



NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

Fact Sheet

Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls



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Fact Sheet: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls

Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has created a database of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. NWAC has worked hard to research every case, yet we believe there are still many more cases to document. The statistics below are based on NWAC's database as of March 31, 2010.

NWAC has gathered information about 582 cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. Of these:

- ✦ 67% are murder cases (death as the result of homicide or negligence);
- ✦ 20% are cases of missing women or girls;
- ✦ 4% are cases of suspicious death—deaths regarded as natural or accidental by police, but considered suspicious by family or community members; and
- ✦ 9% are cases where the nature of the case is unknown—it is unclear whether the woman was murdered, is missing or died in suspicious circumstances.

This issue impacts all Aboriginal women and girls—First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

The number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada is disproportionately high. NWAC's research indicates that, between 2000 and 2008, Aboriginal women and girls represented approximately 10% of all female homicides in Canada. However, Aboriginal women make up only 3% of the female population.

There are no national data sources regarding missing persons in Canada. This makes it difficult to look at the issue of missing Aboriginal women and girls in comparison to other missing women. The Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police (SACP) is perhaps the only policing body to publish statistics on missing persons. It reports that almost 59% of missing women and girls in Saskatchewan are of Aboriginal ancestry.

Most of the cases in the database are from the last 10 years, but there are likely older cases. The oldest case in NWAC's database occurred in 1944, but most are much more recent; 39% of the cases in NWAC's database occurred between 2000 and 2010, and 17% occurred in the 1990s. In contrast, only 2% of the cases in the database occurred before 1970. This gap strongly suggests that there are still many older cases to document.



Woman holds a placard of a murdered Aboriginal woman.

Most of the cases involve young women and girls. Just over half of the cases (55%) involve women and girls under the age of 31, with 17% of women and girls 18 years of age or younger. Only 8% of cases involve women over 45.

Where are their children? There is an intergenerational impact to this issue.

Of the cases where this information is known, the vast majority of women in NWAC's database (88%) were mothers. NWAC estimates that more than 440 children have been impacted by the disappearance or murder of their mother. Very little is known about what happens to these children following the loss of their mother.

Most of the cases occurred in the Western provinces. More than a quarter (28%) of all cases occurred in British Columbia, followed by Alberta with 16% of cases.

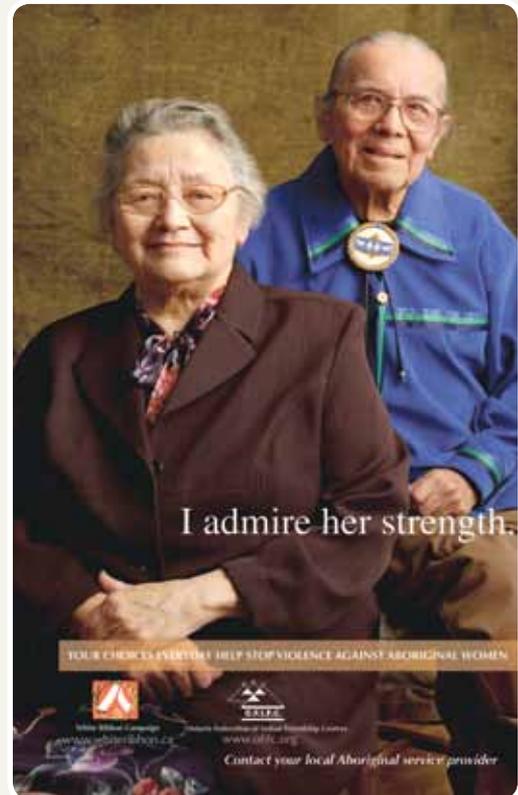
Overall, more than half (54%) of cases occurred in the West: 29% of cases occurred in the south (Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec), 6% took place in the North; and 2% took place in the Atlantic provinces. NWAC is still working to confirm where the violence occurred in 8% of cases.

The majority of cases occurred in urban areas, but resources are also needed in rural and on-reserve communities. Of the cases where this information is known, 70% of the women and girls disappeared from an urban area and 60% were found murdered in an urban area. Only a small number of cases occurred on-reserve (7% of missing cases and 13% of murder cases).

While the majority of cases occurred in urban areas, this violence often has a direct impact on rural or reserve communities. Most Aboriginal peoples living in urban areas maintain close ties to their home communities. The shock and grief of a missing or murdered community member impacts the entire community, no matter where the violence takes place.

Nearly half of murder cases in NWAC's database remain unsolved. NWAC has found that only 53% of murder cases involving Aboriginal women and girls have led to charges of homicide. This is dramatically different from the national clearance rate for homicides in Canada, which was last reported as 84% (Statistics Canada 2005, p.10). While a small number of cases in NWAC's database have been "cleared" by the suicide of the offender or charges other than homicide, 40% of murder cases remain unsolved.

Clearance rates are low but differ by province. NWAC has found that clearance rates range from a low of 42% in Alberta to a high of 93% in Nunavut. Higher clearance rates in the North may reflect the proportion of family violence cases in this region, and the fact that it is generally easier to lay charges when the offender is someone close to the woman (such as a partner or family member) than when the offender is an acquaintance or stranger.



Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) and the White Ribbon Campaign "Admire her Strength."

Aboriginal women are almost three times more likely to be killed by a stranger than non-Aboriginal women are. Of the murder cases in NWAC's database where someone has been charged,

- ✦ 16.5% of offenders are strangers with no prior connection to the woman or girl (in contrast, Statistics Canada reports that, between 1997 and 2004, only 6% of murdered non-Aboriginal women were killed by strangers);
- ✦ 17% of offenders are acquaintances of the woman or girl (a friend, neighbour or someone else known to her); and
- ✦ 23% are a current or former partner of the woman or girl.

NWAC's research confirms that Aboriginal women experience violence by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders, and the vast majority are men.

Where this information is known, more than half (59%) of women and girls died in a residential dwelling. NWAC's research indicates that violence in the home is not limited to family violence. Of deaths involving a stranger or acquaintance, 37% occurred in a residential dwelling. There is a need to think critically about the idea of "safe space" or "safe situations." NWAC's research demonstrates that meeting or accompanying a stranger or acquaintance to a residential dwelling is not necessarily "safer" than a public place or open area.

Women involved in prostitution are extremely vulnerable and experience high levels of violence. NWAC has gathered information about prostitution in only a small number of cases. Of these cases, about half involve women who were not involved in prostitution, and about half involve women who were or were suspected to be involved in this area. This finding may change as we collect more data.

The information gathered to date speaks to the urgency of missing reports involving women in prostitution, as well as the broader need for greater protections for women in this area. 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.

What Their Stories Tell Us

What Their Stories Tell Us 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. It also draws on information gathered from the existing literature, and highlights some of the stories and experiences shared by families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.