



The Road to Safety

Indigenous Survivors in BC
Speak Out against Intimate
Partner Violence during the
COVID-19 Pandemic



BCAFC | BC Association of
Aboriginal Friendship Centres





Preface and Content Warning

The following report, **The Road to Safety: Indigenous Survivors in BC Speak Out against Intimate Partner Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic**, covers topics including, but not limited to, colonial violence, interpersonal violence, child abuse, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, substance use, racist misogyny, and issues related to poverty. The information and material presented in this report may trigger unpleasant feelings, thoughts, and responses.

Immediate counselling and crisis intervention support is available for Indigenous peoples Canada-wide through the Hope for Wellness Help Line. It is available **24 hours a day, 7 days a week**. If you need support, please call the toll-free help line at:

1.855.242.3310

or connect to the online chat at:
www.hopeforwellness.ca.

Women and gender diverse people experiencing gender-based violence and intimate partner violence can receive support from Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) by calling the **24/7** crisis line at:

604.687.1867

or toll free at:
1.855.687.1868.

The crisis line can also be reached by text at:
604.652.1867

or by email at:
intake@bwss.org.

The Indian Residential School Survivor Society (IRSS) operates a crisis line for First Nations peoples in British Columbia that is available **24 hours a day** for anyone experiencing pain or distress as a result of their Residential School experience. If you need assistance, please call :

1.800.721.0066.

Acknowledgements



We would like to acknowledge and express our gratitude to many people for their involvement in this project, especially Indigenous women and gender diverse people who shared their experiences of intimate partner violence with us.

We acknowledge the challenging nature of sharing personal stories and honour the courage of those who participated in this project. We thank participants for their time, their commitment, and for sharing their wisdom with us. We understand that many offered their stories to prevent others from experiencing intimate partner violence, and we hope we have amplified their powerful voices in such a way as to move towards making this vision a reality.

We would also like to thank the many front-line support workers who contributed to the project as interview participants. Support workers who participated in this project offered thoughtful and heartfelt responses representing a diversity of personal experiences and perspectives from across the province of BC. We are so grateful to have had the opportunity to connect with so many dedicated individuals working in organizations serving women and their children.

We thank our funder, the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control, for their support in bringing this project to fruition. With your assistance we have been able to shed light on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC who have experienced intimate partner violence.

We are grateful for the artwork provided by an Indigenous artist (who wishes to remain anonymous) that is featured on the cover of this report. This artwork titled “Road to Safety” represents the path Indigenous women take to get to safety and, ultimately, freedom from intimate partner violence. The report’s title derives from this artwork.

We thank the researchers and authors who dedicated their hearts and minds to the gathering of knowledge and the publication of this report, including Angela Marie MacDougall, Summer

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The rights to all images in this report are owned by the organizations and researchers involved in this project: Battered Women’s Support Services, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, Photographer Geoffrey Howe for BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, and Kirstin Scansen-Isbister for Battered Women’s Support Services.

Finally, we raise our hands up to Matriarchs all over Turtle Island and to Elders of all genders for their teachings in the face of continued efforts to silence the many generations of knowledge they hold. We think of women everywhere who are experiencing or who have experienced intimate partner violence. We hold you in our hearts and dedicate this work to you.

Terms and Concepts about Intimate Partner Violence



There are many forms and degrees of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (United Nations, 1993).

- **Intimate partner violence (IPV)** is abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic or intimate relationship by current or former partners.
 - **Gender-based violence (GBV)** is defined as violence that is inflicted upon a person or persons due to their gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender. Gender-based violence recognizes that violence occurs within the context of women’s and girl’s subordinate status in society and serves to maintain this unequal balance of power (Learning Network, 2020).
- Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for violence experienced by women, girls, and gender diverse people, while intimate partner violence is specific to the context of intimate relationships.¹
- The findings in this report detail the experiences of Indigenous women and gender diverse people with intimate partner violence (IPV). Intimate partner violence refers to violence by both current and former spouses and dating partners. It can vary in frequency and severity; ranging from one episode of violence that could have lasting impacts, to chronic and severe episodes over multiple years. Intimate partner violence can include any of the following types of behavior:
- **Physical violence** is when a person hurts or tries to hurt a partner by hitting, kicking, or using another type of physical force.
 - **Sexual violence** is forcing or attempting to force a partner to take part in a sexual act, sexual touching, or a non-physical sexual event (e.g., sexting) when the partner does not or cannot consent.
 - **Stalking** is a pattern of repeated, unwanted attention and contact by a partner that causes fear or concern for one’s own safety or the safety of someone close to the victim.

¹ On several occasions participants were either implicitly or explicitly uncomfortable with the term intimate partner violence. Interview participants used the terms intimate partner violence, domestic violence, gender-based violence, and family violence interchangeably. For example, one support worker noted that a large portion of the women they served were women who worked in the sex trade. Those women accessed the resources for violence they experienced as part of survival sex work, which they would not refer to as intimate partner violence or domestic violence, but rather gender-based violence.

- **Psychological aggression** is the use of verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to harm the other partner mentally or emotionally, and/or to exert control over the other partner.
- **Coercive control** is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation, and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten a victim. This controlling behaviour is designed to make a person dependant by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence, and regulating their everyday behaviour. As described by Women's Aid, "Coercive control creates invisible chains and a sense of fear that pervades all elements of a victim's life. It works to limit their human rights by depriving them of their liberty and reducing their ability for action" (Women's Aid, n.d. in the [Learning Network](#), 2020).
- **Femicide** is defined by the World Health Organization as the intentional killing of women because they are women; however, a broader definition includes any killings of women and girls (WHO, 2013). Femicide is the most extreme form of violence against women on the continuum of violence and discrimination against women and girls (Laurent et al., 2013).





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Executive Summary

We have been confronted by the global COVID-19 pandemic since 2020, and we are living in a time that is rife with uncertainty, isolation, and fear. With provincial health orders put in place and people following health mandates to stay at home, it is important to remember that home is not the safest place for many women and children. During this time there have been devastating impacts for women, girls, and gender diverse people, as well as a wide-spread erosion of gender equity.

The United Nations recognizes that increased rates of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence constitute a “shadow pandemic” — a public health and safety concern with its own dire implications ([UN Women](#), 2021). In Canada, rates of women and gender diverse people accessing anti-violence services has dramatically increased ([CTV News](#), October 2020; [CTV News](#), January 2022). Tragically, femicides in Canada increased by 26% between 2019 and 2021 ([Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability](#), 2021), a fact that reflects the seriousness of increased violence against women in Canada and the need to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic and Canada’s pandemic responses have contributed to dangerous situations for women, girls, and gender diverse people.

For Indigenous women and gender diverse people, the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating gendered colonial violence, already one of the most pressing human rights issues in Canada. The perpetuation of gender-based violence stems from historical and ongoing gendered colonial violence, and racist misogyny through discrimination targeted at Indigenous women and girls ([Amnesty International Canada](#), 2004; [Amnesty International](#), 2016). Indigenous women have been targeted by governmental policies, legislation, and heteropatriarchal decision-making. “Colonial state practices”, explain Carol Muree Martin and Harsha Walia of the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre, “target women for removal from Indigenous lands, tear children from their families, enforce impoverishment, and

manufacture the conditions for dehumanization” ([Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre](#), 2019, p. 25).

For example, the *Indian Act* was intended to undermine Indigenous women and girls, placing them into dangerous and violent situations. In “*Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*,” it is clearly outlined how “the Act’s Status provisions, otherwise known as the ‘disfranchisement provisions,’ evicted a woman and her children from her community, forcing her to commute or essentially sell off her rights if she married a man who did not also hold Status under the Indian Act... White women who married First Nations men, by contrast, would be able to marry into the band” ([Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of](#)

the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Volume 1a, 2019, p.251). The continued and ongoing oppression of the *Indian Act* targets Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people till today, and is the only race-based law left in the western world.

Our Research: Indigenous Women Experiencing IPV During the Pandemic

Historic and ongoing colonialism lays the foundation for the many ways that Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse peoples not only experience intimate partner violence, but also the barriers and realities Indigenous survivors face in accessing anti-violence supports and services. Our research focuses on understanding the IPV experiences of Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers who provide services in BC to Indigenous survivors of intimate partner violence.

Provincial health orders in BC between 2020 and 2022 mandated people to stay at home, which gave rise to a shadow pandemic of gender-based violence, and, consequently, an increase in rates of IPV against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. This research project came to fruition because of our experiences as anti-violence service providers during this difficult time.

The COVID pandemic exacerbated existing challenges in anti-violence service delivery in BC.



We knew from our conversations with women calling our crisis lines in the first year of the pandemic that they faced novel challenges, on top of pre-existing barriers, in accessing services in their communities. Through this research, we wanted to hear and amplify first-hand perspectives of Indigenous women and gender diverse people accessing anti-violence supports in BC during these tumultuous and volatile times.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in the spring of 2020, there were drastic changes in the ability of most anti-violence organizations to provide services to survivors across the province. At this time, our society faced widespread shutdowns across multiple sectors and industries, including service delivery organizations. This was

a period of pressure and flux for anti-violence service delivery organizations, who struggled with meeting the needs of ever-growing numbers of IPV survivors, while at the same time rapidly adjusting to a new model of service delivery. Safe homes and transition homes in the province were adjusting to the new reality of social distancing and other necessary health measures to keep people safe. Each organization faced the task of providing increased front-line services, while simultaneously experiencing a reduction in their physical, financial, and staffing capacities.

When it became clear that the pandemic would be long term, Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) instantly moved to adapt to the reality of remote work. We immediately implemented new



MCFD and/or law enforcement agencies prevented women from accessing anti-violence support services. When supports were provided, they were often undertaken without cultural safety for Indigenous women in mind, creating additional stress by taking away Indigenous women's agency, power, authority, and self-autonomy.

For many Indigenous women and gender diverse people living away from urban centres, accessing support services often means that they need to leave their communities, which displaces them and their children from their families and homelands. The fact that these services are often rooted in Eurocentric value systems presents additional impediments for Indigenous women. When Indigenous women and gender diverse people do access anti-violence support services and resources, they are faced with staff who have inadequate cultural competence or cultural safety experience. This reality emphasizes the need for more Indigenous-led and Indigenous-run anti-violence services to be funded in BC.

Identifying both the obvious and more subtle forms of ongoing colonization that Indigenous women and gender diverse people experience when fleeing violent circumstances is a crucial first step to improving anti-violence support services in BC. Ultimately, anti-violence organizations should empower Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse peoples by providing intersectional, anti-racist, decolonial, culturally relevant, trauma-informed, feminist support services that break down barriers to accessibility and ensure the safety and security of Indigenous survivors of intimate partner violence.

and novel technologies into our service delivery frameworks, which were rolled out within three weeks to respond to the influx of crisis calls and immense need for support from across the province. BWSS received additional funding to staff our crisis lines 24/7, add more paid positions to our team, and expand our infrastructure. This research project, *The Road to Safety: Indigenous Survivors in BC Speak Out against Intimate Partner Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, came to fruition to respond to the identified gaps in services, especially for Indigenous survivors, that BWSS and BCAAFC had started filling around the province during the pandemic.

The survey findings of our study show the extent to which the pressures placed by the pandemic

were related to Indigenous women and gender diverse people experiencing an increase in the frequency and severity of intimate partner violence, and, further, that COVID-19 related restrictions and public health measures correlated with an increase in difficulties with accessing anti-violence supports and services.

Through the research process, our team found that persistent barriers arose for Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC seeking protection from violent circumstances of IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerns about reduced services and service closures, growing waitlists to access services, transportation, childcare issues, quarantine and isolation, racism and discrimination, and the involvement of

Understanding the relationship between ongoing structures of colonial gendered violence and the increased rates of GBV and IPV experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people is also important in order to enact meaningful changes in policy and decision-making in BC. Policymakers must focus on the historical impacts of colonialism and the ongoing colonial violence that is embedded in social institutions that continue to target Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. Gendered colonial violence and systemic barriers continue to create a culture of exclusion, with an unacceptable lack of supports available to Indigenous women and their families.

In Chapter 1, we introduce ourselves to the reader and describe how the organizations involved as partners in this project, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) and Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS), have committed themselves to ending violence against Indigenous women. Chapter 2 outlines the research questions and processes that guided this research project. Chapter 3 walks the reader through the quantitative data that emerged from the survey. This data is arranged into four themes. In Chapter 4 we highlight additional themes that came from the interviews that were conducted with Indigenous IPV survivors and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers. Chapter 5 explores the concept of cultural safety and explains why mainstream anti-violence support services should adopt cultural safety as a central approach in their work. Chapter 6 summarizes five different themes that came from interview responses

to the question “What needs to happen to eliminate intimate partner violence?” Chapter 7 addresses a key participant concern: the need to engage and support men and boys in the elimination of violence against Indigenous women. Chapter 8 emphasizes and reiterates BC's moral and legal obligations to eliminate violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. This chapter ends with a series of recommendations from the BCAAFC and BWSS that both elaborate upon recommendations from interview participants and reflect the decades of experience that we have as service delivery organizations.

Highlights of the Research

- The survey findings of our study show the extent to which the pressures placed by the pandemic were related to Indigenous women and gender diverse people experiencing an increase in the frequency and severity of intimate partner violence. 85% of survey respondents reported an onset of IPV during the pandemic and 77% of survey respondents reported that they experienced an increase in IPV during the pandemic.
- The survey findings showed that 67% of participants indicated they had faced challenges in accessing services during the pandemic. In a follow-up question on the types of barriers they faced, 30% of participants answered that support services were closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Taken together, 85% of participants who left home during the pandemic left more than once, and 70% of participants reported having to leave home because of intimate partner violence.
- While IPV experiences are unique and personal, Indigenous survivors and support workers spoke about a generalized increase in violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of the severity and intensity of IPV and/or a shift in the type of abuse. We were told that there was an escalation from mental to physical abuse, and different forms of mental abuse and control.
- During the personal interviews, support workers consistently remarked that violence experienced by Indigenous survivors has fluctuated depending on the stage of lockdown or the severity of public health restrictions. Most support workers noted an increase in the number of calls they received, particularly in year two of the pandemic. Early in the pandemic, there was a decrease in the number of women accessing safe homes and transition homes. This decrease was not a reflection of need; rather, this was attributed to survivors' inability to leave home because of restrictions, isolation, lack of access to transportation, and/or fear.
- The survey findings identified numerous social, structural, infrastructure, and technological barriers that form an interrelated system of oppression that heighten the experience of IPV.

- We heard from Indigenous survivors that the following issues prevented them from accessing safety when fleeing IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Housing affordability.
- Shared housing risk of COVID-19.
- Self-isolation with abusers in small spaces.
- Lack of transportation.
- Closure of services due to the pandemic and/or wait lists.
- Discrimination and racism.
- Risk of MCFD/police/court involvement.
- Having a disability (themselves or their children).
- Navigating mental health and addictions.

- More generally, Indigenous survivors outline the tremendous difficulty they have with accessing housing, support services, counselling, transition houses, secondary spaces, transportation, Indigenous support workers, and community-based supports. They emphasized the lack of education and awareness of the issues they face, and the need for culturally safe and appropriate services.
- Access to safe space is imperative for Indigenous women experiencing IPV. While there is an ongoing housing crisis both on- and off-reserve in terms of availability and affordability, some women reported that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenge of finding affordable and safe



housing. The COVID-19 pandemic also limited spaces in safe or transition houses, limited the willingness of family and friends to house those fleeing abuse, and increased the duration that women needed to stay in safe homes because they were unable to find secondary housing.

- Survivors and support workers mentioned a need to engage and provide services to men and boys in the work of eliminating IPV, without losing funding for services for women and while continuing to augment supports for women.
- Indigenous survivors of IPV identified that interacting with non-Indigenous staff in

anti-violence support roles was a significant problem that impacted Indigenous survivors' ability to meaningfully access resources. Interviewees were more likely to mention specific instances of the ways that not having Indigenous support workers affected their ability to feel comfortable accessing anti-violence services. For some Indigenous women, not having Indigenous women working in anti-violence services meant that they felt judged, excluded, unsafe, fearful, and uncomfortable accessing supports and services. Most of the support workers we interviewed for this project were not Indigenous. The underrepresentation of Indigenous people within these critical

support roles raises questions about culturally safe and appropriate support services for Indigenous women and gender diverse people accessing anti-violence organizations.

- Many Indigenous women and gender diverse people who are living in BC and experience IPV do not have access to an Indigenous-led safe home or transition home, which could provide them with culturally safe and relevant supports and services. When asked if they have access to an Indigenous-run transition home or safe home, 47% of the respondents to our survey reported that they did not. There is a clear and urgent need for more Indigenous-focused and Indigenous-led anti-violence services, safe homes, and transition homes to be funded in BC.
- Support workers identified a lack of decolonial education and training within the organizations they work for as a barrier to Indigenous women accessing resources. On several occasions, support workers identified they were lacking in their ability to provide trauma-informed care and support to Indigenous women and gender diverse people. Like many Canadians, non-Indigenous support workers at anti-violence organizations have not received formal or informal education on the ongoing structures and impacts of colonialism. There is also a lack of cultural safety and cultural humility training, which perpetuates non-Indigenous support workers' inability to understand the ways that Indigenous

peoples in Canada are affected by ongoing colonization and structural racism. Cultural safety training moves beyond the concept of cultural sensitivity to analyzing power imbalances, institutional discrimination, colonization, and colonial relationships as they apply to anti-violence support services.

- Many participants of this study identified that one of the main barriers preventing Indigenous women from escaping violent situations and reporting abuse is the fear of being reported to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Participants reported deep fears and traumas related to having their children taken from them and placed into the child welfare system. The fear is not simply a perceived danger, it is a real risk and reflects ongoing colonial policy that continues to remove Indigenous children from their families at disproportionate rates. Similarly, many Indigenous women were hesitant to seek out support services and report violence to police due to fear of mistreatment by police. The participants in this study reported police inaction and the callous disregard for the safety of Indigenous women as some of the reasons that prevented them from pursuing legal options to protect themselves from violence. Participants offered examples of their past experiences with police and the legal system that reinforced their mistrust of these institutions. Given that child welfare, police, and other legal systems form the foundation of gendered colonial violence today, it is no surprise that Indigenous

people experiencing IPV are skeptical of the ability of these institutions to protect them when they need it the most. The result is a system of violence that exacerbates already dangerous situations for Indigenous women and their families when they report and seek out support services for intimate partner violence. These forms of violence are distressing and destructive, and the BC provincial government and the Canadian federal government need to address and confront these colonial forms of violence immediately.

- There is an underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in leadership roles of anti-violence organizations. Most valuable funds needed to address violence against Indigenous women are in the hands of mainstream, non-Indigenous organizations, and not in the hands of Indigenous communities and organizations themselves. Funds flow from governments to mainstream service organizations, many of whom do not have Indigenous representation in their leadership. Indigenous communities or organizations are then forced to apply for access to these funds, with specific stipulations around the receipt of these funds being dictated by the non-Indigenous organizations holding them. Overall, these findings highlight the need for Indigenous representation at all levels of anti-violence organizations to address prevalent challenges of access due to racist colonial structures.

CHAPTER ONE

Who We Are



The **BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC)** worked together with **Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS)** and **The University of Victoria** to engage Indigenous women and gender diverse people living in BC as well as anti-violence support workers in BC to participate in this study. The nature and extent of our community engagement was determined through discussion with, and under the advisement of, BWSS and the BCAAFC, considering relevant protocols and the highly sensitive nature of the research. BWSS and BCAAFC are leading organizations that center Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people's voices.



BCAAFC | BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

The British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) is the provincial umbrella organization that supports the 25 Friendship Centres in BC. Collectively, Friendship Centres form the largest social service infrastructure sector in the province. Over the past year, BC Friendship Centres delivered approximately 580 unique programs and services with the help of over 1,200 employees and 4,300 volunteers. Through

ongoing advocacy and communication with collaborative networks, BCAAFC and BC Friendship Centres work together to address the priorities of urban Indigenous peoples through community-based and culturally-informed decision making. BC Friendship Centres work to promote the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples living in urban areas by advancing their self-determined vision of health and wellness.

History of the Friendship Movement

The Friendship Centre Movement emerged in the 1950's as more Indigenous people began migrating into urban areas. The growing urban Indigenous population both created and responded to a need to develop Indigenous-

specific community services by raising funds through the efforts of many volunteers. Some of the earliest Friendship Centres in Canada include the North American Indian Club in Toronto, founded in 1951, and the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre in Winnipeg, founded in 1952.

