

Aboriginal Women and Family Violence

Final Report

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In recent years, family violence has become a prominent area of social research. Understanding of the incidence, causes and effects of family violence has greatly increased, along with efforts to craft appropriate legislation and provide support to victims of this often unseen crime. However, work still remains to be done. Evidence suggests that certain sub-groups in society have a higher incidence of family violence than others, but no comprehensive studies have detailed the scope of this crime within Aboriginal communities. As well, scant documentation exists of the attitudes and perceptions of the victims, their abusers and the community at large within the Aboriginal context.

The current research employed qualitative data on the attitudes and opinions of Aboriginal women, both on and off reserve, on the issue of family violence. Specifically, this research describes perceptions of incidence, coping mechanisms, perceived resources, and impacts, among other issues. The following specific points were addressed:

- The importance of family violence compared to other major issues facing women in the Aboriginal community: that is, perceptions of incidence and severity of violence;
- Causes of male violence against women in the Aboriginal community, including such contributing factors as poverty, familial experience, inadequate parenting skills, substance abuse, community and familial indifference, and gender stereotypes;
- Consequences of male violence against Aboriginal women, for the emotional and physical health of women and for their financial situation, as well as for children and extended families, community relationships, and for the perpetrator of the violence;
- Sources of help for Aboriginal women both on and off reserve who experience violence, such as shelters, crisis centres and social services, in terms of accessibility, privacy, safety and reliability;
- Resources available for the families of Aboriginal women who experience violence, and for the offenders themselves, including educational initiatives and counselling for long-term prevention of violence;
- Current gaps in resource availability and community support to end male violence against Aboriginal women, and perceptions of the most effective ways to disseminate information and provide assistance to families suffering from this problem.

METHODOLOGY

This research approached the question of male violence against Aboriginal women using two methodologies, designed to capture detailed information from a variety of key informants and from Aboriginal women themselves.

Phase 1: Focus Groups

Ipsos-Reid conducted a series of eight two-hour focus groups across Canada in May 2006, each with ten First Nations and Metis women, living on and off reserve. Focus groups were conducted in the following locations:

- Prince Albert, Saskatchewan
- Val D'Or, Quebec
- Prince George, British Columbia
- Sydney, Nova Scotia

Focus groups were evenly divided among First Nations women living on reserve, and First Nations and Metis women living off reserve. The focus groups were all held in close proximity to a reserve, in areas that also included large numbers of off reserve First Nations and Metis women. The focus groups were held in the town or a nearby centre, to afford both privacy and comfort to participants. All moderators were female, in deference to the sensitivity of the research topic.

To facilitate the focus groups, and where possible, Ipsos-Reid made preliminary calls into the communities to make contact with personnel at community resources who are knowledgeable of the issue of male violence against Aboriginal women. Care was taken to ensure that participants were recruited from a variety of communities to ensure focus group diversity and where possible, to avoid multiple participants from a single community. The focus groups were structured and paced to ensure that the participants were comfortable within the setting and with the topic of male violence against Aboriginal women. Following the groups, very few, if any participants expressed any discomfort with the group discussion. In fact, many respondents in Val D'Or, Prince Albert and Prince George expressed appreciation with being consulted for their opinions, and willingness to participate in such projects in future. During the second phase of research, the key informant interviews described below, Ipsos-Reid received very favourable feedback on the focus groups from individuals involved in programs that provide assistance to women who have experienced male violence.

Phase 2: Key Informant Interviews

Ipsos-Reid conducted in-depth exploratory telephone interviews during June 2006 with fifteen key informants who work directly with Aboriginal women – including women living on reserves and in urban centres, as well as Inuit women in the North – on the issue of domestic violence. Each interview ran approximately 35-45 minutes, during which informants were guided through a questionnaire that included close-ended measures as well as qualitative questions, allowing informants to elaborate on their answers and to offer detailed comments on issues of particular concern to them.

Informants included police (both provincial and RCMP), health care workers, social workers, and crisis centre staff from Aboriginal communities across Canada, both on and off reserve. Five of the interviews were conducted with individuals working with Inuit women in Northern communities; the rest were with first responders working with First Nations women in various reserves and urban communities in southern regions across Canada. All currently or recently worked as “first responders” dealing with Aboriginal women victims of male violence.

KEY FINDINGS

Despite the fact that no effort was made to recruit victims of violence, many participants in the focus groups had direct, first-hand experience of domestic violence (man against woman). While violence is perpetrated in many ways, physical and emotional violence are the two most common forms described by the participants.

Incidence and Causes:

First responders, those who work directly with Aboriginal women who experience physical and emotional violence, observe a higher incidence of such abuse in the Aboriginal community than elsewhere.

Violence has many root causes (loss of identity and way of life, continued impact of residential schools, learned cycle, etc) but nearly all participants and first responders point to drug and alcohol consumption (his and hers) as an aggravating factor.

Consequences:

Both participants and first responders describe a variety of physical, psychological, financial and social consequences of male violence against Aboriginal women, including:

- Diminished self-esteem and sense of security;
- Damage to physical and emotional health;
- Negative impact on children (fear, insecurity, perpetuation of the cycle of violence);
- Negative impact on financial security;
- Loss of matrimonial home and sometimes relocation outside of the community; and,
- Self-blame.

Meanwhile, the impact on the male perpetrator is often seen as minimal and ineffective. A common view among women within the Aboriginal community, as well as among first responders, is that community sanctions are mild, and legal repercussions within the corrections system are flimsy. Although some laws and policies allow police officers to lay charges against a perpetrator without the consent of the victim, neither victims of violence nor first responders feel that laws are adequately applied. First responders and focus group participants call for increased accountability among perpetrators, and reform of the justice system to allow for more punitive measures.

However, some first responders see reason for optimism in a recent gradual opinion shift among Aboriginal community leaders, who are beginning to condemn male violence against women. However, focus group participants express mixed perceptions on community progress on attitudes toward male violence. Although some feel that community opposition to male violence may be increasing, others worry that unless steps are taken to develop awareness and accountability, abuse may simply go further underground within the pre-existing culture of secrecy surrounding this issue in the Aboriginal community.

Key Resources for Aboriginal Women Victims of Violence:

Key resources for Aboriginal women include:

- On reserve and in settlements: informal networks of family and friends; health care professionals (nurses); Health Centre referrals (Monday to Friday, 9 to 5) to myriad off reserve and urban resources, including counselling, shelters and programs; and police.
- In urban centres and cities: crisis centres and shelters; crisis hotlines; Friendship Centres; informal networks of family and friends; and counselling services.

The use of support resources and services, however, is compromised by:

- The distance of these resources from the home community;
- Lack of transportation;
- Poor relationships with the police;
- Low awareness of existing resources;
- Lack of faith in the effectiveness of the resources;
- Lack of privacy on reserve and in small settlement communities, and ensuing shame about accessing resources;
- Complex relationships between the victim, the perpetrator, their families, and other community members; and,
- The need to keep the family structure intact at all costs (due to fear of the unknown and of losing children, home, assets and face).

