



STOPPING VIOLENCE AGAINST ABORIGINAL WOMEN

A Summary of Root Causes,
Vulnerabilities and Recommendations
from Key Literature

FEBRUARY 23, 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper supports the work of the British Columbia Government in preparing for an upcoming National Aboriginal Women's Conference on violence against Aboriginal women and girls to be held in Vancouver in June 2011. Based on an analysis of key symposium, conference and research reports on the issue of violence against Aboriginal women and girls, it provides an overview of the root causes of and vulnerabilities associated with such violence, and a synthesis of recommendations for addressing the issue.

There is clear consensus across the reports reviewed on the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and the existing vulnerabilities that make Aboriginal women far more susceptible to being victims of violence than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. The root causes may broadly be traced to years of colonial policies and practices that sought to exclude Aboriginal people economically and socially, and that attempted to destroy their cultures. Such policies have created a legacy of transgenerational poverty, dislocation and trauma that underpins the disproportionately high rates of violence and abuse that Aboriginal women and girls suffer today. Among colonial policies, it is generally agreed that the residential school system has wrought the most cultural and psychological damage to Aboriginal people, families and communities. The system's legacy of intergenerational abuse dominates the literature on violence against Aboriginal women.

The racist assumptions that informed colonial governments' Aboriginal policy still thrive in contemporary mainstream Canadian society as well as within its systems and institutions. The literature identifies racism as a significant cause of acts of violence against Aboriginal men and women by non-Aboriginal Canadians. Systemic racism also creates barriers to Aboriginal people accessing the supports they need from the justice system, and health and social service systems. Furthermore, racism underpins and reinforces Aboriginal people's socio-economic disadvantage.

In addition to racism, Aboriginal women and girls must confront the burden of sexism and of policies that are founded upon, and reinforce, gender inequality. Government policies that support Aboriginal women's economic dependence on men, and which therefore discourage women from leaving violent relationships, are a common point of discussion in the literature. The literature also targets Aboriginal community leaders, specifically their indifference to the issue of family violence and their inclination to side with male perpetrators, for contributing to the powerlessness of women in abusive relationships.

Societal and systemic racism and sexism intersect. The disproportionately high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women, for example, may be blamed at least in part on the racist and sexist attitudes of both the perpetrators of violence and of the people working in the justice system.

The literature identifies a number of factors associated with an increased vulnerability to family violence. These include personal vulnerabilities such as youth, poor self-esteem, and problematic substance use. They also include broader socio-economic issues, including poverty and economic dependence. The inadequate provision of services and supports for women seeking help with family violence situations dominates the conference and symposium reports. Lack of services is a particularly acute problem in rural and remote communities. Furthermore, services that do exist are rarely staffed by Aboriginal women and do not necessarily provide culturally-appropriate support and assistance. There also tends to be a lack of integration and coordination between services, a problem that exposes Aboriginal women seeking help to cracks and gaps in the social and judicial safety net. Finally, distrust of the justice and child welfare systems means that Aboriginal women are often reluctant to pursue cases of family violence.

Vulnerabilities associated with cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women include poverty, homelessness, problematic substance use, and participation in the sex trade. These factors are closely interrelated – poverty and addiction force many women into homelessness and prostitution. With regard to the cases of missing and murdered women along B.C.’s Highway 16 corridor (“the Highway of Tears”), youth and rural isolation are also identified as key contributing factors. The remoteness of many of the communities along the Highway, and their lack of recreational and social and health services, leads young women to travel to larger urban centres. Poverty means that these women rely on hitchhiking as their means of transportation. The ineffectiveness of police responses to cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women is also seen as underpinning Aboriginal women’s vulnerability.

The many policy and program recommendations put forward in the literature fall into a number of categories: those that focus on the root causes and vulnerabilities; those that speak to the fundamental characteristics of effective programming and strategies; and those that focus respectively on promising practices for violence prevention, intervention and post-incident support.

The recommendations make a loud and unanimous call for increased and sustained funding for all initiatives to address Aboriginal socio-economic disadvantage as well as to address the specific issue of violence against Aboriginal women and girls. In addition, the recommendations make a clear call for all levels of government to take an integrated approach to the socio-economic challenges facing Aboriginal people, and to work in close collaboration with Aboriginal leadership, communities and women’s organizations.

Other key imperatives in the recommendations for addressing violence against Aboriginal women and girls effectively may be broadly captured as follows:

- Governments and Aboriginal leadership must acknowledge the extent and seriousness of the problem, and be held accountable for addressing it;
- More and higher-quality research should be conducted to inform a better understanding of the problem and how most effectively to address it;

- Governments must support Aboriginal approaches to individual and community healing;
- Cultural revitalization strategies that allow women and men to reconnect with traditional roles and with healthy ways of relating must be supported;
- There should be an expansion of culturally-appropriate, community-based services across the prevention, intervention and post-incident continuum;
- Governments must make prevention of violence a priority;
- All non-Aboriginal personnel who work with Aboriginal clients must receive adequate cultural-sensitivity training and education;
- Standards and protocols for how police and other relevant services respond to cases of family violence or of missing and murdered women must be developed; and
- Culturally-appropriate alternatives to the mainstream justice system must be explored and developed.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge and Information Services (KIS) has been contracted by the British Columbia Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (MARR) to provide research support for the upcoming National Aboriginal Women's Conference on preventing and addressing violence against Aboriginal women that will be held in Vancouver in June 2011. This paper represents the first in a suite of research products that KIS has been asked to deliver.

The purpose of this paper is primarily twofold: 1) to provide an overview of the root causes of and underlying vulnerabilities associated with Aboriginal women and girls' experience of violence; and 2) to offer a synthesis of the numerous recommendations that have been put forward in key reports over the last 15 years. The paper will help to shape development of a consultation document to support community consultation sessions across British Columbia. Consultation findings will inform B.C.'s work leading up to the conference.

Since the 1996 publication of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), there have been a significant number of symposium, conference and research reports on the issue of violence against Aboriginal women, each of which includes a list of recommendations. This paper focuses on 18 such reports published between 1996 and 2010. The 18 reports represent a short-list chosen in consultation with conference organizers in British Columbia from an original long-list of 45 reports. They include papers produced by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers and organizations, and they deal with the issue from provincial and national perspectives. A full, bibliographical list of the reports reviewed is appended.

The paper is organized into three sections. Section 1 provides an overview of the root causes of and vulnerabilities associated with violence against Aboriginal women and girls. Sections 2 and 3 offer syntheses of the many recommendations contained in the reports examined. Section 2 contains recommendations that address the root causes and underlying vulnerabilities. Section 3 focuses on recommendations that deal specifically with the issue of violence and stopping the violence initiatives. They are categorized according to the social service "prevention, intervention, post-incident" continuum.

The recommendations syntheses offered here eradicate duplication and overlap. However, considerable care has been taken to honour the original words and intent of each of the recommendations. At the end of each section, the reader will find a much more highly distilled summary of the recommendations that identifies the most essential elements. A similarly succinct, high-level summary of root causes and vulnerabilities is also provided at the end of Section 1.

1 ROOT CAUSES AND VULNERABILITIES

There is very clear consensus across the reports reviewed on the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and the existing vulnerabilities that make Aboriginal women far more susceptible to being victims of violence than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. This section of the paper offers an overview of those root causes and vulnerabilities. In the interests of clarity, they are discussed separately; however, both tend to be interrelated and compounding.

1.1 ROOT CAUSES

1.1.1 Colonialism

There is broad agreement in the literature that the root causes of the intolerably high levels of violence and vulnerability to violence experienced by Aboriginal women and girls in Canada lie in the colonial policies of historical and contemporary governments.

The 2004 Amnesty International report, *Stolen Sisters*, asserts that colonialism “has had a profoundly negative impact on Indigenous communities as a whole” (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 12). Years of government interventions that sought to exclude Aboriginal people economically and politically and attempted to destroy their cultures has resulted in a legacy of transgenerational poverty, dislocation and trauma. Within Aboriginal communities, such trauma and disadvantage frequently manifests as violence, and in particular violence against women.

Stolen Sisters (2004) sums up the cumulative impact of these policies on Aboriginal women:

“[the] social and economic marginalisation of Indigenous women, along with a history of government policies that have torn apart Indigenous families and communities, have pushed a disproportionate number of Indigenous women into dangerous situations that include extreme poverty, homelessness and prostitution” (p. 2).