The first Indigenous service agency in BC was founded in Vancouver in 1952. A group of Indigenous youth recognized that Indigenous students moving to the city for school lacked access to culturally-relevant support services. This group formed the Coqualeetza Fellowship Club, a safe space for Indigenous students to seek information, meet new people, and connect with Indigenous cultures. As individuals transitioned

into Vancouver's urban setting, requests for service continued to rise. The Coqualeetza Fellowship Club became a resource not only for Indigenous students, but all Indigenous peoples relocating to Vancouver. In 1963, the club changed its name to the Vancouver Indian Centre Society, now known as the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, thus marking the beginning of the Friendship Centre Movement in BC.

The Friendship Centre Movement represents a national network of community hubs as spaces to embrace Indigenous peoples' vision for a vibrant society and culturally safe resources and services for a brighter future for urban Indigenous people in Canada.

Anti-Violence Initiatives in BC Friendship Centres

Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or go missing than non-Indigenous women, a number that is even higher for Indigenous women and girls in the North ([Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019](#)). Evidence shows that services designed, developed, and delivered by Indigenous people are successful in meeting the needs of Indigenous clients.

BCAAFC and the BC Friendship Centres are committed to delivering accessible, wrap-around services to Indigenous peoples to prevent and end violence, and to help victims of violence and their families heal. BCAAFC has long been working with Indigenous communities to address violence against



Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. BCAAFC has participated in both the federal and provincial inquiries into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

BCAAFC has also produced reports for research on topics such as human trafficking and sexual exploitation of Indigenous youth. In addition, BCAAFC has led research on the health and wellness of urban Indigenous communities in BC. For the past twenty years, BCAAFC has also worked with Indigenous youth at the annual Gathering Our Voices youth conference to develop and provide culturally appropriate training for youth on the topics of intimate partner violence and sex education.

In the 2020-21 fiscal year, the 25 BC Friendship Centres ran 77 anti-violence programs and reached 39,854 participants. Anti-violence programs addressed family and intimate partner violence, sexual violence and abuse, bullying and lateral violence, trafficking and exploitation, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). Many BC Friendship Centres also operate emergency shelters and transition housing for women and youth fleeing violence or experiencing homelessness.

BC Friendship Centres saw a substantial increase in requests for service from people impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Stressors caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, physical distancing, and social isolation increased the risk of experiencing

violence for Indigenous women who, even prior to COVID-19, were already at a greater risk for experiencing violence than non-Indigenous women. Culturally safe services delivered by and for Indigenous peoples are critical to ending violence against Indigenous women and girls and supporting them and their communities healing from violence. Friendship Centres are trusted service providers in their communities and the success of their programming will only grow with increases in funding to support capacity building and infrastructure.

BCAAFC and BWSS recognized the lack of support services available to Indigenous women facing intimate partner violence during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. BCAAFC supported BWSS to increase their capacity to provide communities with urgent supports for Indigenous women and girls to offset the lack of services during that time.

In 2021 the BCAAFC partnered with TELUS to provide phones with one year of nationwide talk & text + data, made possible through the TELUS Mobility for Good program. Friendship Centre organizations across BC continue to distribute mobile phones to Indigenous women girls and 2SLGBTQQA+ people who otherwise would not have access to cellular communication. Increasing accessibility to mobile communication is one part of BC Friendship Centres' strategy to prevent violence against Indigenous women and girls and improve their safety.

More recently, the BCAAFC received three-year capacity-building funding from the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality to develop and

deliver anti-violence, culturally specific training for Indigenous women in the social services sector. In collaboration with BWSS, Aboriginal Housing Management Association and BC Society for Transition Houses, the project will increase the capacity of Indigenous anti-violence service providers in BC.

In early 2022, the BCAAFC was selected to develop and administer the Path Forward \$5.34 Million Community Fund, a key part of BC's plan to end violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQA+ people. The fund advances a top priority identified by Indigenous communities and individuals to end violence against Indigenous women: the need for safety planning and capacity building so communities can create and implement their own culturally safe solutions.

all women. We contribute to the freedom and liberation of girls and women from violence and to empower our community through training and education programs.

Since 1979, we have provided counselling and healing spaces for those who have experienced abuse. To help women build strength and resiliency, we work on institutional and systemic advocacy, legal advocacy and law reform, youth engagement, and operate two social enterprises: My Sister's Closet and Strategic Interventions in British Columbia. In addition, BWSS engages men by urging them to own their role in ending violence against girls and women. BWSS works toward the elimination of barriers to our services for Indigenous women, Black women, women of colour, immigrant and refugee women, sex workers and/or sexually exploited women and girls, women with disabilities, and women of all ages, classes, and cultures.

BWSS works closely with Indigenous women and organizations to address violence against Indigenous women and girls through systemic advocacy and community organizing. For over a decade, BWSS has been involved as partners on several research projects and grants seeking to address violence against Indigenous women and girls. BWSS understands that violence against Indigenous women and girls does not happen in isolation, but rather is a result of ongoing colonial policies and practices meant to disempower and exploit Indigenous peoples.

In the early 2000s, BWSS established its own Indigenous Women's Program (IWP), originally known as the Aboriginal Women's Program, to



Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) is a women's anti-violence organization that provides services to all women and femmes who are experiencing or have experienced gender-based violence. BWSS provides education, advocacy, and support services to assist all women in its aim to work towards the elimination of violence and to work from a feminist, anti-oppressive, and anti-racist perspective that promotes equality for

offer culturally relevant and safe programming to Indigenous women accessing its services. Run by Indigenous women for Indigenous women, the IWP team currently offers one-on-one counselling, workshops, and support groups at BWSS and in partnership with other organizations. The Indigenous Women's Program support workers use traditional healing practices while working with women survivors of trauma and colonization. The program also organizes and hosts the Wildflower Women of Turtle Island Drum group, a hand drum group to help women heal from trauma, find their voices, and stand strong in their power through drumming and singing.

In 2008, BWSS developed its Women's Leadership and Training Initiative, working closely with communities to organize local responses to violence rooted in women's empowerment, leadership, and community development. With an emphasis on First Nations women, BWSS collaborated with members of northern communities in BC by hosting a series of brainstorming sessions to integrate local ideas, knowledge, and experience to the development and delivery of the Women's Leadership and Training Initiative.

In addition, BWSS has long been involved in community organizing to address violence against Indigenous women, as part of its work to

end violence against all women. BWSS is a long-serving member of the organizing committee for the annual February 14th Women's Memorial March in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Since it began in 1992, "this event is organized and led by women in the DTES people because women – especially Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and trans people – face physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual violence on a daily basis" (Feb 14 Annual Women's Memorial March Committee, 2022).

BWSS played a key role in both the British Columbia's Missing Women's Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. BWSS supported Indigenous women and community organizations in applying pressure to the MWCI to include group and family participation, and to denounce the Inquiry when it failed to include community groups and the families of missing women. BWSS then became involved in the provincial Coalition on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to meaningfully engage with families and communities.

Similarly, BWSS was involved in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls as a Party with Standing and participated in all three phases of the Inquiry. Before the announcement of the launch of the

National Inquiry, BWSS supported Indigenous communities in calling for a truthful and just investigation into the causes of violence against Indigenous women in Canada. BWSS offered recommendations on who should be involved in the process and offered testimony at the Inquiry as well. BWSS continues to work to hold the federal government accountable for the Calls for Justice that came out of the National Inquiry, detailed in "Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls."

In addition to programming for Indigenous women facing gender-based violence and systemic advocacy to address violence against Indigenous women and girls, BWSS offers many other support services including: a 24/7 intake and crisis line, Stopping the Violence one-on-one counselling and peer support, women's support groups, community-based Victim Services, Legal Advocacy Program, Women's Safety and Outreach team, Advancing Women's Awareness Regarding Employment (AWARE) Program, 55+ Healthier Together program, South Asian Women's group, Latin American Women's program, and Youth Ending Violence prevention education program. BWSS's newly launched Research and Policy team works with both academic and community organizations to explore and address the impacts of government policy on gender-based violence.

BWSS and BCAAFC are leading organizations that center Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people's voices.



CHAPTER TWO

Conceptualizing the Research

Purpose and Methodology

Our goal with this research was to explore the realities of Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC who have experienced IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to gain perspectives from Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers who provide anti-violence resources and/or services to Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC.²

Our team wanted to fully understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC who are experiencing intimate partner violence during the pandemic. We hoped to understand how public health measures can be better applied in the future to ensure populations under threat are protected.

The findings of this research should be used to inform Indigenous IPV services in BC. It tells us about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous women and gender diverse people's

experiences of IPV, and Indigenous survivors' access to culturally relevant, safe, and appropriate services. The findings will also be shared with provincial funders of IPV prevention services and broader gender-based services in BC. Our team anticipates that the results of this research will have broad impacts, such as the impact of the pandemic and subsequent public health restrictions on women, Indigenous peoples, and service and support organizations.

It is important to point out that most of the support workers that were involved in this study were non-Indigenous. This overrepresentation of non-Indigenous people in support services positions highlights the need for more Indigenous support workers and Indigenous-centered and Indigenous-led service delivery in BC.

Our research approach is based in anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices, and the data we gathered has been generated from a mix of qualitative and quantitative research

methods and Indigenous methodologies. We co-developed an approach to the study that meets community standards, protocols, and practices for conducting research with Indigenous peoples.

The study consisted of two methods:

1. A survey for Indigenous women and gender diverse people living in BC who have experienced IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We used an online survey to gather data from October 2021 to January 2022, and 95 people participated in the survey.

2. Personal interviews with Indigenous women and gender diverse peoples living in BC who have experienced IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as support workers who provide anti-violence resources and/or services to Indigenous women and gender diverse peoples in BC.

² Front-line workers included a variety of individuals who work to ensure that Indigenous women experiencing IPV get the programs and services they need. In the case of this study, we heard from a diverse range of mostly non-Indigenous frontline workers including, but not limited to, program managers, counsellors, executive directors, and front-line staff of safe homes and transition homes in BC.



We held numerous interviews to hear from participants about their experiences with IPV in a safe and supportive environment. Our first group was comprised of Indigenous women and gender diverse people living in BC who have experienced IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic. We held ten interviews with this group of participants. Our second group was comprised of mostly non-Indigenous support workers, and we held 18 interviews with this group about their perspectives on barriers that Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC have been facing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Approach and Ethics

Our research work was guided by Dr. Charlotte Loppie and Dr. Jacqueline Quinless with research assistance from Caitlin Dyck at the University of Victoria. As much as possible, our research was guided by a “by Indigenous women, for Indigenous women” approach. Many of our team members identify as Indigenous women, including staff at the BCAAFC and at BWSS. The research team provided guidance on the research questions, ensuring that the knowledge gathering process was ethically guided and the process was culturally safe.

The team applied ethical principles outlined in Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2), which was designed to serve as a framework for the ethical conduct of research involving Aboriginal (including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) or Indigenous peoples, regardless of where they reside, or whether or not their names appear on an official register (TCPS2, 2018, p.110). The purpose of this Tri-Council Policy Statement is to ensure, to the extent possible, that research involving Indigenous peoples is premised on respectful relationships and encourages collaboration and engagement between researchers and participants. The TCPS2 acknowledges the role of the community in shaping the conduct of research that affects First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

We worked with Dr. Loppie and Dr. Quinless as Indigenous and racialized researchers specializing in Indigenous health and violence against women research. Of particular importance, the University of Victoria Research Ethics Board (REB) recognizes that research with Indigenous communities or involving Indigenous peoples must be conducted according to the following: a respectful and culturally appropriate manner; follow protocols regarding entering community sites; engaging with community Elders and Knowledge Keepers; acknowledge cultural knowledge and cultural property; and disseminate research findings in an ethically safe manner.

Our data gathering, analysis, and interpretation is based on a decolonizing framework and informed by the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP³). OCAP³, as sanctioned by the [First Nations Information Governance Committee](#) (2007), was established as a guiding principle for the ethical and culturally competent collection of data between researchers and Indigenous Nations and is aligned with Indigenous self-determination and self-governance. The principles of OCAP³ are as follows:

- **Ownership** – the concept that Indigenous Nations collectively possess cultural knowledge, data, and information.
- **Control** – the rights of Indigenous peoples to control their empirical environments that are infused with their everyday life, which includes research, information, and data.
- **Access** – the concept of Indigenous groups having control, ownership, and accessibility of the data collected.
- **Possession** – the trusted relationship between the possessor of data and those who own said data.³

We are confident that our research was conducted in a culturally safe and ethical manner according to the TCPS2 policy guidelines, and that the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes are aligned with OCAP³ principles.

³ First Nations Information Governance Centre, “The First Nations Principles of OCAP³,” OCAP³, 2020.



What We Wanted to Understand

The following questions guided our approach to the research:

1. What are the IPV experiences of Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What IPV resources and services do Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC need during the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. What barriers and opportunities to accessing IPV resources and services do Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Survey

SurveyMonkey hosted the online survey from October 15, 2021 to December 10, 2021, and then again from January 13, 2022 to January 23, 2022. We received 95 survey responses.

The survey had 44 questions that were closed-ended response with dropdown selections

options as well as an “other, please explain” category with an open-response option.

The first five questions asked about the participants’ gender, sexual identity, children (if any), and area of BC in which they lived.

Questions 6-14 asked about connectivity (phone, internet) and transportation, including the reliability of and barriers to access.

Questions 15-22 asked about if participants had ever experienced different types of IPV, and Questions 24-25 asked about the onset or increase of such IPV since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Question 23 asked about the gender of their abuser.

Questions 26-30 asked about having and wanting to leave home because of abuse, barriers to leaving, and the number of times they have left home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Questions 31-36 asked about awareness and access to IPV services and resources.

Questions 37-43 asked about access, use, and experiences at Indigenous and non-Indigenous safe houses.

Question 44 was open response about additional supports required to be safe.

People had the option to answer or skip any question and could provide more than one answer to several questions.

We recognize and honour the strength required to speak truth about intimate partner violence, the inadequacies of the justice system, and the failures of the state to provide support to Indigenous women experiencing violence. We recognize that truth-telling is a crucial act of resistance to the ongoing attempts of colonialism to deny agency to Indigenous women, and we honour the Indigenous women and gender diverse people who participated in this project as warriors for sharing their stories.



PHOTO BY: Geoffrey Howe, BCAAFC Annual Gathering our Voices Youth Conference, 2019.

In-depth Interviews

At the end of the survey, respondents were provided with the contact information of the BWSS Manager of Direct Services and Indigenous Women's Program if they wished to participate in a one-hour interview about accessing IPV services. Keeping with the "by Indigenous women, for Indigenous women" approach, the interviews were coordinated and carried out by an Indigenous research team member who is one of BWSS' Research and Policy Analysts, in collaboration with the BWSS Indigenous Women's Program team.

We held numerous personal interviews by phone and in-person between January 2022 and March 2022 in a safe and supportive environment to hear firsthand about Indigenous participants' experiences with IPV, as well as the experiences of anti-violence support workers. We recorded the interviews, transcribed them, and analysed the transcripts using NVivo qualitative coding software.

Our first group was comprised of Indigenous women and gender diverse people living in BC who have experienced IPV during the COVID-19

pandemic. We wanted to hear about Indigenous survivors' experiences of IPV and accessing services. We held ten interviews with this group of participants. We invited Indigenous women to be part of the study mainly through public advertisement via organizations, including BCAAFC, and various BC women's shelters and organizations that provide service to Indigenous women experiencing gender-based violence, as well as through media such as social media, list serves, and newsletters.

To ensure the confidentiality of our participants, Indigenous women who are currently accessing services from BWSS were not contacted to participate. If, however, a woman heard about the study through another organization, we welcomed them to participate in the online survey. For confidentiality purposes, if they wanted to participate in an interview, they were not interviewed by a BWSS Support Worker who had ever provided them with services, but by BWSS's Indigenous Research and Policy Analyst.

Our second group was comprised of support workers providing services to Indigenous women and gender diverse people experiencing

IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic. Support workers were invited to be part of the study because they can describe patterns of barriers and opportunities for providing services to Indigenous women and gender diverse people. We approached support workers through direct recruitment by BWSS's Indigenous Research and Policy Analyst, who contacted their publicly available email or phone number. We held 18 interviews with mostly non-Indigenous support workers about their perspectives on the barriers faced by Indigenous women and gender diverse people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both groups of participants first completed a consent form that included information about the upcoming interview, and then we provided them the opportunity to ask questions. We reminded people they could stop or take a break at any time and even skip any question they did not want to answer. Participants were informed that they were welcome to withdraw from the study at any time and that their interview transcripts would then be withdrawn as well. Transcripts were then completed, and all analysis was conducted to distill main themes from the conversations.

Our goal with this research was to explore the realities of Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC who have experienced IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to gain perspectives from Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers who provide anti-violence resources and/or services to Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC.

CHAPTER THREE

What the Quantitative Data from the Survey Says



In the spring of 2020, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) conducted a survey of 750 Indigenous women across Canada to determine how the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting them.

The study found that intimate partner violence during the pandemic has reached epidemic proportions resulting in many Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people becoming more vulnerable to violence as their access to support and safety was affected (NWAC, 2021). Nearly one in five reported that they had experienced physical or psychological violence since the pandemic began, often by an intimate partner. As stated in the NWAC report, "Indigenous women have reported increased violence during pandemic lockdowns. In May 2020, 17 percent experienced violence (physically or psychologically) in the previous three months, compared to 10 percent reporting violence from their spouse over the previous five years, as reported in 2014" (NWAC, 2021, p. 4).

Our research similarly found increases in IPV experienced by Indigenous women and gender diverse people during the COVID pandemic. In this section, we provide a discussion of our survey findings that shed light on Indigenous women and gender diverse peoples' experiences with IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings are startling and provide insight into the impacts IPV has had on homelife. We share the heartbreaking stories of survivors and the many obstacles faced when trying to access support services and safe/transition houses during the pandemic.

Who participated in the survey?

The survey gathered basic demographic information about the 95 participants from across different geographic locations in BC. The survey findings show that of the 95 participants:

- 53% were from the southwest or south-central of BC.
- 13% were from Vancouver Island.
- 11% were from the southeast of BC.
- 10% were from the northwest of BC.
- 13% were from the north central or northeast of BC.
- 65% of participants reported their gender as women and 35% reported being a trans woman and/or Two-Spirit.
- The majority of participants (60%) chose straight/heterosexual as their sexual identity, while 31% chose bi-sexual, and 5% selected lesbian.
- 67% of people responded that they had children, and the majority (75%) of respondents with children have their children living with them in the home.

For the purpose of this section, we organized the survey questions around four themes:

1. Connectedness.
2. Experiences with different types of abuse.
3. Having to leave home.
4. Awareness, access, and barriers to the use of IPV resources and services.

THEME 1 Connectedness

Nine questions asked survey participants about their connectedness including access/barriers to cellphone ownership and reception, availability of and access to internet, and transportation options.

Of the 92 participants who responded to the questions of access to phone and internet, 88 participants, or 96%, have access to a phone and 90 participants, or 98%, have access to the internet. Of the 88 participants who responded to the question “If yes, do you have good phone reception?”, 84 participants, or 95%, said that the service reception was reliable. Of the 4 people who responded that they do not have access to a phone, 2 reported they do not have the financial means, and 2 reported their husbands control their phones.

When asked about access to a car when needed, 72 participants of the 93 who answered the question (77%), responded they did. Twenty-one people, or 22% of respondents to this question, said they did not have access to a car. Of those who do not have access to a vehicle, 14 said they do not have access to another form of transportation when needed. Of the 11 people who filled in the open-response about why they didn’t have access to a car, 6 referred to affordability, 3 referred to a lack of control, and 2 referred to the availability of public transportation.

THEME 2 Experiences with Different Types of Abuse

The survey questions directly responded to the first research question of this study: what are the experiences of IPV of Indigenous women and gender diverse people in BC during the COVID-19 pandemic? The survey asked a series of questions about the types of abuse participants had ever experienced, and the survey provided a set of responses with the option to check all they had experienced. The survey also provided an “other” response so participants could specify additional responses if they chose. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants responded that there was a significant increase of IPV during this time and/or the onset of IPV.