What Still Needs To Be Done:

Although community-based resources would be ideal, smaller reserves and Northern settlements often do not have the means to sustain crisis centres or shelters, and both

focus group participants and first responders note that privacy and safety are real concerns.

Close proximity resources are appropriate if supported by transportation services and experienced and trained personnel. However, concerns about the qualifications of staff are often raised, and low numbers of Aboriginal personnel are an issue in some communities, particularly among the police. Even when Aboriginal personnel are recruited for policing among Aboriginal people, their presence does not guarantee that Aboriginal officers will treat the women with cultural sensitivity.

Women need to be made more aware of the resources that are available. However, women who live on reserve and in small settlements have a particular interest in receiving information without having to seek it out, due to the chronic lack of privacy in such communities. Furthermore, the Internet can be useful, but only as a supplement to other means of acquiring information. Most Aboriginal women would not think to look to the Internet, due to the low incidence of computer ownership and web access. Not a single first responder mentioned the Internet as a likely candidate for future educational or support initiatives.

Instead, suggestions from participants regarding communications include the use of:

- Local papers;
- Local radio;
- Directories of services;
- Advertising and educational programs in schools;
- Advertising through the Friendship Centre bulletin;
- Inserts in government mail; and,
- Integrating information about male violence against women into regular women's meetings, as a discreet means of educating women about this issue.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that providing assistance for Aboriginal women who experience violence, as well as for the perpetrators of violence, involves a series of challenges. These include the prevalence and severity of violence in the community, as well as the long-term distorting effect on children in terms of learned behaviour. Providing explicit information and educational initiatives for all family members, not just parents and children, is a key challenge in ending male violence against Aboriginal women.

“What does a healthy relationship look and feel like?” Many victims and perpetrators of violence lack a basic understanding of what a healthy or loving relationship should be. Within the focus groups, women who had “turned their lives around” indicated that explicit information they received about how a relationship should work helped them understand how to break away from the cycle of violence. In other words, it is necessary to introduce and support such norms – not just for individuals and couples experiencing family violence, but also for the entire community. An approach that raises awareness among whole communities, including victims, perpetrators and community leaders, as well as the general public, is advised for dealing comprehensively with violence against women in the long term. In particular, a culture of victimization should not be treated as an excuse within the Aboriginal community – neither for committing violent abuse, nor for accepting it as normal. Instead, an increased sense of community and individual responsibility for the safety and security of Aboriginal women should be fostered.

However, even when information is available to women suffering in an abusive relationship, it can take time and repetitious exposure for this information to be absorbed and for women to act on it. Sometimes, an accumulation of violence may finally push women to overcome the barriers to seeking help. For other women, the effect of family violence on children can be an important impetus for seeking help. Because children are often adversely affected by male violence against women, both in the short and long term, they represent a key audience for educational materials.

Trust is a very important issue within the Aboriginal community. Trust takes time to develop, but it can be facilitated in a crisis situation by a friendly and familiar Aboriginal face, and further enhanced by personal experience with violence. Focus group participants express mixed views about the need to have Aboriginal staff managing crisis facilities. Women who do not live on reserve are more likely to prioritize expertise

and personal experience. By contrast, women who live on reserve tend to think that a friendly and experienced Aboriginal woman would be better equipped to deal with Aboriginal women – and more trustworthy.

For all focus group participants and first responders, funding, tools and resources are required to provide the means and the opportunity for women to look beyond the cycle of violence, and to rebuild their lives. Aboriginal women believe that access to affordable housing, transportation to places that provide education and assistance, and financial help, coupled with counselling and life skills education, are the ideal ways to approach this problem. While community-based resources may be optimal, this may not be realistic or sustainable in smaller communities. Instead, for these areas, reliable, convenient and affordable transportation to a safe shelter with accommodation for their children nearby is of prime importance. The inadequacy of the judicial process is also a key area for reform, including especially the leniency of sentencing, and the current state of insufficient engagement by the correctional and parole systems on the issue of male violence against women.

At this point in time, given the low incidence of computer ownership within the Aboriginal community, web-based resources are not a particularly advantageous means of providing Aboriginal women with information on male violence against women. Rather, crisis phone lines, posters in community centres and schools, brochures and direct mail are frequently suggested as effective means of providing information about violence to women and their partners.

Recommendations

The following points are suggested as potential ways that Aboriginal women and first responders may be better informed and assisted in dealing with the problem of male violence against Aboriginal women:

- Increase funding for resources to assist Aboriginal women victims of male violence. This should encompass:
 - Educational programs to teach Aboriginal women about healthy relationships.
 - Provision of short and long-term housing for victims of violence.
 - Short and long term counselling for victims of violence.
 - Counselling and provision of basic resources like clothing and food for children.
 - Interim financial assistance for victims of violence.
 - Provision of affordable transportation to available resources.

- Provide emergency 24 hour, 7-day crisis hotlines.
- Provide 24 hour, 7-day access to assistance from first responders within reasonable proximity to communities.
- Develop and extend resources on reserves and in settlement communities to increase convenience and privacy of reporting acts of violence.
- Provide cultural sensitivity training for all first responders: law enforcement officers, health care professionals, educators and others who directly assist women victims of violence, and who work with communities to reduce the incidence of this problem.
- Provide strong incentives or mandatory training for First Nations and Inuit community leaders to treat the issue of male violence against women as a high priority and a serious community-wide problem.
- Work through schools to teach Aboriginal children about male violence against women, and to reach out to parents.
- “Piggy-back” on the infrastructure of existing programs, such as Friendship Centres and medical facilities, or government sponsored mail-outs such as bills, to provide information on this issue, and to spare women victims of violence from having to seek out information themselves.
- Encourage the dissemination of information about coping with and stopping male violence against women via word of mouth.
- Provide training for personnel dealing with this issue about privacy issues, and the consequences of failing to respect the confidentiality of women dealing with this sensitive issue in communities with tight and overlapping familial ties.
- Provide both short and long-term assistance and relapse prevention for perpetrators, dealing with violence as well as related problems, including:
 - Educational programs, including community-based education on the issue of male violence.
 - Substance abuse programs.
 - Job training and assistance with finding employment, as part of efforts to minimize conditions in which violence takes place.
 - Mandatory participation in such community-based education programs, as part of treatment and counselling for perpetrators, with immediate, predictable and reliable punitive consequences for repeat offences or failure to participate in these programs.
 - Long-term engagement with perpetrators through the corrections and parole system, including following release, to ensure long-term change. This should include:
 - Development of Aboriginal community based support programs for men.

- Development of sentencing circles and application of the principles of restorative justice¹, to foster culturally sensitive means of determining consequences for acts of violence, and to develop a sense of individual *and* community responsibility for the issue of male violence against Aboriginal women.

