



NATIVE WOMEN'S  
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES  
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



# Fact Sheet: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls in British Columbia

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 British Columbia against the national context.

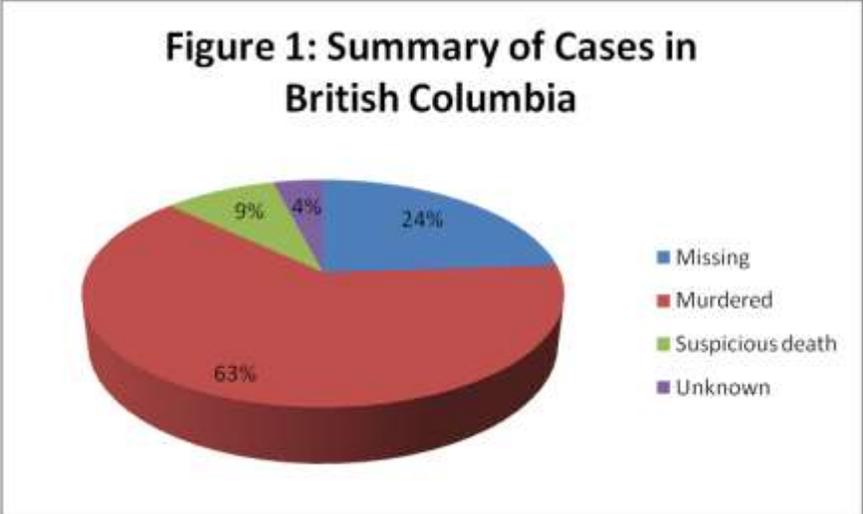
## **British Columbia has the highest number of cases in Canada**

NWAC has gathered information about 160 cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in British Columbia. This accounts for almost a third (27%) of all cases in NWAC's database. To date, the number of cases in British Columbia is substantially higher than any other province or territory in Canada (Alberta follows with 93 cases, representing 16% of cases in NWAC's database).

## **More cases of suspicious death**

Of the 160 cases in NWAC's database, 63% are murder cases and 24% are cases of missing women and girls. This is quite similar to the national average; Canada-wide, 20% are cases of missing women and girls and 67% are murder cases.

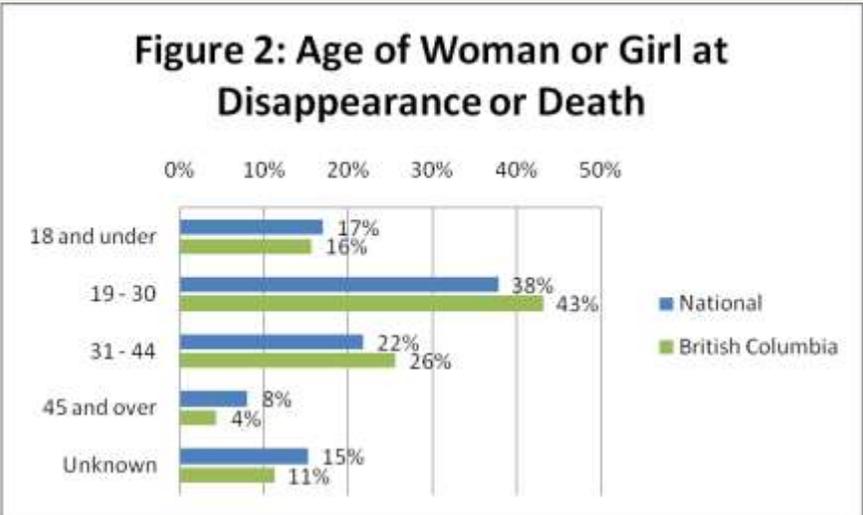
British Columbia has the highest percentage of suspicious death cases in Canada—cases that police have declared natural or accidental but that family or community members consider suspicious. 9% of cases in British Columbia fall under the category of suspicious death, compared to 4% nationally. See Figure 1.



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

**Majority of cases involve young women**

Like the national situation, most of the cases in British Columbia involve young women and girls under 31 years old, especially women aged 19-30. In contrast, there are few cases involving women aged 45 and over.