The socio-economic implications of colonialism are discussed in more detail in the subsections that follow, as is one particularly damaging colonial initiative, the establishment of the residential school system.

1.1.2 Legacy of Residential Schools

Consistently, the residential schools system, and its legacy of intergenerational abuse, dominates the literature on violence against Aboriginal women. RCAP (1996) identified residential schools as one of the most significant root causes of family violence among Aboriginal peoples.

The residential school system was established in order to further the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples by removing children from their homes and cultures, and instilling in them the values of

the colonial society. The removal of Aboriginal children from their families has, broadly speaking, created a generation of Aboriginal women who never learnt how to be parents (United Native Nations, 2007). Many children who attended residential schools were the victims of physical and sexual abuse. Instead of traditional, nurturing parenting skills, these children learned violence and abuse (RCAP, 1996; Amnesty International, 2004). Consequently, many residential school survivors went on to inflict violence on their own families (RCAP, 1996). The 2008 Government of Canada study by Ipsos-Reid, *Aboriginal Women and Family Violence*, highlights how the intergenerational experience of family violence together with poor parenting and relationship skills contribute to violence against Aboriginal women. In many cases both the victim and the perpetrator of violence come from violent homes.

The impact of residential schools and their attempted assimilation of Aboriginal people have resulted in a loss of culture and of self-respect. Residential school survivors who experienced sexual abuse as children often carry a sense of profound shame and self-loathing (Amnesty International, 2004). Violence – in the form of suicide or domestic abuse – may be seen as an external manifestation of self-loathing. The severe disruption wrought by the residential school system resulted not only in the loss of parenting, but also in the loss of traditional ways of life (RCAP, 1996). Amnesty International draws a link between the loss of tradition and family violence and argues that the “[e]rosion of cultural identity and the accompanying loss of self-worth [were] brought about, in part, through assimilationist policies” (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 15).

Fear of losing their children is a common barrier women face both to reporting and to leaving a violent family situation. *Stolen Sisters* (2004) and *Aboriginal Women and Violence* (2008) detail Aboriginal women’s concerns that violence frequently goes unreported, and therefore continues, because women fear that they may lose their children. The Provincial Roundtable on Aboriginal Women’s Issues (2007) found that these fears are driven by the residential school experience of children being taken from families. The (ongoing) issue of social workers removing Aboriginal children from their homes and the high rates of Aboriginal children in care also compound these fears (Aboriginal Affairs Working Group, 2010; Amnesty International, 2004).

1.1.3 Socio-Economic Exclusion

The economic exclusion of Aboriginal people was perpetuated through government policies that dispossessed people of their traditional territories and forced them onto reservations that were much smaller than the lands they originally occupied, and that were often established on unproductive land and in isolated and remote locations. At the same time, Aboriginal people were subjected to a number of policies that circumscribed their political and legal status, including the denial of the right to vote and the denial of matrimonial real property rights to Aboriginal women.

The patterns of exclusion that pushed Aboriginal people to the fringe of Canada’s economy are directly linked to many of the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women. Marginalization and the loss of traditional ways of life have manifested themselves in poor

educational outcomes, high unemployment and high levels of poverty. Racism within contemporary Canadian society creates significant barriers to Aboriginal people's success in school and in the workplace (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003; Aboriginal Affairs Working Group, 2009; NAWS II, 2009). Chronically high unemployment among Aboriginal men combined with the loss of traditional roles has led to a loss of self-respect and low self-esteem (RCAP, 1996 and Government of Canada, 2008). Brownridge (2008) has found that unemployment is linked to higher rates of violence.

The literature reviewed also suggests that low education levels, poverty and economic dependency are common characteristics of women who experience violence (Government of Canada, 2008). Both the Government of Canada (2008) and Brownridge (2008) found that women who were uneducated were more likely to be vulnerable to family violence, while those with more education were more likely to leave a violent situation.

In British Columbia, the low graduation rate among Aboriginal women has been identified as a major barrier to safety and wellbeing. The 2003 report, *Start of Something Powerful*, produced by the Pacific Association of First Nations Women, the BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, and the BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs notes that a lack of education makes it difficult for Aboriginal women who are victims of violence to navigate the justice system. One respondent stated, "I get the impression the women have been undermined because of their literacy levels" (*Start of Something Powerful*, 2003, p. 8).

1.1.4 Gender inequity

In addition to the socio-economic disadvantages commonly experienced by Aboriginal men and women, Aboriginal women must confront the added burden of sexism, and of policies that are founded upon, and that reinforce, gender inequality.

Government policies that discourage Aboriginal women from reporting family violence and trap them in violent relationships are a common point of discussion in the literature examined. The denial to Aboriginal women of matrimonial real property rights has rendered many women powerless in their attempts to get out of violent relationships. The Provincial Roundtable on Aboriginal Women's Issues (2007) notes that women who live on reserve are denied the rights enjoyed by women who live off reserve. Women living off reserve who are separating from a spouse have the opportunity to pursue a fair and equitable settlement through the judicial system, but those who live on reserve are denied this opportunity. A woman living on reserve in a home owned by her male partner has no legal recourse to a fair and equitable settlement.

The literature also targets Aboriginal community leaders for contributing to the powerlessness of women in abusive relationships. RCAP (1996) heard testimony that chiefs and councils were unwilling to address violence in their communities. Similar views were also heard by the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba which found that "most chiefs and council members are male and often exhibit bias in favour of the male partner in a domestic abuse situation" (Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, 1999). The Provincial Roundtable on Women's Issues (2007)

concluded that because “the offender is quite often a political affiliate within the local band office,” it is difficult for women to access the social services funding distributed by the band office, which forces women to leave their reserves or return to an abusive relationship (p. 10).

1.1.5 Racism

The negative impacts of sexism intersect with and are compounded by racism. The RCAP report notes that the erosion of Aboriginal culture has been exacerbated by the prevalence of racially motivated attacks on Aboriginal men and women (RCAP, 1996). Submissions to RCAP by Aboriginal women recounted stories of racially motivated attacks including racial slurs, stereotyping, and devaluation (RCAP, 1996).

The disproportionately high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women may be blamed at least in part on the racist and sexist attitudes of both the perpetrators of violence and of the people working in the justice system. Sexism and racism are, in other words, societal and systemic. A 2009 paper produced by the Aboriginal Affairs Working Group concluded that the societal indifference to the high rate of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada and the inadequate police and justice system response to the issue are key contributing factors to Aboriginal women’s vulnerability to (non-familial) violence (Government of Canada, 2009).

Racism within Canadian society also contributes to violence within Aboriginal communities through its association with socio-economic exclusion and disadvantage. RCAP, for example, concludes that “violence within Aboriginal communities is fostered and sustained by a racist social environment that promulgates demeaning stereotypes of Aboriginal women and men and seeks to diminish their value as human beings and their right to be treated with dignity” (RCAP, 1996, para. 16).

1.2 VULNERABILITIES

The vulnerabilities that can lead to violence against Aboriginal women are divided into two categories in this section: vulnerabilities that commonly underlie cases of family violence, and vulnerabilities associated with the issue of murdered and missing women. These categories are not mutually exclusive and many of the vulnerabilities are consistent across both types of violence.

1.2.1 Family Violence

Family violence is defined by RCAP (1996) as a “serious abuse of power within family, trust or dependency relationships” (para. 6). The literature examined identifies a number of factors that make Aboriginal women particularly vulnerable to family violence. These vulnerabilities include personal and domestic characteristics as well as issues within the broader community and the justice system.

On the personal level, the literature identifies drug and alcohol abuse, poor self-esteem and youth as common characteristics of women who have been victims of family violence. RCAP (1996) found that substance abuse was a common vulnerability of women experiencing family violence. However, the 2008 report, *Aboriginal Women and Violence* (2008) questions whether substance abuse occurs as a result of the violence or whether it is a preceding factor. Both RCAP (1996) and *Aboriginal Women and Violence* (2008) note that low self-esteem is a common characteristic of Aboriginal women who have suffered family violence. Brownridge (2008), notes that it is a “well established fact that youth is a risk factor” for family violence (p. 356).

Aboriginal women are also vulnerable to violence because of domestic circumstances that are in part formed by historical experiences. Women’s economic dependence on abusive spouses tends to trap them in violent relationships (RCAP, 1996, Government of Canada, 2008 and Amnesty International, 2004). In addition, fear of losing their children is, as already noted, a powerful barrier to reporting family violence.