¹ See www.restorativejustice.org for information.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Male Violence against Aboriginal Women

Incidence and Severity of Violence against Women in Aboriginal Communities

Focus Group Participants

Despite the fact that no attempt was made to recruit victims of violence, many focus group participants had first hand experience, and all knew of instances within the community. Participants listed abuse as a key problem facing women in their communities today. The abuse is described as verbal and physical, sometimes having severe emotional and physical effects.

“My, you feel small and dirty. They won’t look at you ... they put you down and then they tell you they love you.”

“I almost got killed last year, he tried to choke me to death.”

« La violence physique c’est grave et ça fait mal sur le coup mais verbale ça reste puis ça détruit. »

“My husband killed my baby and he got away with it. I was three months pregnant ... that’s why I can’t live up there.”

“There’s lots of tragedy behind our lives. Nobody sees it, it’s nothing to laugh at ... every week I had different coloured eyes.”

Several women made a point of saying that violence can go both ways.

« J’ai été battue par mon ex-conjoint. Jje me défendais et je le battais moi aussi. J’essayais de lui faire autant mal qu’il me faisait mal. »

Some participants see violence against women as having dissipated somewhat in recent years, however. This may be due to gradually shifting attitudes in the community about the acceptability of such abuse. Other comments made by participants suggest that while abuse continues, abusers may now take greater care to conceal it.

“It used to be more normal to beat up a woman.”

« Ca existe encore c'est pas plus caché mais c'est encore caché. C'est pas tout le monde qui parlerait de ça. »

“Abusers have toned it down. Abusers will keep you in the home until the bruising goes down.”

First Responders

Among first responders, male violence against women was universally characterized as somewhat or very prevalent in Aboriginal communities, and most describe it as more prevalent than in the general population. Responders typically deal with multiple acts of violence in a given month, with estimates between 4 and more than 300, depending on the size of the community. Abuse is described as ranging from verbal abuse and mild physical abuse to the most severe physical abuse possible, sometimes leading to death.

“It’s difficult to characterize because there’s such a range. It can be from what I would describe as torture, to psychological and emotional abuse.”

“They are honestly beaten up just like they are men. There would be bruises everywhere, death threats as well. It isn’t just a shove.”

“I’ve seen the whole gamut of levels of violence, from throwing boiling water onto a woman or hitting her with a chair, to a slap.”

“I guess the most severe that I have on my caseload now is someone who has brain damage. On occasion we’ve had to deal with a couple of homicides as well.”

These findings suggest that as a resource, first responders must be able to deal with a broad range of acts of male violence against Aboriginal women, including emotional abuse through to very severe physical abuse.

The Victims and the Perpetrators: Common Characteristics

First Responders

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS: VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Some first responders point to a few key variables that are often shared by women victims of violence. Many come from homes where violence occurred in the past, and low self-esteem is also thought to be a common characteristic of women victims of

violence. Many have substance abuse issues, although substance abuse may be more the result of the violence than a preceding factor. Foetal alcohol syndrome among women victims of violence was also mentioned.

“Quite often they came from families where similar abuse – violence, alcohol and substance abuse – was prevalent.”

“I would say self-esteem. There’s not the strength there to say no, you can’t do that to me.”

“Alcohol was a big issue; they would drink a lot and do drugs as well. So mostly the ones that had alcohol in the house or frequented the bar a lot.”

“They are extremely vulnerable from other things like foetal alcohol syndrome.”

Low education levels, poverty, and being of a young age are typically thought to characterize women victims of violence – although first responders are also quick to point out that there are many exceptions to this. Others find that in their experience, victims include women from all levels of education and income, and all ages.

“Most have a Grade 11 education, or lower. A lot of the women also have issues with alcohol and drug abuse, as well as mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder issues. There are also a lot of financial difficulties; a lot of them are living below the poverty line.”

“Education was a part of it. Typically it would be women who were uneducated, probably not completed high school. I found that educated women often wouldn’t get victimized, or not more than once, because they would go after the guy.”

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS: PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE

First responders found many of these characteristics to apply to the male perpetrators of violence, also. Substance abuse problems in particular are almost universally considered to be a characteristic of perpetrators, even among responders who do not see many commonalities between offenders. A domineering attitude toward women, perhaps resulting from childhood experience with family violence, is also found to be common. Finally, a lack of self-esteem stemming from the loss of traditional roles and identity, sometimes the result of direct or indirect experience with the residential school system, is mentioned as a characteristic of abusers.

“A lot of the offenders, maybe half, have not graduated, and live off social assistance. They may also have come from dysfunctional backgrounds. I believe violence is a learned behaviour, and a lot of them are repeat offenders.”

“They would drink a lot, so alcohol was a big issue. It was mostly alcohol and drugs. Marijuana, or gas, also.”

“Male Aboriginals in the community have lost some identity and self-esteem, as they get away from the traditional lifestyle. Residential schools had both positive and negative effects on males, in particular ... there’s a big loss there ... They don’t have many responsibilities now, so the loss of those traditional values is common.”

Male violence against women does, of course, exist outside of the Aboriginal community. However, a series of important characteristics that feed into this type of violence exist in higher proportions within Aboriginal communities, including poverty and its correlates (limited education, substance abuse), and the “legacy impact” of residential schools on traditional gender roles and family structure across generations. Each of these adds a layer to the likelihood of family violence.

Drivers for Male Violence against Aboriginal Women

Focus Group Participants

Most focus group participants felt that among the main drivers of male violence against Aboriginal women, alcohol and drug abuse in particular rank very highly.

“Alcohol and drugs.”

« L'alcool. Il n'y a rien à faire ici sauf boire. On est une ville de 35000 et il y 42 bars. »

Loss of the traditional way of life and identity is also a contributing factor. This is exacerbated by the erosion of the traditional role of the male within the community and household, and the legacy of the residential schools, which is thought to perpetuate male violence against women. Both the perpetrator and the victim may have attended, or had parents who attended, residential schools where abuse took place.

A lack of parenting skills can also contribute to violence. Participants suggest that perpetrators may have had a violent upbringing from parents with poor skills, and subsequently fail to understand the impact of the violence on their own children.

“They learn what they live. Everything they are demonstrating is from the grass roots.”

“The daughter sees this from her father, and she thinks this is supposed to be the way. She’s not shown the right way.”

Participants think that violence is a learned behaviour: the victim or the perpetrator may have grown up in a violent home, in which they learned to see a linkage of violence with love. For these individuals, violence may be seen as normal, perhaps even inevitable and unpreventable.

The first time I was abused by my husband, he said ‘it’s not my fault; I’m doing what my father used to do. I’m following in his footsteps.’ Same genes.”

Violence may also be caused in part by the economic insecurity of men and the lack of financial independence among women, according to focus group participants. These issues can lead to disputes over finances and how to deal with poverty. They can also promote insecurity and low self-esteem on the part of the victim and perpetrator, as well as frustration resulting from the boredom and monotony of unemployment and life in a small community.