FIGURE 1

Have you experienced an onset or increase of IPV since the COVID 19 pandemic?

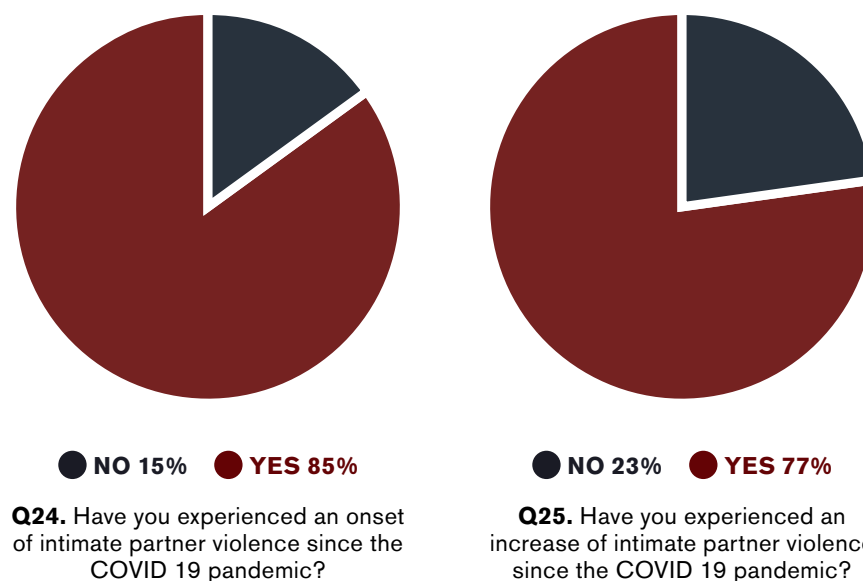


Table 1 presents the answers on the different types of IPV that participants have ever experienced; the survey instructions asked participants to select all responses that apply. Depending on the question, between 91 to 93 of the total number of participants (95) responded to these questions and the # in **Table 1** reflects the number of participants who selected this answer choice. Participants also selected “other,” “prefer not to answer,” and “none of the above” as responses. Notably, 9 participants selected “prefer not to answer” on Question 18 about using children as a tactic of IPV; on other questions, 3 or 4 participants selected “prefer not to answer.” There were no questions asking about physical or sexual IPV on the survey, although some participants did provide evidence of such violence when using the “other” response option. For example, in response to the experience of intimidation, one participant provided this response in the other category: “slam doors, throw things/use physical body to scare me.”

TABLE 1. TYPES OF IPV EXPERIENCED BY PARTICIPANTS		
Question	Answer Choices	#
Q15. Using Coercion & Threats	• Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt you	51
	• Threatening to leave you, to commit suicide, to report you to welfare	50
	• Making you drop charges	23
	• Making you do illegal things	23
Q16. Using Economic Abuse	• Making you ask for money	39
	• Not letting you know about or having access to family income	37
	• Preventing you from getting or keeping a job	35
	• Taking their money	20
Q17. Using Male Privilege	• Giving you an allowance	18
	• Treating you like a servant	40
	• They make all the big decisions	40
Q18. Using Children	• They are the one to define the roles in the relationship	35
	• They act like the “Master of the Castle”	34

TABLE 1. TYPES OF IPV EXPERIENCED BY PARTICIPANTS		
Question	Answer Choices	#
Q18. Using Children	• Using the children to relay messages	37
	• Making you feel guilty about the children	33
	• Threatening to take the children away	30
	• Using visitation of the children to harass you	17
Q19. Minimizing, Denying, Blaming	• Shifting the responsibility for abusive behavior	43
	• Making light of the abuse and not taking your concerns about it seriously	41
	• Saying the abuse did not happen	40
	• Saying you caused it	34
Q20. Using Isolation	• Controlling who you see and talk to	44
	• Controlling what you do	36
	• Controlling what you read	30
	• Limiting your outside involvement	30
Q21. Using Emotional Abuse	• Controlling where you go	29
	• Using jealousy to justify actions	25
	• Making you feel bad about yourself	49
	• Calling you names	42
Q22. Using Intimidation	• Making you think you're crazy	39
	• Humiliating you to make you feel guilty	30
	• Putting you down	28
	• They play mind games	27
Q23. Using Intimidation	• Making you afraid by using looks, actions, gestures	51
	• Destroying your property	41
	• Smashing things	40
	• Displaying weapons	18
Q24. Using Intimidation	• Abusing pets	16

THEME 3

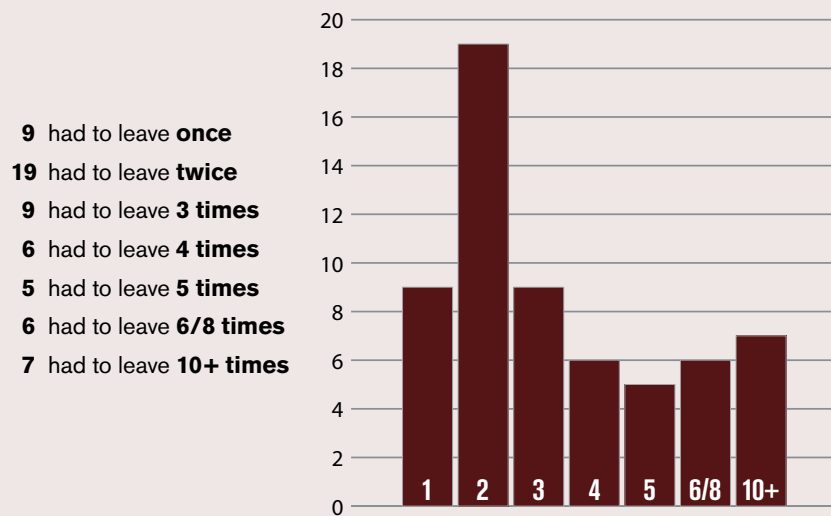
Having to Leave Home

Five questions asked about participants having to leave home. In general, 64 out of 92 participants (or 70%) who responded to the question of whether they have ever had to leave home due to IPV reported that they had, at some point, needed to leave their homes. Notably, 54 out of 62 participants (or 87%) responded “yes” when asked if they returned home to where they were experiencing intimate partner violence.

FIGURE 2

Having to Leave Home during COVID-19 Pandemic

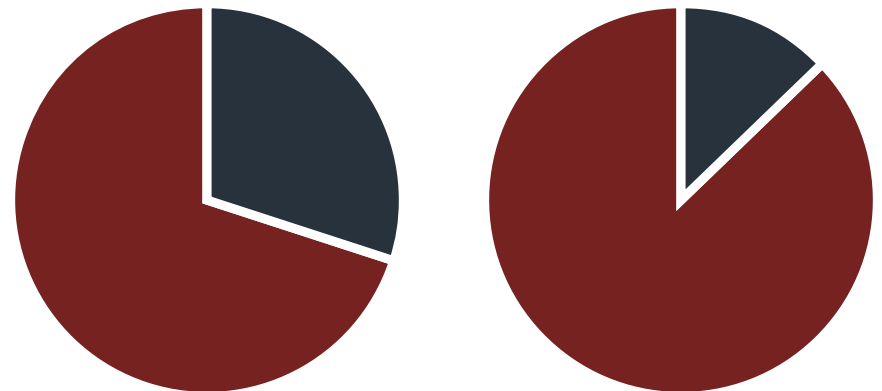
Of the 60 participants who stated they had to leave their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic:



One respondent had to leave their home 30 times, another 40 times. Taken together, 85% of participants who left home during the pandemic had to leave more than once.

FIGURE 3

Have you ever had to leave home due to IPV and did you go back?



● NO 30% ● YES 70%

Q26. Have you ever had to leave your home because of intimate partner violence?

● NO 13% ● YES 87%

Q28. Did you go back to the home where you were experiencing intimate partner violence?

Taken together, 85% of participants who left home during the pandemic left more than once, and 70% of participants reported having to leave home because of intimate partner violence.

Whereas 70% of survey participants left home because of violence, 70% of participants also responded “yes” to “Do you now, or have you ever, wanted to leave because of abuse but could not?” We see that these participants selected the answer choices displayed in **Table 2** below. From the responses, over one-third, or 36%, of participants selected “fear of losing custody of my children.” This was followed by over one-quarter of women who said they were in “fear of retaliation by abuser,” and over one-quarter of women who reported that they faced financial barriers to fleeing intimate partner violence.

TABLE 2. WHAT BARRIERS DID YOU FACE IN LEAVING?

Q30. Answer Choices	# of Responses
Fear of losing custody of my children	31
Fear of retaliation by abuser	24
Financial	24
No safe/secure housing in community	23
Love/connection with the abuser	23
No place to go	20
Fear of breaking up the family	19
Mental health	17
No place that accepts children	13
None of the above	12
Fear of retaliation by abuser’s family or friends	12
Lack of transportation	6
Children did not want to leave	6
Other (please specify)	2
Disability	1

THEME 4

Awareness, Access, and Barriers to the Use of IPV Resources and Services

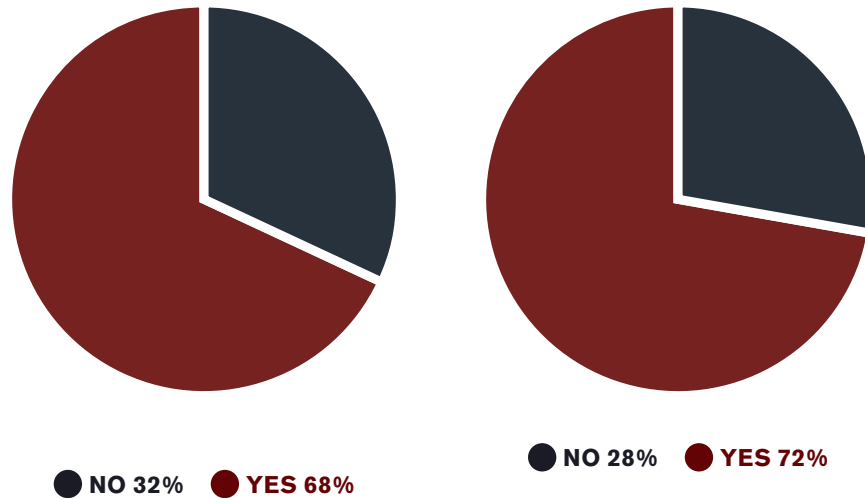
The final 14 questions in the survey asked participants about their awareness, use, and experiences with services and resources for women experiencing IPV. Most participants were not aware of or did not have access to these services and resources in a way that corresponded to their needs. For example, only 48 participants, or 52%, were aware of services or resources for women experiencing domestic violence; 45 participants, or 48%, responded they were not aware of these services or resources. For those who responded yes, 16 participants, or 33%, provided responses listing the kinds of services and resources they were aware of in their area, including safe homes or transition houses, counselling, childcare services, crisis lines/VictimLink, online resources, recreation sites, legal support, and specific organizations in their regions.

The number of participants accessing these services was also below what might be expected given the prevalence of those experiencing IPV, as evidenced by the previous sections. When asked if they had ever accessed or attempted to access services, 68% of participants had, while 32% had not **Figure 4**. During COVID-19, 72% of participants needed these types of services between March 2020 and July 2021, as **Figure 4** represents.

Whereas 70% of survey participants left home because of violence, 70% of participants wanted to leave home because of abuse but could not. Of these, 36% feared losing custody of their children if they left.

FIGURE 4.

Access to Services – Ever and During COVID-19 Pandemic



Q33. Have you ever accessed or attempted to access these services?

Q34. Did you need this type of service between Mar 2020 and Jul 2021?

The survey also asked participants about whether they experienced barriers, and, if so, what barriers they faced when accessing these services. Of the 91 people who answered this question, 67% indicated they had faced challenges in accessing services. In a follow-up question on the types of barriers they faced, of 86 responses, 30% answered that they were closed due to COVID-19. **Table 3** presents the answers that participants selected. The four participants who selected “other” specified the following barriers to access: “fear of retaliation;” “it was counseling that had a waitlist, I was able to get into the woman’s shelter with my youngest son, my oldest son is 15 and felt uncomfortable coming here;” “I never knew about it;” and “stigma and awful, rude staff – not a safe place.”

TABLE 3. BARRIERS FACED IN ACCESSING SERVICES

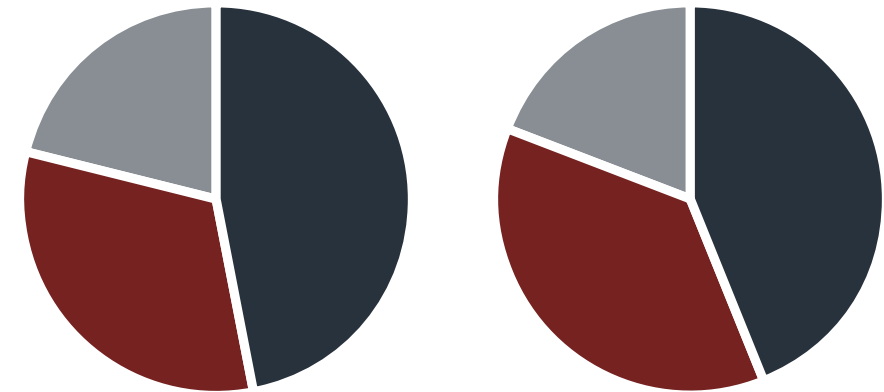
Q36. Answer Choices	# of Responses
No financial means to access the service	35
They were closed due to COVID restrictions	26
Lack of privacy	25
Abuser wouldn't let me go	15
No phone or internet	12
Had to work	10
No transportation	9
Services are not culturally safe for Indigenous women	9
No Elder care	8
No childcare	7
No time	4
Other (please specify)	4
None of the above, I do not face barriers accessing these services	11

The survey included specific questions about access to, use of, and experience with Indigenous-run and non-Indigenous-run safe or transition houses. The results were quite similar across both Indigenous and non-Indigenous run safe houses in terms of access and use **Table 4**, and the comments about the experience were also positive across both types of transition/safe houses. This was an open-response question where participants wrote what they wanted and did not select an answer from a list of choices.

67% of participants indicated they had faced challenges in accessing services during the pandemic, with 30% answering that support services were closed because of the pandemic.

FIGURE 5.

Access to Indigenous-run and non-Indigenous-run transition and safe homes.



47% ● Access NO
 32% ● Access YES • Stayed YES
 21% ● Access YES • Stayed NO

Q37 & Q38. Do you have access to an Indigenous-run transition/safe house? If yes, did you ever stay there?

47% ● Access NO
 37% ● Access YES • Stayed YES
 19% ● Access YES • Stayed NO

Q40 & Q41. Do you have access to a non-Indigenous-run transition/safe house? If yes, did you ever stay there?

Question 37 asked participants if they had access to an Indigenous-run transition house or safe house. Of the 90 participants who responded to the question, 48 participants, or 53%, said they did, and 42 participants, or 47%, said they did not. Of those 48 participants who had access, 29 participants, or 60%, had stayed there. For non-Indigenous-run safe/transition houses, 56% of respondents (50 of 89 total respondents) had access. Of those 50 participants who had access, 33 participants, or 66%, had stayed there.

The responses provided about these experiences illuminate how helpful these houses are in ensuring safety in the face of IPV, as many participants mention explicitly safety or feeling safe; although there were exceptions at the non-Indigenous-run houses, and one exception in the Indigenous-run house.

The responses for the non-Indigenous houses were somewhat more nuanced than those for the Indigenous houses, and in **Table 4** we have arranged and rated the responses from positive (+) to neutral (o) to negative (-).

TABLE 4. RESPONSES OF EXPERIENCES IN INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS-LED SAFE/TRANSITION HOUSES

Q39 AND Q42. If you have stayed at a(n)... transition/safe house, what was your experience?	
INDIGENOUS-RUN	NON-INDIGENOUS-RUN
+ I was treated well there	+ It was fantastic, I felt safe
+ That's the only place I felt safe, I had nothing to worry about because I was shown great affection	+ I feel safe
+ It was a bit better than home	+ Was awesome
+ It was a good experience	+ It's better
+ I felt at home when I was there	+ Good
+ Good discipline	+ Nice
o Food and security	+ I was taking good care
- It feels sad and lonely sometimes.	+ Was great. Meet new people but still don't want my children growing without their father
	+ It feels safe when I'm not around the abuser.
	o It is very safe, strict and loud. I am thankful for it at this time, however there are definitely challenging days with others in here and workers.
	- Rather stay with my abuser. The staff was abusive and not safe. The entire house was unsafe. No professionalism. No confidentiality. Told me I don't look Indigenous and laughed when I identified.
	- Not culturally safe or appropriate

Question 43 followed up on the experience in non-Indigenous safe houses by asking specifically: *how were you treated?* Participants provided overwhelmingly positive responses for how they were treated at non-Indigenous-led safe/transition houses. Of the 34 responses that provided information on this question, 22 responses were rated as positive, 6 as neutral, and 6 as negative. The fact that there are any negative responses at all about how people were treated at a safe house is cause for concern, as outlined below in **Table 5**.

TABLE 5. RESPONSES TO HOW WERE YOU TREATED AT A NON-INDIGENOUS SAFE HOUSE?	
Q43. If you have accessed a non-Indigenous transition/safe house, how were you treated?	
+ Better	
+ Fair	
+ Fine	
+ First they treated me as a stranger then afterwards they were friendly to me	
+ Good	
+ I felt safe and was treated well	
+ I was treated really great	
+ I was treated with care	
+ I was treated with respect	
+ Like a family I was really happy how they accepted me	
+ Nice	
+ Pretty okay	
+ Safe	
+ The service attitude is very satisfactory.	
+ The treatment was welcoming and was far better than home	
+ They are calm and treat you with utmost respect.	
+ They treated me good	
+ Very awesome	
+ Very good	

TABLE 5. RESPONSES TO HOW WERE YOU TREATED AT A NON-INDIGENOUS SAFE HOUSE?	
Q43. If you have accessed a non-Indigenous transition/safe house, how were you treated?	
+ Very well	
+ Well	
o I was given clothes and food	
o I was treated good for the most part but felt I didn't deserve the services and sometimes I was treated like a child with the rules	
o Some workers are great. Others make me want to leave here. Pick and prying at our everyday schedules, general rules for everyone are difficult when I work fulltime and can't always get everything done according to schedule. And have been pulled aside many times making me very uncomfortable. It is only the one worker that is like this.	
o Can't say	
o I don't know what's gonna happen, okay	
o I was treated like human being	
o Anti-violence and crime prevention	
- I was worried about getting hurt.	
- I was treated like garbage.	
- May be discriminated against	
- Not really good	
- Not well	
- Unfair treatment	

How were you treated in non-Indigenous safe houses?
Of the 34 responses, 22 responses were rated as positive, 6 as neutral, and 6 as negative.

Our survey asked participants what additional supports they would need to be permanently safe. Of the 46 people who answered the question (49 people skipped it), 33 provided an answer (other than “none” or “n/a”) which we coded thematically to affordable housing, authorities (i.e., law enforcement), awareness/education, counselling, cultural programming, emotional support, family, financial, legal, ongoing, outreach, rules, safe house, and safe distance. **Table 6** provides examples of these responses and the themes.

