

GBV AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

CONTEXT¹

There is a pattern of sexual violence among Indigenous women in Canada, which stems from a history of colonization, racism, and sexism. Indigenous women are more likely to experience multiple forms of

violence including but not limited to sexual violence, physical injury, and homicide.

Every 8 days, an indigenous woman or girl goes missing in Canada.

- Indigenous women are 3.5 times more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women in Canada.
- 54% of Indigenous women reported severe forms of family violence, such as being beaten, being choked, having had a gun or knife used against them, or being sexually assaulted.
- Homicide rates for Indigenous women are almost 7 times higher than those of non-Indigenous women and are more likely to go unsolved (only 53% of murder cases in NWAC's Sisters in Spirit database have been solved, compared to 84% of all murder cases across Canada).
- Approximately 75% of survivors of sexual assault in Indigenous communities are girls under 18 years of age; 50% of the girls are under the age of 14; 25% are under the age of 7.

1 Adapted from Native Women's Association of Canada, *Fact Sheet: Violence against Aboriginal Women; Newfoundland Labrador, Violence Against Aboriginal Women Fact Sheet*.

- Indigenous women in Canada between the ages of 25-44 are 5 times more likely than all other Canadian women in the same age group to die as a result of violence.

There are thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada with a high rate of unsolved cases. *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls* (June 2019) examines the connection between colonial violence, genocide, gender-based violence, social injustices, systemic racism, etc. – all of which have contributed and are still contributing to this national tragedy.

Impacts of Colonization

Prior to the creation of Canada in 1867, over 80% of Indigenous communities were matriarchal.

With the creation of Canada and enforcement of European values and governance (i.e. patriarchal)

and the creation of the Indian Act in 1876, Indigenous women have been subject to colonial-based and gender-based violence. Violence experienced by Indigenous women is directly linked to the colonial violence that was created and perpetuated by the creation of Canada and the federal policies that govern every aspect of Indigenous Peoples life (i.e. the Indian Act).

90% of federally sentenced Indigenous women have reported physical and sexual abuse.

The Indian Act

The Indian Act was created by the government of Canada with a goal to control and assimilate Indigenous peoples into Canadian culture.

Essentially, it is a set of legislative decisions and policies that govern every aspect of Indigenous people's lives (i.e. health, education, land, governance, etc.).

The Indian Act is the only Act in Canada that governs every aspect of an ethnically-segregated group of people's lives. In its nature it is discriminatory, and woven into the very fabric and systems of Canada, resulting in ongoing systemic racism.

Many legislative policies within the Indian Act are targeted at displacing Indigenous women from their inherent and rightful roles as matriarchs. It is estimated that approximately 2 million Indigenous women across Canada have been displaced since the Indian Act was created. For more in-depth information, visit equalpress.ca/indigenous-peoples/.

Residential Schools

Approximately 150,000 Indigenous children were forced to attend residential schools over a 100+ year period in Canada. Attendance was enforced by the Canadian government and the RCMP, and parents could face criminal charges and jail time if they did not send their children to residential schools. The mandate of the residential schools was to “kill the Indian in the child” and to “get rid of the Indian problem”.² Indigenous children were abused sexually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and thousands of Indigenous children never returned home, perishing in residential schools. In addition to residential schools, 200,000 Indigenous children attended

² Facing History, *Stolen Lives: The Indigenous Peoples of Canada and the Indian Residential Schools*, “Chapter 3: Killing the Indian in the Child”.

Indian Day schools and experienced similar treatment to those who attended residential schools.

As residential schools and day-schools started to close in Canada, the increase in apprehension of Indigenous children by the Ministry of Children and Family — both federally and provincially — began, and has been viewed as the agent of forced assimilation by some. At the beginning of the 1960s, less than 1% of children in care were Indigenous, and by the end of the decade, 30-40% of children in care were Indigenous.

Indigenous children that attended residential schools reported the following: 90% cultural loss; 84% loss of language; 64% sexual abuse; 93% physical abuse.

“The legacies of colonization such as the **residential schools** and the **60s scoop**, socio-economic conditions like **poverty**, and **sexism, racism and discrimination** have all played major roles in the **breakdown** of healthy families and communities for Indigenous peoples. This is especially noticeable in the **high rates of violence** experienced by Indigenous women, who face life-threatening, gender-based violence, and experience more violent crimes than non-Indigenous women.”³

The context outlined here is in no way meant to be a fulsome account of the creation of Canada through an Indigenous Lens. Please see equalpress.ca/indigenous-peoples for further readings and training opportunities.

3 Native Women’s Association of Canada, *You are not Alone: A Toolkit for Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people escaping domestic violence*.

FORMS OF GBV COMMON TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

- Sexual violence
- Physical violence
- Murder/Homicide
- Colonial Violence — Indian Act Legislation
- Marginalization
- Systemic Racism/Discrimination
- Forced sterilization

84% of homeless Indigenous girls have been sexually abused.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SUPPORT

- Language barrier/Communication barrier
- Oral culture vs. Written culture
- Limited transportation options
- Fear of losing children due to high Indigenous child apprehension
- Colonial hierarchical structures/authority

WHEN INTERVIEWING/WRITING ABOUT INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE, REMEMBER TO⁴

Prior to the interview or community visit:

- Research the Indigenous community that you are visiting

⁴ Adapted from The Media Hub, *Violence against Indigenous women — reporter tip sheet*.