“Being unemployed leads to abuse. If they don’t have anything to do, they beat us up.”

“They try and blame you. If he cheats, he thinks you did the same thing.”

First Responders

First responders also typically point to drug and alcohol abuse as being significant causes of male violence against women, both in the short and long term. In the short term, first responders note that substance abuse frequently results in individual acts of violence, which may have been avoided in the absence of intoxication. In the long term, substance abuse contributes to other problems such as the breakdown of the family and the rise of poverty, which in turn feed back into the cycle of violence. Access to alcohol in some communities, however, is controlled; so occasional bingeing is more problematic.

“This is especially important for the degree of violence. I think if you take away the alcohol, they’ll still be violent, but the degree goes down.”

“Alcohol is more of a bingeing issue, because the community is controlled. It’s only accessible by air, so alcohol can be either smuggled in, or ordered in controlled amounts.”

Poverty itself is seen as a contributing factor by first responders. This is not only because of the inherent difficulty of living in poverty, but also because of the psychological impact for men who are unable – or in some cases, unwilling – to provide for their families, and who take advantage of women who are able to hold down jobs.

“When there’s not enough money it does increase the stress in a household, and if there’s a propensity for violence already then having this extra stressor might make it more likely.”

Intergenerational experience with family violence goes hand in hand with poor parenting skills and poor relationship skills in contributing to male violence against Aboriginal women. First responders cite each of these variables as a major contributor to perpetuating violence.

“A lot of it has to do with the changing of roles in the community. They used to get guidance from the elders in the community ... now maybe there’s less resources for young married couples ... without the elders to go to for the benefit of their wisdom that could be part of the problem as well.”

“There’s a lot of foetal alcohol syndrome, and a lot of general poor parenting.”

“I definitely think if you grow up seeing that kind of violence in the house, it has more of an influence. You could be a drug abuser and not be violent if you didn’t grow up seeing it.”

Community indifference due to sexist attitudes about women’s role in precipitating acts of violence can also be a contributing factor, according to first responders. Some responders think it is less a matter of sexist attitudes than simple resignation to what appears to be an irresolvable issue.

“There’s kind of an acceptance that that’s the way it is ... and it’s almost out of the norm not to have violence. It also contributes to people not being able to leave the situation.”

“I think the view that you see up here is that although it’s a matriarchal family structure up here, the fathers feel that it is their right to discipline their wives to make them change their ways.”

Some first responders point to residential school experience as a contributing factor to family violence, but this is not generally considered to be a major problem, at least for

current generations. It may, however, have contributed to the poor parenting skills of the victims and perpetrators of family violence. That is, something of a disconnect appears to exist between the perceptions of the participants in the focus groups and of the first responders. Participants are much more likely to stress what might be termed the “legacy impact” of the residential school experience on the victims and perpetrators of male violence against women. Focus group participants believe the residential school system has had ripple effects on parenting skills and family structure across decades, while first responders were less likely to link male violence against women with residential school experience.

“There are people I know who attended residential schools who are successful ... and will openly admit that there were benefits to the residential schools, like structure and discipline.”

“If you come from a place where nobody ever said ‘I love you’ and so you never learn to express it and you just mimic the disciplinarian attitude you grew up with, including physical punishment, it would just be natural for you to bring that into the family environment where it’s just not appropriate.”

Some first responders were reluctant to ascribe significance to such contributing factors to male violence, suggesting instead that there is no excuse for the behaviour, and that a stereotypical attitude of male dominance is at the root of the problem.

“Maybe this goes back to the stereotypes again but I think that sometimes the idea that the man is the head of the household and should be in control, and has more importance than the woman, I think that is a big contributing factor.”

As such, first responders and the women who they assist may have a different understanding of the issue of male violence. In other words, the women and their communities may be less able to view the issue with clarity or resolve, having yet to fully come to believe that male violence against women is inexcusable.

The Impact of Male Violence against Aboriginal Women

When Violence Occurs

Focus Group Participants:

In the short term, focus group participants said that women and children often turn to family and friends, particularly on reserves and in small Northern settlements where other resources may not exist. Other women may leave the community on their own, with the help of the police or of family and friends, or with the assistance of a crisis centre or hotline worker. Temporary assistance and accommodation can be found for women victims of violence at crisis centres and shelters, and these resources can provide a needed sense of safety, albeit, for some only on a temporary basis.

“The woman always has to leave. The man keeps the house. If you try to get the house, and your husband owes money, you have to pay it first.”

However, in the longer term, the women frequently return to the relationship and the home, following a “cooling off period” involving a temporary shift of “power” in the relationship toward the victim, or during a temporary “honeymoon”. According to focus group participants, there are many factors that may lead a woman back to an abusive relationship, including distance from extended family, children and friends; lack of financial resources or job and life skills to cope outside the community; and often, a profound sense of loneliness.

“Abuse is something familiar, so women keep going back.”

« C’est très difficile pour les femmes des réserves qui essaient de quitter et d’aller en ville. Dans la communauté il y a de l’entraide – en ville ‘you are on your own’. Si elles toffent un mois elles sont bonnes. »

“I would end up in the hospital, but I kept going back for my daughter’s sake.”

First Responders:

However, first responders point out that these resources are certainly not accessed every time women experience an act of violence against them. Instead they may be more of a last resort.

“No one really leaves. Hardly ever. We usually have to ask them if they want to go to a shelter, but they hardly ever go. We have to arrest the perpetrator if there’s any evidence, so they know they’ll be okay for the rest of the night.”

Barriers to Reporting Violence

Focus Group Participants

Focus group participants said that when violence occurs, it must be very severe – often near death – before the woman will report it to the police or leave the home. Reporting is compromised by distance from police and support resources, by a poor relationship with the police, and by fear of reprisals. The fear of reprisal is a significant barrier for any woman considering reporting an act of violence to the authorities. Acts of reprisal may not be limited to the perpetrator and may involve family members of the male who often exert pressure on the woman to leave the incident unreported and to return to the relationship.

“Seventy-five percent of the time abuse against women isn’t reported.”

« Moi j’avais peur qu’il se re-fâche de cette façon là »

“Someone from the family might get mad and get involved. The family is against you. You feel like the argument is with the entire family rather than the person you’re dating.”

« Elles ont peur de l’autre... Peur de ce qu’il pourrait faire. »

“You report it to your friends and family, yes.”

Few participants understand that laws and spousal abuse policies exist to allow police to lay charges without the consent of the victim. Many felt that the police were unsympathetic, ineffectual and sometimes cynical about the often-recurrent cycles of male violence against women. Women may see police as cynical due to their reactions to repeat incidences and the apparent reluctance of some women victims to help themselves by reporting the issue, and following through by leaving the situation or pressing charges. Focus group participants suggest that police may tire of women who seem unwilling or unable to help themselves.