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

Further differences can be seen when looking at cases of missing women and girls, compared to cases of murder. For example, women 45 and older represent 2% of murder cases, compared to 9% nationally. We also see that there fewer disappearances involving women aged 18 and under, and more involving women 19 to 30 years old. See Figure 3.

| <b>Figure 3: Missing and Murdered Cases by Age</b> |          |                  |          |                  |
|--|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|
| Age  | Missing  |                  | Murdered |                  |
|  | National | British Columbia | National | British Columbia |
| 18 and under                                       | 24%      | 18%              | 17%      | 17%              |
| 19 - 30  | 36%      | 44%              | 44%      | 47%              |
| 31 - 44  | 21%      | 23%              | 24%      | 27%              |
| 45 and over  | 10%      | 8%               | 9%       | 2%               |
| Unknown  | 10%      | 8%               | 7%       | 7%               |
| Total  | 100%     | 100%             | 100%     | 100%             |

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

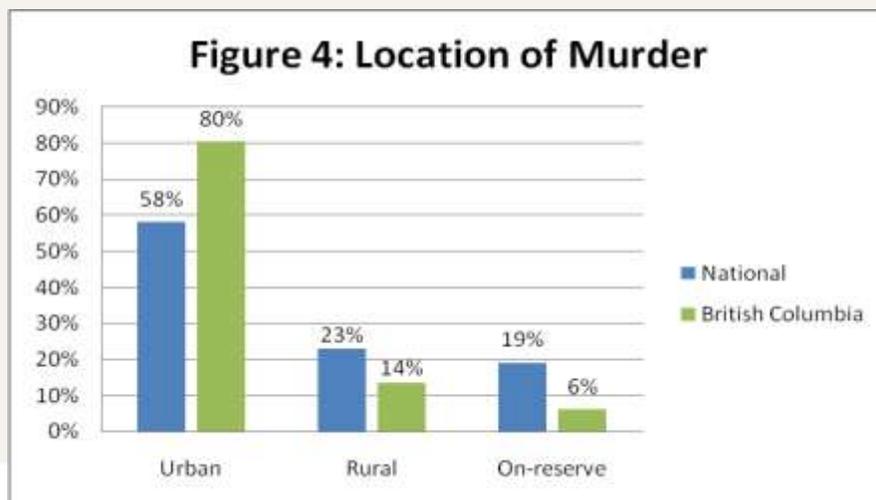
### **Intergenerational impact of missing and murdered Aboriginal women: Many are mothers**

Information about motherhood and number of children is known in 49 cases in British Columbia. Of these 49 women, the vast majority (88%) were mothers.

The number of women that were mothers speaks to the intergenerational impact of this issue. There is a responsibility to ensure that the children of missing and murdered Aboriginal women remain connected to their communities and receive the necessary supports for healing. There is also a dire need to support family and community members who assume care for the children left behind. Perhaps even more importantly, supports and resources for mothers must be understood as integral to any violence prevention strategy.

### **More cases in urban areas, fewer in First Nations communities**

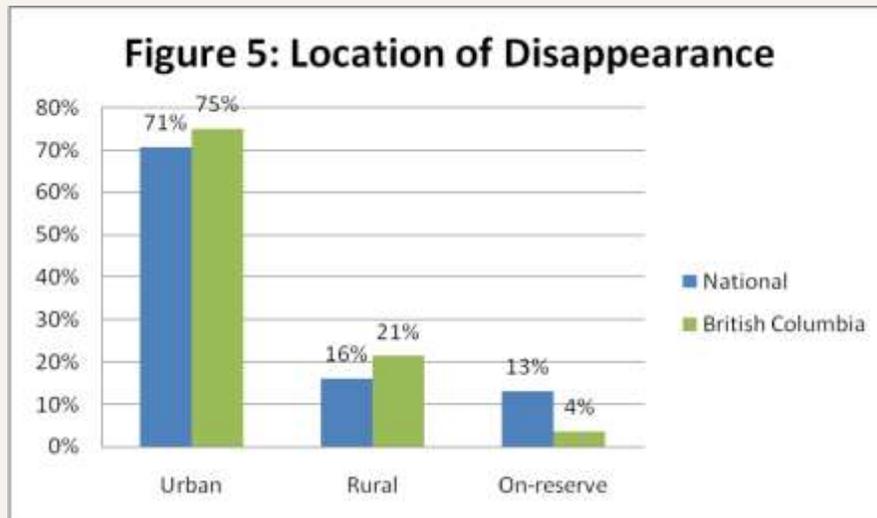
Like the national average, most of the documented cases in British Columbia occurred in urban areas, particularly Vancouver. There are also a number of cases in the Prince George area. In British Columbia, 80% of murders occurred in urban area, compared to 58% nationally. Only 6% percent of women and girls were murdered on-reserve, compared to 19% Canada-wide.