At the community level, there are challenges and characteristics that make Aboriginal women vulnerable to violence. A lack of community-based support services, the distance to travel to access such services elsewhere, and a lack of culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal women are commonly cited in the literature as factors that prevent women from leaving violent relationships and getting the help they need. *Start of Something Powerful* (2003) identifies the lack of specific services for Aboriginal women in isolated communities as a particularly acute problem. Additionally, the report notes that the poverty experienced in isolated communities prevents Aboriginal women from travelling to access services in the larger urban centres. The isolation of many Aboriginal communities is generally seen as contributing to the vulnerability of Aboriginal women to family violence. According to Dreddy, author of the 2002 report *Moving Toward Safety: Responding to Family Violence in Aboriginal and Northern Communities of Labrador*, “geographical isolation in rural communities is a factor influencing the likelihood of assault, since some aspects of rural life may make women more vulnerable to domestic violence” (p. 7).

In addition to an inadequate provision of services, the literature also notes that women’s safety and wellbeing is compromised by the lack of integration and coordination between those services that do exist. Jurisdictional complexities compound this situation for Aboriginal women. Amnesty International, for example, describes the make-up of discrete (and sometimes unclear) federal, provincial and territorial responsibilities as “a jurisdictional web” in which there is little coordination or communication, and which exposes Aboriginal people to cracks and gaps in the social and judicial safety net (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 21).

The literature also finds that abusive men are vulnerable to the same lack of resources and supports as their victims. *Start of Something Powerful* (2003), for example, notes the paucity of programs available to help men who abuse to change their behaviour. This lack of support is especially poignant when one considers that many violent men have experienced childhood abuse and also suffer from substance abuse problems (Government of Canada, 2008).

A common assertion of Aboriginal women experiencing family violence is that they do not trust the system to intervene adequately (RCAP, 1996). This distrust of the system extends both to the ability of police to respond sympathetically and proactively, and to the effectiveness of the courts in prosecuting abusers. At the Provincial Roundtable on Aboriginal Women's Issues, Aboriginal women recounted stories of delayed police arrival times, not being taken seriously, and having difficulty navigating Canada's legal system (United Native Nations, 2007). *Start of Something Powerful* (2003) notes that Aboriginal women are often reluctant to take issues to court because they feel it will not accomplish anything.

1.2.2 Murdered and Missing Women

There are cases of murdered and missing Aboriginal women recorded across Canada, but the Western provinces appear to have a disproportionate number of cases. In British Columbia, most incidents of murdered and missing women have occurred along the Highway 16 corridor between Prince George and Prince Rupert (commonly referred to as the *Highway of Tears*), and in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Many of the factors that make Aboriginal women susceptible to family violence are recognized as vulnerabilities associated with murdered and missing women.

The Federal, Provincial and Territorial Missing Women Working Group (2010) found that the vulnerability of women to violence is determined by situational and marginalizing factors. For women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside the main situational factor that renders them vulnerable to violence is participation in the sex trade. Marginalizing factors for Downtown Eastside women include poverty, homelessness and drug addictions (Missing Women Working Group, 2010). Indeed, it is poverty and addiction to drugs that pushes many women into prostitution.

The *Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report* (2006) provides an in-depth exploration of the vulnerabilities faced by women living, travelling and working along the Highway 16 corridor. As in the Downtown Eastside, poverty and substance abuse are chronic problems in the communities that border the highway. Youth and rural isolation are also contributing factors to increased vulnerability to violence. The remoteness of many of the reserve communities in Northern B.C., and their lack of recreational activities and social and health services, leads many young women to travel to larger urban centres. High rates of poverty mean that few people own cars, and since transit is limited to Greyhound buses, many women rely on hitchhiking for transportation between the isolated reserves and the cities and colleges in the area (Highway of Tears, 2006).

The literature on murdered and missing Aboriginal women contains considerable criticism of the police response to these cases. Amnesty International's 2004 report, *Stolen Sisters*, for example blames police failure to provide an adequate standard of protection, and notes that gaps in how the police record and share information means that there is no comprehensive picture of the

actual scale of violence against Aboriginal women, nor an adequate understanding of the nature of the perpetrators (Amnesty International, 2004). Police are also criticized for not having the appropriate training to interact with Aboriginal people in a culturally sensitive and effective way. Consequently, it has not been possible for police forces to establish the trust and confidence of Aboriginal women. Just as women are reluctant to involve the judicial system in cases of family violence, so *Stolen Sisters* (2004) reports that women's lack of trust in the court system makes it less likely that they will report incidence of non-domestic violence because they know "that they will not be taken seriously by the police and courts" (p. 11).

HIGHLIGHTS OF ROOT CAUSES AND VULNERABILITIES

There is very clear consensus across the literature on the nature of the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls and the factors that make them more vulnerable to violence than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

The root causes may be traced back to the colonial policies of historical and contemporary governments that have created a legacy of socio-economic exclusion and disadvantage, cultural dislocation, and transgenerational trauma and violence. The damage wrought by the residential school system has been particularly profound and long lasting. Children who attended residential schools were unable to learn traditional parenting skills, were taught to be ashamed of their cultures, and many suffered physical and sexual abuse at the hands of residential school staff. Such experiences have contributed to the normalization of violence within Aboriginal communities and the long-term impacts continue to feed the cycle of self-loathing and abuse.

Research draws a link between elevated rates of family violence and low educational achievement, high unemployment and poverty. The existing education, employment and income gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians goes some way, therefore, to explaining the high levels of domestic abuse experienced by Aboriginal women and girls.

Aboriginal women also experience disadvantages related to sexism and to policies that are founded upon sexist assumptions. The denial to Aboriginal women living on reserve of matrimonial real property rights effectively renders them economically dependent upon a violent spouse. Aboriginal community leaders – who are predominantly male – can be unwilling to recognize and to address family violence in their communities, and have been found to show bias towards male partners in domestic abuse situations.

Racism and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of Aboriginal men and women diminish their value as human beings and motivate acts of violence by non-Aboriginal people. The negative impacts of racism and sexism intersect and are associated with the failure of the legal system to address adequately the issue of murdered and missing Aboriginal women, and of society's general indifference to the issue.

Vulnerabilities associated with an elevated risk of experiencing family violence include poor self-esteem, youth and problematic substance use (by the abusive partner and the victim). Furthermore, women's economic dependence on abusive spouses tends to trap them in violent relationships.

Lack of culturally appropriate, community-based services, particularly in rural and remote communities, also prevents women from leaving abusive relationships and getting the help they need to heal and to establish their independence. Abusive men are equally vulnerable to the same lack of resources and supports as their victims. Distrust of mainstream child welfare and justice systems means that Aboriginal women are reluctant to report family violence and to pursue legal redress.

The inadequacy of services is compounded by a lack of integration and coordination between and across funders and providers. The literature draws particular attention to the jurisdictional complexities that prevent comprehensive and seamless provision of services.

The vulnerability of women to extra-familial violence is determined by a range of situational and marginalizing factors. Poverty is an overarching factor; it forces women into homelessness and is often the reason why women decide to work in the sex trade. The need to fund an addiction to an illicit substance(s) also pushes many women into prostitution.

Research into cases of missing and murdered women along the "Highway of Tears" also identifies poverty and problematic substance use as vulnerabilities. Youth and rural isolation are also contributing risk factors. Lack of recreational and social services in remote communities along the Highway 16 corridor attract many women to larger urban centres and they tend to rely on hitchhiking to travel to these centres.

The literature on murdered and missing women is critical of the police response to such cases. Reports identify problems with regard to: gaps in the police record; inadequate information sharing between police forces and jurisdictions; and lack of culturally appropriate training and awareness within police forces.

2 SYNTHESIS OF RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES AND VULNERABILITIES

The recommendations in this section focus on the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and the socio-economic vulnerabilities that place Aboriginal women at higher risk of experiencing violence. The recommendations tend to be high-level and strategic in nature. They call for long-term, sustained, collaborative efforts on the part of governments and Aboriginal communities to address the fundamental social, economic and health challenges that confront Aboriginal peoples in Canada and that are implicated in high levels of violence against women.

Recommendations of this nature dominate the reports analyzed for this paper. To some extent, this is due to the fact that several of the reports have a broader focus than violence against women. However, reports that examine the specific issue of violence also pay significant attention to the underlying causes and vulnerabilities and, in their recommendations, call for these issues to receive immediate attention by governments.

