wellbeing.



Unique Risk & Protective Factors for Gender-Based Violence Across Sarnia-Lambton County

During the focus groups, two questions asked participants to reflect on unique risk and protective factors for gender-based violence across Sarnia-Lambton County. The resulting themes can be organized into two different categories: (a) Sarnia-Lambton (regional)-specific factors and (b) skilled trades persons/sector-specific factors.

	Sarnia-Lambton (Regional)	Skilled Trades Sector-specific Factors
Protective Factors	Strong community services & collaboration between community organizations. Growth of community services & awareness of gender-based violence.	Peer support & healthy mentorship amongst trades people. Trade-specific safety organizations that are proactive with mental health. Prosocial unions and employers that advocate for and support women at the workplace.
Risk Factors	Migratory population of trades people that frequently move in and out of the region. Male-dominated industrial cultures. Less progressive cultural dynamics between community organizations. Growth of community services & awareness of gender-based violence.	Workplace stress & hazards. Inconsistent work & financial insecurity. Mental health & substance abuse. Relational strains with family due to work stress, travel, and financial stress.

DID YOU KNOW?

Skilled trades workers experience unique work, life, and financial stressors that may impact their health, mental health, & relationships. To access resources, see the BASES '[Mental Health Resource for Workers](#)'. For more information, see the Canadian Building Trades Union recent report on [Mental Health & Substance Use in the Skilled Trades](#).

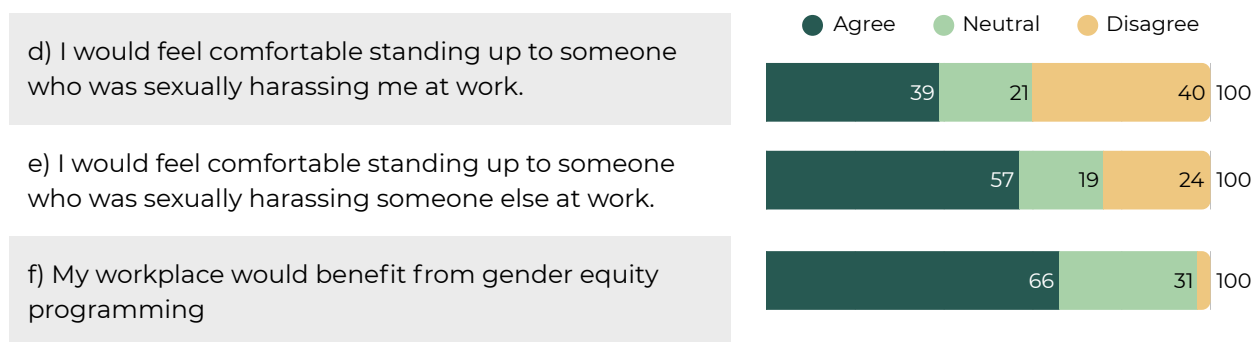
Workplace Interventions for Gender-Based Violence

The final section of the SASC community needs assessment asked participants about the need for workplace gender-based violence programming. Results are presented in a table below and described in the following written paragraphs:

Necessity for Workplace Gender-Based Violence Interventions:

Overall, we found that 67% of survey participants reported that they could personally think of at least one co-worker who would benefit from gender-based violence education (ques. 'a' in table below). In addition, we found that 66% reported that their workplace would benefit from gender equity programming (ques. 'f'). These results were consistent between the skilled trades (n = 53) and non-skilled trades (n = 90) community groups and suggests that community members are overall supportive of workplace gender-based violence interventions.





Note: table includes data from all participants with completed survey data (n = 143)

Co-workers' Attitudes & Behaviors Towards Gender Diversity & Gender-Based Violence:

We also asked two questions ('b' and 'c') about anticipated attitudes and behaviors of co-workers. Question 'b' asks whether co-workers would be accepting of a new team member, regardless of their gender or sexuality. We found that overall (n = 143), 61% of participants reportedly agreed with this statement. When comparing these results across community groups, we found a statistically significant difference between the skilled trades (46%) and the non-skilled trades (69%) participants, suggesting that skilled trades co-workers would be less accepting than non-skilled trades co-workers. In question 'c', we asked whether individuals believed a co-worker would intervene if they saw someone being treated differently because of their gender or sexuality. Overall, 56% of participants reportedly agreed with this statement, however, when comparing the results across groups we found that more skilled trades participants (63%) agreed that a co-worker would intervene, compared to the non-skilled trades participants (50%). These incongruent findings suggest that skilled trades participants believe their co-workers would be less accepting of individuals who do not conform to dominant genders or sexuality norms, yet may be more willing to intervene when someone is treated differently because of their gender or sexuality.