TABLE 6. ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS FOR FEELING SAFE	
Q44. What additional supports would help you to be permanently safe?	
RESPONSE	THEME
The housing and rentals here in Prince Rupert are awful. A 3-bedroom townhouse block recently renovated are going for 2150 each! A one-bedroom apartment and basement suite listed for 1500. It has been a month of me looking and I am not confident we will find a home for Christmas	Affordable housing
Safe affordable housing, not BC housing prison suites.	Affordable housing
Better community policing. I have a family protection order where my abuser is still stalking and harassing me and the police have not arrested him or stopped it.	Authorities
Proper handling of the situation by the appropriate authority	Authorities
Police should always investigate	Authorities
Create forums to educate the general public on respecting human rights and gender respect.	Awareness/Education
Create awareness. Let the abusers know that they are not doing well.	Awareness/Education
Support, education	Awareness/Education
Counselling. Support from the police and safe, secure housing with high security measures. Online safety: I was harassed online and by phone. Phone company can't block unknown callers.	Counselling
Counselling and Therapy	Counselling
Now that I know they exist I would go there for someone to talk to	Counselling

TABLE 6. ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS FOR FEELING SAFE	
Q44. What additional supports would help you to be permanently safe?	
RESPONSE	THEME
Cultural programming or mentorship. It is challenging, my sister is going through something similar, she has three kids. It is hard not being able to see her leave and put up with the abuse. I left 2 different relationship due to the abuse. It is an on-going challenge and struggle within our communities.	Cultural Programming
Encouragement	Emotional support
Show me love	Emotional support
Resilient, I need people to acquaint me on how to get over this	Emotional support
I need women empowerment programs	Emotional support
My family	Family
Financial support	Financial
Financial support and government intervention	Financial
A court order	Legal
Legal help.	Legal
If my husband was charged or threatened.	Legal
Ongoing support, programs, services	Ongoing support
They should be people or organizations who check the health of homes to make sure they are both living happily	Outreach
Outreach support	Outreach
Providing securities or rules	Rules
Giving some certain kind of rules	Rules
Safe house that I would feel safe and comfortable at. Not judged, have options that would work	Safe House
Being taken to a safer safe house	Safe House
Staying as far as I can	Safety Physical
Get my apartment far from him	Safety Physical
Starting a new life in a new home	Safety Physical
Moving to a new place	Safety Physical

CHAPTER FOUR

What the Qualitative Data From the Interviews Says



The perpetuation of intimate partner violence stems from a continuation of discriminatory stereotypes and ongoing colonial practices targeted at Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. Understanding the ways in which IPV is enabled through government and institutional practices and policies is essential to preventing IPV, as well as to offer appropriate supports to Indigenous women, children, and their families. In our interviews, we asked participants to tell us how the COVID-19 pandemic in BC has impacted Indigenous women and gender diverse people's experiences of IPV. What we learned is that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the severity and incidence of IPV, survivors' ability to find safe spaces, and the ability to access or provide services or supports in the province.

We also learned that there is an overrepresentation of non-Indigenous people in support worker positions in BC, which gives rise to the urgent need for more Indigenous support workers and Indigenous-centered and Indigenous-led service delivery in BC. As previously mentioned, most of the support workers that were included in this study were non-Indigenous, although there were a small number of Indigenous support workers interviewed.

In this section, we relay the voices of Indigenous women and gender diverse people and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers with respect to issues Indigenous women and gender diverse people experiencing IPV have with housing, child-welfare agencies like MCFD, police and court systems, pre-existing and ongoing barriers to accessing anti-violence support services, and pandemic-specific barriers to accessing services.

“We couldn't find a safe place to escape violence because no one would take us in because they were scared of getting COVID.”

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

What We Heard from Participants

While IPV experiences are unique and personal, survivors and support workers spoke about a generalized increase in IPV in terms of the severity and intensity of violence and/or a shift in the type of abuse. There were reports of escalation from mental to physical abuse, and different forms of mental abuse and control. Support workers remarked that the violence has fluctuated depending on the stage of lockdown or the severity of restrictions, but most noted an increase in the number of calls received, particularly in year two of the pandemic. Early in the pandemic, there was a decrease in the number of women accessing transition homes. This decrease was attributed to survivors' inability to leave home because of restrictions, isolation, lack of access to transport, and/or fear, and was not a reflection of need.

› We heard from Indigenous survivors that the following specific issues prevented them from accessing safety when fleeing IPV during the pandemic:

- Housing affordability.
- Shared housing risk of COVID-19.
- Self-isolation with abusers in small spaces.
- Lack of transportation.
- Closure of services due to the pandemic and/or wait lists.
- Discrimination and racism.
- Risk of MCFD/police/court involvement.
- Having a disability (themselves or their children).
- Navigating mental health and addictions.

It [the relationship] just changed drastically in the past year, it was pretty bad. We live in the North right, it's already pretty isolated up here as is. When you feel alone, you feel alone. It's hard to remember that you're not alone, especially when you're going through something like intimate partner violence. I was living with my boyfriend and his family at the time. They didn't even know what was going on because of how isolated he kept me. It was hard to leave, to talk about it, to acknowledge that it was happening because I was afraid of having my safety taken from me, even though I wasn't safe.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I think it's changed the kind of violence I've experienced. Yes, I would say it has increased. It's increased by more smashing my things up and like not hitting me but pretty much the name calling really cuts my heart in half and it feels like I need to be more, I have to be around him. He is trying to sweep me away from my family.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I left my relationship. I fled my relationship in October [2021]. And what I've noticed is that the lack of, so I was in this long-term relationship for quite some time not knowing how to get out of it. I've noticed during COVID a lot of things shut down. Lack of supports regarding crisis, I tried to contact many transition houses to have a safe place to go with my kids. There were no beds ever, I would call every day. There were days when I couldn't call, because I couldn't call safely.

Then I would call the next day and they would say the bed was taken yesterday. It seemed like the whole world was shut down in that aspect.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

This relationship that I was in was mental abuse mostly and it turned into physical when this person realized that there weren't very many options for me to leave.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

And then I found that the verbal abuse became more increased. I don't know if it was because the time thing, consuming all of our time. It's like a child underfoot, right? You say to them get out, just go somewhere, just go for a walk, get away. Well, many times I felt like saying that, but it was frustrating and. He always blocks the door so I can't be the one to walk out. And insists on his right to talk, to be heard. And when I know it's only going to escalate into violence when it goes to name calling.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

But it was terrible being in a four-wall room with a guy that you don't know has got a temper. That was what I was afraid of. There was no really services because everything was shut down. The only place that I thought of to go to was either to my sister's place or the Women's Centre which was downtown on Main and Hastings. Those were the only two places that I could really go turn to. That was about it.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

It went from physical to mental. As he got older. So, I can't tell you the difference because it's a different kind of violence now, it's mental.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

› Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers cited many factors why violence increased during the pandemic and the obstacles for Indigenous women accessing support services:

- Loss of community connections and support systems due to pandemic restrictions.
- Increased stress, including mental health challenges.
- Uncertainty, layoffs, and unemployment.
- Increased demand for and decreased capacity of existing anti-violence support services.
- A decline in the number of services and programming offered.

› Below we hear from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous women and gender diverse peoples' experiences of IPV:

Restrictions on freedom of movement due to pandemic lockdowns and restrictions. For our services in the transition house, we have had a continuous waitlist for the past 10 months once things opened up again more. This has been really, really difficult because calls are starting to increase. We are not able to operate at full capacity and we are operating at about 80 percent capacity. And

that's just due to proper social distancing and what not throughout the pandemic which is understandable. We unfortunately have not been able to support as many people as are requesting our support services. And that's been difficult, just having that lack of space.

SUPPORT WORKER

I would say that in my experience, this pandemic has increased isolation for Indigenous women and that has led to, I think, a potential increase in violence because women are not necessarily as able to communicate with support, to get time and space away from their abuser. They aren't able to travel to their supports, and their supports cannot travel to them. My experience has been also that I think this pandemic has illuminated the issues that were already there for Indigenous women.

SUPPORT WORKER

Lack of employment or employment impacts affecting income. In general, challenges with employment. There has been a significant amount of layoffs in Northern BC while companies figure out policies related to COVID. Non-vaccinated people laid off because of no vaccination. Increased amounts of layoffs, resulting in break ups and violence.

SUPPORT WORKER

Another aspect of that is that within Indigenous communities, a lot of getting together and connectedness and everything is in person. You know, the big house, long house, all of that happens in person. Funerals,

“I left my relationship. I fled my relationship in October [2021] . . . I was in this long-term relationship for quite some time not knowing how to get out of it. I've noticed during COVID a lot of things shut down. Lack of supports regarding crisis, I tried to contact many transition houses to have a safe place to go with my kids. There were no beds ever, I would call every day. There were days when I couldn't call because I couldn't call safely. Then I would call the next day and they would say the bed was taken yesterday. It seemed like the whole world was shut down in that aspect.”

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

potlatches, everything. So not being able to have those in-person gatherings, I think also really limited the ability for people to just check in and say “Hey, how are you doing? Do you guys need anything? Can I take the kids for a bit, do you need a break?” It’s really impacted overall support for Indigenous women and the ability to just having people that are checking in on you, you know, making sure you’re ok and if something isn’t right, reminding you that you don’t have to tolerate that and you can reach out for support.

SUPPORT WORKER

No Housing, No Escape

Access to a safe home is imperative for women experiencing IPV. While there is an ongoing availability and affordability housing crisis in BC that is both on- and off-reserve, some women reported that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenge of finding affordable and safe housing. This includes safe homes (temporary safe housing like private homes, hotel units, and rental apartments), second-stage housing (transition houses or safe homes), co-ops, non-profit housing, short-term shelters, and supportive housing (non profit subsidized housing, assisted living).

› Below we outline how the lack of access to safe, affordable housing during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the ability of Indigenous survivors of IPV to leave an abusive situation:

But as far as housing, it was kind of difficult because like I said when he raised his voice, people would be calling the cops and I would

be on the list of eviction. So I was homeless with him and the dog. We had to live in a tent on the street. There’s not very many places that you can go that would accept dogs. I was homeless for almost a good year.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

So, housing. The availability is the big thing. And you know, why should I leave my environment? I’ve got a sweet little studio apartment and with his intimidation and stuff you know, I don’t want to leave my environment because of violence anymore. I’m always the one having to uproot myself and get out of the circumstances. They should get out, stay away and leave me alone. Men have to start taking responsibilities for their behaviours.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

Well I would say it was very, very hard for me to, I couldn’t leave, there was really nowhere to go. Like I said, I only had my sister to help me through what I was going through. And she told me that if I ever needed a place to go, I can turn to her, go to her place. But like I said, other than that, there really was nowhere to go, in my situation. And even if I did leave, he would follow me so it was kind of a really scary situation.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

The COVID-19 pandemic also limited spaces in safe or transition houses and limited the willingness of family and friends to house those fleeing abuse. The pandemic also increased the duration that women needed to stay in

“She just lost hope because she had been looking for so long. There was nothing that she could afford. There was no subsidized housing for her. She didn’t have any family that she felt safe to stay with and she didn’t have the funds to travel back to where her family that she would feel safe to stay with lived. And so, she lost hope and she went back to her abusive partner.”

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

safe homes because they were unable to find secondary housing. The pandemic also made it logistically difficult to find potential rental spaces, which are already difficult to secure because of lack of affordable housing, racist misogyny, and discrimination. The impact of the pandemic on housing was particularly acute in areas of BC where people from other areas moved into smaller towns to work remotely, putting additional pressure on an already tight rental market. Several support workers remarked on the prevalence of chronic homelessness over the past two-years “with women couch surfing or living in their cars, particularly because they feel unsafe at homeless shelters” (Support worker, personal communication, 2022).

› To address the capacity restrictions in safe houses during the pandemic, the BC government funded more spaces for women in need, usually in the form of hotel rooms. However, these spaces were not always suitable for Elders, people with disabilities, or women with pets. Nor were these hotel rooms always culturally safe. Support workers gave us several anecdotes of racist misogyny and discrimination against Indigenous women looking for housing. We also heard of the numerous barriers that Indigenous women and gender diverse people face when seeking safe shelter from violent situations:

All of these things are influencing these women’s situations that are just escalating because they keep going back to the individual or into another relationship because there’s no safe place for them to live.

SUPPORT WORKER



Most of the time that I see, they end up going back to the abuser because they can’t afford [housing].

SUPPORT WORKER

We have a transition house, a safe house, two safe houses and then a hotel safe house program. And there were times during the last two years that they were full and you know, women either had to choose between leaving their community or staying in an unhealthy and violent household or relocate to the Lower Mainland. And when you have children or a job it’s very challenging.

SUPPORT WORKER

We’re supporting another Indigenous woman that’s living in her car. She’s been assaulted several times in her car. So she drives around and tries to park in a different place in town so that people can’t find her. She’s very, very unsafe and she’s very, very cold. She comes in in the morning. Each morning she’s waiting at the door, 10 am, to come in and warm up and have a hot cup of coffee. She does not feel safe at the homeless shelter. She’s stayed at the transition house many, many times. And we’re just full right now, we can’t house her unfortunately and so her car is the only option.

SUPPORT WORKER

With more people staying home and not being at work, some mental health stuff flared up for some people. Especially for seniors. Husbands with dementia who are getting violent, no friends to take them in because they were all so scared of COVID. People usually have resources; they have family and friends. Especially at the beginning of the pandemic, people just not willing to take a chance with family and friends.

SUPPORT WORKER

It's just so important that we do find them housing and generally with the way our housing crisis is right now and how long it's taking people; we're seeing a huge increase of women go back to their abusers because they tend to give up.

SUPPORT WORKER

The only thing I can speak to here is my experience of Indigenous women needing to access the safe home more often and I would call it about a 100% increase that just seems to be going up.

SUPPORT WORKER

I have been working with a family for I don't know, maybe 3 or 4 years. And they've tried to leave, the mom has tried to leave the violent relationship two times. And then during the pandemic the severity of the violence was increasing. The children were in a lot of danger. And so MCFD was involved and they were removed, and then Mom left and she went to a transition home with her children. And then what happened

was right before Christmas she just lost hope because she had been looking [for housing] for so long. There was nothing that she could afford. There was no subsidized housing for her. She didn't have any family that she felt safe to stay with and she didn't have the funds to travel back to where her family that she would feel safe to stay with lived. And so, she lost hope and she went back to her abusive partner.

SUPPORT WORKER

Many of the Indigenous women that we have served over the last two years are coming through as chronically homeless. So they actually have no housing or are kind of couch surfing or precariously housed. This is a very dangerous trend and especially for women, it leaves them much more vulnerable.

SUPPORT WORKER

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE >



› We also heard from most Indigenous participants that the challenge with housing existed before COVID-19 emerged, and that it became worse over the course of the pandemic. The housing crisis resulted in women often having no other option but to stay in an abusive situation or return to an abusive household after they have left. Employment, ties to community, and children's schooling also complicate decisions to secure safe housing outside of community. Below we hear more about the challenges that Indigenous survivors of IPV face in accessing housing:

The beginning of COVID, I had my own apartment, which was already pretty pricey being a single parent. I had to have a roommate right, who is my best friend. It was a good situation. My son was safe, I was safe but keeping a job was really hard. But after awhile my roommate had to move out. My mom had been begging me to move home since forever. The day I'm supposed to move in, she tells me you can't move here. My boyfriend is a night worker, he has to sleep during the day so your son can't be here.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I didn't really have much of a choice or where we would go because nobody wanted income assistance plus like a little dog and two children. People just want to rent out like one tiny little closet for \$700 for one person. Like when you would look at the place that you're going to rent, it looks like maybe a den closet off the side of the kitchen that they converted into a bedroom by throwing a mattress on the floor. And so it seemed like the two times prior to now that I tried to leave, we ended up

having to go back because I basically could not raise my kids without having them in a weird environment or unable to find a place.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

It's really hard to access affordable housing for single women because there isn't enough money. The rent is so high, it's crazy, it's really difficult. When I had a partner, there it's half and half and if they're working, it's even better. If you're on your own, you have to do everything on your own. It's really hard, it's expensive. That's why a lot of ladies are ending up in shelters because they can't afford rent.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

It's been horrible. The ways it's been horrible is financially, the rent increase, the lack of safe houses, the fact that my kids have disabilities has also been a setback. Moving into the place I lived in before was super small and crowded. Now the place we live in is big but overpriced. There's no way of being able to do any of it. It was already short before, I tried to flee the relationship more than once in many years and before COVID it was almost easier.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

› Finally, an additional strain on the housing market was identified in regions of interior and northern BC due to the ongoing Trans Mountain pipeline expansion and Coastal Gaslink fracked gas pipeline. Support workers reported that pipeline workers are displacing locals in the housing market, exacerbating an already tense housing situation. As a result, women fleeing abusive relationships had even fewer options in those communities.

Private market housing here has been dramatically affected by the pipeline project. We do have one of the camps for that located, I know this isn't COVID-related but it certainly has provided some additional pressures on what little bit of private market housing we had. Rents have just skyrocketed as a result of the project and workers getting living-out allowances. So, for a woman in our community experiencing intimate partner violence, there are very, very few options. In fact, many women will sort of have to make a choice of whether or not they want to stay in the community because sometimes their only option for housing is to leave.

SUPPORT WORKER

When a woman is trying to get back on her feet, most of the time they are going to be on social assistance and very limited on income. That alone too is another thing that they fear, being judged. So housing is definitely a really tough one for Indigenous women in this area. In [northern BC community] there's that LNG project so the rent went sky high. The rent here for just a two-bedroom small apartment is like \$2200. It is insane.

SUPPORT WORKER

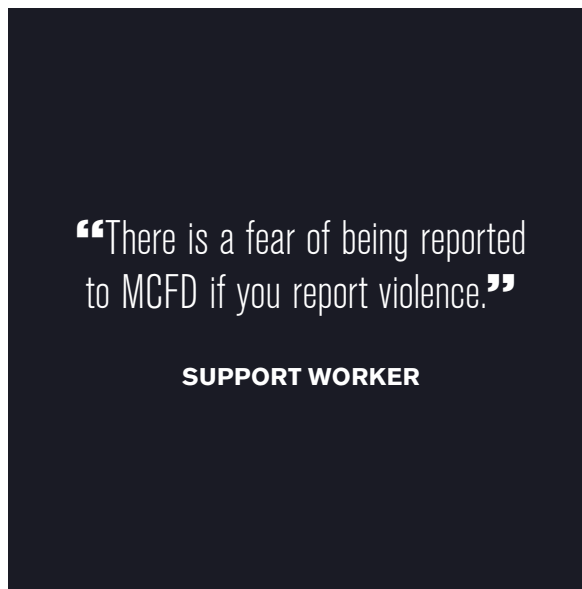
I guess our area might be a little bit different because we also have the pipeline going through, and so that has caused problems for women who have to leave their situation because of violence, looking for a safe place to live.

SUPPORT WORKER

Threats from the State: Child Apprehension and Police Intervention

Ongoing colonial violence through state policies and practices continue to impact Indigenous peoples and are directly linked to high rates of violence experienced among Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. Many participants of this study identified that one of the main barriers preventing Indigenous women from escaping violent situations and reporting abuse is the fear of Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) involvement and mothers having their children removed from their protection and placed into the foster care system.

The fear is not simply a perceived danger; it is a real risk and a reflection of ongoing violent colonial policy that continues to remove Indigenous children from their families at a disproportionate rate. In a 2019 article, Cindy Blackstock, a long-time activist for Indigenous child welfare and Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, revealed that “First Nations children spent a heart-breaking 67-million nights in foster care between 1989 and 2012. That is 12 times the rate of other children in Canada” (Blackstock in [Macleans](#), 2019). Ideologically, child welfare agencies in Canada are an extension of the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop — characterized by the same Eurocentric and genocidal principles. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), “Canada’s child-welfare system has simply continued the assimilation that the residential school system started” ([Truth and Reconciliation Commission Executive Summary](#), 2015, p. 138). Further illustrating



the severity of the crisis, the Chair of the TRC, Justice Murray Sinclair, has stated that “there are now more Indigenous children in the foster care system in Canada than there were in the residential school system” ([Globe and Mail](#), 2018). This pattern has been dubbed by critics of the child-welfare system as the “Millenium Scoop” ([CBC News](#), January 2018). What results is a very real and significant threat to Indigenous women who are seeking out support services to leave an abusive relationship.

› Below we hear from participants about how fear of potential MCFD (or “Ministry”) intervention influences the decisions Indigenous women make about leaving a violent relationship:

Judgement, a lot of the workers that I’ve run into with my experiences are not friendly. It seems that they’re in the wrong kind of work. It’s embarrassing to be judged by someone who is supposed to support you. I’ve run into that many times in reaching out for supports and services. It’s shut me down in many ways, I don’t want to reach out when you’re being judged. There’s been fear of them calling MCFD in the past.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

There’s counsellors through the Ministry of Children and Family but a lot of women will not go that way because they don’t want the Ministry involved in their lives because of stigma, whatever the reason is...we do see a lot of involvement with MCFD and that can be really difficult. While I know they have a really difficult job, I would love if they would be able to support mom when she is experiencing intimate partner violence. Unfortunately, we often see it as kind of coming in you know from a place of power and in a way where mom feels blamed and like it’s her fault. And sometimes there are ultimatums issued that it could go quite differently if there was maybe a little more understanding as well as appreciation of the history of MCFD and Indigenous women.

