



NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

Fact Sheet

Fact Sheet: Violence Against Aboriginal Women



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Aboriginal women and girls are strong and beautiful. They are our mothers, our daughters, our sisters, our aunties and our grandmothers.

For years, communities have pointed to the high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. As of March 31, 2010, Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has gathered information about 582 cases from across the country.

Aboriginal women face life-threatening, gender-based violence, and disproportionately experience violent crimes because of hatred and racism. This fact sheet places the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in the broader context of violence against Aboriginal women. By understanding the severity of the issues, we can better work toward breaking the cycle of violence.

According to Statistics Canada's 2004 General Social Survey (GSS), Aboriginal women experience much higher rates of violence than non-Aboriginal women.

Statistics Canada also reported the following findings:

- ✦ Aboriginal women 15 years and older are 3.5 times more likely to experience violence than non-Aboriginal women.
- ✦ Rates of spousal assault against Aboriginal women are more than three times higher than those against non-Aboriginal women.
- ✦ Nearly one-quarter of Aboriginal women experienced some form of spousal violence in the five years preceding the 2004 GSS.

Statistics Canada reported that Aboriginal women are more likely to experience more severe and potentially life-threatening forms of family violence than non-Aboriginal women.

- ✦ 54% of Aboriginal women reported severe forms of family violence, such as being beaten, being choked, having had a gun or knife used against them, or being sexually assaulted, versus 37% of non-Aboriginal women
- ✦ 44% of Aboriginal women reported "fearing for their lives" when faced with severe forms of family violence, compared with 33% of non-Aboriginal women.
- ✦ 27% of Aboriginal women reported experiencing 10 or more assaults by the same offender, as opposed to 18% of non-Aboriginal women.
- ✦ While the number of non-Aboriginal women reporting the most severe forms of violence declined from 43% in 1999 to 37% in 2004, the number of similar attacks against Aboriginal women remained unchanged at 54% during the same time period.

Certainly, family violence represents one of the most urgent issues impacting Aboriginal women. However, **there is also a need for more research and awareness about other forms of violence—particularly violence perpetrated by strangers or acquaintances.**

- ✦ Most of the existing research focuses on family violence or abuse between parents and children. Apart from studies dealing with women involved in prostitution, little attention is paid to other forms of violence.
- ✦ Statistics Canada does not have enough data to produce reliable estimates of sexual assault against Aboriginal women.
- ✦ There are no national data sources regarding the number of missing persons reports filed each year, the number of cases resolved or the percentage that remain outstanding. This makes it virtually impossible to compare figures for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women.

Statistics Canada reports that Aboriginal women are significantly overrepresented as victims of homicide.

- ✦ Between 1997 and 2000, homicide rates of Aboriginal females were almost seven times higher than those of non-Aboriginal females.
- ✦ Often overlooked or ignored is the extreme vulnerability of women in the sex trade. Between 1991 and 2004, 171 women involved in prostitution were killed in Canada; 45% of these homicides remain unsolved (Statistics Canada 2006a, p. 37).
- ✦ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) data published in Amnesty International Canada's report *Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada* indicate that Aboriginal women between the ages of 25 and 44 with Indian status are five times more likely than other women of the same age to die as the result of violence.
- ✦ NWAC's research indicates that homicides involving Aboriginal women are more likely to go unsolved. Only 53% of murder cases in NWAC's Sisters In Spirit database have been solved, compared to 84% of all murder cases across the country.



2008 SIS vigil.

Community-based research has found levels of violence against Aboriginal women to be even higher than those reported by government surveys. There are many limitations to government-collected statistics.

- ✦ Government statistics are based on police-collected data, but police numbers reflect only those incidents that are reported to police. Six out of 10 incidents of violent crime against Aboriginal people are thought to go unreported.
- ✦ There are no standard policies covering whether and/or how police track violence experienced by Aboriginal peoples. Some police agencies, including the RCMP, do not collect this information at all. This is significant, as the RCMP covers 75% of Canada's geography and serves more than 630 Aboriginal communities.

NWAC holds the only national database on the number and circumstances of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. For more information, please see Fact Sheet 3D, "Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls."

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