



RESOLVE to End Violence in Our Society

Aboriginal Women and Intimate Partner Violence

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Introduction

- Aboriginal women face greater risk of victimization, poverty, and oppression than non-Aboriginal women (Bourassa, McKay-McNabb & Hampton, 2006)
 - In 1992, twice as many Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal women reported emotional, physical, sexual, or ritual abuse (Green, 2000)
 - In Saskatchewan, 57% of women using shelters in 1995 were of Aboriginal ancestry, yet Aboriginal women comprised 11% of the total female population (Saskatchewan Women's Secretariat, 1999)



Introduction

- In 2006, Aboriginal people in Canada were estimated at 4% of the total population, with slightly larger percentage in the Prairie Provinces (Stats Canada, 2006)
- 8/10 Aboriginal people in Canada live in Ontario or the Western Provinces (i.e., Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia; Stats Canada, 2006)
 - For example, Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are estimated at 15%



Introduction

- In 2003, Aboriginal people were three times more likely to be victims of spousal violence than non-Aboriginal people (NWAC, 2007)
- In 2007, Aboriginal women aged 25-44 are five times more likely than other Canadian women of the same age to die of violence
- 54% of Aboriginal women reported experiencing severe and potentially life threatening violence compared to 37% of non-Aboriginal women



Introduction

- These rates remain unchanged since 1999 for Aboriginal women (NWAC, 2007)
- However, for non-Aboriginal women, rates of experiencing the most severe forms of violence declined from 43% in 1999 to 37% in 2004



Introduction

- Discrepancies also exist in violence experienced by men and women (NWAC, 2007)
 - 24% of Aboriginal women, as compared 18% of Aboriginal men, reported violence from a current or previous intimate partner between 1999 and 2004



Introduction

- As much as 75% of survivors of sexual assault in Aboriginal communities are young women under 18 years of age (NWAC, 2007)
 - 50% are under 14 years of age
 - 25% are younger than 7 years old



Healing Journey Findings

- In the Healing Journey Study (Ursel et al., ongoing; SSHRC/CURA, PAF), 668 women were recruited from shelters and other services for abused women in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta
- These participants identified their cultural background
- 331 (49.5%) of the 668 women participating in the Healing Journey project self-identified as being of Aboriginal ancestry
- Aboriginal women are vastly over-represented among the women abused by intimate partners in the Prairie Provinces



Cultural Identification for Healing Journey Participants (668 women)

First Nations	45 women (6.7%)	49.5% (331 women) identified as having some Aboriginal Ancestry
First Nations and Non-Aboriginal	1 woman (0.1%)	
Métis	43 women (6.4%)	
Métis and Non-Aboriginal	9 women (1.3%)	
Aboriginal	206 women (30.7%)	
Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal	26 women (3.9%)	50.3% (337 women) identified as non-Aboriginal or other ancestry
Inuit and Non-Aboriginal	1 woman (0.1%)	
European	197 women (29.4%)	
Caucasian	31 women (4.6%)	
Canadian	72 women (10.2%)	
Visible Minority	30 women (4.6%)	
Other Cultural/Religious Affiliation	7 women (1.0%)	



Healing Journey Project

- These participants also struggled with identifying themselves by “cultural background,” yielding a wide range of cultural identification
- The categorizing of “Aboriginal” as a way of self-identifying cultural background is contentious
- Identity is an important issue for Aboriginal peoples of Canada as an act of power and as an act of self definition (Kubik, Bourassa, & Hampton, 2009)



Why Does This Happen?

- The introduction of the *Indian Act* in 1876 had a profound effect on the identities of Aboriginal women as part of Canada's assimilation policy (1876-1973) (NWAC, 2007)
 - Between 1876 and 1985, “Indian-ness” was defined through the male line
 - Between 1876 and 1960, Indian women who had lost their status through marriage had no citizenship rights and no legal Indian rights



Why Does This Happen?

- Aboriginal women face the highest poverty and violence rates in Canada (Stats Canada, 2006)
- These multiple economic, social and political barriers result in Aboriginal women having “lower incomes, less formal education, and poorer housing, lower health status and a greater chance of becoming lone parents” (Kubik, Bourassa, & Hampton, 2009)
- Gaps exist between Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men as well as non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal women



Why Does This Happen?

- Discrimination and stereotyping of Aboriginal women contributes to the high rates of violence (Laroque in NWAC, 2007)
- In 2004, Amnesty International released their report documenting how social, political, and economic marginalization of Aboriginal women has led to heightened risk of violence, particularly for Aboriginal women living in poverty or working in the sex trade



The Solution

- The Sisters in Spirit campaign recommends:
 - Implementing the recommendations of RCAP (i.e., provide funding to Aboriginal organizations including urban based groups; invest in health and healing institutions; provide for full and fair participation of Aboriginal women in governing bodies)
 - Sustained funding for culturally appropriate services
 - Increased recruitment of Indigenous police officers, particularly women
 - Protection of women sex trade workers' fundamental rights
 - Education programs addressing the history of colonization and marginalization of Indigenous people
 - Upholding international human rights instruments relevant to the prevention of violence against women



The Solution

- None of these recommendations can occur without a fundamental change in our mainstream and Aboriginal institutions
- NWAC (2007) recommends addressing root causes of violence against Aboriginal women, noting that
 - “Colonization is at the very core of the systemic violence targeted at Aboriginal women and girls. Canada must stop its colonial policies immediately”



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