SUPPORT WORKER

And then if there’s Ministry involvement, that just adds another layer to the complications that women face, if there’s Ministry involvement. Because if that Ministry worker isn’t trauma informed or has a great



awareness of a history of colonization, the women can often feel revictimized or be revictimized. Whether it's through Ministry or our police services or our local hospital if they're seeking treatment. You know, they tend to get those barriers in front of them that are systemic too. It's not just the financial but it's also the systemic barriers that exist that we try to challenge and try to break down in our education of violence against women. And then also recognizing the power imbalance that exists.

SUPPORT WORKER

I think Indigenous women are overrepresented in terms of having Ministry involvement and

often women will become sort of the target of Ministry suspicion and risk losing their children when they leave a relationship which is very ironic and backwards. We do find that women can often fall under suspicion with the Ministry and her parenting is questioned, her mothering skills. So, I think that is a huge barrier, and that fear of losing children probably keeps women away from leaving.

SUPPORT WORKER

Similarly, many Indigenous women can be hesitant to seek out support services and report violence to police due to fear of mistreatment by police themselves. This fact is well known within anti-violence support organizations and

is supported by statistics recently released by the [Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics](#). They report that in Canada, Indigenous women (17%) were more than twice as likely to report having not very much or no confidence in the police compared with non-Indigenous women (8.2%) (Heidinger, [Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics](#), 2022).

Participants in our study reported police inaction and the callous disregard for the safety of Indigenous women as reasons why Indigenous women and gender diverse people do not pursue legal options to protect themselves from violence. Participants explained that police dealt ineffectively with situations of intimate partner violence against Indigenous women. In addition to simply being unwilling to follow through on reports of intimate partner violence or gender-based violence against Indigenous women, police unfairly favour male perpetrators of violence when responding to calls.

➤ Indigenous survivors of IPV explain below how fear of police intervention, including police reporting to MCFD, prevents them from calling for help during violent situations. Participants also offer examples of their past experiences with police and the legal system that reinforced their mistrust of these institutions:

So many times I called, locked in a bathroom, scared, nowhere to go and fearful of calling the police and making it worse. Or having the police involved and taking my kids, or siding with him cause he was a mass manipulator.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I've not had any good experiences with the justice system. I was held against my will for months, beaten, tortured, raped. I went to the police after being drugged and my picture taken. I was 15. To hear the police threw out my case.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

Well right now I think that we need more support from our cops, more understanding. Because right now as it is, the cops are just a one-sided situation, you know? Because they believe they guy over the woman right, it's always that way.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

It's hard for me to trust the legal system there. It feels pointless, what's the point if they're not going to help me? If they're not going to keep people safe with the knowledge I told them. It put me in a place of danger and mentally it destroyed me. That's still a process I go through every day.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

› Many support workers recognized the unique difficulties faced by their Indigenous clients in terms of law enforcement and the justice system. Below we hear from support workers about how the treatment of Indigenous women and gender diverse people by law enforcement and the justice system perpetuates violence and retraumatizes those who reach out to them for help:

The justice system feels so broken to me in terms of like I can understand why Indigenous women don't want to go to the police because nothing ever happens. That's what they say and

that's what I see. And that nothing ever comes of it and it's the hardest experience to tell the story again and half the time not be believed and so much intergenerational trauma there.

SUPPORT WORKER

I just think if the women could have that, the women and their children have that sense of safety where they're able to safely reach out and not put themselves at risk for being under the gun for, you know. "Are you, how are you protecting your children?" If they felt more supported by the workers in the systems that surround them. Whether it's legal or police, any of it. If they just had more advocacy where they actually had safety to speak freely... Because there's a divide and a distrust and a very legitimate distrust that has stemmed from the history in this area and the history of colonization and systemic racism.

SUPPORT WORKER

Given that the child welfare, police, and legal systems form the foundation of gendered colonial violence today, it is no surprise that Indigenous people experiencing IPV are skeptical of the ability of these institutions to protect them when they need it the most. The result is a system of state-sanctioned and state-enabled violence that exacerbates already dangerous situations for Indigenous women and their families when they seek out support services for intimate partner violence. These forms of colonial state violence are distressing and destructive, and the BC provincial government and the Canadian federal government need to address and confront these colonial forms of violence immediately.





But when I did use the crisis line, it would be more helpful if there were more emergency beds open for that crisis.... It would have been more supportive if I could have talked to somebody and have an out, someone who could meet me and put me somewhere safe. That would have been way more helpful, maybe it would have been easier to leave and stay gone, if that makes sense.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

There are some transition houses in [name of city] but I am not familiar with the Aboriginal ones. I don't think there's any to be honest. I know about [local Indigenous community organization], I don't know if it's based on abuse, being in abusive relationships to be honest. I've had to go to [city] for a lot of my services due to lack of supports out here.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

But the one thing that I find, the act of having or travelling to say, if we have a woman that's outside of a catchment area, we don't have any resources to get them to our safe house. We will only provide transportation if it's within 5 or 10 kms from where our safehouse is. I know that in the Lower Mainland, they have the resources, where they will get a bus ticket or a plane ticket, just to get the women to the house, where we are limited very much to a taxi within a few kilometers of a certain area. We are not capable of helping the women get transportation to be in a safe spot. For me it's frustrating, when you're asking the question of oh, how are you going to get here? And they say oh I don't have any way to get

Pre-existing and Ongoing Barriers to Accessing Support Services

Another theme in our conversations was that there are numerous pre-existing and ongoing barriers that Indigenous women and gender diverse people experience when accessing or attempting to access IPV support services in BC. We have grouped these barriers into three categories: structural barriers, social barriers, and systemic barriers.

We learned that Indigenous women and gender diverse people experience **structural barriers** to accessing support services. These structural barriers include availability and funding of transportation, issues with space and capacity at shelters, services being closed or unavailable in the moment they are needed, childcare, cell phone reception/Wi-Fi access, and remoteness.

- › Participants we spoke to described experiences that highlight how these barriers affected their experiences of leaving abusive relationships:

there...Transportation is huge. Bus systems are unreliable. There is no Skytrain here. People might not have access to a vehicle at all.

SUPPORT WORKER

We have no transportation. No Greyhound bus, no taxi. People get stranded here quite often. With more people staying home and not being at work, some mental health stuff flared up for some people.

SUPPORT WORKER

- › Mostly non-Indigenous support workers explained the unique barriers that Indigenous women face as mothers who are having to balance childcare when trying access supports and services:

I've never had childcare. Sometimes I don't have bus fare... I think lack of knowledge of basically any place that can help me is a huge issue.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

When it comes to accessing counselling and different things like that, I definitely see that childcare can definitely be an issue for women. Having childcare so they can focus on something like a counselling session. Even an hour is impossible for some people that have a real lack of supports in their house, or people to help them.

SUPPORT WORKER

So I think there's only 1 or 2 programs, specifically like parenting programs that run that will provide childcare when mom is doing maybe a parenting program.

SUPPORT WORKER

Childcare is another barrier because I don't believe that childcare is offered at all of the different services while accessing support. I know we at the Women's Centre, we try to do the best that we can. If a woman wants to access support, we will try to provide childcare. But I can't speak to the other agencies.

SUPPORT WORKER

Another theme that emerged in conversations with participants was social barriers to accessing support services. These **social barriers** include lateral violence, stigma, racism, and discrimination in accessing housing and healthcare, lack of Indigenous support workers, and lack of awareness/knowledge of supports.

- › In the words of many Indigenous IPV survivors and support workers outlined below, we learn of the diverse array of social barriers that Indigenous women face when trying to access supports and services:

Where I live, no there's not many services. With [local community organization], there is a waitlist, I still haven't heard back from them. You can still call Doc of the Day, but there's a huge waitlist for them. I don't be able to get in to the [local community program] for six months. My other experience with going in to see the doctor. I feel judged. There's no "Hi, how are you doing today?", it's just "Care card please". Then they give you a number to hold and wait. It's very uncomfortable.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I've really never had an Indigenous support worker, hardly ever. And I go to my band office but we usually have white women working there.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I wasn't too comfortable going through that [the transition house]. Because it's a small town, everybody knows everybody and there's a lot of shame around it too. The mother of the father of my son works there and I didn't want to give them another reason to try to take my son away.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

We've been trying to really, really support more Indigenous women but a lot of them just don't feel comfortable coming in because it's not Indigenous led.

SUPPORT WORKER

Well, I'm going to say one of the biggest barriers to accessing supports and services is racism. Systems based racism. The systems are broken. The racism is intergenerational, it's systemic. It is very apparent when women are trying to access services, Indigenous women versus non-Indigenous women, that the systems are set up in my opinion to have women fail, specifically Indigenous women in my opinion.

SUPPORT WORKER

What we've been doing is accessing hotels but there's a lot of stigma with the few hotels we have in town. If we're sending someone who is struggling with mental health or addiction.

There's quite a bit of stigma there. Sometimes they're not willing to give us a space in the hotel. So even when we've got the money to pay for hotels, sometimes hotel providers aren't willing. I would say this area has, there's definitely a lot of racialized issues.

SUPPORT WORKER

Systemic barriers were yet another important theme to emerge from our conversations. These systemic barriers include waitlists, time limits at safe houses, triggering “safe” houses, and lack of services in rural areas for support services and programs, including PEACE and SAIP.

► In the words of many of our participants, we learn of the diverse array of systemic barriers that Indigenous women and gender diverse people face when trying to access supports and services:

I think particularly women living on reserve that have to leave the reserve to come to a transition house, there is a lot of disconnection that can come, disconnection from community, traditions, the land. So yeah, I think that is a huge barrier.

SUPPORT WORKER

Unfortunately, there aren't any more SAIP [Sexual Abuse Intervention Program] certified counsellors anymore in our area. So then they would get referred to that and my

understanding is that then they would have to go again 40 minutes outside of our community to access that service. So when we're talking about young folks, kids who are witnessing abuse, and the Indigenous communities are very rural in our area, kids could be having to travel over two hours to get to an appointment that may last 45 minutes and there's no cultural humility involved in that. So that's definitely a concern.

SUPPORT WORKER

I was assigned a support worker who gave me all of the knowledge that she knew, that I was super grateful for. It wasn't very helpful because of lack of [availability]. At first I went to a hotel. The hotel I went to wasn't a very good one but it was all I could afford. I stayed there until I was able to stay at a transition house in [city]. That one was too far from my kids [from their school] so I wasn't able to stay very long.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I think the band office, the people in authority in the band need to get involved more in our children's lives and more stuff with the families. Our Chief, our Council, everybody, there needs to be more. My kids don't really get support from the band which they should. So, I don't know, why is that?... I asked them, are

you guys getting any support from your band office, they tell me, no we're not. That's why I had to leave my village to come out and get the support I needed.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

One thing that we've noticed that's lacking in our community is we have a safe home which is up to 10 days and then we have a second stage housing if it's available that could be up to a year. But we don't have, within 10 days we need to have figured out a place to move this individual or family so whether it's just themselves or yeah.... So we really only have 10 days unless our second stage is available. So that is a big issue because to be removed, to have to move somewhere else for, until I guess everything that needs to be figured out can be figured out is adding to the trauma that they've already suffered through.

SUPPORT WORKER

I would say that making things more culturally safe would be moving away from the institutionalization of transition houses and safety supports. So for instance we've removed, we don't have keys to our house, it's all pin pads. Women are triggered, it's been our learning that women can be triggered by the sounds of keys, hard knocking.

SUPPORT WORKER

We learned that Indigenous women and gender diverse people experience structural barriers to accessing support services.

“It was very difficult for me, just to get help anywhere because basically when COVID hit, everything was shut down. I had no support, everything like that.

I couldn't go to the grieving place, there where they get together and grieve and talk about it. That was very difficult when things got shut down.

I got into a little bit of a relationship but it couldn't work out. Just everything with COVID. Him too, he couldn't get a job, things were really stressful.”

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

COVID-specific Barriers to Accessing Support Services

There are many pandemic-related barriers that have emerged in the past two years that make accessing support services extremely difficult, including the impacts of lockdowns, restrictions, and public health measures on service delivery for anti-violence organizations and other non-profits. Our interviews brought to light several detrimental effects on anti-violence support service organizations. Support workers mentioned the difficulty of providing services during the COVID-19 pandemic due to strains on internal capacity. Pressures such as physical space, shortages of staff, and needing to limit COVID exposures all posed significant barriers to fully functioning support services.

› One support worker described in detail having to balance keeping women safe from COVID with ensuring that the transition home remained available for people fleeing unsafe and abusive situations:

I want to say we're a very low barrier transition house and we are, but COVID has certainly created some challenges for us just in terms of that balance between having a pandemic plan in place because it's a work site versus you know, really it being a home for folks for a temporary period of time. So, we did have to implement some tighter rules around folks' exposure in the community... That created some challenges for us that we weren't always able to utilize the maximum number of beds that we have. Because we had to be conscious of how many folks we could have in there potentially isolating and having their own space. Before COVID, if we needed to, we would have two women in a room. And with COVID that had to be eliminated... It did impact the number of women that we could have coming in... The other piece that we did have to look at, being a low-barrier transition house. We did have prior to COVID, we would have women who were homeless that would be able to come and stay for a certain amount of time. And with the pandemic plan, we did have to eliminate that just because of the additional risk that that posed to staff.

SUPPORT WORKER

› Below we highlight some of the ways in which Indigenous survivors of IPV and mostly non-Indigenous support workers described these COVID-specific challenges:

Waitlists, yes. Waitlists and calling and having to get an answering machine. And having someone say they'll call you back. And that's not good, when you try to call somebody in immediate crisis and you have to wait. So that was frustrating. And like I said, there was nobody around, no support workers, no nothing. Before [COVID], there was so many things readily available between the Friendship Centre, between this service [BWSS], between the Women's Centre, and Atira Housing. There was just so many available support services that you could have accessed. Cultural diversity, support.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

The support that they did have for abused women and their children was already tight before COVID and after COVID it becomes even more scarce. But then the aftermath. I'm in a position now where I'm safe from being



abused but we are in danger of other things like losing our place due to high rent, high bills. Low income, like I'm not in a position where I can afford what I'm paying for right now. But I have to choose because if I don't pay what I pay now I could lose my kids to MCFD, I could end up on the streets with them. But this situation we are in is still better, but we are struggling. There is not much support for the aftermath I find because of COVID right? Everyone is in crisis.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I don't know very much about the supports in this community. I have reached out but like I

said, COVID has really messed things up. It's really hard to get help because of the COVID, it has restricted a lot of things. I don't know too much about the resources in [location] right now.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

In [location] I had some support there. When COVID hit, I was seeing my support worker which was really helpful. I couldn't go into my own band office because of COVID, I couldn't go see my support worker because of COVID. And it's hard over the phone, to get things done and just to talk, it's difficult... I got to know her [support worker] really well, I got to

trust her. She's there for me, I could trust her. After [COVID] I couldn't get in the vehicle, to look for places or anything. She's not allowed anyone in the vehicle because of COVID. You need transportation to where you're going, maybe to the doctors for example. Especially if it's - 40 degree weather.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I feel like because of this COVID, all of us feel like we're on our own. We feel like we're doing this on our own and it's difficult.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

Also there are waitlists for sure. I know there's big waitlists with Vancouver Coastal Health mental health and child and youth mental health. They've had a lot of waitlists during COVID. In fact, some of the work I've taken on as a Peace counsellor this past year in particular has been providing service to children and youth who are on the child and youth mental health waitlist.

SUPPORT WORKER

Waitlists. Like too long, it's like, you know how many times I made up with him? And then my name would come up and that day we would be in the honeymoon stage, we would just be very in love, eh? So it's all good. Then when things fall to shit, well of course the waiting list is going to be another 10 years, because of COVID, forget it. It's full.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

With the huge waitlists we do have a waitlist for counselling... So it's hard for women to be

able to access services. I also believe in the Friendship Centre, a lot of the services had to be cut back due to COVID. And not having appropriate childcare for the women to do the programming or to access the services such as Legal Aid or counselling for themselves is to have that childcare which has been really, really difficult as well.

SUPPORT WORKER

- › An additional barrier is related to technology. Participants expressed concern over a lack of literacy to use platforms like Zoom or that being at home provided them with nowhere private to talk. In other situations, participants indicated that Zoom facilitated easier counselling access, but it came with several challenges and complications.

Additional challenges related to technology included:

- cancelled programs.
- online counselling (privacy, access, childcare challenges).
- increased waitlist times were a deterrent.
- increased isolation, feeling alone/without the support of family and friends.

It's been my experience that most of the resources are looking to alleviate barriers. And so, having it virtually versus in-person is important and it works except that then we're running into barriers around women and technology. So women have had to flee and don't have cellphones. In the early stages of COVID and the pandemic, some large companies, Telus communication company, Telus, Rogers were providing cell phones and minutes. That was one of the most helpful things that we have experienced in my time working in transition house. Because that's probably one of the biggest barriers is the technology piece.

SUPPORT WORKER

I would say another barrier too is with COVID specifically, when it comes to our counsellors and therapy on reserve because we're a small community, we've been taking so many extra precautions when it comes to the spread of COVID. All of our counsellors have moved online. I can only imagine that if women are in their homes and if they're unsafe, how can they actually access counselling even in an online format like Zoom?

SUPPORT WORKER

But even with COVID, a lot of that has been cancelled and it's virtual. So having the capabilities of women to use electronics to connect via Zoom and feeling comfortable. And having the time to have Zoom and have somebody watch your kids so you can actually focus on the meeting or the programming is a big one.

SUPPORT WORKER

- › Of course, technology does also enable easier and increased access to programming. One support worker discussed how accessing services virtually has broken down barriers for some:

And actually I have to say that because of COVID a lot of the things have changed where people have accessed services from the comfort of their own home, where they might not have ever accessed it because they had to leave their home. Things like Zoom appointments, and telephone appointments, that's been a great move for many people who just can't financially afford or get a ride, they don't have a vehicle, they live too far out of town.

SUPPORT WORKER

This chapter highlighted the numerous barriers to accessing supports and services for Indigenous women and gender diverse people, a challenge that is especially heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the voices of Indigenous survivors of IPV and support workers, it is clear to us that there have been numerous structural, social, and systemic barriers experienced by Indigenous women and gender diverse people fleeing intimate partner violence. In addition, many COVID-19 barriers have emerged in the past two years that make accessing support services extremely

difficult, and many of these barriers are related to restrictions posed by lockdowns and public health measures. The lack of safe and affordable housing, the threat of MCFD and/or police involvement, inadequate access to transportation and childcare, and the closure of support services all negatively impacted the road to safety. This highlights the urgent need for multifaced solutions that improve access to IPV services and offer an array of options to respond to a diversity of circumstances for Indigenous survivors.

Ensuring Culturally Safe and Appropriate Support Services



The need for culturally safe and appropriate supports is a major theme that was woven throughout our conversations with Indigenous IPV survivors and support workers. Indigenous women and gender diverse people need to access support services that are Indigenous-specific and Indigenous-led. Indigenous IPV survivors spoke about the impact of not having Indigenous support workers. Some survivors reflected on their negative experiences with non-Indigenous support workers. Indigenous survivors of IPV also told us that mainstream, non-Indigenous led service providers have a limited understanding of what culturally appropriate services are and how they should be provided. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers expressed the need for culturally safe supports and services for Indigenous women and gender diverse people accessing anti-violence services in BC.

What is Cultural Safety?

The concept of cultural safety was first introduced in the 1990's by Irihapeti Ramsden, a Māori nurse and scholar in Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Koptie, 2009 in [First Nations Health Authority, 2022](#)), as a response to historical and ongoing health disparities between Māori people and other New Zealanders. Ramsden recognized that the lack of education about colonialism in the public education system in Aotearoa led to nurses being trained and accredited to practice and serve Māori people without an understanding of the impacts that colonialism has

had on health outcomes ([Ramsden, 2002, p. 2](#)). Ramsden saw a need for educational reform that would transform relationships between healthcare providers and Māori people and lead to improved health outcomes for Māori people.

The concept has since been applied to health systems across the world, including in Canada, where colonialism has impacted health outcomes. According to the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), “cultural safety is an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the healthcare system. It results in an environment free of racism

and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving care” ([First Nations Health Authority, p. 10](#)). Cultural safety moves beyond the concept of cultural sensitivity to analyzing power imbalances, institutional discrimination, colonization, and colonial relationships as they apply to health care systems and many kinds of support services.