The recommendations have been organized under common themes. In addition, certain recommendations have been identified as specific to federal, provincial (B.C.), or Aboriginal governments/leadership. Otherwise, recommendations apply to all levels of government working in partnership with Aboriginal communities and organizations.

Developing a comprehensive action plan/strategy

- National and regional Aboriginal women's organizations must be provided with appropriate resources for the development, implementation and monitoring of a national, long-term strategic plan for Aboriginal women in all spheres. Resources must reflect the unique circumstances of each group or geographical area.

Federal

- An Aboriginal Women's Commission should be established at the federal level.

B.C.

- A British Columbia Aboriginal Women's Council should be created whose mandate is to:
 - o Further the positive evolution of Aboriginal women's issues; and
 - o Develop and encourage young Aboriginal women into future leadership roles.

Collaboration and partnerships

- Federal, provincial and territorial governments must collaborate with Aboriginal nations, regional Aboriginal service agencies, community governments and Aboriginal organizations, as appropriate, to adapt legislation, regulations and funding to promote:
 - Integrated service delivery that transcends restricted service mandates of separate ministries and departments;
 - Collaboration and shared effort between federal, provincial/territorial and local governments; and
 - The pooling of resources flowing from federal, provincial, territorial, municipal or Aboriginal sources.
- Federal, provincial and territorial governments must address jurisdictional issues so that programs and services are provided irrespective of status and residency with specific agreements for delivery.

Funding

- All levels of government to provide adequate, sustainable, multi-year funding for programs and services that address Aboriginal health and well-being, including:
 - Initiatives to deal with the immediate and intergenerational impacts of both the physical and psychological abuse suffered at residential schools, including the loss of cultural identity; and
 - Initiatives to address all issues that negatively affect Aboriginal women's well-being, including poverty, lack of housing, sexualized and racialized violence, employment, education, single parent families, healthcare, and urban and remote issues.
- Federal, provincial and municipal governments should subject all social programs to a periodic review to ensure the accessibility and resourcing of programs for Aboriginal women and families is at least on a par with those available to non-Aboriginal people and is sufficient to ensure effective protection and full enjoyment of their rights.

Federal

- The federal government should restore funding to fulfill the commitments set out in the *Kelowna Accord* to end inequalities in health, housing, education, and other services for Aboriginal peoples.

Gender-equity

- Full participation of Aboriginal women at all decision making tables is needed so they are well served in all legislative, policy and programming initiatives affecting Aboriginal people:

- o Develop a framework that allows for increased opportunities for Aboriginal women to be engaged in capacity building;
 - o Policy development within all levels of government to include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women interagency groups; and
 - o Legislate an Aboriginal Women's Commission.
- Aboriginal women must be actively involved and take their rightful place in self-determination, and processes must be developed to ensure that their unique and important roles in Aboriginal governments be recognized:
 - o Fund recognition and institution of traditional practices;
 - o Resources and supports to facilitate women's participation in traditional practices; and
 - o Identify and share best practices for self-determination.
- Accountability mechanisms need to be established at all levels of government, including at the community level, to ensure gender equity for all Aboriginal women.
- Gender equity is a right and must guide all policies and legislation while taking into account the distinctiveness of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women:
 - o Adoption of a culturally relevant gender based analysis (CRGBA) framework by all levels of government internal and external to Aboriginal communities;
 - o Adequate resources for integration of CRGBA; and
 - o Accountability mechanism to ensure it is adopted.

Socio-economic status of Aboriginal women

- All levels of government must ensure that economic opportunity strategies consider all the socio-economic conditions that are required to create the right environment for Aboriginal women to participate in the economy. For example, child care, adequate housing, strategies to combat gendered racism, and ensuring that the right and fundamental freedom to live free from violence are all factors to be considered. Existing inequities facing Aboriginal women must be removed in all sectors. (This requires the application of a culturally relevant gender-based analysis.)
- All levels of government should undertake an analysis of existing labour laws that allow for preferential hiring of Aboriginal people by Aboriginal organisations to determine if this is an effective means by which to promote employment of Aboriginal women.

Federal

- The Federal Government must ensure that economic development and economic security for First Nation, Métis and Inuit women is a priority. Actions should include:
 - Reinstatement of the *Federal Equity Program*;
 - Establishment of entrepreneurial training programs;
 - Adaptation of the existing Aboriginal Business Canada and *Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy* (formerly AHRDS) through the application of an Aboriginal women's GBA;
 - Maintenance of ASETS funding specifically for Aboriginal women; and
 - Increased representation of Aboriginal women on the Canadian Executive Service Organization Board.
- In collaboration with Aboriginal representatives and organizations, the Federal Government should take urgent action to address the chronic unemployment and poverty faced by Aboriginal women and men both on and off reserve.
- The Federal Government should commit to fully implementing outstanding recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples that address poverty and social marginalization of Aboriginal people in Canada, as has repeatedly been urged by United Nations treaty bodies.
- The Federal Government should provide funding to Aboriginal women's organizations, including urban-based groups, to:
 - Improve their research capacity and facilitate their participation in all stages of discussion leading to the design and development of self-government processes; and
 - Enable them to participate fully in all aspects of nation building, including developing criteria for citizenship and related appeal processes.

Cultural revitalization

- Aboriginal languages are a significant part of identity. Federal, provincial and territorial governments should provide adequate, multi-year funding to address language support for First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Specific initiatives could include:
 - Reinstatement of Heritage Canada funding; and
 - Funding for more research on language through partnerships with universities.
- All levels of government should develop strategies to allow Aboriginal women to reclaim their traditional roles, pass on traditional knowledge, and revitalize their cultures and communities through increased research and educational opportunities.

- All levels of government, in partnership with Aboriginal organizations and communities, should support the development of cultural camps for adults and youth that allow families to become closer to their lands, cultures and languages.

Federal

- The Federal Government should provide adequate, sustained, multi-year funding for initiatives to deal with the immediate and intergenerational impacts of both the physical and psychological abuse suffered at residential schools, including the loss of cultural identity.
- The Federal Government (as a result of past assimilation policies that had a negative impact on languages) must fund the revitalization of indigenous languages through programs dedicated to adults, youth and children.
- The Federal Government should implement, with adequate funding, all recommendations of the 2002 Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures.

Education and learning

- Educational outcomes for Aboriginal women must be improved through accessible affordable educational opportunities and increased financial resources. Efforts should focus on:
 - Connecting girls and young women to educational aspirations; and
 - Providing support for young mothers so that they can finish school.
- All levels of government, in partnership with Aboriginal organizations and representatives, must collaborate in the development of a lifelong learning strategy (in key areas of early childhood development, primary, secondary, post-secondary education, and skills development) which addresses the unique circumstances of Aboriginal women. The strategy should include:
 - Funding for Aboriginal-lead research into First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures and history;
 - After school programming aimed at children age 6-12; and
 - Rewriting of history books to reflect the Aboriginal experience and view of colonization.
- Federal, provincial and territorial governments should review existing school systems and their preparation of Aboriginal women for college, university, and employment:
 - Greater emphasis should be placed on trades; and
 - Greater access to online learning and distance education would help women access Adult Basic Education as well as post secondary education.

- All levels of government should review and address childcare barriers to furthering education and employment that may be unique to Aboriginal women.

Federal

- The Federal Government should develop a national strategy focused on Aboriginal women that enables them to get at least their grade 12 education, and supports their participation in post-secondary education. The strategy should include:
 - Literacy programs;
 - Tools that enable Aboriginal women to recapture their traditional roles as women, mothers, sisters, wives and community members; and
 - Components on family issues, law, and community issues.

Community capacity building

- All levels of government must work jointly with First Nations, Métis and Inuit to facilitate governance, capacity building and accountability with an emphasis on supporting the roles of Aboriginal women. Initiatives should include:
 - Development of community coalition partnerships:
 - Identify and develop experts in communities;
 - Support collaboration for community building between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women on and off reserve/settlement; and
 - Support for Aboriginal women's organizations to develop partnerships with governments and businesses.
 - Provincial and regional summits and conferences.
- Federal, provincial and territorial governments should provide financial support for Aboriginal institutional development that is inclusive of women.
- All levels of government should provide adequate resources to support the training and capacity building required for communities to be able to deliver meaningful programs and services.