These perceptions mean that many women doubt the efficacy of reporting an act of violence to the authorities. Furthermore, allegiance to and dependence on an abusive

partner sometimes leads women to attempt to protect the partner from the legal consequences that police can set in motion.

“Women will stick up for the men, don’t leave it up to the women. Have the police charge him and put him in jail.”

« Même quand j’ai faite la plainte avec la police puis je suis passée a travers tout ça, 5 ans après il m’appelait au téléphone pour me faire des menaces: Tu feras attention parce que je te surveille. »

“He just gets a slap on the wrist.”

Another barrier to reporting acts of violence is the fear of losing children to social services following acts of violence in the home. Focus group participants note that one cannot assume that the extended family and friends are able to take in women and children who have experienced male violence in the home.

“Most women don’t want to report it. They don’t want the children to see the violence.”

« On ne le signale pas parce qu’il faut garder la famille ensemble – c’est une valeur importante chez les autochtones. »

« J’ai beaucoup vécue de la violence. Je ne me suis pas plainte parce que j’avais peur de perdre mes enfants. J’allais au centre d’hébergement me reposer un peu puis je retournais. Si la police intervient souvent j’ai peur de les perdre à cause de la violence qui se passe chez nous. C’est ce qu’on voit souvent. »

“You have nowhere to go.”

Another significant barrier is shame.

« C’est difficile d’aller chercher de l’aide puis c’est gênant. C’est ma mère qui m’a forcée à aller chercher de l’aide. »

« Elles ne voudraient pas que les gens sachent qu’elles se font battre. »

First Responders

First responders agree that it can be very difficult for Aboriginal women to actually report incidents of violence to the authorities, or even simply to seek basic assistance with the problem. Aboriginal women face a wide variety of obstacles, psychological, social and

logistic, in reporting acts of violence against them and in seeking help and legal recourse. First responders suggest that often, by the time women call the police, they have suffered a series of incidents of escalating violence culminating in what is often a severe beating.

“A lot of times you’d finally get one where there was enough to warrant a weapons charge and then the victim would say ‘well, last week he slapped me’ ... there were many previous incidents, patterns of getting worse and worse, but you couldn’t use them because they were too dated.”

One reason for this reluctance to report violence is the fear of losing custody of children. Some first responders note that historically, children were often removed from the home when domestic disputes arose, and that although the approach has shifted in many communities to keeping children with parents wherever possible, many still share this fear. Although first responders now strive to preserve and support family units as far as possible, they note a common perception among Aboriginal families, more or less historically justified, that losing children to social services is a distinct possibility following a report of violence, and that getting the children back may be very difficult.

“They certainly might not want to get children services involved, there’s a policy here that if the children have seen the violence, they have to get services involved. It might cause the violence to escalate.”

Another shared perception is the fear of reprisals as a key barrier to reporting violence and to pursuing legal solutions. This can be fear of the abuser himself, but also of his family. Both focus group participants and first responders cite this as a major barrier to reporting violence.

“They might not want to piss off all of his family in the community. The community is just 200-300 people, and if you piss off half of them it can cause you all kinds of grief. There’s probably more reasons not to call than there are to call.”

Police among the first responders suggest that after a while, cynicism can grow, feeding into the belief that there is little they can do in the long term to fix the problem of male violence against Aboriginal women. However, other first responders suggest that in recent years, police have received better training in charging the perpetrator and avoiding blaming the victim. This shared view may point to a key cyclical element in the relationship between the police and the women victims of violence. That is, fear of cynicism on the part of the police may be a contributing factor toward distrust of police,

and to a reluctance to seek assistance or follow the recommendations of the attending law enforcement officer – the very behaviours that increase police cynicism.

“At first I was shocked and everything, but since it happens so often, it becomes routine. We become desensitized to it. In the end it’s always the same outcome, they get released, so you go deal with it, but you can’t really help that much.”

“For police, I think they’ve gotten a lot better about charging and not blaming the victim – it really depends on the individuals though ...”

The Impact on Women

Focus Group Participants

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS:

Participants in the focus groups feel that violence negatively impacts on the victim’s self-esteem, and on her sense of security and safety. They also feel that victims often blame themselves, and conceal the violence from others as best they can to avoid the stigma that is attached to victims of violence. Some participants said that a “code of silence” exists which prevents many victims disclosing abuse outside the family unit. Turning to alcohol or drugs to escape from the situation is described as a common coping mechanism.

“You’re scared no one else will want you.”

“You’re isolated, you’re alone.”

« C’est un sentiment d’échec. »

« Tu te fais dire ‘tu ne vaux rien’. A force de l’entendre pendant des années ça rentre, pis ça reste. »

“They think it’s their fault, they carry it for years.”

“I don’t deserve any better.”

Focus group participants also describe women’s concern that their parenting is affected by the experience of violence. Women victims of violence may feel that they have nothing left to give to their children, emotionally or physically, after dealing with violence. Some participants said that there was a huge sense of failure, betrayal and hurt when the children sided with the abuser against the women. A few participants said that the

sense of failure was often accompanied by feelings of hopelessness when patterns of male violence and abuse emerged in subsequent generations, among both victims and perpetrators.

« Tu es moins portée à t'occuper de tes enfants parce qu'il faut que tu t'occupes de toi-même. »

“Some children side with the abuser.”

“They use the children as a weapon. She'll come back because they want their dad.”

“The children don't know the fighting is going on. It takes place when they're in bed. They think the dad is a good guy.”

POVERTY IMPACTS:

Focus group participants talk about women being trapped by their sense that violence in a relationship is normal, and may represent love. They are also trapped by their lack of knowledge about and access to options, information and resources to deal with male violence against women. Fear of the unknown can keep women from seeking help, as can fearing the loss of a home and income: the financial impact on women can be a serious deterrent to reporting violence. Furthermore, focus group participants from on reserve were less likely to indicate that they know what “healthy” relationships are, and to have had access to spousal abuse information or resources.

“It's a way of being loved. You saw your parent being beaten every day, now you get the same.”

« Si tu quittes, tu perds ton logement. Tu te retrouves au bas de la liste. Il y a de la pression du conseil qui administre les logements. »

« La plus part des gens se font dire 'si tu quittes t'auras pas une cenne pis t'auras pas les enfants. »

“You leave everything behind. You have no money, no self-esteem, poor education.”

“I didn't realize the women's shelter was for me.”

“The woman is the same on the lease, you have the right to stay. Maybe women don't know that.”

First Responders

PSYCHOLOGICAL, PHYSICAL, AND SOCIAL IMPACTS:

According to first responders, the impact of family violence on women is primarily felt in their physical and emotional health. Respondents generally rate these as the most serious consequences of violence. For some, the consequences for emotional and mental health radiate out into other areas, impacting the ability to function normally at work, as a parent, and within the community.