The transformative capacity of cultural safety can be applied to a variety of environments where power imbalances exist between providers of services and their clients. Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people experiencing IPV require and deserve culturally safe and appropriate anti-violence support

“They were understanding, especially when I did talk with an Indigenous woman. Because I felt that she understood me a lot more than a white woman would. Because when I talk with a white woman about my situation, I felt that she looked at me like I asked for it, sort of thing. Which made me feel a bit uncomfortable talking about my situation with her. I’m talking about the white woman. I just felt like, I didn’t, like we [are] on a different level. She was kind of looking down at me, sort of thing. I really didn’t care for that kind of feeling.”

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

services. Cultural safety within an anti-violence context means that support service staff can communicate competently and meaningfully with a client’s social, political, linguistic, economic, and spiritual perspectives and belief systems. Culturally safe and appropriate transition houses and safe houses are desperately needed for Indigenous survivors.

When we asked participants about how to make supports and services more culturally safe for Indigenous women and gender diverse people, the responses stressed the importance of addressing the impacts of colonization and trauma by augmenting, improving, and adding to existing anti-violence supports. Participants noted that for mainstream/settler service providers this means creating culturally safe spaces that foster guidelines rather than strict rules, moving away from the institutionalization of transition homes and safe homes, and involving Elders for guidance and healing. This must be the focus of mainstream service providers moving forward.

› Below we hear from support workers about some improvements that need to be made in mainstream support services:

Everybody that’s working with [Indigenous women] needs to have a baseline training in cultural safety. And have done a little bit of that work on their own in terms of unpacking their own biases and privilege, those pieces that are so important to have cultural humility. And then really all the feminist intersectional practices like centering the women as the experts in their own lives, as the expert in their own experience. Listening to them, believing them. These all seem so foundational but it’s not what is happening out there.

SUPPORT WORKER

I think there’s a real lack of culturally specific training and education for all the service providers and social service in this community. So I think that would be. There’s just a real lack of education about it and I think our clients know that. They know and they can tell when they’re working with someone where that is maybe culturally incompetent I’ll say. They sense it and they know and I know it’s a put-off. It becomes a barrier for them accessing services and I’ve seen that certainly since I’ve been here.

SUPPORT WORKER

Meeting the client where they’re at and not asking them in these moments of crisis and trauma, not asking them to push their comfort zone to go somewhere to get to an appointment that just is so, you know. It’s hard enough for them just to like get out of the house. And so, how can we, I guess just more outreach services. How can we go to the women, not ask them to come to us? I think that that would be really helpful.

SUPPORT WORKER

Especially in times where Indigenous women have felt that they haven’t had a good experience with your services, to be open and willing to change what we can.

SUPPORT WORKER

Either having more non-profit housing, more long-term housing for them and having an outreach worker that is specifically connected and having an understanding of the history would be very, very helpful for them. So the women may not feel so alone and can get connected easier.

SUPPORT WORKER



Ideally we would have some additional funding for culturally relevant foods. It would be nice to be able to get whether it's salmon, or it's game meat, or tinctures, berries in the summertime that have been naturally harvested. And just being able to get women and their families and their children specifically back out onto the land. And healing their trauma in a land-based way from the teachings of their Elders and their ancestors... But, is that culturally safe today because not we're looking at Elders getting really inundated with these requests. And so, there's a fine line and there's a balance there between providing more culturally safe spaces and over asking from the culture to sort of right our wrongs.

SUPPORT WORKER

› In addition to the crucial task of ensuring that existing support services become more culturally safe, it is important to increase the number of Indigenous-led and Indigenous-specific support workers. Numerous Indigenous IPV survivors we spoke to discussed the lack of Indigenous support workers and/or cultural programming in support services they accessed and some of the negative issues they have had in interactions with non-Indigenous support workers:

We are judged as soon as we walk in the door. It's all white people looking at us and we have our kids. We need help and you're looking at us like aliens. We need to have our own people to deal with.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I've tried to do that counselling a couple times but just wasn't comfortable and felt judged. I've never met a First Nations counsellor at any counselling company that I was referred to ever. We need to be seen and heard more.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

They don't really do too much. The transition houses. Here I haven't met a native worker here at all, no. Same with the one in [interviewee's home community], there were no [Indigenous] women there.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

The issues that I had with judgement were from the non-Indigenous support workers. For Aboriginal services, there wasn't many, but there was an option to meet with the Indigenous worker. They were trying on a cultural basis, if you were First Nations to meet with someone who was also First Nations but there wasn't a lot of cultural things happening.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

And so you have to develop a little bit of a relationship with your support workers. That's why a lot of people don't access services, Indigenous or otherwise. Because they don't know, and there's a trust factor. So if there was more Elders available, like you know, in residence, 24/7, an Elder that is willing to be called on and there for you.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

› We also heard from an Indigenous support worker who discussed working with Indigenous clients, and the benefit that Indigenous staff members can provide to Indigenous people accessing services:

I've seen a First Nation person come into our society and right away she wants to connect with a First Nations person. Right away they're connecting with me. I don't know, I don't think I've had a really bad experience, but they sometimes say they do. We have every nationality in our society. There is a little bit of racism, the women sometimes don't feel heard. Sometimes they want to talk to a First Nations person because they're not feeling heard properly.

SUPPORT WORKER

› Although most of the support workers we spoke to were non-Indigenous, there were a few Indigenous support workers we were able to connect with. The Indigenous support workers below offered insights into what their organizations are doing to ensure that the services and programming they offer are as welcoming as possible:

I think we need more, like a safe place for First Nation women to go to that they can feel safe at. And it is just for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women, that's what we need. I try to do that when I'm at work, I really do bring our First Nations culture to my work with me.

INDIGENOUS SUPPORT WORKER

We've been in the process of trying to decolonize our organization as a whole. Like there's some things where it is, we go by the rules but we try to not make it so colonial. We have all our Indigenous artwork in the rooms. We allow women to smudge and pray. We have our Elders who come in for talking circles and they're doing more cultural workshops at our head office. So like

ribbon skirt making or drum making. Or they're doing ceremonies for the full moon, like different types of ceremonies. So it's a process but it's on its way. Because we try, like even our ED wants to change the language. So like not calling them our clients... we call them our Sister or our Family. She doesn't like it, well she's the main enforcer of trying to decolonize or make it more home-y. The only thing is some people don't like some of the rules that we have because we try to keep it, equal across the board so that everyone feels safe and comfortable. So a lot of people who do enjoy it, they say even just walking into the house, they're like "wow it feels so home-y. It's so welcoming, it feels safe".

INDIGENOUS SUPPORT WORKER

Every interview that was conducted with support workers asked the question "What types of supports would be most helpful for Indigenous women (and their children) when facing intimate partner violence?" Follow up probing questions included: "What is missing? What would support workers need to make a difference for women and children in their community?" Support workers provided examples of how organizations can make a difference for Indigenous women and gender diverse people experiencing IPV in their community. The following table summarizes interview responses we heard from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers who provide services to Indigenous women and gender diverse survivors of intimate partner violence.



TABLE 7. RESPONSES TO QUESTION 6

Q6. What types of supports would be most helpful for Indigenous women (and their children) when facing Intimate Partner Violence?

Indigenous domestic peace worker.

Free transportation with a driver.

An Elder advisor, somebody who can work with the family, prior to MCFD [involvement]. Indigenous family support.

More childcare options such as an Indigenous daycare.

Cultural safe spaces including housing, cultural safety

Indigenous-specific and Indigenous-led services

Choice of whether they can stay or leave reserve

Not addressing the abuser – impetus and onus on the women to find safety for herself, what about the men who get to stay in the house, on reserve, in community?

Trauma-informed supports

Cultural training for support workers

Full-time Indigenous workers in transition houses and cultural humility training for all service providers

Easier access to counselling – services in community

Men need more help than what is offered right now and we need to find a cultural format that they can identify with so they can work through their trauma, and not pass that on to their children

Mental health supports in community

In conclusion, we heard from support workers that there are obvious improvements needed in mainstream support services for them to become culturally safe. We also heard from Indigenous IPV survivors that they need to be able to share their perspectives in a culturally-safe environment, have people listen, and be treated respectfully by support service professionals. Indigenous participants also expressed the need for culturally-safe appreciation of their beliefs, behaviours, and values. Listening to Indigenous women and gender diverse people and what they say with the intent to act is critically important. This is a way to generate more knowledge and awareness on the horrific ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities and to transform the horrific realities of violence for Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people.



CHAPTER SIX

Eliminating Intimate Partner Violence



While much of this research project has been focused on understanding specific barriers that Indigenous women and gender diverse people face in accessing anti-violence supports and services, this work ultimately seeks to understand how to completely end intimate partner violence and gender-based violence against Indigenous women and gender diverse people.

Survivors of intimate partner violence are the experts of their experiences and our team wanted to amplify the voices of Indigenous IPV survivors we spoke to. We also sought to hear the perspectives of support workers who provided services to Indigenous women experiencing IPV. To that end, every interview we conducted ended with the question “What needs to happen to eliminate intimate partner violence?” We wanted to know what Indigenous women and gender diverse people who have experienced IPV and those workers who support them would offer as solutions to eliminate IPV. What we heard from participants was wide in breadth, indicating that ending intimate partner violence will require diverse solutions. Much of what we heard from participants during the in-depth interview process echoes what we heard from survey respondents (for more information, refer to **Table 6**).

Participant Recommendations on Eliminating Intimate Partner Violence

There are five themes that emerged from our conversations with Indigenous IPV survivors and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers that are related to eliminating intimate partner violence:

1. Early intervention.
2. Overhaul of anti-violence service provision.
3. Emergency transportation for Indigenous women and gender diverse people fleeing IPV.
4. Empowering women with access to housing and childcare.
5. Overhaul of police and justice system responses to IPV and consequences for perpetrators of violence.

“I think getting close to the Earth and having the experience of some of the culturally available things. I wish we had, cause they took down the two sweat lodges. You have to build a sweat lodge and I wish we had a women's lodge, like a real healing lodge like the old days where we could leave the camp and leave from them.”

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

A sixth theme, Engaging and Supporting Men and Boys, is highlighted in greater detail in the following chapter.

Below we outline the first five themes. We hear from interview participants about why these recommendations are important and how these approaches should be put into action.

1. Early intervention

- Starting at school age, the education system should ensure that children and youth are gaining knowledge, awareness, and education of healthy relationships, healthy communications, and consent-based behavior.
- Emergency intervention workers outside the formal system are urgently needed. They should be able to intervene ahead of time, thereby reducing family stress and uncertainty that can lead to intimate partner violence.
- Violence prevention interventions and strategies should meet families at home, where they're at, and with their needs in mind.
- Early violence prevention and intervention should include comprehensive and culturally safe mental health programming, as well as funded, accessible, and available cultural rehabilitation centres.

An Indigenous outreach worker that could come and if you're isolated in your home, you'd be able to come out and communicate, see if you were ok.

Maybe sit and share some tea. Cause sometimes you just have to know that there's somebody who cares, for you to open up. Because talking about the things that happened to you, or the abuse in your relationship, is intimate.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I definitely would like to look into counselling, I know that I need it. In 2006, maybe 2007, I joined a program there with [local community organization]. It gave me insight, that I don't have to be abused anymore. Then the program ended and the abuse started again.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

Especially intergenerational abuse in residential schools that's carried on. It's never talked about or faced, it's hushed. There's so much guilt and shame about it. If we don't face it, it's going to get worse. What we should be putting our foundations on. How to ground ourselves and how to know what we deserve, and how to take care of ourselves in the way we deserve. The relationship that you have with yourself, the relationship you have with your environment, and how to build strong relationships to build your foundation upon in life.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

Shelters play a huge role absolutely in providing that safe space for people. But if you really actually want to end intimate partner violence, then there needs to be a huge increase in available mental health programs, specifically to meet Indigenous needs because they are very unique. We need more cultural rehabilitation centres, and not just

rehabilitation centres specifically for substance abuse, but Indigenous communities need a huge increase in cultural rehabilitation centres that deal with grief, trauma, and the impacts of colonization.

SUPPORT WORKER

2. Overhaul of anti-violence service provision

- Comprehensive training for non-Indigenous staff members of anti-violence organizations regarding colonization, as well as training in trauma-informed service provision. The same training should be made available to professionals from different sectors who serve Indigenous women, such as police, MCFD, medical professionals, and lawyers.
- Additional Indigenous women and gender diverse people need to be trained and hired within anti-violence and women's support organizations.
- Increase the capacity of safe homes beyond short-term stays of 10-90 days. Short stays, especially stays in length of 30-days or less, make it nearly impossible for Indigenous women to build a better and safer life for themselves.
- There should be less, and ideally zero, wait times for Indigenous women fleeing immediate violence. When a woman calls for help, she should receive immediate assistance.

So I think our law enforcement, our medical profession, our lawyers, I think they need to be, it would be a great benefit to be more informed for the ones that aren't, about the historical history of these lands that we work on. And to just bring it into the awareness of their work with compassion.

SUPPORT WORKER

I think that as a society we all need to learn more about the impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities and how that relates to their trauma.

SUPPORT WORKER

Even with the transition homes, the 30-day stay thing is really, it's just so short. Especially people who have experienced traumatic situations. It's really hard. Sometimes those 30 days are just sort of like coming out of the fog. But when they go to a transition home, they're expected to immediately [find long-term housing]. And you have to, if you're going to find somewhere safe for yourself and for your children to stay. 30 days is so short and they might have experienced something really traumatic and then they've got to immediately go into looking for housing. It's just really hard, that 30 days is so quick and some women are just processing a lot.

SUPPORT WORKER

I'm going to say first off it would be full time Indigenous workers in transition houses where women are fleeing domestic violence. I would say additional training in cultural humility for all service providers would definitely be helpful. I think that collaboration between Indigenous communities and I'm talking collaboration, like



a level collaboration, this is not top down. This is not us going to them, this is the Indigenous communities coming to us wanting to collaborate around supports so that we can provide supports or have supports in place that are going to work for them. It would be ideal if they could let us know what they need and how they need it.

SUPPORT WORKER

3. Emergency transportation for Indigenous women and gender diverse people fleeing IPV

- All levels of government need to ensure the funding of emergency transportation for Indigenous women fleeing intimate partner violence. This transportation system needs

to be fully funded and available 24/7 upon immediate request and provided for both short and long distances. In communities where emergency transportation is not already available, especially in northern communities, the provincial government should implement this emergency and fully accessible and available transportation service.

[Participants' community] has a really not reliable public transportation system... There's like 3 taxis in town, and it's so expensive. The other day I had a client wait for 2.5 hours for a taxi. And then that obviously just becomes a barrier to like leaving the house or getting any support because it's so hard to get around. And [the community] is really spread out so if you live on the other end of town, you just

can't walk, it's too far. And the support services are also, they're not all located downtown or in one area. They're all across town as well and not close to the reserve.

SUPPORT WORKER

So another big barrier is if we do find housing that's in a neighboring town, there's no more Greyhound or transportation. Even if we do find housing that's say out of town, it's very hard to get people there and a lot of our clients don't have access to vehicles or have vehicles at all.

SUPPORT WORKER

It's hard because of where we're situated and with no public transportation between the communities. I would say it's quite isolated here. Not just for us but if we were trying to refer to services outside of the community, it's really tough for people to get there. We're in the middle of the mountains too so wintertime it's extra hard.

SUPPORT WORKER

4. Empowering women with access to housing and childcare

- Support women's independence and wellbeing by providing safe, free, and universal childcare.
- Subsidized, quality housing, including Indigenous-specific housing, should be available to Indigenous IPV survivors immediately and upon need.
- For women who wish to do so, support women to stay in their own homes so they don't lose their housing.

The top of the list by far is safe and accessible housing. It's so hard to support Indigenous women with children when they don't have a safe place to go. We see it over and over and over again that they go back to violent, unsafe relationships that are really, really hard for the children and of course really, really, really hard for the women.

SUPPORT WORKER

Need to put in place housing, more safe places for women. Where families aren't split up. More safe housing for women in BC and all over the place. More affordable housing. Yeah, just counselling, stuff like that...More housing, more financial funding to help the families that are leaving. Maybe for like a year afterwards, because it takes a long time to get your life together after something like that. Having the services there with no wait list. More counselling for the whole family. Just more of everything that is already happening but with less waitlists and non-judgemental people.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

Government reopening another Indigenous housing fund which would allow a number of Indigenous organizations to apply for these housing funds, which would allow communities to address these needs.

SUPPORT WORKER

I would like to reiterate that it can be very challenging for women to receive services in communities where childcare is not available. It's been our experience that many women, many Indigenous women have young children that need to be looked after and that duty is consistently

falling on my staff or their friends and family and if they're not connected then that can be a big challenge too.

SUPPORT WORKER

5. Overhaul of police and justice system responses to IPV and consequences for perpetrators of violence

- Police should treat Indigenous women with full respect and dignity. Victim-blaming of Indigenous survivors as a general police response to intimate partner violence needs to come to an end. Indigenous women reporting intimate partner violence should be believed by police, and their cases should be followed up on with rigorous examination and commitment to duty.
- Harsher consequences for perpetrators of violence including stricter sentencing for gender-based/intimate partner violence that more accurately reflects the seriousness of the offenses.
- Police and the justice system should employ a zero-tolerance for approach to intimate partner violence.

Believe women when they tell you they've experienced violence, believing that to be true is often a huge part of that. They are told there's not enough evidence to support what has happened and that the system can't do anything to help them.

SUPPORT WORKER

Having police and the justice system support women that are either disclosing abuse or disclosing and reporting abuse.

SUPPORT WORKER

I don't think you can eliminate it because, well like there's always going to be violent people and there's not even like really penalty for them being violent. They get one day in jail and then a year later it's addressed. So it seems like there's no consequence for them. It doesn't matter how much times they've been violent or anything. So, it just never changes.

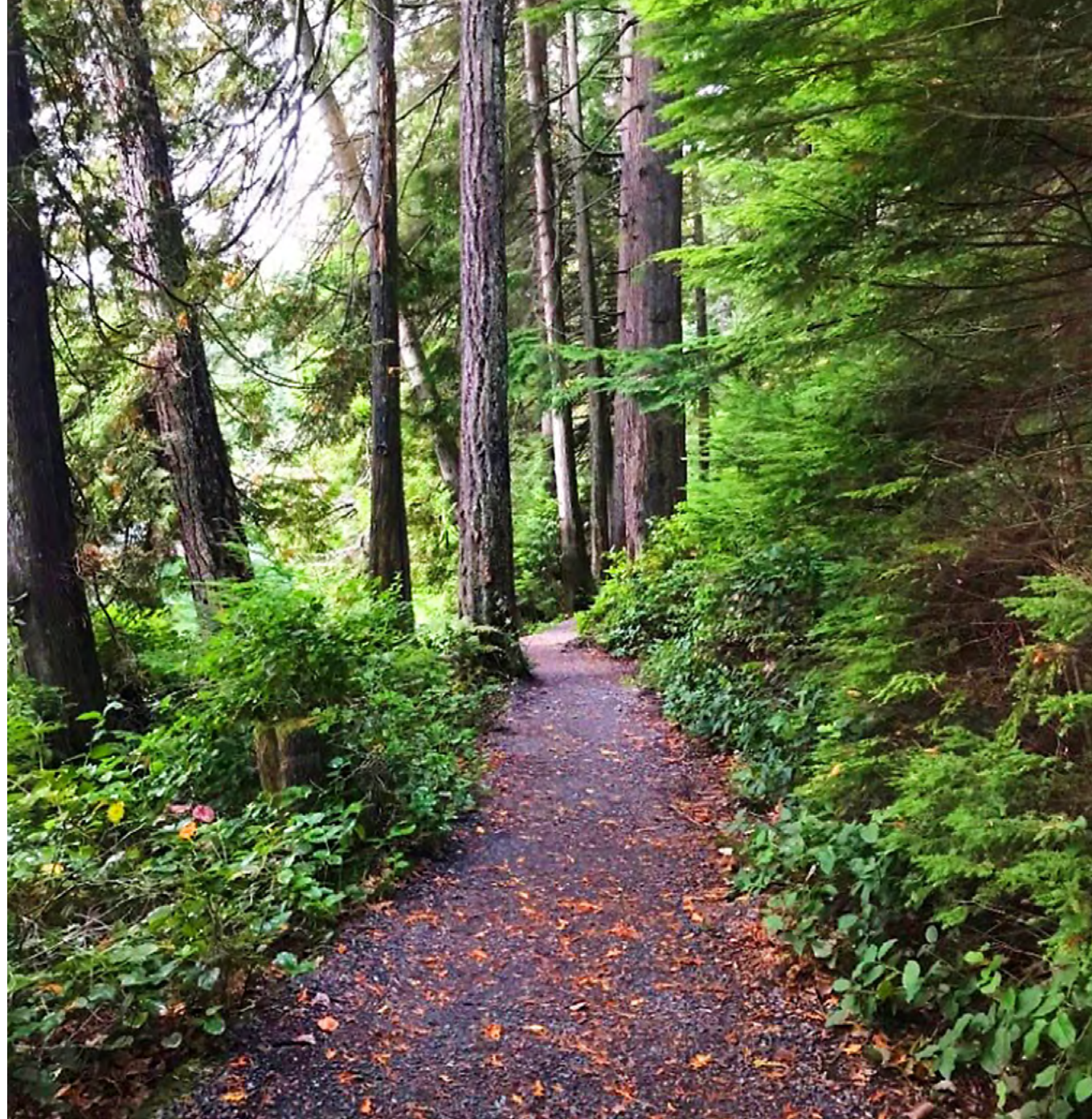
INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

I do believe there needs to be harsh consequences because if I know what the consequences are to a certain behaviour, I think I would choose better. At least if I knew that this was going to happen. And I guess that's part of the problem in our world, people get away with doing certain things and they keep doing those same things.... Without consequences it'll continue to happen. I think that unfortunately, our consequences, they're not consistent. People aren't concerned with not doing it. Unfortunately, violence continues.

