



NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



Fact Sheet: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls in the Atlantic Region

For years, communities have pointed to the high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. As of March 31, 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has gathered information about 582 cases from across the country. NWAC has worked hard to look at every case, yet we believe there are still many more to document. Based on five years of quantitative research drawn from NWAC's Sisters In Spirit database, this fact sheet examines the situation in the Atlantic region against the national context.

Fewer documented cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in the Atlantic

NWAC has gathered information about 13 cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in the Atlantic region.¹ This accounts for approximately 2% of cases in NWAC's database—the smallest of any province or region in Canada.

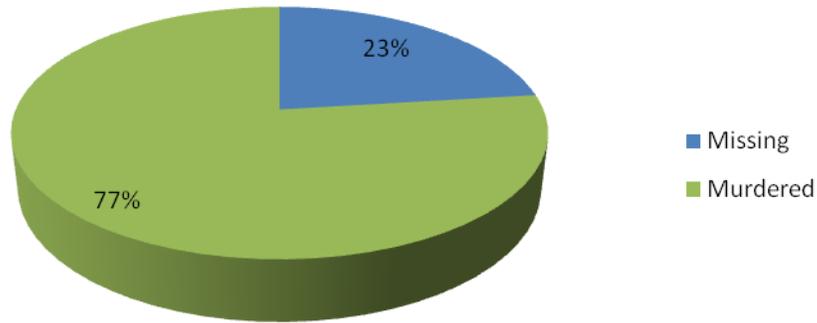
NWAC has documented cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in every Atlantic province, except for Prince Edward Island. NWAC has received some information about cases in this province, but is still working to gather further information about these reports.

The smaller number of cases does not necessarily mean that the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls is less prevalent in the Atlantic region. The lower number of cases may be due to under-reporting or may simply reflect the smaller number of Aboriginal peoples living in the region.

Most are murder cases

Of the 13 cases in the database, 10 are cases of murder and 3 of the women or girls are missing (see Figure 1). Unlike the national data, the Atlantic region has no known cases of suspicious death (incidents that police have declared natural or accidental but that family or community members regard as suspicious) and no cases where the nature of the case remains unknown (meaning it is unclear whether the woman was murdered, is missing or died in suspicious circumstances).

Figure 1: Summary of Cases in the Atlantic Region

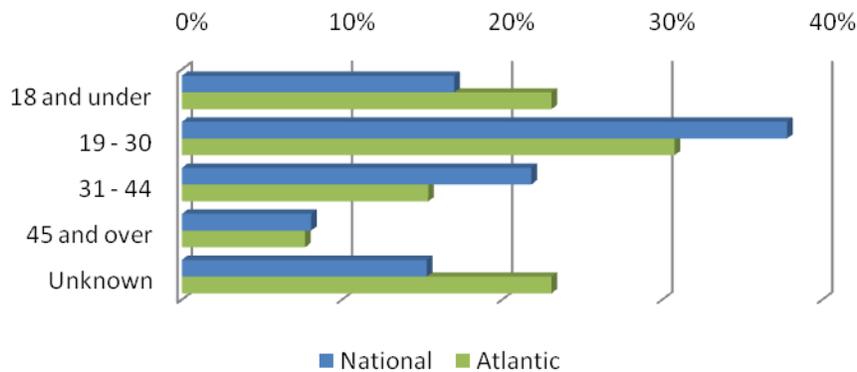


Source: Calculations by NWAC using data from Sisters In Spirit (SIS) database, 2010.

Majority of cases involve young Aboriginal women and girls

Where the age of the woman or girl is known, most are under the age of 31, which is consistent with the national level data. Within this age group, a higher percentage of cases involve women and girls 18 and under, and a lower percentage of women aged 19-30 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Age of Woman or Girl at Disappearance or Death



Source: Calculations by NWAC using data from Sisters In Spirit (SIS) database, 2010.

The impact on youth is particularly strong with respect to murder cases. More than half (6 cases of 8 cases where information is known) of murdered women and girls were under 31 years old.

Most of the women are mothers

Whether or not missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in the Atlantic region are mothers is known in only 6 cases. Of those 6 women, 5 have children. The intergenerational impact that occurs when mothers are taken from their children after disappearance or death is an issue of concern.

Only half of murder cases in the Atlantic have charges laid

The clearance status (meaning if a charge has been laid in a case of murder) is known for 10 cases in the Atlantic region. Of those cases, 5 have been cleared by criminal charge. This is comparable to the national clearance rate, which stands at 53%. Also very close to the national average of 39%, 4 of 10 cases remain unsolved in the Atlantic region.

More cases in First Nations communities than national average.

The location of women and girls' disappearances and deaths is known in nine cases. Of those women and girls, most disappeared or were killed on-reserve.

Murders most often take place in residences

The specific location of murder cases in the Atlantic region is known in only 6 instances. Of these cases, the data shows that 5 women and girls were murdered in residences (either their own home or another person's residence). This is much higher than the national average, where 59% of women and girls were murdered in residences.

Addressing family violence must be a priority

Information on relationship to the offender in murder cases in the Atlantic is known in 5 cases. All 5 of these women and girls were killed by someone known to them; either a partner, ex-partner, or family member. This is different from the national average, which shows that approximately 28% of women and girls were killed by someone known to them (Canada-wide, a higher percentage—almost 34%—of Aboriginal women and girls in Canada were killed by an acquaintance or stranger).

This information, coupled with the fact that most women and girls were killed in residences, suggests the death of Aboriginal women and girls is likely linked to domestic or family violence. For this reason, it can be argued that police and service providers in the Atlantic must make cases of family violence involving Aboriginal women and girls a priority. It also indicates that Aboriginal women and girls in the Atlantic region tend not to be victims of the "stranger violence" that Aboriginal women and girls in other provinces face. However, it must be reiterated that the murder cases of 4 Aboriginal women and girls (or 40%) remain unsolved.

Most cases handled by RCMP

The majority of cases (5 of 6 where information is known) are handled by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in the Atlantic region.

¹ For the purposes of this Fact Sheet, the Atlantic region includes Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

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For more information, read What Their Stories Tell Us: Research findings from the Sisters In Spirit initiative. This report presents demographic and statistical evidence from NWAC's Sisters In Spirit database, while situating the issue within the larger context of root causes and ways forward. The report can be found on NWAC's website at www.nwac.ca about Sisters In Spirit, please contact the NWAC satellite office.