Culturally appropriate, community-based services

- All governments must develop a culturally-based, ethical framework that is respectful of First Nations, Inuit and Métis.
- All levels of government should ensure that policies and programs address the holistic needs of communities in ways that are culturally relevant and designed by the community.

- Aboriginal women must be supported to give Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service agencies direction and guidance in formulating policy and developing services that may be used by Aboriginal women and children.
- Aboriginal women must be supported to participate fully in the delivery of programs and services established specifically to meet the needs of Aboriginal women.
- Non-Aboriginal individuals and organizations whose work or responsibilities directly affect Aboriginal women's lives must receive:
 - o Cross-cultural training; and
 - o Comprehensive information and education on the history, culture, traditions and current situation of Aboriginal peoples and, in particular, of Aboriginal women.
- All Aboriginal organizations must work in partnership with all levels of government, mainstream organizations and each other to ensure: a) that existing victims' services are adaptable to needs of Aboriginal victims of crime; b) that existing services and structures are respectful of traditional approaches to justice.
- Police officers, judges and lawyers must learn about the legislative and policy-related history that affects only Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and in particular, Aboriginal women. They should also be aware of the key factors that lead Aboriginal women into the justice system.
- All governments must support Aboriginal communities' continued implementation and expansion of collaborative and cooperative Restorative Justice Approaches where this is appropriate and supported by the Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal communities

- Aboriginal governments and planning bodies with a mandate to develop new structures for human services undertake, in collaboration with women's organizations, an inventory of existing services, organizations and networks with a view to building on existing strengths and ensuring continuity of effort.

Healing

- Federal, provincial and territorial governments should provide funding for the promotion of Aboriginal holistic approaches to healing and wellness. Initiatives should include:
 - o The establishment and funding of family healing centres;
 - o Providing support and recognition to traditional healers;
 - o Providing opportunities for Aboriginal women to help develop traditional healing policies and programs; and

- o Encouraging meaningful dialogue between Aboriginal healers and non-Aboriginal health care providers.

Federal

- The Federal government should provide adequate, sustained, multi-year funding for initiatives (e.g. counselling, community-based programs, cultural programs) to deal with the immediate and intergenerational impacts of both the physical and psychological abuse suffered at residential schools.

Addressing racism

- All levels of government should work with Aboriginal peoples to strengthen and expand public education programs, including within the formal school system, that acknowledge and address the history of dispossession and marginalization of Aboriginal peoples and the present reality of racism in Canadian society.
- All levels of government should work to improve mainstream Canadian society's understanding of the intergenerational impacts of colonialism.

Legislation and Human Rights

Federal

- Action must be taken on a full suite of legislative initiatives including addressing the gender bias under the Indian Act, customary and family law reform, Bill C-31 and Canadian Human Rights legislation. Aboriginal and Treaty rights of Aboriginal women under Section 35(4) must be recognized and protected:
 - o Aboriginal Commission to review and make recommendations regarding registration under the Indian Act; and
 - o Restoration of funding to Court Challenges program.
- Prior to the repeal of Section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, a comprehensive multi-year plan must be developed for community education and consultation in order to define next steps.
- Federal legislation related to Matrimonial Real Property (MRP) on reserve must be enacted in order to ensure that the property rights of Aboriginal women are recognized and

meaningfully respected upon marital breakdown.¹ The proposed solutions must be reviewed to ensure that they do not result in inequitable impacts on Aboriginal women.

- The Federal Government must engage Aboriginal peoples in discussions about the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES AND VULNERABILITIES

All recommendations call for long-term, strategic, collaborative efforts on the part of governments and Aboriginal communities to address the fundamental social, economic and health challenges facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada today. In addition, all recommendations require the provision of adequate, sustainable, equitable, multi-year funding for programs and initiatives. Several reports emphasize the need for the Federal Government to honour its obligation to implement the outstanding recommendations of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Other key issues are:

- *Gender-equity*: full and active participation of Aboriginal women at all decision-making tables (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal); and accountability mechanisms for ensuring gender-equity for all Aboriginal women.
- *Socio-economic status of Aboriginal women*: urgent action by the Federal Government to address the unemployment and poverty faced by Aboriginal women and men; existing inequalities facing Aboriginal women to be removed in all sectors; economic development strategies to support Aboriginal women's ability to participate in the economy; funding for Aboriginal women's organizations; the desirability of preferential hiring of Aboriginal people by Aboriginal organizations to be explored.
- *Cultural revitalization*: funding for the revitalization of Aboriginal languages; strategies to support Aboriginal women to reclaim traditional roles and knowledge, and revitalize their communities and cultures; cultural camps for adults and youth.

¹ Legislation to address MRP issues is in progress. Bill S-4, the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act, was passed by the Senate in July 2010. It was read for the first time in the Commons in September 2010 and is currently awaiting its second reading.

- *Education and learning*: development of a national lifelong learning strategy (all levels of government); accessible and affordable educational opportunities for Aboriginal women; review of existing school systems and their preparation of Aboriginal women for college/university/employment.
- *Community capacity building*: collaboration across all levels of government to facilitate Aboriginal governance capacity building and accountability with an emphasis on supporting the roles of Aboriginal women; development of community coalition partnerships; financial support for Aboriginal institutional development that is inclusive of women.
- *Culturally appropriate, community-based services*: all governments to develop a culturally-based, ethical framework; all policies and programs to address holistic needs of communities in ways that are culturally relevant and designed by those communities; an inventory of existing services, organizations and networks to be undertaken to facilitate building on existing strengths; Aboriginal women to be supported to give direction and guidance to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers with regard to service and policy development; non-Aboriginal personnel to receive cross-cultural training and education; support for the expansion of restorative justice approaches.
- *Healing*: all governments to support the promotion of Aboriginal holistic approaches to healing and wellness.
- *Addressing racism*: expansion of public education programs; initiatives to improve mainstream Canadian society's understanding of the impacts of colonialism.
- *Legislation and Human Rights*: address gender bias under the Indian Act; customary and family law reform; Bill C-31; protect rights of Aboriginal women under Section 35(4) of Canadian Human Rights Act; action on Matrimonial Real Property on reserve.

3 SYNTHESIS OF RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO THE ISSUE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST ABORIGINAL WOMEN

The recommendations in this section focus on the issue of Aboriginal women and girls' exposure and vulnerability to violence.

First of all, a number of overarching recommendations for stopping the violence strategies and initiatives have been identified. These are both philosophical and practical in nature. They speak to the fundamental principles and key characteristics of effective approaches to reduce and respond to violence against Aboriginal women and girls. There is significant thematic overlap between these recommendations and those in Section 2 above, but the focus of these recommendations is expressly the issue of violence.

The overarching recommendations are followed by recommendations that deal with more concrete, program-level activities. They are organized according to the service continuum of prevention, intervention and post-incident. Distinctions along this continuum are not always clear-cut, nor are the categories mutually exclusive. In particular many post-incident initiatives will and should have a preventive function. Nevertheless, in order to avoid repetition, recommendations have been assigned to one category only. Distinctions have also been made between recommendations that apply to all types of violence, those that pertain particularly to family violence, and those that address the issue of murdered and missing women. (Identification of those recommendations that apply expressly to the federal level of government, the B.C. provincial level of government or to Aboriginal community leadership continues as per Section 2 above.)

3.1 OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing and acknowledging the severity of the issue

- All levels of government, including Aboriginal governance structures, should publicly condemn the high rates of violence against Aboriginal women – within Aboriginal communities and society as whole – and make public their plans to address the crisis.

Aboriginal communities

- Aboriginal leaders should take a firm, public stance in support of the right to freedom from violence of all members in the community, but particularly of women, children, elders, persons with disabilities and others who may be vulnerable, as well as in support of a policy of zero tolerance of actions that violate the physical or emotional safety of Aboriginal persons.

- Strong incentives or mandatory training should be offered for community leaders to ensure that they treat the issue of male violence against women as a high priority and a serious community-wide problem.
- Aboriginal leaders and agencies serving vulnerable people should encourage communities, with the full participation of women, to formulate, promote and enforce community codes of behaviour that reflect ethical standards endorsed by the community and that state and reinforce the responsibility of all citizens to create and maintain safe communities and neighbourhoods.