SUPPORT WORKER

I think the justice system needs to be overhauled. If murderers got off at the rate that perpetrators of domestic violence get off, we would change the justice system.

SUPPORT WORKER



CHAPTER SEVEN

Engaging and Supporting Men and Boys



There can be no discussion of violence against women without recognition of the fact that patriarchy, and cis-heteropatriarchy⁴ specifically, is the reason that GBV and IPV are as pervasive as they are. To eliminate both IPV and GBV, the impact of patriarchy on men and boys will need to be addressed and overcome. Men face pressure to maintain a version of masculinity that is contingent on the subjugation of women. Predictably then, the majority of those who commit intimate partner violence and gender-based violence continue to be men and the majority of those who are victims of IPV and GBV continue to be women and gender diverse people. In 2019 in Canada, nearly 80% of all victims of intimate partner violence reported to police were women (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2020). Of the Indigenous women and gender diverse people who responded to our survey, 78% reported that the individuals who committed intimate partner violence against them were male.

A prominent theme to emerge from participant responses to the question of eliminating intimate partner violence is the urgent need to engage men and boys in preventing intimate partner violence and gender-based violence. Participants acknowledged that men are often the perpetrators of IPV and GBV and, as such, eliminating intimate partner violence requires preventative strategies aimed at supporting healthy masculinities. The goal of intervening in patriarchal violence is to ensure that solutions are upstream, and that early-stage interventions transform harmful dynamics of power and control inherent to intimate partner violence.

Engaging Men and Boys in Preventing IPV and Dismantling Patriarchy

Participants in our study noted that more programs should be available for all men and boys wanting to build healthy relationships and mechanisms to cope with trauma at a young age, before they turn to the use of violence. Men currently face societal stigma and are often mocked for expressing emotions in healthy ways and for accessing mental health resources. This makes it necessary to ensure that programs are developed, implemented,

⁴ Cis-Heteropatriarchy is “a system of power and control that positions cis-straight white males as superior and normative in their expression of gender and sexuality (Harris, 2011; Smith, 2006). An assumed logic of deficiencies and static binaries undergirds the continued socio-cultural, legal and institutional marginalization of multiple gender and sexual identities that do not conform with heteronormativity, as well as the continued authority of masculine expressions over the feminine (Schilt, 2009; Woodson & Pabon, 2016).” in *Unleading, Systems of Oppression*, “Cis-Heteropatriarchy” <https://www.yorku.ca/edu/unleading/systems-of-oppression/cis-heteropatriarchy/>

and funded to engage men and boys to dismantle patriarchy and strengthen their emotional capacities. This includes anti-violence education and awareness programming for boys starting in school and in the community at a young age, learning about consent and healthy relationships, and culturally safe mental health supports for Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and boys.

This work is important not only to ensure that men are working towards eliminating gender-based violence, but also to shift the responsibility of ending patriarchy onto men. Below we hear from Indigenous survivors of IPV and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers about why men must be held accountable for their actions and the types of supports needed for men and boys to make this happen:

I spoke to a woman who has worked in this field for – she’s 75 – and she’s been working in this field for 40 something years. She said, you know, we’ve been teaching women or trying to teach women how to keep safe, how to get out, how to heal themselves after they’ve experienced abuse. But what we really need to do is educate men and boys. And I strongly believe in that and it’s something I’ve been thinking about a lot lately.

SUPPORT WORKER

When a woman experiences violence, the whole narrative becomes about her and what she is doing and not about him and what he has done. The man gets kind of eliminated and the problem becomes her problem.

SUPPORT WORKER

We need to, we need government funding for men who use violence, that voluntarily would like to stop using violence. So, when men reach out to us and feel like ‘I don’t love what I’m doing, I want to make a change, I feel like I’m losing my wife and kids’. Right now, there is no program for men who want to do change work. Their partners say go get help.

SUPPORT WORKER

Also having programs where adults or adolescents could go to and talk about things like this openly and without judgement. Groups, quality of life groups where things like this are talked about. Not just having women but men be involved in this too.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

If we want to stop violence against women, we have to stop men who use violence. I don’t think we understand enough why it happens, and how to respond when it happens, so that that perpetrator is not able to reoffend.

SUPPORT WORKER

I think it starts with men receiving services, counselling services, mental health support in terms of healing their own trauma from their childhoods. And learning skills, tools, strategies, techniques to, I guess, just like to be a man and not the way that they’re taught to be. For them to learn ways to express their emotions in a safer way. So, supports for men. And education for men around what healthy relationships look like and not leaving the onus all on the woman to get out of an unhealthy relationship. But what about putting the onus on men to not put women in unhealthy relationships. So that would be a good start.

SUPPORT WORKER

I would like to see more education for young men around intimate partner violence. I would like to see a lot of work around consent and what consent looks like, what it feels like, that it’s ongoing, that it’s forever changing, that it’s a fluid environment.

SUPPORT WORKER

Suggesting that men receive supports and services can be traumatic for those survivors who have righteous rage towards men who are abusers, which is why it is key that any funding for programming for men does not interfere or take away from available funding or programming for women and gender diverse survivors. Many of the Indigenous survivors and Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers whom we interviewed mentioned that funding for additional programs and supports directed toward men cannot be taken from funding for existing and future anti-violence programming and supports for women and gender diverse people.

I think the problem has to stop with men really, that’s where it needs to shift. Because we’ve been working with women and children since the 80’s and we’re not getting too far. So, I think maybe the whole dialogue needs to shift towards supporting men and not vilifying them. I have a lot of empathy for men, I don’t think they have an easy go. And I don’t think there’s a lot of support for them so maybe it’s getting some more supports for them so that they can be in relationships that they feel good about.

SUPPORT WORKER

I think we have put a lot of resources into responding to the problem of relationship violence, but we haven't put nearly enough into the sources of relationship violence which is primarily men who use violence. That is what has to be the focus. Certainly, I don't want any of the really good resources that we have to be scaled back in any way for women but without the companion focus.

SUPPORT WORKER

Participants also mentioned the need for support, healing, and learning for men who have used violence in the past to ensure that the risk of recurring violence is eliminated. This strategy can, understandably, be triggering for some survivors. To be clear, it is not an excuse or justification for violence that has occurred; rather it is a strategy to prevent further harm and eliminate further violence by engaging men in the work of undoing patriarchy, developing healthy strategies for emotional regulation, and feminist transformation. This work follows in the tradition of Black feminist bell hooks, whose iconic work *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* challenges men to express their emotions and intimacy, and to shed their patriarchal place in society. She writes, "The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves" (hooks, 2004).



As one Indigenous IPV survivor whom we interviewed put it:

There is so much stigma around domestic violence. Men who have been involved are just seen as monsters. If you're going to ostracize or push someone out of societal values because of mistakes they've made, how are you helping anybody here? How are they going to learn from their mistakes?

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

Another Indigenous IPV survivor we interviewed reflected on the role of parenting in teaching boys to develop healthy patterns of emotional expression:

I hope that I've taught my son to love himself. There's a lot of people who don't know that as parents right now. If we could find a way to keep children safe not just from other people but from themselves. That would be a good step on eliminating domestic violence. We should be teaching young boys how to love themselves too. It's not just a female thing, a lot of men get abused too. A lot of repeated cycles we put ourselves through because that's all we know. It's all taboo and super real and we should be talking about it, but we don't.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

Colonialism and Indigenous Masculinities

Although our team did not obtain disaggregated, race-based data on the ethnic or racial background of those committing intimate partner violence against the Indigenous IPV survivors we spoke to, we recognize that the impact of patriarchy on Indigenous men and masculinities is worth discussing.

Before colonialism, Indigenous societies were matriarchal and there was a great deal of equality between and amongst genders. Indigenous women were decision makers on behalf of their people, and the roles that women and two spirit people played in Indigenous societies were valued and respected. Historically, settler women were in a much different social position due to their gender, and colonial society was far more stratified and hierarchical than Indigenous societies. As such, settler women occupied positions in society that left them with little power or autonomy over their lives. In the same way that colonizers forced their legal, governance, and economic systems onto Indigenous nations, they enforced a gendered worldview onto Indigenous societies.

Patriarchy was and continues to be a necessary pillar for the colonial project to function, and for settler colonial power to take hold. This includes violently displacing the central role of Indigenous women from the land and nations, as well as violently replacing Indigenous notions of masculinity with western, colonial ones. “For Indigenous men,” explains Robert Innes, “the assimilation process meant, among other things,

“Part of the colonial project was to socialize Indigenous men to be like colonizer men, to be violent and abusive without consequences. Another aspect of colonization was to take away the agency that Indigenous women had over their lives, to become like settler women with no power and no authority.”

LESLIE VARLEY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BCAAFC

that Indigenous ideals of masculinity had to be replaced to conform to a masculinity that upheld the White supremacist heteronormative patriarchy” (Innes, 2015, p. 51). Innes goes on to state that, as a result, “many Indigenous men have, to varying degrees, internalized White supremacist heteronormative masculine ideals and have, also to varying degrees, adapted it to a tribal patriarchy within their communities” (p. 53). In Canada, one of the primary ways that this was done was through the imposition of the *Indian Act*. The *Indian Act* created a legal stratification and a rigid hierarchy between Indigenous men and Indigenous women in Canada.

Indigenous Masculinities scholars have done much work to advance an analysis and vision of healthy Indigenous Masculinities. As Innes writes:

“Indigenous masculinities theorists ask how, and to what degree, have Indigenous men adopted and adapted the western heteronormative notions of maleness that serve to subjugate and erase Indigenous women and queer people in violent and non-violent ways, and leads many to inflict violence on each other, while leading others to become trapped in the carceral cycle, with the results contributing to the maintenance and strengthening of colonial structures that oppress all Indigenous people. At the same time, Indigenous masculinities scholars look into how Indigenous men are trying to overcome the negative and toxic masculinities that have engulfed them. Indigenous men lead in various categories indicative of the social conditions they have to overcome. For example, in Canada, Indigenous men have the lowest rates of life expectancy and education attainment while their suicide, murder, and incarceration rates are the highest. As more and more Indigenous men become aware of their situations many strive for change by creating pathways for themselves and others to address their issues so they can turn their lives around and become positive contributing members of their families and communities.”

Undoing the influence that colonialism has had on Indigenous men and masculinities will be crucial in ending violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people.

Decolonizing Indigenous masculinities will involve recentring and relearning traditional masculinities and traditional roles. As such, we strongly recommend that funding should be made available for the creation of sustained programming for Indigenous men and boys to learn about the impact that colonization has had on Indigenous masculinities and to assume their traditional roles as protectors and providers. This programming should focus on undoing the patriarchal influence on gender roles in

Indigenous communities, thus preventing one key contributor of gender-based violence against Indigenous women.

Support workers we heard from described the need for decolonization in anti-violence work:

A big thing is there are more support for women, as opposed to men. Men need more help than what is offered right now and we need to find a cultural format that they can identify with so they can work through their trauma, and not pass that on

to their children. Intimate partner violence is a result of colonialism in Indigenous communities. Women were previously held to the highest regard, a gift from the creator, and not seen as property. Violence was never the answer. Until we address the impacts of colonialism, intimate partner violence will continue and even rise.

SUPPORT WORKER

I mean I would say especially as this work is so tied to decolonizing. It's a great place to start and then beyond that certainly looking at in general how we're allowing and perpetuating violence on a bigger scale to continue. But how it's also harming boys and men. And how we're, these really rigid and unhelpful wider cultural beliefs that kind of support these really rigid gender roles and toxic masculinity and all the rest of it. But yeah in this context. I think we have to start with this idea of the extension of colonialism and everything that comes from that in the way we understand intimate partner violence.

SUPPORT WORKER

Below we hear from Indigenous IPV survivors about the connection between the need for men and boys to heal and the wellbeing of Indigenous families, communities, and Nations:

And again taking, letting the men be responsible. Holding talking circles and making available counselling services for them. Because we want to heal the Nation, we don't want to take it apart. We want to bring the family together and make it a strong unit again.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR



I'd like to see the family unit healed and the Nation made stronger.

INDIGENOUS IPV SURVIVOR

Community-based Work by Indigenous Men to End Gender-based Violence

Decades of work has been envisioned and carried out by communities and organizations to engage and support men and boys to eliminate violence against women. Programs have been created, campaigns have been mobilized, and numerous organizations have been equipping men and boys with healthy coping mechanisms for mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Men committed to change must commit to difficult internal work on themselves, especially the work of unlearning patriarchy. Even men that have not been physically or sexually abusive need to look at how they benefit from and uphold patriarchy.

We recognize that a multitude of tactics are required to effectively tackle the issue of toxic masculinity, but any such tactic does require the engagement of men and boys to be deep and long-term in nature. This meaningful engagement is clearly distinct from that of short-lived, superficial, “feel good” campaigns. We are increasingly noticing an appropriation of “ending male violence campaigns” by the very same resource extractive industries that perpetuate violence against Indigenous women and Indigenous lands. We also do not stand beside men who use anti-violence campaigns as a shield to protect themselves from accountability

and scrutiny of their own problematic and misogynistic behaviour.

Below we highlight grassroots organizations and programs that are meaningfully engaging Indigenous men to eliminate gender-based violence. We choose to amplify work with Indigenous men given the nuanced intersections of race, gender, patriarchy, and colonialism that construct and influence masculinities for Indigenous men in unique ways. Outside of white settler society, these organizations are doing long-term, ethical, and meaningful work to undo the influences of toxic masculinity on Indigenous men. These organizations, working with integrity, offer us blueprints and pathways for those seeking to engage men and boys in eliminating GBV and IPV through intersectional feminism and transformation.

Guided by the Seven Grandfather Teachings and run by the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, [Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin](#), which translates to “I’m A Kind Man” in Anishinaabemowin, works with Indigenous men to reconsider definitions of manhood that are based on traditional Anishinaabe teachings. By addressing the question of “What does it mean to be a good man?” this program engages Indigenous men to end violence against women. The program applies culture-based programming that “increases resilience by empowering men to acknowledge and resolve trauma, as it provides a venue for exploring historical traumas and how they are transmitted from generation to generation. The goal of which is to improve men’s well-being and foster community wellness” (Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centre, 2022).

We also want to highlight a local example of an organization that is successfully engaging men and boys in ending intimate partner violence and gender-based violence against women. [Warriors Against Violence](#) is an anti-violence program based in Vancouver operating out of the Kiwassa Neighbourhood House. Founded by an Indigenous couple, the program works with Indigenous individuals, couples, families, and groups to delve deeply into the causes of and solutions to intimate partner violence. According to their statement of principles, “We believe there is a need to restore the traditional Aboriginal values of honour, respect, and equality. The Circle of Life includes elders, life givers, men, and youth. All have a right to live in non-violent families and communities.” Operating on a shoestring budget, Warriors Against Violence does individual work with men, group sessions and workshops. Beginning as a program for Indigenous men who have assaulted women, the program has expanded to provide services and support for Indigenous youth, women, and families.

Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys on Achieving Gender Equality

In addition to local, community-based initiatives, there have been efforts made globally to unite in the work to engage men and boys in ending violence against women. One such effort was the [Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys on Achieving Gender Equality in Rio de Janeiro](#). Held in 2009, the Global Symposium brought together representatives from 80 countries to hold government, private

sector, organizations, and media accountable to make tangible change in gender equality. The Declaration includes 8 different calls to action that focus on transforming policy and the allocation of resources to enact tangible change.

In their collective declaration stemming from the symposium, participants acknowledged that patriarchy affects men and boys in substantive ways: “There are deep costs to boys and men from the ways our societies have defined men’s power and raised boys to be men. Boys deny their humanity in search of an armor-plated masculinity.” Participants go on to elaborate “What brings us together here is a powerful

sense of hope, expectation, and possibility for we have seen the capacity of men and boys to change, to care, to cherish, to love passionately, and to work for justice for all... This belief in the importance of engaging men and boys is no longer a remote hope.”

Global symposium participants also recognize that the struggle to end violence against women has been in the hands of women for too long. The Declaration notes “We are here because we know that the time when women stood alone in speaking out against discrimination and violence – that this time is coming to an end.”

This sentiment is echoed by both Indigenous IPV survivors and support workers we spoke to as part of this project who highlighted that the burden of ending violence against Indigenous women and gender diverse people cannot be borne by Indigenous women alone. Indigenous survivors and support workers in our study similarly recommended that we must engage men and boys in the work to end gender-based violence, hold men and boys accountable for their part in transforming patriarchal norms and society, and provide men and boys with supports and programming to help them unlearn toxic socialization and behaviours.

There is no quick fix to undo the influence of patriarchy and to redefine masculinity, and gender more broadly, in a healthy way. There must be a wide-spread recognition that gender-based violence and abuse are unacceptable and must end. We need a shift in societal expectations on men and boys, who must no longer define themselves in relation to the subjugation of women. To dismantle cis-heteropatriarchy, the notion of “being a man” and the definition of manhood need to be reconsidered and reconceptualized. A crucial part of the process of addressing misogyny and violence is deep and thoughtful work to unlearn destructive patterns and to critically examine gendered norms. Although the programs we highlighted above may last a short while, the work of dismantling cisheteropatriarchy lasts a lifetime.

This work is also urgent; Indigenous IPV survivors and support workers we spoke to have made clear that this work must be resourced and supported immediately to have a tangible impact on the lives of Indigenous women and their families on the frontlines. The commitment of both Canadian federal and provincial government funding is crucial to make this a reality. Therefore, we call upon the federal government of Canada and the provincial government of British Columbia to fund the service delivery of grassroots, community-based programming that meaningfully engages and supports men and boys to end intimate partner violence and gender-based violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people.

CHAPTER EIGHT

British Columbia's Obligations to Prevent Violence Against Indigenous Women



Colonialism has created structural systems that perpetuate the normalization of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. These systems are maintained and enforced by provincial and federal legislation, policy, and practice. Decades of activism by Indigenous peoples and their allies have resulted in some protections for Indigenous peoples' rights, with provisions for women, girls, and gender diverse people. Activism and lobbying have also pressured Canada to adopt frameworks or commission inquiries focused on protecting Indigenous women from gender-based violence. Thus, as part of the process of righting their historical and ongoing wrongs, the federal government of Canada and the province of British Columbia have the moral and legal obligation to protect Indigenous women from violence in its many forms.

This is especially true given the number of commitments made in recent years through national and international legal and moral frameworks. Canada has formally ratified and adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and it launched the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as well as the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Similarly, BC has adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, commissioned its own Missing Women's Commission of Inquiry, created the Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women, and engaged in numerous dialogue sessions within Indigenous communities throughout the province to understand the priorities and perspectives of Indigenous communities, including how to eliminate violence against Indigenous women.