“The person often remains anxious for a very long time ... and when you’re really anxious, it can impact you in other ways, your relationships with other people, whether or not you can actually get a job ...”

For women who experience violence, the impact on their social relationships can also be quite serious.

“There often seems to be more sympathy for the ‘good victim’ who doesn’t have substance abuse problems, who will go through the courts, and do everything that’s required. But if the abusive relationship continues, the system becomes less responsive. Kids may be taken away if the victim doesn’t follow the recommended path of dealing with the problem.”

POVERTY IMPACTS:

Some first responders suggest that the financial impact of violence can actually be less of an issue than at first glance, due to higher employment levels among Aboriginal women and the provision of housing by the band. Nonetheless, most acknowledge that the potential financial consequences certainly play a part in determining Aboriginal women’s reactions to male violence. This is of particular concern if the woman does not reside in her own community.

“I think that what a lot of men do is they financially abuse women. They don’t work themselves, but they’ll go out and drink all the money.”

“She may find other housing, but a lot of the time the abuser will constantly harass her, and it often happens that he’ll eventually move into the new housing with her.”

The Impact on Family Members

Focus Group Participants

Among focus group participants, there is a clear sense that the impact of family violence on children is a serious consequence of such situations. Children are scared and scarred by the violence, and eventually, violence becomes a learned behaviour. In the short term, academic performance may fall, and substance abuse can become an issue. Perhaps the most feared impact on family members is that of children replicating the behaviours they have observed – one woman spoke of her dismay at seeing her child and the neighbourhood children playing “grown-ups” and pretending to stagger around drunk – perhaps becoming victims or perpetrators later in life.

“It’s emotional hell for the children. The children don’t have the skills to deal with it. Kids wonder if they are the cause, they’re in the middle.”

« Maintenant c’est mon fils qui me dit ‘laisse-le, tu sais que ça va se reproduire. »

« Quand ils habitent dans ce milieu les enfants ne voient que ça, ils ne vivent que ça. Pour eux, c’est normal. Comment veux-tu qu’ils aient des buts dans leurs vies plus tard? Ca les empêchent de vivre leur enfance. »

« Mon fils est à l’école et il voit son père passer complètement saoul. Il a peur, il sait ce qui va arriver. Penses-tu qu’il peut travailler? Et puis il a des problèmes de comportement agressif, puis il pleure tout le temps. »

“They see normal families, and see that they are different.”

“They act out at school, and get labelled as a bad kid at school.”

The effects on other family members can also be serious. They may have to take in or financially support victims of violence and children. The safety of other family members may be compromised. Other family members, friends, and even neighbours may be drawn into the conflict and seek to punish or protect the perpetrator. Some relationships with friends and extended families come to be characterized by frustration when the victim of violence refuses help.

“The neighbours ... I would always run to the neighbour’s house, he wouldn’t come after me there.”

« Elle laisse tomber la plainte jusqu’à ce que la violence recommence encore. »

“How can you help someone beaten down, who keeps going back?”

First Responders

First responders also point out that the consequences of male violence against women are serious for the family unit as a whole. The breakdown in expectations and roles, and the lack of trust and soaring resentment involved in family violence can negatively affect generations of a family.

“Violence is kind of the final step in the family breakdown ... We’ve been to an assault where someone beat up his dad who was 65, and you always see that the dad was violent and beat up the mom when the guy was young.”

For all first responders, the impact on the children is particularly egregious and widespread. In addition to the direct short-term impact on emotional and physical health, in the long-term, the future parenting and relationships skills of children are at stake.

“They tend not to do very well in school, they tend to be really anxious, it impairs their ability to relate well to other people, they end up with a lot of serious emotional problems ... And they’re more likely to either become victims or perpetrators in their adult life.”

“They learn from seeing it happen to the victim that sometimes that is the way to treat women. They may learn from it that that is not the way to treat women if the police and other agencies get involved.”

Another consequence of the conflicts that stem from violence is tension between parents and children. Children’s loyalties may be torn between their mother and father, and being taken from the family home to a shelter can lead them to inadvertently re-victimize the woman by blaming her for the situation.

“The kids end up blaming the mom as well, which makes it more difficult for her. The kids end up saying things like ‘I hate you, why can’t we be with Dad?’”

First responders also point to the complexity of family relationships in small communities, where abusers and victims are well known to all, and extended families can be drawn into conflicts. Privacy concerns are key, with a general sense that in such small inter-related communities, including on reserves, in Aboriginal communities in urban centres, and in Northern settlements, everyone knows everyone else’s business.

There is also the fear of reprisals from the abuser's family, both against the woman victim of the violence, and against her own family.

“The violence doesn't stop with the abuser, it continues with the extended family members ... The families on both sides of the victim often become abusive, partly because the abuser's family are going to protect and be supportive of their family member. Many times the victim's family wants to re-victimize for fear of reprisal from the abuser's family, or for fear of financial responsibility.”

“Parents often get involved, siblings ... Some people are believed, some aren't, and some are seen as troublemakers, there's a stigma for being a rat.”

The Impact on the Perpetrator

Focus Group Participants

When asked about the male perpetrator of violence against women, focus group participants felt that they were often victims of violence themselves, and that it was typically a learned behaviour. Some felt that in the short term, the perpetrator also felt bad about the violence.

“Women drop the charges. He's sorry, he loves her ...”

“You forgive and forget.”

Within the community, there is little responsibility or accountability assigned to the perpetrator. People are aware of the violence but “tend to their own business.”

“Something tragic happens, and it only lasts for a month. Someone comes to talk to you but then they leave and it's forgotten about.”

« Tout le monde le sait, personne ne fait rien. Il y a un grand manque de solidarité. Dans la vraie vie, tout le monde se mêle de tes affaires mais quand tu as besoin d'aide, personne ne veut s'en mêler. »

“The woman gets beaten, and the man holds his head high, but the woman has low self esteem, and hangs her head low.”

Focus group participants also see police as reluctant to deal with or to remove the man from the scene, or to charge the man. Additionally, the police may be perceived as disinterested or cynical: some see this as the result of women resisting the laying of

charges and calling for the lifting of non-contact orders. Occasionally, focus group participants mention racist attitudes among police, including some Aboriginal members of the police force. Some even speak of friendship and familial ties between police and abusers that compromise the objectivity with which women victims of violence are treated.

“The abuse was going on for twenty years. I tried to use the justice system, but the justice system failed me. You can’t use it. Abusers just get a slap on the hand and get community service.”

“I used to call the cops, but they used to drink with him, so they wouldn’t do anything.”

On reserve, especially the smaller reserves, as well as in isolated Northern settlement communities, distance and the enforcement of restraining orders become very difficult. According to focus group participants, the perpetrator is often allowed to stay in the home, while the women and children are forced to leave. Furthermore, the legal consequences are seen as insufficient and not in keeping with the severity or impact of the crime. This perception is likely derived from personal experience, word of mouth or an inadequate understanding of existing spousal abuse laws and legislation. Participants also suggest that victims of violence, or their families and friends, occasionally resort to vigilante justice, and that this might be more effective than the legal consequences.

