

NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

Fact Sheet

Fact Sheet: Root Causes of Violence
Against Aboriginal Women
and the Impact of Colonization



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Fact Sheet: Root Causes of Violence Against Aboriginal Women and the Impact of Colonization

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) believes that knowledge of past and present issues is essential to building a better life for future generations. Aboriginal women in Canada have historically been devalued not only as Aboriginal people but also simply because they are women. It is important to acknowledge the impacts of colonization and recognize that they currently exist and affect Aboriginal women and girls. By understanding the intergenerational effects of colonization, we can begin to address current issues and create a better future for Aboriginal women and girls.

As explained by Guthrie Valaskakis (1999) early colonial writings described Aboriginal women as “Indian princesses”—fetching, proud and virtuous. Resistance to colonization led to the invention of Aboriginal women as “squaws”—dirty, lewd, uncivilized and sexually deviant.

- ✦ Both of these characterizations described Aboriginal women as “sexually available,” which served to remove responsibility from men who forced sex on Aboriginal women.
- ✦ To this day, many Aboriginal women and girls are forced into situations or coping strategies that increase their vulnerability to violence, such as hitchhiking, addictions, homelessness, prostitution and other sex work, gang involvement, or abusive relationships.

As discussed in the National Council of Welfare (2007) the history of colonization has burdened our nations with a continual “passing down of various loads or degrees of post-traumatic stress. Generation after generation, so that we wind up with this entire burden of our people as they exist today.”

- ✦ Alcohol has been cited as a risk factor for violence. Certainly, the connection between colonization, alcohol use and increased vulnerability can be seen in situations of family violence.
- ✦ The residential school experience had a direct impact on the next generations of Aboriginal children, resulting in what is often referred to as the intergenerational effects or intergenerational trauma of residential schools.

The residential school system and 60s Scoop were two strategies used to assimilate the Aboriginal population.

- ✦ The residential school system operated from the 1800s until 1996.
- ✦ Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) children were forcibly removed from their homes for the purpose of assimilation, often without the knowledge or consent of their families or communities.
- ✦ Aboriginal children were predominantly placed with white families in different communities, often resulting in lost connections to their home community and family.
- ✦ More than 11,000 status First Nations children with Indian status, along with many other Aboriginal children, were adopted between 1960 and 1990 (National Council of Welfare 2007, 84).
- ✦ Both initiatives are commonly characterized as cultural genocide because they served to eliminate Aboriginal culture and traditions.

The residential school system and the 60s Scoop disrupted the roles, values and traditions of the Aboriginal family. Many of the lasting effects of these government-mandated actions can still be observed through current trends and issues facing Aboriginal people today.

- ✦ According to the National Council of Welfare (2007) the number of status First Nations children entering the child welfare system rose to a staggering 71.5% between 1995 and 2001 (p.85).
- ✦ According to a study conducted in Australia by Cripps et al (2009), Indigenous women (with children) who had been removed from their natural family during childhood were at higher risk of experiencing violence as adults than those who had not been removed.
- ✦ Furthermore, research shows in one survey (Sikka, 2009) that two-thirds of women involved in street prostitution in Winnipeg had been taken into care as children.
- ✦ Girls who run away from their foster homes or care facilities are “particularly vulnerable to being preyed upon by older males seeking to exploit them.” (Sikka, 2009, p. 11)



Brothers and Sisters In Spirit stand in solidarity with the Silent Witness Initiative.

NWAC’s research recognizes that government passed legislation—such as the *Gradual Civilization Act in 1857, An Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians in 1869 and the Indian Act in 1876*— that entrenched sex-based discrimination against First Nations women.

- ✦ The *Indian Act* does not contain any laws that apply to matrimonial real property (MRP) on reserve land. This gap in legislation has had serious consequences, especially for women who live on reserves after their marriage.
- ✦ The lack of legal clarity and protection also means that women who are experiencing violence, or who have become widowed, may lose their homes on the reserve.
- ✦ It also leads to poor housing options and limited choices for Aboriginal women who want to leave violent relationships or escape unsafe situations.

According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) (2010) a history strong in colonial thought and attacks on Aboriginal culture directly influences the socio-economic conditions Aboriginal people currently experience. Canada needs to acknowledge that the current system perpetuates racism toward and inequality for Aboriginal families and communities (p. 37).

- ✦ CCPA research also indicates that Aboriginal women are affected by higher levels of poverty, lower educational attainment, higher unemployment, poorer physical and mental health, and lack of housing than non-Aboriginal women.
- ✦ Low educational attainment and unemployment have been identified as risk factors associated with violence.