— what have been the recent events in the news? Where are they located? What are their languages, culture, traditions?

- Research the correct pronunciation of the community's name.
- Read the community's website and familiarize yourself with community leadership — elected (and/or hereditary) and staff.
- Reflect on your knowledge (or lack thereof) and biases — if your knowledge level is low on Indigenous Peoples in Canada, commit to a learning journey — read books by Indigenous authors, attend trainings (in-person or online), attend Indigenous community events that are open to the public, watch Indigenous documentaries, etc.
- Research and read:
 - The Indian Act as it pertains to Indigenous women and communities
 - Truth and Reconciliation — Final Report / Executive Summary / 94 Calls to Action
 - United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
 - Reclaiming Power & Place, the Final Report on the National Inquiry for Indigenous Women and Girls (2SLGBTQIA)

During Interview:

- Ask your sources how they wish to be identified, including their name, gender pronoun, which Nation they are from, proper titles, correct spelling, and how they would like their

community to be referred too (Band, Nation, Traditional Territory, Tribal Council, Community, etc.)

- Frame the story within the larger context of colonization and ensure that you emphasize that addressing violence against Indigenous women and gender diverse people is everyone's responsibility, not just the Indigenous community's responsibility.
- Emphasize that Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people are not to blame for the violence they experience — this can be done by providing the larger picture/context of colonial history/violence and its perpetuation of violence towards Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse individuals.
- Prioritize the voices of Indigenous women and make them visible in your story (include photos, tell their stories). Government and police should not be central voices in reporting on violence against Indigenous people.
- Practice active listening skills and being fully present with your interviewee. Do not cut off, interrupt, change the subject, tune out, be on your smart phone, etc.
- Provide options for how the interview can roll out — by giving a thorough overview of the story you are co-creating with your interviewee, highlighting the topics you would like to cover, and saying how would you like to go about this — “I can ask you questions, or you can share with me what you like.”
- Allow for silence and don't feel the need to fill the silence. Allow ample time before responding to a comment or question.

Post Interview

- Question the role of institutions in Canada in perpetuating violence against Indigenous women and gender diverse people. Many have been complicit and active in systemic violence against Indigenous people — research and read the numerous academic articles that have been written by Indigenous Authors/Academics or in partnership with Indigenous Authors/Academics.
- Leave out any sources that stereotype Indigenous people or in any way support systemic racism.
- Avoid portraying Indigenous people as a problem and make sure to not insinuate that they are to blame for the violence they face.
- Include Indigenous expert voices that can speak to the consequences of violence in their community.
- Highlight the strength and resiliency of Indigenous people. Do not portray them as disempowered victims, but instead recognize them as strong nations of people who have sustained themselves and this land since time immemorial who have sophisticated traditional governance systems, culture, language, and sustainability principles. Recognize the many activists and organizations that fight against systems of oppression.
- Follow up after stories are done — this will be seen as respectful by communities that value reciprocity.
- Check Indigenous news websites for under-reported story ideas.⁵

5 Angela Sterritt, *Reporting in Indigenous communities: 5 tips to get it right*, CBC News.

- Find a balance between “bad” and “good” news stories about Indigenous peoples and communities.⁶
- Commit to shifting the dominant colonial narrative about Indigenous Peoples in Canada by broadening stories that are written about Indigenous peoples in the media — focus on the strength and resiliency of Indigenous Peoples, Nations, communities, knowledge, ways of being and knowing

LANGUAGE TIPS

- The politically correct term right now to refer to the First Peoples of Canada is Indigenous.
 - There are other out-dated terms that have been used over the years: Indian, Native, Aboriginal, First Nations, half-breed, Eskimo, etc.
 - Indigenous is a word in Canada that is inclusive of: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit.
 - If you are unsure, ask the interviewee how they would like to be referred to in your article — not everyone identifies with the word Indigenous — they may prefer to be referred to from their nation or community or another term.
- Minimize use of jargon, industry terminology, acronyms, and academic terminology.
- Be mindful of how you refer to the colonial history and legacy in Canada.

6 Angela Sterritt, *Reporting in Indigenous communities: 5 tips to get it right*, CBC News.

LOCAL INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Pacific Association of First Nations Women

<https://pafnw.wordpress.com>

Native Courtworker & Counselling Association of British Columbia

<https://nccabc.ca>

Urban Native Youth Association

<https://unya.bc.ca>

Aboriginal Mother Centre

<http://www.aboriginalmothercentre.ca>

Vancouver Friendship Centre

<http://www.vafcs.org>

First Nations Health Authority

<http://www.fnha.ca>

Developed in consultation with Chastity Davis, [Chastity Davis Consulting](#)

FURTHER READING

equalpress.ca/indigenous-peoples 