“I went to the police, got a restraining order, but the police didn’t enforce it.”

“Zero tolerance against violence didn’t change anything. The guy is supposed to be taken away right away. Instead the woman is taken to a transition house or a friend’s house.”

« C’est une joke. On les envoie en prison pour 2 ans moins 1 jour. Les sentences pour eux sont trop légères en comparaison de l’impact à long terme sur les victimes. »

« Emprisonnement – probation – amande à la maison d’hébergement. Mais le monsieur revient à la maison. Ton conjoint violent revient dans la communauté. Et comme il manque de places, il peut habiter en face de chez toi! La réserve est petite. C’est difficile de se séparer physiquement. »

“The cops won’t help like a friend would.”

First Responders

Most first responders agree that it is usually the victim that moves out of the family home when violence occurs. However, in some communities, it is the perpetrator who is encouraged to leave, particularly when legal proceedings are instigated.

“Here it’s usually the perpetrator now. The ones we see who have gone through the court systems, anyway.”

When asked what usually happens to the perpetrator, most first responders mention various legal proceedings that can or do take place as a result of a female victim reporting an incident of violence. Legal sanctions can range from a night in jail, to a sentence of several months or more, depending on the severity of the incident. In some communities, alternative treatment-based programs are an option for those who plead guilty. However, some note that reporting is much less frequent than the violence itself, and that many offences go unpunished. Treatment programs and jail terms are viewed by many as insufficiently punitive to dissuade future violence, even if the offender is genuinely remorseful.

“We see the perpetrator being charged and sent to the specialized court, which is treatment-based. If he takes responsibility, he goes into treatment. But if it’s a repeat offender, they’re kept in jail overnight until they can do a bail hearing.”

“The jargon now is ‘relapse prevention’, so talking about it as an illness takes a lot of the responsibility away from the perpetrators. It really ends up giving mixed messages to the community.”

“Sometimes nothing happens to them at all, and they get away with it unfortunately, and they don’t learn anything from it.”

Logistically, visiting consequences upon the man can be very difficult in some communities, particularly in more isolated areas. For fly-in communities in the North, access to the criminal justice system is often remote and infrequent. According to first responders, this can discourage victims from pursuing charges against the perpetrators due to the difficulty of physically reaching the courts and the length of time between the incident and any trial that ensues. In many cases, women victims of violence and their abusers return to the same home long before any legal repercussions are felt. Furthermore, the geographical obstacles for women in these communities to obtain legal representation can inflate the fear of reporting acts of violence and of losing

custody of children. That is, it may take exponentially longer for a woman in such an isolated community to find a lawyer to help press charges, or to regain custody after an incident. This too can dissuade women from reporting acts of violence and alleviate the consequences for male perpetrators.

“The justice system is a little different here. If they do report it, we’ll come and take the report, but the travelling court doesn’t fly in for a couple of months so they know that nothing will happen for a while.”

“We have telecourt, so we can do it by phone, but they don’t even see the suspect, it’s hard to judge a person like that. The people on the other end will hear the perpetrator sounding really sorry, so they often don’t take it further.”

Among first responders, there was a clear view that the community sanctioned the violence to some extent. First responders suggest that in many Aboriginal communities, male violence against women is seen by some as an unpleasant but an inevitable aspect of the relationship between a man and a woman. Some state that even band council leaders are not universally innocent. In terms of community sanctions, there has been little for the perpetrator to fear.

“On the surface it’s frowned on, but the leaders themselves do it ... it’s accepted, it’s almost part of their culture now. On the surface, if you were to ask them, they would say it’s bad, but they also do it.”

However, first responders also point to encouraging signs that attitudes are shifting within the communities they deal with. Violence against women is gradually becoming less socially acceptable, and community leaders are beginning to favour educational initiatives that spread this message. Nonetheless, currently, little stigma is attached to the man as an abuser.

“It’s becoming less and less tolerant of violence against women, and we’re looking for more and more ways to combat it ... we’re looking at it from more of a restorative approach instead of a criminal one, which I think is helpful ... I think Aboriginal leaders are becoming less tolerant, and pressures are increasingly applied to people at all levels ... People talk about it now.”

Existing Resources

For Victims and Their Children

Focus Group Participants

Knowledge of coping and support resources was lower among women who live on reserve, and there was a sense that there was not a wealth of available resources (with the exception of Val D'Or).

“There’s no women’s centre on the reserve.”

« En terme de ressources, elles se tournent plutôt vers la famille et les amies. »

« Il y a un centre d’hébergement avec cinq places – c’est vite rempli. »

“I don’t know the location of the transition house.”

“I’ve never been there.”

However, focus group participants were able to list a variety of resources that women victims of violence can access. A number of participants had personal experience with these resources, and some spoke approvingly of the way they were treated and the support and security provided.

“These places are for everyone and anyone.”

“You can stay as long as necessary. There are decent houses with security for natives and non-natives. Lots of security.”

“It’s locked at night, there’s a curfew, and a direct line to the police.”

The most commonly cited resources include:

- Transitional Houses, women’s shelters or crisis centres (municipal, non-profit or associated with a church); and,
- Crisis hotlines.

Services provided by such facilities include:

- Temporary accommodation and assistance with longer term housing;
- Financial assistance;

- Counselling services for victims and children;
- Life skills courses;
- Security and safety;
- Drug and alcohol treatment and counselling (although the adequacy and the allocation of these services was uncertain);
- Exposure and companionship with other victims; and,
- Transportation.

Some focus group participants decried what they felt was a tendency to refer them from program to program without any longer term solution.

« Il y a le jeu de références – ou aller chercher de l'aide quand tu en as de besoin. On te réfère de place en place, c'est difficile. »

First Responders

First responders also describe some resources specifically designed to deal with spousal abuse, such as special courts that deal only with incidents of spousal assaults. Programs that work hand-in-hand with such courts allow perpetrators to get help with their problems prior to sentencing.

“Quite often it has a real mitigating factor on the sentence. Sometimes women really want their guys to get some help but not to go to jail, and this provides an option for them to get treatment and not to go to court right away.”

In some places, a special Aboriginal constable is employed, who is able to develop a good relationship with the community over time. This allows for a higher level of comfort in dealing with the police.

Most first responders thought that these services were accessed by women victims of male violence much of the time, *when they actually choose to seek help or report the incident*. However, the frequency with which women choose not to report acts of violence means that these services are probably underutilized in terms of the actual incidence. That said, it is extremely important to note that these services are often at or over capacity. Should the many unreported incidents and unmet needs be reported, they could overwhelm the existing resources.