Developing a comprehensive action plan

- As a matter of urgent priority, the federal government should work with Aboriginal women, communities and representative organizations, and with provincial and territorial officials to develop and implement a comprehensive, co-ordinated national plan of action in keeping with the scale and seriousness of the violence and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal women. This plan of action must:
 - Address the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women;
 - Incorporate and prioritize traditional teachings and help to develop cultural identities; and
 - Build adequate support and service systems for long-term healing and community development.
- As all policy issues underlie/inform violence against Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women's full and equal participation in policy making must include "violence against women" initiatives and extend beyond them to include treaty and all other issues affecting Aboriginal peoples.

B.C.

- A British Columbia Aboriginal Women's Council should be created whose mandate is to:
 - Further the positive evolution of Aboriginal women's issues; and
 - Develop and encourage young Aboriginal women into future leadership roles.
- The Provincial Health Services Authority should provide core funding to develop a provincial Aboriginal women's organization with Aboriginal women's health and safety as a primary mandate.

Collaboration and partnerships

- Increase collaboration and engagement among all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, service agencies, justice systems including courts and police forces, and

National and other Aboriginal organizations with the goal of developing more co-ordinated and comprehensive approaches to address issues of violence against Aboriginal women, including missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

- Federal, provincial and territorial governments, with the full participation of Aboriginal women, should organize a high-level intergovernmental and interdepartmental meeting to ensure proper coordination and information sharing on initiatives to address the safety and welfare of Aboriginal women.

Funding

- Federal, provincial and territorial governments should ensure adequate, sustained, multi-year funding to ensure the provision of culturally appropriate violence prevention, intervention and aftercare services for Aboriginal women.
- Federal, provincial and territorial governments should increase funding for family violence and missing and murdered women initiatives.
- In order to ensure that funding is long-term, sustainable, and coordinated, a National Aboriginal Family Violence and Abuse Initiative should be established that is collaboratively funded with monies from relevant departments and agencies.

Federal

- INAC should open up funding to all Aboriginal groups in an inclusive, equitable manner.

B.C.

- Provincial ministries with responsibility for health and social services for Aboriginal women, including “stopping the violence” services, should allocate core funding directly to Aboriginal organizations and programs in the areas of anti-violence and health-related services.
- Provincial ministries should review and alter population-based funding formulae to ensure that women in remote communities have access to services.
- Provincial ministries with responsibility for health and social services for Aboriginal women, including “stopping the violence” services, should review current government funding criteria to ensure that it is accessible, relevant and equitable to Aboriginal women and peoples.

Accountability

- All levels of government must clearly outline the measures taken to address the problem of violence against Aboriginal women in Canada in reports to relevant UN human rights bodies,

including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Human Rights Committee.

Research

- All levels of government should undertake a review of outstanding recommendations from Canadian commissions, inquiries and inquests pertaining to the safety and welfare of Aboriginal women with a view to ensuring their timely implementation.
- All levels of government should provide funding for the following research activities:
 - Identifying and mapping the dynamics of key determinants of family violence and abuse, and acquiring understanding of how each determinant plays out in each community;
 - Identifying key community capacities needed to bring about change, and how best to develop those capacities and apply them; and
 - Evaluation of existing family violence policies and programming, including identifying promising practices.
- In consultation with Aboriginal peoples' organizations and organizations representing ethnic minorities, protocols should be developed to ensure that all police forces consistently record and appropriately use data on the ethnicity of the victims and perpetrators of violent crimes.
- Gender disaggregated data on health and social and economic conditions for Inuit, Métis and First Nations women and men, including rates of violence against Aboriginal women should be collected and routinely published.

Federal

- The federal government should ensure adequate funding for comprehensive national research on violence against Aboriginal women, including the creation of a national registry to collect and analyze statistical information from all jurisdictions.
- The federal government should request the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people and Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, to jointly study and document patterns of violence against Aboriginal women, including in Canada.

B.C.

- All social policy ministries in B.C. should review existing research about Aboriginal women and violence to expand knowledge and inform policy, programs and services. Funds should be provided for Aboriginal women to review the existing literature related to Aboriginal women and violence, aggregate the findings and recommendations, and for ministries to begin implementing programs based on the recommendations.

Community capacity building

- All levels of government must provide support for the development of Aboriginal civil society, including the development of alternative platforms from which healing and capacity work could happen.
- All levels of government should diversify funding to enable civil society organizations to do some of the work that local government refuses or is unable to do.

Culturally-appropriate, community-based services

- Approaches to ending violence must be holistic, community-based and must include Aboriginal men, and especially the male perpetrators and leaders.
- Non-Aboriginal governments must take the role of advocate and not “expert” in anti-violence policy and program development and delivery.
- Aboriginal leaders and communities must take responsibility for stopping violence against Aboriginal women.
- Aboriginal leaders and communities must work to ensure increased convenience and privacy in reporting acts of violence.
- Aboriginal leaders must work with federal, provincial and territorial governments to ensure that safe options for victims of family violence are available in communities. Where issues of sustainability, privacy and safety are significant concerns, services and supports may be better offered in close proximity to the community, with adequate transportation to and from those services provided.
- All levels of government should provide the necessary resources for recruiting and training Aboriginal counsellors and other personnel.
- Cultural sensitivity training must be mandated for all first responders (police, health care professionals, educators and others who directly assist women victims of intimate partner violence or otherwise work with communities to reduce the incidence of such violence).
- Cultural sensitivity training must be mandated for all levels of government employees.
- All Aboriginal organizations must work in partnership with all levels of government, mainstream organizations, and each other to ensure that:
 - Existing victims services are acceptable to needs of Aboriginal victims of crime; and
 - Existing services and structures are respectful of traditional approaches to justice.

Healing

- Policies and programs must support and promote healing the root causes of family violence and abuse, including:
 - Breaking cycle of intergenerational trauma by assisting the present generation of parents to see roots of their pain and learn how to stop cycle of abuse;
 - Assisting children living within abusive relationships to receive focused therapeutic care;
 - Mobilizing the community around a vision of healing; and
 - Interrupting community power dynamics that create barriers to this work.

Awareness about programs

- Communication about available programs and services must be improved. In small communities especially, due to privacy concerns, women need to receive the information rather than actively seek it out. Services and supports should therefore be advertised in local newspapers; on local radio; in local service directories; through advertising and educational programs in schools; in Friendship Centre bulletins; through government mass mailings; and during women's meetings. Word-of-mouth dissemination of information should also be encouraged.

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTION STRATEGIES

- All levels of government must make prevention programs a priority for all policy areas.
- All governments should support the promotion and establishment of Aboriginal women's forums where women can speak openly and honestly about their current situations and know that other women are experiencing the same challenges and successes.
- All levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations, should provide funding for prevention-oriented education and public relations. Educational initiatives should include:
 - Programs to teach Aboriginal women about healthy relationships;
 - School-based activities to teach Aboriginal children about the issue and to reach out to parents;
 - A curriculum designed to support Aboriginal women and men to recapture their traditional roles that incorporates traditional teachings and cultural values; and
 - School and community-based programs aimed at non-Aboriginal children and adults that address and seek to prevent racism and violence against Aboriginal people.

- All police forces must be provided with the necessary training and resources to make prevention of violence against Aboriginal women a genuine priority:
 - All police officers should receive adequate training to ensure an understanding of violence against women in a range of settings including family violence, child sexual exploitation and violence against women in the sex trade;
 - The scenarios used in police training should incorporate issues of cultural sensitivity and violence against women;
 - Meetings with Aboriginal women leaders and other community members should be organized to build understanding of the specific risks to Aboriginal women in Canadian society and establish and strengthen relationships of trust between police and Aboriginal communities;
 - All police departments should review issues of workload, staffing levels and job rotation to ensure officers have the opportunity to become familiar with and can develop relations of trust with the specific communities they are intended to serve and protect; and
 - Funding should also be provided for the creation of independent advocates and liaison workers for Aboriginal people in contact with police.
- Adequate resources should be provided for the maintenance and supervision of at-risk individuals and households.
- All levels of government should fund the establishment of Aboriginal women's telephone help lines that are operated by Aboriginal women who can provide assistance with issues such as substance abuse, domestic violence and sex trade work.

B.C.

- The Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General should provide funds to develop and implement education and training on variety of topics related to violence in Aboriginal communities. The programs should be delivered by Aboriginal women.
- The Provincial Government should support Aboriginal women to develop and deliver training within Aboriginal communities that is focused on capacity building. (Topics should include: leadership, inter-sectoral coordination, and policy and protocol development.)

