



NATIVE WOMEN'S  
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES  
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



# Fact Sheet:

## Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls in the North

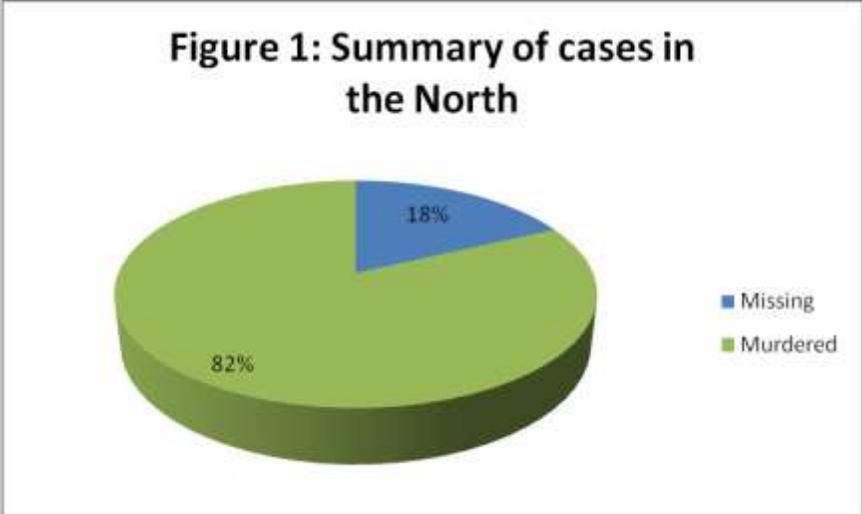
For years, communities have pointed to the high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. As of March 31, 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has gathered information about 582 cases from across the country. NWAC has worked hard to look at every case, yet 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 North against the national context.

### **Fewer documented cases, more community-based research needed**

NWAC has gathered information about 33 cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in the North—6 in Yukon, 12 in the Northwest Territories and 15 in Nunavut. Together, these cases account for 6% of NWAC's database.

The smaller number of Northern cases does not necessarily mean the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls is less prevalent in the region. Much of the information in NWAC's database comes from secondary sources, particularly media stories. Community members have told us, however, that cases in small or isolated communities are often overlooked by the media. For this reason, there is a need for more community-based research that draws directly on the knowledge and experiences of family and community members. Finally, we must remember that the number of Northern cases is influenced by the smaller population in the region.

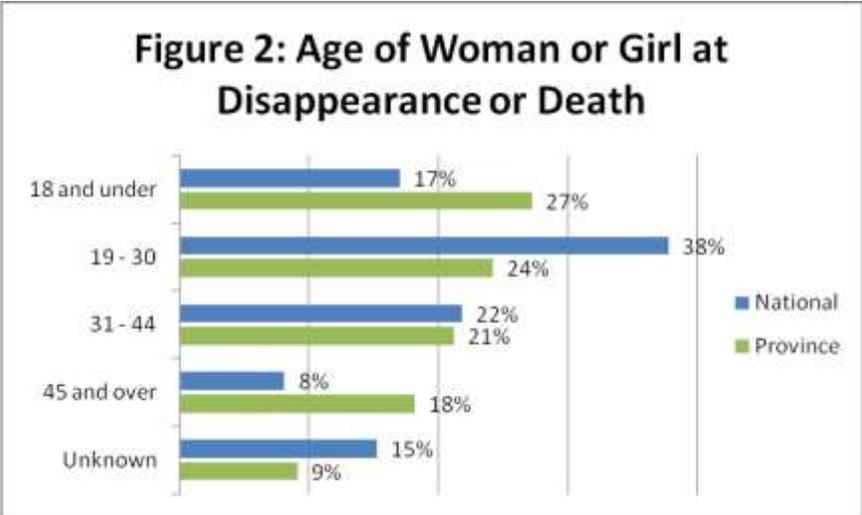
Of the 33 Northern cases in NWAC's database, 27 are murder cases and 6 are cases of missing women and girls. Compared to the national average, there are fewer missing women and girls in the North, but a much higher percentage of murder cases (Canada-wide, 20% are cases of missing women and girls and 67% are murder cases). See Figure 1.