- ✦ NWAC research indicates that some women were “vulnerable” **only** insofar as they were Aboriginal and they were women.
- ✦ Women who work as prostitutes or in other areas of the sex industry frequently tell researchers that they experience violence perpetrated by strangers, clients, acquaintances, partners and the police.

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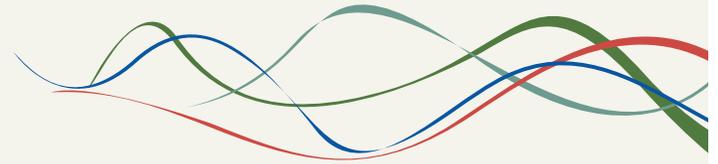
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Glossary



60s Scoop

The 60s Scoop refers to the adoption of First Nation and Métis children in Canada between 1960 and the mid-1980s. This period is so named because the highest numbers of adoptions took place in the 1960s and because, in many instances, children were literally scooped from their homes and communities without the knowledge or consent of families and bands.

Aboriginal

Aboriginal is the collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. The Canadian constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people: Indians (commonly referred to as First Nations), Métis and Inuit. These are three distinct peoples with unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. More than one million people in Canada identify themselves as an Aboriginal person, according to the 2006 Census. Source: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

advocate

An advocate is anyone who raises awareness of the issue of missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls—whether they do so by holding an event, writing a letter to the editor or taking any other sort of action.

Amnesty International Canada

Amnesty International is an international non-governmental organisation that coordinates worldwide events in the human rights movement. They include membership in more than 140 countries and over one million people.

band

A band is a group of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart, or for which money is held by the Crown, or that is declared to be a band for the purposes of the *Indian Act*.

campaigner

A campaigner is anyone who raises awareness of the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls—whether they do so by holding an event, writing a letter to the editor or taking any other sort of action.

Circle	Is an all encompassing, holistic, powerful symbolic way of life. It is a common belief in various First Peoples' cultures that the power of the world always works in circles, as everything tries to be round; the earth, the moon, life cycles and the seasons are some examples.
Congress of Aboriginal Peoples	The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples is a nationally incorporated umbrella organization that represents the interests, nationally, of its provincial and territorial affiliate organizations across Canada for urban Non-Status First Nations peoples.
Crown attorney	A Crown attorney is a prosecutor and trained lawyer who appears on behalf of the Crown in Canada. In some provinces, they are called Crown prosecutors.
Elder	Elders are moral and spiritual leaders of our Aboriginal communities. They are also the teachers, who pass knowledge on to the next generation.
Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime	The Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime is a resource for victims in Canada. The Office was created in 2007 to try to ensure the federal government meets its responsibilities to victims of crime.
First Peoples	First Peoples is a collective term used to describe the original peoples of Canada and their descendants. It is used less frequently than terms like "Aboriginal peoples" and "Native peoples."
first responder	Members of an emergency service, first responders are the first on the scene at an emergency.
Friendship Centre	Friendship Centres are not-for-profit corporations that are mandated to serve the needs of all off-reserve Aboriginal people, regardless of legal definition. This necessitates responding to thousands of Aboriginal people requiring culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate services in urban communities.

General Social Survey

In 2004, Statistics Canada conducted its fourth General Social Survey (GSS) on victimization. This survey asked Canadians aged 15 years and older about their experiences as a victim of crime (if any) and their fear and perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system.

Grandmother Moon logo

Grandmother Moon teaches us about our sacred role as the life-givers and the heart of our nations- for without women our nations cannot go on. Artist Dick Baker designed the Kwakwaka'wakw Moon for the Native Women's Association of Canada and his design is the official logo for our Sisters In Spirit initiative.

Grandmothers Lodge

A Grandmothers Lodge is a gathering of grandmothers, aunts, mothers, sisters, and relatives who recognize, respect, promote, defend and enhance their Native ancestral laws, spiritual beliefs, language and traditions given to them by the Creator.

Highway of Tears

An unsolved series of murders and disappearances of young women in the vicinity of Highway 16 in British Columbia has earned the route the nickname Highway of Tears.

I Am a Kind Man

I Am a Kind Man is a website that reminds us that violence has never been an acceptable part of Aboriginal culture. This website embraces the Seven Grandfather Teachings which show us how to live in harmony with Creation through wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility and truth.

Indian status

There are three categories of Indians in Canada: **Status Indians** are people who are entitled to have their names included on the Indian Register, an official list maintained by the federal government, which includes specific rights and benefits excluding Non-Status Indians, Inuit and Métis. **Non-Status Indians** are people who are Indians or members of a First Nation but whom the Government of Canada does not recognize as Indians under the *Indian Act*, either because they are unable to prove their status or have lost their status rights. A **Treaty Indian** is a Status Indian who belongs to a First Nation that signed a treaty with the Crown.