Family violence

- Children need educational dialogue in their schools that teaches them that violence is not acceptable. Programs must be implemented that will allow children to report domestic violence without facing repercussions at home for themselves or their mothers.

Missing and murdered women

- All levels of government should fund the introduction of exit strategies that will assist Aboriginal women on a path to recovery from substance abuse. Long-term support services need to be in place in order to ensure that a relapse does not happen.
- First step addiction/recovery centres must be accessible in the neighbourhoods where women with addictions are living.

Highway of Tears

- A shuttle bus transportation system should be established between each town and city located along the entire length of Highway 16 (“The Highway of Tears”).
- RCMP patrols must no longer drive past a hitchhiker who fits the victim profile.
- The RCMP must be provided the resources to increase their highway patrols during the hitchhiking season, and, more specifically, to increase these patrols along the sections of Highway 16 near First Nation communities, towns and cities.
- The Greyhound Bus Company’s “free ride” program should be expanded, and target marketed to the population in the Highway 16 corridor who fit the victim profile.
- Every Public Sector employee working between Prince George and Prince Rupert should be contacted and used as a female hitchhiker detection network.
- A number of “safe homes” similar to, and possibly including, MCFD and Aboriginal Social Service safe homes should be established at strategic locations along the entire length of Highway 16, between the cities of Prince Rupert and Prince George, British Columbia.
- The Rural Crime Watch Program should be expanded to include a Highway Watch component along the full length of the Highway of Tears.
- A number of emergency phone booths should be placed along the highway at strategic locations between the Cities of Prince Rupert and Prince George, British Columbia.
- A number of billboards, and many more posters, should be placed at strategic locations along the Highway 16 corridor between Prince George and Prince Rupert, British Columbia.
- An annual awareness and prevention campaign should be delivered to every elementary school, high school, college, university, and silviculture company located in, and between, the cities of Prince Rupert and Prince George prior to the hitchhiking and tree-planting season.

- Every First Nation community, and all First Nation families living in the towns and cities, located on or near Highway of Tears, should be targeted for a more intensive awareness and prevention program.
- Aboriginal Youth, who live in the Rural First Nations communities, and Urban Aboriginal Youth who live in the towns and cities on the Highway of Tears, should be organized and listened to.
- Recreation and social activity programs for Rural First Nation community youth, and Urban Aboriginal youth, be increased in the First Nation communities, towns and cities located along the Highway of Tears.
- Media campaigns should be launched on the subject of the murdered and missing women, and more specifically should contain key victim prevention measures targeting young women viewers and readers along the Highway of Tears.
- The number, types, and frequency of essential health and social services should be increased for direct delivery to the First Nation communities located along the Highway of Tears.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

- All levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal women's organizations, must support the establishment of Healing Lodges that are operated by Aboriginal women. These lodges will:
 - Be places that Aboriginal women can come to work or come to heal;
 - Provide a sense of community currently lacking in the lives of many Aboriginal women; and
 - Provide a range of services including: counselling, life skills, family support, and a safe meeting place.
- A joint committee of federal, provincial and territorial governments should be established to look at victim services from an Aboriginal perspective.
- The RCMP and local police authorities should receive further education and sensitivity training with regard to Aboriginal women. This type of training needs to be mirrored in the judicial system which many women feel sides with Aboriginal men in custody suits, divorce law and domestic violence.
- Medical personnel require a mandatory training program to alert them to the environments from which some of the Aboriginal women experiencing violence are coming and the historic and social factors that have led them to this situation.

- Police officers found to have failed to act on reports of missing women, or to have carried out biased or inadequate investigation of violence against women, should be subject to appropriate discipline.

Federal

- National Legislation (similar to the “Nunavut family Abuse Intervention Act”) should be enacted that emphasises community intervention orders and community-based healing.

Family violence

- All levels of government, in partnership with Aboriginal organizations and communities, must work to expand the availability of culturally appropriate Aboriginal treatment and support programs for family members involved in domestic violence cases. Such programs should encompass:
 - Early detection and intervention;
 - Holistic, community involvement that includes men and perpetrators;
 - Protection of victims, including children witnessing violence;
 - Confrontation and containment of abusers;
 - Culturally appropriate second stage housing for women and children;
 - Short-term and long-term counselling for victims;
 - Counselling and provision of basic resources (e.g., food and clothing) for children;
 - Interim financial assistance for victims;
 - Affordable transportation to available services; and
 - Emergency 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotlines.
- Governments and Aboriginal organizations should work together to develop an Aboriginal Housing Strategy that provides for safe and affordable housing, including transition and second stage housing for women escaping violence.
- There must be more Aboriginal safe houses available to Aboriginal women in abusive situations. Offering Aboriginal women non-Aboriginal safe houses isolates them from their culture and traditional way of life. Aboriginal women need to be healed by other Aboriginal women in a safe and culturally inviting environment.
- Programs need to be implemented that will allow children to report domestic violence without facing repercussions at home for themselves or their mothers.

- Communities, with the support of governments, need to explore how to ensure increased convenience and privacy in reporting acts of violence on reserves and in settlement communities.
- There must be adequate training for all personnel working with victims of abuse about privacy issues and the consequences of failing to respect the confidentiality of women dealing with this sensitive issue in communities with tight and overlapping familial ties.
- The number of Aboriginal persons employed in violence against women services must be increased so that these services may be delivered to Aboriginal women primarily by Aboriginal service providers.
- There is a need for Aboriginal violence telephone help lines staffed by Aboriginal women who are familiar with Aboriginal cultures and traditions, and who can help women navigate the maze of programs and services to find appropriate assistance for themselves and their children.
- All levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations and communities, should develop and fund an adequate family violence community response system. This system should include:
 - Creating and training a community response team made up of representatives from community agencies and leadership, community volunteers, and professional counsellors, whose mandate is:
 - To provide safety, healing and long-term support for victims and their extended families; and
 - To contain, monitor and supervise abusers as they undertake healing and rehabilitation.
 - Establishing a protocol, in collaboration with justice and social service agencies, for intervening in family violence and abuse situations; and
 - Creating an alternative program for community-based healing and reconciliation to support the needs of victims and abusers, to which the legal system can divert offenders.
- There must be 24-hour, 7-day access to assistance from first responders within reasonable proximity to communities.
- Governments, in partnership with Aboriginal organizations and representatives, should investigate whether development of a 24 hour response capacity for Aboriginal family violence programming, available to men and women, would be an effective service.

- Governments should review whether increased Crown discretion, in appropriate domestic violence cases, subject to appropriate guidelines, could be used to encourage counselling and other intervention programs for offenders. Any new approach should be carefully monitored and evaluated.

B.C.

- Funds should be allocated for a transition house program for Aboriginal women in the North.
- Funds should be allocated for a new community-based victim assistance program located in a region with high Aboriginal population.

Missing and murdered women

- Police should work closely with Aboriginal women's organizations and other frontline groups to identify and implement appropriate and effective protocols for action on missing persons cases, with a view to developing standards for police response in keeping with the risks to Aboriginal women and girls.
- Police forces should provide specialized staffing to review and coordinate responses to missing persons cases.
- As part of ongoing review and implementation of laws regarding the sex trade in Canada, give police clear instructions to ensure that the fundamental rights of women involved in the sex trade are protected in the course of all law enforcement activities.
- Co-ordination of police investigations into long-term missing persons cases and unsolved murders involving Aboriginal women and other women at risk must be improved.
- The actions of police, including compliance with policies on the investigation of missing persons cases, should be subject to independent civilian oversight.
- Clear policies and practices should be established with respect to the timely provision of information, including autopsy results and coroners reports, to the families of missing and murdered persons.

Highway of Tears

- The Highway of Tears Community Governing Body should undertake the development of an Emergency Readiness Plan.
- The Emergency Readiness Plan should contain specific timelines for the actions of the Community Emergency Readiness Teams commencing from the time a missing person's report is first received.

- This Emergency Readiness Plan should contain a missing persons Alert and Response component in the form of community emergency readiness teams.
- This Emergency Readiness Plan should be communicated to an Emergency Readiness team(s) located in each city, town and First Nation community located along the entire length of the Highway of Tears.
- To the greatest extent possible, existing and established community resources such as Search and Rescue organizations and Fire Departments should be utilized and expanded upon in building each Emergency Readiness Team.
- There should be two contact persons appointed: one acting as the primary, and one the backup secondary, who would be given authorization by the RCMP to enact the Emergency Readiness Plan in each community, and coordinate pre-determined Emergency Readiness team actions.