Based on cases in SIS database where this information is known.

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

Compared with the rest of Canada, there are far fewer cases of missing Aboriginal women and girls in First Nations communities. However, we see a higher percentage of cases in rural areas. We know that many of the missing women and girls disappeared along the Highway of Tears (Highway 16), and other rural areas in northern British Columbia.



Based on cases in SIS database where this information is known.

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

### Fewer women and girls died in a residential dwelling

NWAC tracks the specific location of murder or suspicious death. This information allows us consider issues of ‘safe space.’ The percentage of women and girls that were killed outside or in a public area is higher in British Columbia (49% versus 41% nationally). Just over half of women and girls died in a residential dwelling, versus almost 60% nationally.

**Figure 6: Location of Murder or Suspicious Death in SIS Database, 2010**

|   | National | British Columbia |
|---|----------|------------------|
| Residence                                 | 59.4%    | 50.8%            |
| Public place                              | 6.8%     | 8.5%             |
| Vehicle (including public transportation) | 0.4%     | 1.7%             |
| Street, road, highway                     | 13.7%    | 16.9%            |
| Open area                                 | 14.5%    | 15.3%            |
| Other                                     | 5.1%     | 6.8%             |
| Total known locations                     | 100.0%   | 100.0%           |

Based on cases in SIS database where this information is known.

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

## Almost half of murder cases remain unsolved

British Columbia has among the highest rate of unsolved cases in Canada. 49% of British Columbia murder cases in NWAC's database remain unsolved, compared to 39% Canada-wide (see Figure 6).

| <b>Figure 6: Clearance Rates, SIS Database 2010</b> |          |                  |
|---|----------|------------------|
|   | National | British Columbia |
| Cleared by charge                                   | 53.2%    | 47.0%            |
| Cleared by suicide                                  | 3.3%     | 0.0%             |
| Cleared otherwise                                   | 0.3%     | 0.0%             |
| Not cleared   | 39.4%    | 49.0%            |
| Unknown   | 3.8%     | 4.0%             |
| Total   | 100.0%   | 100.0%           |

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

## Almost half of cases involve strangers or acquaintances

Based on cases where charges have been laid, NWAC's research indicates a high number of deaths in British Columbia involving a stranger or acquaintance. Overall, almost half of persons charged were strangers (13%) or acquaintances (36%). This is very different from the national average; Canada-wide, strangers and acquaintances represent 33% of persons charged. In contrast, few cases were found to involve an intimate partner or family member—10% in British Columbia compared to 28% nationally.

Information about persons charged may be helpful in understanding the number of unsolved cases in the province. In general, it is easier to lay charges when the offender is someone close to the victim (versus a stranger or acquaintance). The trend suggesting more cases involving strangers and acquaintances—cases that can be more difficult to solve—may contribute to the lower clearance rate in British Columbia.

NWAC is often asked about the links between missing and murdered Aboriginal women and prostitution. Recognizing that women involved in prostitution are extremely vulnerable and experience high levels of violence, NWAC has worked to better understand how this experience relates to the disappearance and death of Aboriginal women. To date, however, NWAC has been able to gather information in only a small number of cases. It must be emphasized that prostitution is not a 'cause' of violence; rather, many women experience prostitution in the context of limited options and after experiencing multiple forms of trauma and violence.

## **More than half of cases under RCMP jurisdiction**

Policing in British Columbia involves the RCMP, as well as municipal and First Nations police services.

Where this information is known, NWAC has found that the majority of cases in British Columbia involve the RCMP (55%), followed by municipal police forces (39%). At least 6% of cases were found to involve more than one detachment or police service. This includes cases handled by the Missing Women Task Force (a joint force operation).

# Native Women's Association of Canada

Head Office:

Six Nations of the Grand River  
1721 Chiefswood Rd, PO Box 331  
Ohsweken, ON N0A 1M0

Satellite Office (Correspondence to this address):

1 Nicholas Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Ottawa, ON K1N 7B7  
T: 613.722.3033  
F: 613.722.7687

Toll Free: 1.800.461.4043

[www.nwac.ca](http://www.nwac.ca)

For further information about Sisters In Spirit, please contact the NWAC satellite office.

*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](http://www.nwac.ca).