Standing Up to Address Workplace Gender-Based Violence Directed at Self and Others:

Finally, we asked two questions about individuals' levels of comfort for standing up for themselves and others during instances of workplace sexual harassment (ques. 'd' & 'e'). Overall, participants reported being more comfortable standing up in support of someone else who is being victimized by sexual harassment (ques. 'e', 57%), compared to themselves (ques. 'd', 39%). When comparing across the two participant groups, we found that the skilled trades participants (n = 53) were significantly less likely to stand up for themselves in the face of workplace sexual harassment (22%) compared to the non-skilled trades (49%). Skilled trades participants were also less likely to report that they would stand up for someone else experiencing workplace sexual harassment (45%), compared to the non-skilled trades participants (65%). These findings suggest that skilled trade community members may be less comfortable standing up for themselves or others during instances of workplace gender-based violence, compared to community members who work in other settings, highlighting the need for workplace gender-based violence education and allyship programming.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2020, the Sarnia-Lambton Workforce Development Board interviewed 12 women on their experiences of working in the skilled trades. Their finding suggests a need for increased:

- 1. Male Allies & Champions** that value & promote women's contributions to the workplace
- 2. Reducing Barriers Faced by Women in Trades:** Gender-based violence, isolation, lack of suitable equipment & facilities to meet their needs
- 3. A Top-Down Approach to Promoting Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion:** Supported by organizational leaders, management, & organizational policies & practices

Looking Forward: Building 'Strong Allies, Stronger Communities'

This information and results collected from the community needs assessment has directly informed our approach to developing the 'Strong Allies, Stronger Communities' (SASC) program.

The SASC program is comprised of four components that can be implemented within skilled trades organizations, education centres, and communities to promote gender-based violence allyship and to support healthier workplaces and communities. The four components have been designed to be offered in sequence, starting with the 'Gender-based Violence Social Awareness Campaign', which begins two-four weeks prior to the other programming components. Two of the four components are designed to be facilitated by trained male allies who completed the SASC train-the-trainer session.

Gender-Based Violence Social Awareness Campaign

- Promote awareness of gender-based violence & the critical role of men as allies
- Address cultures that increase risk of gender-based violence
- Normalize pathways to services for men
- Promotion of the 'Strong Allies, Stronger Communities'

Gender-Based Violence Occupational Health & Safety Discussion ('Toolbox Talks')

- Offers in-person, interactive opportunities to learn about topics that promote awareness and engagement in allyship
- Co-facilitated by trained allies from the Male Ally Coalition, with train-the-trainer option available

Allyship E-learning Micro-Credential

- Module One: “Mental Health Education for Allies”
- Module Two: “What is Gender-Based Violence”
- Module Three: “Creating Healthier Communities & Workplaces Through Allyship”

Allyship Peer Support Group

- Develop critical knowledge for gender-based violence allyship
- Normalize men’s pathways to services
- Understanding gender, sexuality, & gender-based violence
- Nurturing workplace & communities through allyship
- Facilitated by trained allies from the male ally coalition, with train-the-trainer option available

How to Get Involved

The SASC program can be implemented in a variety of settings, including workplaces, community centres, and education centres. To learn more about the SASC program, and how to get involved, you can contact either Chantel Butterfield, Executive Director of The Centre-Sarnia (chantel@thecentresarnia.ca), or Dr. Allie Wall, SASC Primary Investigator (mwall28@uwo.ca).

Involvement for Individuals: Getting Connected to the MAC

For individuals who are interested in becoming involved as an Ally, you can reach out to the Male Ally Coalition of Sarnia (<https://www.thecentresarnia.ca/get-involved/male-ally-coalition>). By connecting with the Male Ally Coalition (MAC) you will have opportunities to connect with other male allies and work towards creating safer communities. As a member of the MAC you will also gain access to trainings and opportunities to facilitate community SASC groups.

Involvement for Organizations, Unions, & Education Centre

If you belong to an organization, union, or education center that’s interested in the SASC program, please feel free to contact either Chantel Butterfield (chantel@thecentresarnia.ca), Executive Director of The Centre-Sarnia or Dr. Allie Wall (mwall28@uwo.ca).