Inuit	<i>Inuit</i> are the Aboriginal people of the Arctic Canada. Inuit communities are located primarily the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik (northern Quebec), Yukon and northern parts of Labrador.
Métis	People of mixed First Nation and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis, as distinct from First Nations people, Inuit or non-Aboriginal people. The Canadian Constitution recognizes Métis people as one of the three Aboriginal peoples. The Métis people have a distinct culture, historical background and homeland.
National Aboriginal Policing Services (NAPS) of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)	The RCMP's National Aboriginal Policing Services is responsible for planning, developing and managing the RCMP's strategies and initiatives for working with Aboriginal communities.
Native	Native is a word similar in meaning to Aboriginal. "Native peoples" is a collective term to describe the descendants of the original peoples of North America.
Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)	NWAC works to enhance, promote and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations and Métis women. NWAC works with Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada on Inuit Women-specific issues.
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada	Pauktuutit is the national non-profit association representing all Inuit women in Canada. Its mandate is to foster a greater awareness of the needs of Inuit women, and to encourage their participation in community, regional and national concerns in relation to social, cultural and economic development.
reservation	A reservation is land set apart by the United States government for the use and occupation of a group of Native Americans. The term is not often used in Canada.
reserve	In Canada a reserve is a tract of land, the legal title to which is held by the Crown, set apart for the use and benefit of an Indian band. Some bands have more than one reserve. Many First Nations now prefer the term "First Nation community," and no longer use "reserve."

Residential School system

Founded in the 19th century, the Canadian Indian residential school system was intended to force the assimilation of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada into European-Canadian society. The purpose of the schools, which separated children from their families, has been described as “killing the Indian in the child” as an attempt to instill a Euro-Canadian identity in Aboriginal children. It has been revealed that many students at residential schools were subjected to severe physical, spiritual, psychological and sexual abuse by teachers and school officials and many are known to have died from disease and malnutrition.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police is the Canadian national police service and an agency of the Ministry of Public Safety Canada.

Seven Grandfather Teachings

The Seven Grandfather Teachings are

1. to cherish knowledge is to know **wisdom**
2. to know **love** is to know peace
3. to honour all of creation is to have **respect**
4. **bravery** is to face the foe with integrity
5. **honesty** in facing a situation is to be brave
6. **humility** is to know your self as a sacred part of Creation
7. **truth** is to know all of these things

Seven Sacred Laws

The Seven Sacred Laws are important teachings in Aboriginal culture. These teachings honour spiritual law and bring us back to our connection to the land. The Seven Sacred Laws are represented by seven animals, (which corresponds to the Seven Grandfather Teachings), each of which offers a special gift and understanding of how we as people should live our lives.

Sisters In Spirit (SIS)

SIS is an initiative that has worked to identify root causes, trends and circumstances of violence that have led to the disappearance and death of Aboriginal women and girls.

Sisters In Spirit Ribbon Campaign

Ribbons are very visible symbols of the Sisters In Spirit campaign. The ribbons help council members raise funds so they can keep raising awareness.

Sisters In Spirit Vigil	Sisters In Spirit Vigil is a national movement for social change that encourages concerned citizens and Aboriginal community members to gather on October 4. We gather to honour our lost sisters and their families. We gather to show we are a united front, to shed light on a crisis that affects every Canadian and to pressure all levels of government to act now!
sound bite	A short audio quote (radio), audio and video quote (television), or print quote (print media) used to tell a very specific part of a larger story.
Stolen Sisters campaign	The Stolen Sisters campaign, which was created by Amnesty International, ran from 2004 to 2009 to raise awareness nationwide to remember missing women and to raise awareness of missing persons.
support worker	Generally, support workers include social workers and staff members at victims' services agencies.
victim impact statement	Intended to give crime victims a voice in the criminal justice process, a victim impact statement is a written account of the personal harm suffered by a victim of crime. The statement may include a description of the physical, financial and emotional effects of the crime.
Victim Services	"Victim Services" is a relatively new concept whose main focus is to address the needs or concerns of victims.
vigil	Vigils are gatherings where the public is asked to come together to honour a person, a specific cause or an important date. They are an excellent way to rally support and unite a community. They also provide opportunities for curious or interested individuals to freely and safely come to be informed.
White Ribbon Campaign	The White Ribbon Campaign is a national campaign of men and boys working to end violence against women.
women's centre	A women's centre is an organizational place where women can get access to women-specific services, programs and resources in a safe environment.