There are many reports and recommendations waiting for action by the federal government of Canada and provincial and territorial governments, including BC. The findings of these reports and recommendations are repetitive and

overlapping, indicating the lack of political will and commitment that Canada and BC show in enacting meaningful institutional, legal, political, and social change to protect Indigenous women from violence. While it is certainly a positive step that the federal government of Canada and the provincial government of British Columbia have commissioned inquiries and established committees of various sorts, it is crucial that the findings and recommendations that come from these endeavours are implemented immediately to affect tangible change in the lives of Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people experiencing intimate partner violence and gender-based colonial violence.

As a reminder of commitments made and obligations overlooked, each of these inquiries, commissions, frameworks, and recommendations are summarized chronologically below, including highlighting how they relate to federal and provincial obligations to ending violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people.

Highway of Tears Symposium

Held in March 2006 in Prince George, BC, the Highway of Tears Symposium brought together the families of Indigenous women who went missing or were murdered along the Highway of Tears. They were joined by 91 delegate organizations, including local Indigenous nations and regional or provincial Indigenous political and/or service organizations, media, and representatives from local municipal and broader provincial government agencies. From the symposium came the [Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report](#), released in June 2006.

The report outlines the need for supports and services to increase for Indigenous women, girls, and communities along the Highway of Tears, which runs from Prince Rupert to Prince George. The report outlines the need for the development and long-term application of a Victim Prevention Plan, a Community Emergency Readiness Plan, a Regional First Nation Crisis Response Plan, and a Highway of Tears Communication plan. The report also explicitly mentions the need for improved relationships between the RCMP and Indigenous communities, organizations, and Nations. The report advises that steps must be taken to protect Indigenous women and girls in the region by bolstering transportation options, resources, programming, and employment and service opportunities within First Nations communities themselves.

It is important to note that many of the issues identified in the Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report were still being listed by the participants we spoke to from communities along the Highway of Tears. Participants in our study similarly identified continued barriers to leaving abusive relationships and accessing IPV support services, such as barriers to transportation, deficient cell phone reception, lack of adequate employment opportunities, and inadequate support services.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP), which contains 46 articles that are a framework of the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples. Canada ratified the UNDRIP

in 2016, after nearly a decade with objector status and significant pressure from Indigenous peoples and their representative organizations.

UNDRIP Article 22: Protection for Children, Elders, Women, and Individuals with Disabilities is of particular importance on the issue of violence against Indigenous women and girls:

1. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration.
2. States shall take measures, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, to ensure that Indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.

On June 21st, 2021, Canada passed the UNDRIP Act, formalizing its legal obligation to UNDRIP. As it currently stands, this move appears to be largely symbolic, as various colonial state entities are embroiled in conflict with Indigenous groups across the country. One of the most significant areas of contention is the development and expansion of non-renewable resource extraction projects, and in particular, oil and gas pipeline projects in BC. These pipeline projects interfere with Indigenous peoples' ability to collectively access their homelands, violate their safety and sovereignty, and infringe on numerous other individual and collective rights outlined in UNDRIP. In a [submission to the United Nations](#), the Gidimt'en Land defenders of the Wet'suwet'en Nation explain how ongoing pipeline development projects violate their collective rights as Indigenous peoples, with references to specific articles of UNDRIP:

“Canada has violated our right to our traditional territories (Article 26); to life, liberty and security (Article 7); to govern our territories and to free, prior and informed consent (Articles 19, 32); to protect and conserve our lands (Article 29); to not be forcibly removed from our lands or territories (Article 10); and to determine our own development priorities (Article 23).”

As noted earlier, numerous interview participants in our research mentioned these pipeline projects as exacerbating the ongoing housing crisis in the interior and northern regions of BC. This has led to tangible impacts on the ability of women leaving IPV to find suitable and affordable housing options for themselves and their children in those regions.

Missing Women Commission of Inquiry

Established in 2010, the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCII), colloquially known by many as the “Pickton Inquiry” or the “Oppal Inquiry”, was mandated to review the conduct of the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) as it related to crimes committed by now convicted serial killer Robert Pickton. For years, Pickton and his associates (none of whom were ever charged) targeted, raped, and killed sex workers from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, many of whom were Indigenous. During this time, the families and friends of missing women approached police to report what they believed to be an ongoing network of predators targeting Indigenous women and sex workers in the area and to seek assistance in finding their missing loved ones. The failure of the VPD to effectively respond to and thoroughly investigate these reports became a key aspect of the Inquiry, which eventually found that “police investigations into the missing and murdered women were blatant failures” (Forsaken, 2012, p. 160).

Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry was released in November of 2012 and offers 63 recommendations to enhance police investigations, improve working relationships between multiple policing jurisdictions, and increase accountability mechanisms for police in BC. In a status update released in 2021, the government of BC outlines how they have been fulfilling the recommendations in the Forsaken report, including through the development of a variety of violence response programming, improvement to training for police officers, and investments in housing, transportation, and shelter services. However, criticisms of the VPD and the RCMP remain, including from families of Indigenous women who have gone missing or been murdered in recent years⁵, as well as Indigenous IPV survivors we spoke to over the course of our research.

⁵ A recent example is the disappearance and death of Chelsea Poorman. Chelsea was a 24-year-old member of the Kawacatoose First Nation in Saskatchewan who went missing in Vancouver in September 2020. Her remains were found in April of 2022. Shortly after she was found, the Vancouver Police Department deemed her death “not suspicious”, despite the deeply troubling circumstances around her death. Her family is joined by the Kawacatoose First Nation, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, the BC First Nations Justice Council, and Battered Women’s Support Services in calling for a full VPD investigation into her disappearance and death:

<https://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/first-nations-groups-call-for-investigation-into-chelsea-poormans-disappearance-and-death/>
<https://www.bwss.org/bwss-joins-chelsea-poormans-family-Indigenous-and-community-organizations-to-demand-vpd-investigation/>

Minister’s Advisory Council on Indigenous Women

The Minister’s Advisory Council on Indigenous Women (MACIW, “Council”) was formed by the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation in 2011 for the purpose of providing direction to the BC government on taking action to end violence and improve the quality of life for Indigenous women living in BC. The Council is comprised of 10 Indigenous women leaders in BC, representing a variety of fields including “Aboriginal women’s health, social, economic development, justice, culture, family and spiritual needs” (MACIW, 2013, p.3). MACIW’s values are: “Community and Culture, Integrity, Reconciliation, Collaboration, Sharing Knowledge and Safety” (MACIW Strategic Plan 2017-2020, p. 7).

In the Taking Action to End Violence and Improve the Lives of Aboriginal Women in BC report released in 2013, MACIW identifies violence as a key factor negatively affecting quality of life for Indigenous women in BC. MACIW lists eight main strategic directions to be undertaken by the Province of BC and measured over time to ensure “a life free of violence for Aboriginal women and girls”:

- Leadership – To support all leaders to utilize a principle-based approach as outlined in “Taking Action”.
- Empower [Indigenous] Communities – To allow communities to design, implement, and evaluate the necessary programs and services required to stop violence against [Indigenous] women.
- Education and Awareness – To provide all citizens in British Columbia with the information and tools to stop violence against [Indigenous] women.
- Prevention and Early Intervention – To develop a coordinated and pro-active approach to preventing violence against [Indigenous] women.

- Healing and Wellness – To ensure investment in healing and wellness is effective and culturally appropriate.
- Justice Reform – To ensure the justice system is responsive to the needs and aspirations of [Indigenous] people.
- Research and Data – To support Aboriginal organizations and communities to undertake comprehensive research, data collection and analysis on issues related to stopping violence against [Indigenous] women to inform policy, programs, and services
- Accountability – To demonstrate that the provincial government is committed to creating healthy and safe communities for [Indigenous] women through a principle-based approach.

Through its Giving Voice funding initiative, MACIW sponsors community-based projects that work to support Indigenous women and eliminate gender-based violence. The funding is delivered by the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and represents a continued commitment to improving the quality of life for Indigenous women living in BC (MACIW, n.d.).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

Established in 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was created as one of the elements of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, with a mandate to document residential school experiences across Canada. From 2010 to 2014, the commission held hearings in communities throughout the country, and, in doing so, heard from over 6500 witnesses to the atrocities of residential schools.

In December of 2015 the TRC released its final report, containing 94 Calls to Action across child welfare, education, language and culture, health, and the justice system. The Calls to Action also offer guidance on reconciliation in terms of church apologies, media, UNDRIP, youth programs, sports, museums, and archives. Notably, and especially with the recent tragic discoveries of bodies of Indigenous children found on residential school grounds across the country, the Calls to Action also offers six recommendations to federal and provincial governments and agencies on the deaths and burials of Indigenous children on residential school grounds.

The TRC is important to mention because the impact of residential schools on Indigenous families has been far-reaching and long-lasting. Several of the Indigenous IPV survivors and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous support workers we spoke to mentioned the intergenerational trauma of residential schools as a significant contributor to the violent experiences that Indigenous women and gender diverse people have and their ability to seek supports within their communities. The TRC's work in creating a historical record of the residential school system in Canada is an important step in educating Canadians on the intergenerational impacts that violent colonial policies have on the lives of Indigenous peoples. Despite the stark findings of the TRC about the legacy of the residential school system, the Calls to Action remain largely unfulfilled by the federal government of Canada. Many of those that have been fulfilled or are in the process of being fulfilled are the result of further advocacy and action by Indigenous peoples, including through Canada's court systems.

Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

It is crucial to mention the work done by the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre (DEWC) to amplify the voices and experiences of Indigenous women on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. "Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside" was released in November of 2019 and is based on the lived experience, leadership, and expertise of Indigenous survivors. *Red Women Rising* "shifts the lens from pathologizing poverty towards amplifying resistance to and healing from all forms of gendered colonial violence" (DEWC, 2019).

The report offers 200 recommendations to end state and societal violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people that are based on three core principles:

- Violence against Indigenous women and girls is a violation of inherent, constitutional, and internationally protected Indigenous rights. Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) at all levels of government, assertion of Indigenous Title over lands and jurisdiction over law-making, and restoration of collective Indigenous women's rights and governance is the only meaningful way to end this violence.

Increased state enforcement alone cannot eliminate violence against Indigenous women and girls because structural violence is connected to individual acts of male violence.

- A comprehensive plan to end violence against Indigenous women must address socio-economic factors including equitable access to and self-determination over land, culture, language, housing, child care, income security, employment, education, and physical, mental, and spiritual health.
- Indigenous women in the DTES are not silent victims or stereotypes. Indigenous women in the DTES come from diverse nations and families, and have unique stories and dreams. Indigenous women in the DTES are all leaders who contribute countless hours to the community and will never stop fighting for justice. Any policies, services, and solutions must be based on Indigenous women's collective input and leadership.

Although the above principles address Indigenous women in the Downtown Eastside specifically, they are highly relevant to Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people throughout BC and Canada.

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA)

Through the introduction of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA), British Columbia has symbolically aligned its provincial laws with UNDRIP. The BC government passed the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* into law in November 2019. The *Declaration Act* establishes the UNDRIP as the Province's framework for reconciliation, as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. The legislation sets out a process to align BC's laws with the UN Declaration and mandates government to bring provincial laws into harmony with the UN Declaration. As such, the BC government has committed to Article 22 of UNDRIP listed above, which specifies the need for particular attention and measures to be taken to protect Indigenous women and children against all forms of violence and discrimination.

In 2022, the BC Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation released its first five-year [action plan](#) in response to the *Declaration Act*. The

action plan revolves around four themes: Self-Determination and Inherent Right of Self-Government, Title and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Ending Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination, and Social, Cultural and Economic Well-being. In the description of each theme, the action plan outlines a goal and outcomes which are drawn from the UN Declaration. The action plan also describes actions designed to meet the goal and outcomes of each theme that the provincial government will take over the course of its 5-year plan.

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

For decades, statistics have clearly shown that Indigenous women experience gender-based violence at a rate far greater than their rate of representation in Canada. Indigenous women are far more likely to go missing or be murdered than non-Indigenous women in Canada. Despite decades of activism and lobbying by Indigenous Nations, organizations, families and communities, these rates have remained relatively unchanged. This ongoing injustice formed the basis for collective calls for a national level, independent inquiry to be commissioned by the federal government.

In 2015, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was commissioned to understand systemic causes for gender-based violence against Indigenous women and offer recommendations on methods for change within society, government, and institutions. From 2016 to 2018, the National Inquiry held hearings across Canada to hear evidence from Indigenous families about their experiences with loved ones who have gone missing or were murdered. In addition to hearing directly from families, the National Inquiry heard from community groups, Indigenous organizations including those representing First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, provincial governments, and national and international human rights organizations.

In June of 2019, [Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#) was released, finding that the "root causes of the violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people" are the "human rights and Indigenous rights abuses and violations committed and condoned by the Canadian state" (Reclaiming Power and Place, Volume

1b, p. 167). *Reclaiming Power and Place* contains 231 Calls for Justice that require immediate implementation to protect Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. These recommendations address four pathways: “historical, multigenerational, and intergenerational trauma, social and economic marginalization, maintaining the status quo and institutional lack of will, and ignoring the agency and expertise of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.”

One of *Reclaiming Power and Place*’s recommendations is for the development of a National Action Plan to respond effectively to the 231 Calls for Justice. To that end, a Core Working Group was developed and is comprised of governments, Indigenous representative organizations, and Indigenous community groups. In June of 2021, the National Action Plan: Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People was released and features a series of sub-working groups meant to highlight particular experiences of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, urban, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples. The development and application of the National Plan is ongoing since the Plan is meant to be a “living document” that is adaptable to new information and changing circumstances.

The province of British Columbia responded to the findings of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women’s Inquiry and its Calls for Justice by working with Alderhill Planning Inc, an Indigenous-owned planning firm, in the development of Path Forward. *Path Forward* brought together Indigenous community leaders to develop localized responses to eliminate violence against Indigenous women and offers community specific solutions for 12 different BC communities. The *Path Forward* report is a “collaborative effort... to design, facilitate and support a community-based engagement framework to inform the development of strategies and initiatives related to systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls in the Province of BC” (Path Forward, 2019).

The Toxic Culture of the RCMP: Misogyny, Racism, and Violence against Women in Canada’s National Police Force

In May 2022, the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action released its report, The Toxic Culture of the RCMP: Misogyny, Racism and Violence against Women in Canada’s National Police Force. This report

outlines the failure of Canada to ensure that due diligence has been carried out to protect women against violence from state and non-state actors. The report reveals damning evidence that the RCMP has not only been complacent in its role to protect women, particularly Indigenous women, from violence, but that its own members physically and sexually assault women at astonishing rates. In fact, *The Toxic Culture of the RCMP* report argues that a major flaw of the National Action Plan (mentioned above) is that racism within the RCMP is not mentioned at all, nor is there any mention of how members of the RCMP who have committed acts of violence against Indigenous women will be held accountable for their actions (The Toxic Culture of the RMCP, p. 22).

The report also highlights the numerous international obligations that Canada has made to ensure the human rights of women, especially Indigenous women, are met. The report concludes with 7 key recommendations to improve the RCMP, including the need for an independent review of the RCMP, the creation of a new oversight body to investigate and report on complaints made against the RCMP, and that Canada take full responsibility for the failure of the RCMP to protect Indigenous women from violence. Lastly, the report recommends inclusion of Indigenous women in decision making regarding the future of the RCMP.

The list that we have presented here is by no means an exhaustive summary of all the inquiries, committees, commissions, reports and other fact-finding and truth telling work done in recent decades to make Canada accountable for the ways its policies and institutions continue to deny agency to Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. Rather than a reflection of the breadth of its commitments to Indigenous peoples, the above reports, frameworks, and recommendations should be seen as the result of decades of pressure by Indigenous communities and Nations on the federal and provincial governments. They should be seen as minimum standards of government policy and practice to form the basis of a new, just relationship between the federal government of Canada, the province of BC, and Indigenous peoples.

Additional Recommendations from Battered Women's Support Services and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres



The following recommendations come from our experiences as service delivery organizations. We have heard from participants that service delivery organizations need to better reflect the needs of Indigenous women and gender diverse people fleeing intimate partner violence. We also heard that the risk of Ministry of Children and Family Development involvement influences the decisions that Indigenous women make to remain in abusive relationships. Finally, we reiterate calls for sustained core and program funding for Indigenous women's centres and healing lodges, in addition to the need to act immediately on all report recommendations and frameworks listed above.

Service Delivery Framework for Indigenous Women Fleeing IPV/GBV

- Fully funded and accessible Indigenous-led and Indigenous-run 24/7 crisis support services should be available across BC.
- Indigenous women and gender diverse people should be able to provide feedback safely and anonymously to service providers and/or government funders about anti-violence support services that are not culturally safe and appropriate.
- Indigenous-designed accountability frameworks should be implemented in all anti-violence service models and service delivery organizations. Regular service reviews need to be in place for all anti-violence service delivery organizations in BC. Those service providers that are chronically unsafe and culturally inappropriate should be defunded.
- Indigenous-led and Indigenous-run services for crisis support should have an integration of a place-based, cultural framing, trauma

informed, and intersectional decolonial feminist analyses. Cultural safety approaches should be informed by and combined with an analysis of colonization, trauma, and intersectional, decolonial, anti-racist feminist approaches. There should be training for all frontline service delivery workers in this model of service delivery, with comprehensive supervision, oversight, implementation, and accountability mechanisms.

- More gender-based violence funding that is currently allocated to mainstream anti-violence services should be redirected to Indigenous specific organizations and specialized culturally specific programs serving Indigenous women. The funding model for mainstream service delivery must be proportional to the representation of Indigenous workers and the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous women into all aspects of mainstream service delivery, management, board, and staff participation. Funding should also be distributed only upon demonstration of a service provider capably working from appropriate cultural frameworks. This funding allocation should

ultimately increase the capacity for Indigenous women and their support systems.

- All anti-violence organizations and support services must recruit, train, hire, retain, promote, and include the meaningful, non-tokenistic participation of more Indigenous women as support workers and into all aspects of mainstream service delivery in all levels, including leadership, management, and board roles. This applies to all staff anti-violence organizations, safe homes, transition homes, and second and third stage housing programs.
- There is an underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in leadership roles of anti-violence organizations. To address and redress historic and ongoing colonial legacies, decision making of anti-violence organizations that serve Indigenous women must be in the leadership and jurisdiction of Indigenous women and rooted in place-based, culturally safe, trauma-informed, and intersectional decolonial feminist service delivery.

Overhaul of Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), including Vancouver Aboriginal Children and Family Support Services (VACFASS)

- MCFD needs to create and implement a strategy with adequate policy, standards, resources, and training to prevent the automatic involvement of MCFD for women who report abusers to the police.
- The focus of MCFD must be to prevent the separation of Indigenous mothers experiencing intimate partner violence from their children. Indigenous women who are accessing safe homes, transition homes, and anti-violence services should be seen as actively pursuing safety and protection, and this must not weigh negatively in MCFD's assessment of the Indigenous mother. The Ministry should put emphasis and effort towards keeping the family together and safe.
- MCFD must hire and retain Indigenous support workers to work on supporting Indigenous mothers and families, with a whole Indigenous-specific team providing wrap-around and holistic supports to Indigenous mothers and families.

- All MCFD workers must receive mandatory and comprehensive training on cultural safety that is trauma informed and based in intersectional, decolonial, feminist analysis.

Implementation of Existing Recommendations and Calls to Justice

- We emphasize the need for sustained core and program funding for grassroots Indigenous women to create and operate Indigenous women's centers and healing lodges immediately, especially for urban Indigenous women across BC. Sustained core and program funding should also be allocated and provided for Indigenous women-led committees to create, establish, implement, and operate programs that provide comprehensive and holistic services to support Indigenous women and their safety. We affirm Indigenous women's rights and governance to establish and operate such programming on their own behalf.
- We are part of and echo national and provincial advocacy to ensure that immediate action is taken to advance the immediate implementation of all the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls 231 Calls for Justice in their entirety, holding the governments of both Canada and BC accountable for advancing the Calls to Justice as it applies to British Columbia.
- We call for the immediate implementation and immediate action on:
 - a. Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report
 - b. Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry
 - c. Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women's Strategic Directions
 - d. Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action
 - e. Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside
 - f. The Toxic Culture of the RCMP: Misogyny, Racism and Violence against Women in Canada's National Police Force.



These urgent calls are not simply recommendations, but legal obligations given the province of BC's implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) through the **Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA)**. We call for the immediate implementation of UNDRIP at all levels of government.



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