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

**More murder cases involving women over 45**

Like the national situation, most of the known cases in the North involve women and girls under 31 years old. The number of cases involving young women aged 18 and under is particularly high in the North—27%, versus 17% Canada-wide. Compared to the national average, the North also has a higher percentage of cases involving women aged 45 and older.



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

Greater differences can be seen when looking at cases of missing women, compared to cases of murder. In contrast, we see that young women aged 18 and under represent a third of all missing cases in the North. The percentage of murder cases involving women over 30 years old is higher in the North (44% versus 33% Canada-wide). Particularly striking is the percentage of murders involving women over 45 – 22% in the North compared to 9% nationally.

### **Women in the North have diverse and unique needs**

Measures intended to increase safety and well-being must recognize the diversity and unique needs of women in the North. The experiences of women living in the North are very different from women living in the South. Most of the missing and murdered women and girls in the North are Inuit; however there are also many cases involving First Nations women and girls.

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

Information about motherhood and number of children is known in 8 cases in the North. Most of these cases involve mothers.

Collectively, 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.

### **Majority of murders in rural areas**

NWAC has gathered information about location of murder in 25 of 27 cases. Where this information is known, the majority of cases occurred in rural, predominately Inuit communities. Only a small number of known murder cases occurred in urban or First Nations communities. This is very different from the national perspective. Canada-wide almost 60% of women and girls were murdered in urban locations.

In contrast, NWAC's research to date indicates that the majority of the missing women and girls in the North disappeared from an urban area. This consistent with the national average—overall, NWAC has found that 70% of women and girls were last seen in an urban area.

### **Majority of deaths occurred in a residential dwelling**

NWAC has gathered information about the specific place of murder in 22 cases. Of these, the overwhelming majority—19 cases or 86%—took place in a residence (either the woman's home or another residential dwelling). This is much higher than the national average (59%).

### **Higher clearance rates in the North**

Overall, 82% of Northern murder cases have been cleared by charges of homicide (first-degree murder, second-degree murder or manslaughter), compared to 53% nationally. Nunavut has the highest clearance rate in Canada, with charges laid in 93% of cases. Although higher than the national average, clearance rates are slightly lower in the other territories: 63% in the Northwest Territories and 75% in Yukon.

Despite these differences, clearance rates in the North remain much higher than the national average. Only a few cases (15 %) in the North remain unsolved, versus 39% of cases Canada-wide.

## **Most deaths involve an intimate partner**

NWAC's research indicates that police and service providers in the North must make family violence a priority. Of the 22 cases in the North where charges have been laid, 41% were found to involve a partner, versus 17% Canada-wide.

This information can be used to help us understand clearance rates in the North. In general, it is easier to lay charges in cases where the offender is someone close to the victim (versus a stranger or acquaintance). It is likely, therefore, that higher clearance rates in the North are related to the number of cases involving family violence.

Overall, the information gathered to date suggests fewer cases of acquaintance or stranger violence in the North (23%, compared to 33% nationally). It should be noted, however, NWAC is still working to confirm the nature of relationship in almost a third of cases. Our findings in this area might change with more information.

## **RCMP has jurisdiction in the North**

Policing in the North falls under the jurisdiction of the RCMP. A small number of cases in the North were found to involve collaboration between multiple RCMP detachments (including assistance from detachments in the South), or between the RCMP and another police agency.

Community members have long raised issues around the accessibility and response time of policing in the North (the distance between some communities and the nearest detachment), as well as a lack of resources (small detachments with limited capacity), and the high turn-over of police officers in the area. Further work is required to determine how these issues interact with cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in the North.

*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).

# Native Women's Association of Canada

Head Office:

Six Nations of the Grand River  
1721 Chiefswood Rd, PO Box 331  
Ohsweken, ON NoA 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.