3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POST-INCIDENT STRATEGIES

Family violence

- The availability of culturally appropriate Aboriginal treatment and support programs for people involved in family violence cases must be expanded.
- Healing is paramount and a range of healing and reconciliation programs and supports should be available to victims, their immediate and extended family members, and the wider community as well as to the perpetrators and their families. Programs should include long-term counselling, healing and reconciliation work.
- Any family violence initiative must be integrated within a wider community healing movement.
- Governments, and in particular the justice system, should work with Aboriginal organizations and communities to develop and implement an approach to justice that restores balance for victims and communities.
- Both short-term and long-term assistance and relapse prevention for abusive men should be available, including:
 - Educational programs that incorporate community-based education on the issue;
 - Substance abuse programs;
 - Job training and job-search assistance;

- Mandatory participation in community-based education programs as part of treatment and counselling for perpetrators, with immediate, predictable and reliable punitive consequences for repeat offences or failure to participate; and
- Long-term engagement with perpetrators by the corrections and parole systems, including following release, to facilitate long-term change. This should include:
 - Development of Aboriginal community-based support programs for men; and
 - Development of sentencing circles and application of the principles of restorative justice to foster culturally sensitive means of determining consequences for acts of violence and to develop a sense of individual *and* community responsibility for the issue of male violence against Aboriginal women.
- Departments of Justice in provinces work with local authorities to seek options that would preserve the victim's safety but allow the accused to remain in the community while on bail.
- Aboriginal women should have access to educational programs to teach them about healthy relationships.

Missing and murdered women

- A permanent Regional First Nation Crisis Response Plan should be developed and implemented for First Nations communities, and Aboriginal families (Urban and Rural) experiencing a traumatic event.
- A roster of fully qualified Aboriginal mental health therapists, grief counsellors, critical incident stress counsellors, and other counsellors of relevant specialty, should be developed.
- An exceptionally qualified First Nation Crisis Response Team should be assembled, receive training on their roles, and be ready for deployment to any of the Rural First Nation communities, or Urban Aboriginal families, from which a victim disappears.
- Aboriginal Agencies, or First Nation Communities, qualified to deliver such services, should be assigned to provide long term counselling and support to Aboriginal victims' families upon their request and direction.
- The RCMP should re-establish and maintain communication with each of the victim's families.
- A First Nation Advocate should be provided to bridge the long-standing communications and awareness gap which exists between the RCMP and First Nation victim's families.
- The RCMP should continue its official investigation, or inquiry, into the Aboriginal community's assertions on the actual number of missing women.

Highway of Tears

- A Highway of Tears Legacy Fund should be established as one source, among others, to develop and support multi-community and multi-agency efforts in victim prevention, emergency readiness planning and team response, and victim family counselling and support.
- A Board of Directors (Highway of Tears Community Governing Body) should be established to provide direction and support in all four areas of this Highway of Tears Community Initiative, and to manage the Legacy Fund.
- The Board of Directors should establish working committees in each city and municipality along the Highway of Tears.
- The Board of Directors should hire two coordinators to provide development and support assistance to each Highway of Tears community working committee located along the highway.
- The Board of Directors should report out and be held accountable to the communities and funding bodies at annual Highway of Tears Symposiums.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO THE ISSUE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Overarching Recommendations

The overarching recommendations speak to the fundamental principles and essential characteristics of effective approaches to stopping violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

Considerable emphasis is placed on the need for all levels of government and all social service sectors to work in collaboration with Aboriginal leadership, communities and organizations to develop co-ordinated and comprehensive approaches to addressing violence against Aboriginal women.

In addition, long-term, adequate, sustainable, multi-year funding is called for to support the provision of services. With regard to funding at the provincial level, B.C. is urged to review current funding criteria and population-based formulae to ensure equitable funding to Aboriginal women and especially to women in remote communities.

Of particular importance in the context of service delivery is the need for culturally appropriate, community-based and community-driven programs. Sustained support by governments to increase Aboriginal peoples' capacity to design and deliver their own violence prevention, intervention and post-incident initiatives is called for. It is recognized that there is an urgent need

for more services and programs across the continuum, especially in rural and remote communities.

Other key issues include:

- *Acknowledging the severity of the issue*: all levels of government, including Aboriginal leadership, to publicly condemn violence against Aboriginal women.
- *Developing a comprehensive action plan*: all levels of government to work with Aboriginal women, communities and organizations to develop and implement a comprehensive, co-ordinated national plan of action; in B.C., a provincial Aboriginal Women's Council to be created and core funding provided to the Council to support improvements in women's health and safety.
- *Accountability*: governments to report out on measures taken to address violence against Aboriginal women.
- *Research*: governments to undertake a review of outstanding recommendations from key inquiries, commissions and inquests; funding for expanded research activities to better understand and address the issue, including collaboration between the Federal Government and appropriate UN Special Rapporteurs; protocols to be developed to ensure consistent collection and publication of data on the ethnicity and gender of victims and perpetrators; B.C. to review existing research to expand knowledge and inform policy.
- *Healing*: policies and programs to support and promote healing from the effects of violence and abuse.
- *Awareness about programs*: communication about available programs and services to be improved.

Prevention

Governments must make prevention programs a priority. Such programs should focus on prevention-oriented education initiatives to teach Aboriginal women, children and men about healthy relationships and traditional roles and values, and to address the racist attitudes held by non-Aboriginal Canadians. In addition, governments should support the establishment of Aboriginal women's forums where women can speak openly about their experiences of violence.

The role of police forces in preventing violence is spotlighted: police must be provided with the necessary training and resources to make prevention of violence against Aboriginal women a genuine priority.

At the provincial level, B.C. is called upon to enhance violence education programs, and to support Aboriginal women to develop and deliver training within their communities that is focused on building women's capacity and resilience.

With regard to the issue of missing and murdered women, governments are urged to enhance addictions services and better support women's recovery from substance abuse. Recommendations that focus on the Highway of Tears prioritize awareness and prevention education; expansion of affordable public transportation; increased RCMP patrols; and establishment of emergency phone booths and safe homes at strategic locations along the highway.

Intervention

Provision of culturally appropriate, community-based intervention services delivered by Aboriginal women, including healing lodges, safe houses, transition houses, and telephone help-lines, must be expanded. Twenty-four hour, seven-day access to first responders within reasonable proximity to communities is also called for.

Recommendations also speak to the need for cultural sensitivity training and education for police and other personnel working with women victims of violence. With regard to family violence in small communities, the need for non-Aboriginal personnel to have a complete understanding of the privacy issues is paramount. Several recommendations call for communities and social services to explore how to ensure privacy in reporting acts of violence.

At the community level, there is a call for the development of family violence community response systems that include protocols for how justice and social service agencies intervene in family violence situations. At the national level, recommendations propose developing an Aboriginal Housing Strategy that provides for safe, affordable housing, including transition and second stage housing for women escaping violence.

With regard to missing and murdered women, the need for developing and implementing effective protocols and standards for police response to such cases is emphasized. Recommendations for addressing missing and murdered women cases along B.C.'s Highway of Tears focus on the development of a community-based Emergency Readiness Plan to enhance the timeliness and effectiveness of responses to incidents of missing persons.

Post-incident

There is considerable emphasis on healing among the recommendations that focus on post-incident strategies for family violence. Post-incident supports need to be located within the broader context of community healing. Governments are urged to work with Aboriginal communities to provide a range of healing and reconciliation programs and supports for victims, their families, and the wider community, as well as to perpetrators of violence and their families. The need for a greater number of long-term counselling and relapse prevention services for

abusive men is emphasized. In addition, the justice service is urged to explore, develop and implement culturally appropriate alternatives to mainstream corrections systems.

Recommendations that focus on cases of missing and murdered women pay particular attention to the need to develop co-ordinated crisis response plans and teams, and for support services to be delivered, whenever possible, by Aboriginal agencies and qualified personnel. The need to improve the relationship between Aboriginal communities and the RCMP is recognized. With regard to the B.C. context, it is recommended that a Highway of Tears Legacy Fund be established and managed by a Board of Directors. The Fund would focus financial resources from a range of sources and the Board would provide co-ordinated support and direction for initiatives aimed at preventing more cases of missing and murdered women along the Highway.

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