

Violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada

Review of reports and recommendations - preliminary research outcomes

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Background and Outline

Numerous reports, studies, and inquiries, have made hundreds of recommendations about the blight of violence against Indigenous women in Canada. Despite this, the problem tragically persists. Against this background, this research project sought to provide a preliminary analysis of 50 reports containing existing recommendations, and the status of their implementation. The list of 50 reports is based on a list of 40 provided by the federal Department of Justice to justify the federal government's position that there is no need for a national public inquiry, and our own research into additional reports. This briefing note sets out the results of our preliminary research.

Research Trends

50 reports, containing over 700 recommendations, were reviewed over a two week period. Most recommendations seek action from a combination, or all, of the following: the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, municipal governments, and the RCMP. After examining these recommendations, 17 recurring "themes" were identified, outlined in brief below:

1) *National Commission of Inquiry*

Two (2) reports, spanning 2012-2013, called for the establishment of a national commission of inquiry.

2) *National Action Plan*

Nine (9) reports spanning 2004-2013 recommended that a national action plan be established, and that coordination between federal government agencies and departments, their provincial counterparts, and Indigenous governments and service providers, be improved.

3) *Public acknowledgement and prioritization*

Six (6) reports, spanning 2004-2012, recommended that federal and/or provincial governments publicly recognize the extent of the problem of violence against Indigenous women and girls, and declare the issue a priority.

4) *Ratification of human rights instruments*

Three (3) reports spanning 2008-2013 recommended that the federal government ratify international instruments pertaining to violence against women and/or indigenous peoples, including the *Belém do Pará Convention* and UNDRIP.

5) *Indigenous involvement in program development and delivery*

Ten (10) reports spanning the years 2002-2011 called for Indigenous people, and in particular Indigenous women, to lead (or at least be involved in) the development and implementation of programs, policies and actions designed to address violence against Indigenous women.

6) *Properly resourced, Indigenous-specific, and culturally sensitive services for victims/survivors of violence and their families*

Nineteen (19) reports spanning the years 1999-2013 recommend that funding and resources be made available for services for Indigenous women and their families (including long-term services (e.g. healing, counselling and education), or more short-term crisis services to support women and families fleeing violence. All recommendations emphasized the need for culturally sensitive services, and for Indigenous women to be involved in their provision. Of these 19 reports, four (4) (spanning 2004-2011) specifically recommend measures to reduce the poverty of Indigenous women to ameliorate their exposure to violence. Another four (4) (from 2005-2012) recommend specific programming for men to prevent the perpetuation of attitudes that devalue the lives and experiences of Indigenous women.

7) *Law reform*

Two (2) reports from 2007-2009 recommend the repeal or amendment of legislation with discriminatory effects on Indigenous women.

8) *Public information and education*

Thirteen (13) reports spanning 2004-2012 recommend measures to inform the public generally about the nature and extent of violence against Indigenous women and girls, its roots in racism and the marginalization of women, and ways to report it to the police. Schools and service providers are also identified as recipients for public education campaigns.

9) *Greater data gathering and publication*

Ten (10) reports, spanning 2004-2012, recommend better collection of data (disaggregated for ethnicity and gender) on violence against Indigenous women and girls, including the number who are missing or murdered. In addition, reports recommend that, in consultation with Indigenous people and when appropriate, this data should be made publicly available.

10) *Leadership and strength in Indigenous communities*

Four (4) studies spanning 2005-2012 recommended supporting (and funding) initiatives to help promote and restore Indigenous languages, traditions and governance.

11) *Measures to improve policing*

Ten (10) reports spanning 2004-2013 recommended additional training for police officers, the creation of more community liaison positions to improve communication between police departments, the public, Indigenous communities, and family members of missing Indigenous women. Recommendations included additional policies and strategies to prioritize cases involving Indigenous women.

12) Investigation and prosecution

Nine (9) reports, spanning 2004-2013, called for better protocols and financing for cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous women. Four (4) of these reports recommend better police oversight mechanisms to ensure greater accountability.

13) Community based punishment

Four (4) reports spanning 2001-2011 argued Indigenous men being prosecuted for violent crimes against Indigenous women should have access to culturally appropriate alternatives to courts.

14) Transport services and physical access to safe housing/shelters

Four (4) reports spanning 2001-2012 recommended better transportation between remote communities (especially along the highway of tears), and for greater and safer access to crisis accommodation.

15) Community based first response and search and rescue

Five (5) reports spanning 2003-2010 concerned the need to ensure better coordination and funding for community-based search and rescue efforts.

16) Indigenous women working in the sex industry

Four (4) reports spanning 2004-2012 recommended measures to better protect and enhance the safety of Indigenous women engaged in sex work, including the use of 'harm reduction' approaches to policing.

17) Compensation and/or healing fund

Three (3) reports spanning 2006-2012 recommended the creation of a fund for Indigenous women survivors of violence or the families of those who were murdered or went missing. Note, all three referred to disappearances or deaths of Indigenous women in British Columbia.

Preliminary Conclusions:

Preliminary research about the extent to which each theme has been implemented suggests the following general observations:

- There is a general consensus about the root causes of violence against Indigenous women.
- Given that most reports recommended a combination of some or all of the themes outlined above, there appears to be some consensus concerning the measures needed to end violence against Indigenous women.
- Despite the general consensus about the causes of violence against Indigenous women and the necessary response, it is almost impossible to determine with any certainty whether the large number of recommendations made to date have been implemented. In addition, there is little in the way of formal government commitments to implement these recommendations.
- In addition, there appears to be little coordination of implementation.
- This preliminary assessment indicates that few recommendations have been implemented.
- This review offers some observations that may be helpful for determining what is most needed from a future national inquiry (for example, further research into the root causes of violence against Indigenous women is less urgent than the need to examine the implementation of existing recommendations and coordinating a response).