For the Perpetrator

Focus Group Participants

Knowledge of and concern about resources for the male perpetrators of violence against Aboriginal women was low among focus group participants. Many participants felt that the men would be reluctant to seek help, for reasons that include:

- Low accountability or responsibility for acts of violence;
- The need to be seen to control the family;
- Implications for the family and personal reputation;
- Financial impact;
- Concern for privacy;
- Inability to open up and share;
- Distance from resources; and,
- Lack of resources, particularly outside the judicial or correctional systems.

Focus group participants felt that men would reform their ways only if the consequences of their acts of violence were severe: for example, losing the family, or receiving criminal charges and sentencing.

“When we get into these situations, it’s because men are drinking or on drugs. The men want to go into rehab, or the 28 day program.”

For those who do wish to change, focus group participants recommend accessing support groups, education and counselling services. However, participants suspect that perpetrators only agree to participate in these programs when faced with a court order, not because of a sincere desire to change.

“Men will only go to the counselling if it is court ordered. Even if it is court ordered, they only go because the court is telling them to. They’re not dealing with the problem. They’re not doing it from the heart.”

Information on Support Resources

Focus Group Participants

Focus group participants said that the main means of obtaining information on support resources was:

- Via posters in health facilities or within the community;
- Through “word of mouth”;
- The telephone book; and,
- Brochures or pamphlets.

“The police might direct you.”

Mention of web-based resources was almost non-existent. Participants indicated limited access to or use of the Internet, or knowledge of how to access information via a search engine.

“Most people can’t get to locations to access computers because they don’t have computers at home. So no, web-based services are not useful.”

All of the above resources were considered to be the most effective means for disseminating information about support, with the exception of web-based resources. Focus group participants called for more resources in or near the community, and suggested getting information out via the Friendship Centres. They also suggest “piggy-backing” on generalized educational and support courses, or within pieces of government direct mail such as cheques. Disseminating information through existing women’s community meetings is also suggested as a discreet way to provide information to women victims of violence, without drawing attention or inciting accusations from the abuser.

First Responders

Among first responders, a key suggestion was getting information out through the schools. Stopping the inter-generational cycle of violence by educating children at a young age that violence against women is not acceptable is a major way to tackle this problem in a long-term way.

Funding and Management of Resources for Aboriginal Women

Focus Group Participants

Regarding funding, knowledge of how the support resources for victims of violence are managed was mixed. Many focus group participants were aware that governments help fund the support resources, although some expressed scepticism about government commitment to women's needs. Fewer participants understood that charities or fundraisers also play a role.

“The government won't give us money for a women's centre on the reserve. They'll give you the run-around.”

Although it is important that the Aboriginal people are part of the resources provided to victims of violence, professional expertise, empathy and direct personal experience are also considered to be extremely important.

“We need someone who is honest to manage the money.”

« Le Conseil de Bande reçoit tout l'argent pour les programmes. [Est-ce que c'est correct ça?] Franchement? Des fois non. »

Views on the management of resources are mixed. Some focus group participants perceive a lack of transparency and accountability, and suspect there may be problems with favouritism or corruption. Clearly, community leaders do not always enjoy the whole-hearted trust of all members of the community; instead, many participants believe that neutral, uninterested individuals should have control over managing resources. Few participants favoured placing funds directly into the hands of the Band Council, suggesting instead that a “third party” should administer the funds or a separate account.

“Ask INAC for their money instead of the money being sent to the Band.”

“If you leave the reserve, you don't see any money. Please give me the money instead and maybe I can buy a good home.”

Gaps and Problems in Resources

Focus Group Participants

Among focus group participants, there is a perceived lack of resources in the community. Many women victims of violence feel cut off or abandoned by their community, and a sense of loneliness resulting from leaving to seek help may drive women to return home early to the community and thereby, the abusive situation. They also mention the need for accommodation close by for their children while the mothers are undergoing treatment or getting counselling off reserve.

“Women are part of the community, they shouldn’t put the centre outside the community.”

« Il manque quelque chose pour les enfants pour qu’ils soient prêts durant la thérapie. »

Band and community leaders are not seen to engage on family violence. Often, existing family and community relationships make family violence a difficult and complex issue to deal with. Maintaining privacy on reserve, in tight-knit urban communities, and in small settlements in the North can be very problematic, and trust – both in resource personnel and in other members of the community – is a major stumbling block for women in reporting and acting on incidents of abuse.

“Men are prejudiced, every time I call for help I get no help from the band. And once you leave the reserve, you have no access. You still have your band card but you have no help.”

[Que fait le Conseil de Bande dans ces situations?] « Rien. Rien. Rien. Ils ne se mêlent pas dans ces questions. »

« Il y a un problème de clan. Si le problème se déroule dans une famille qui n’est pas dans le bon clan, il n’y aura pas d’intérêt à les aider. »

“They don’t want to talk to people they know. You might as well put an ad in the paper, the whole community will know. The counsellor should be someone who doesn’t live on the reserve.”

“Knowing someone in the talking circle is risky. They could share what happened during the session.”

In terms of resources, existing support services may only provide short-term accommodation, counselling and security, leaving women vulnerable in terms of support and physical safety. In some communities, services are offered only on a 9am - 5pm basis, or are located in a remote area, and may therefore be inaccessible at the time abuse occurs.

“Putting the transition house on the reserve will only cause more problems. We can’t feel safe because the abuser can see you go.”

“The Mounties who work on our reserve work Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and after that you’re on your own.”

In some communities, available resources have limited admittance quotas. Focus group participants find that women are occasionally turned away without receiving assistance.

“You can’t just walk in, even if you’re an abused wife. You’re turned away if the program is full.”

Available resources also often do not employ Aboriginal staff. Focus group participants suggest that non-native staff leave them feeling less comfortable than if they were able to deal with Aboriginal counsellors and social workers. This discomfort is caused by cultural and linguistic differences as well as a sense of displacement in urban communities.

“We’d like to see it run by one of our people, and not by white people.”

« C’est très important que ce soit une femme autochtone. J’ai rien contre les blanches mais je ne pense pas qu’elles comprennent et des fois elles jugent. »

In addition, centres and counselling services may not include women who have experience with male violence against women. As a result, focus group participants perceive a lack of sympathy among some unacceptably judgmental women staffing crisis and counselling services. Some participants, however, praise the available resources that do employ culturally sensitive women with experience of male violence.

“We need people who have dealt with it. People who can fully understand what they are going through.”

“I talked to this sister one time, a social worker. She made me feel like it was my fault. ‘Did you do something wrong?’ This person made me feel small ... She was putting the blame on me. She made me feel a lot worse. I didn’t talk to her any more.”

In some communities, available resources provide little follow-up or after care, leaving women victims of violence without long-term support, or an ongoing guarantee of safety. Other focus group participants, however, note that some centres provide a tracking service for several months to ensure that women are financially stable and that their children are all right.

“Long term support is really important. You need exposure to something different, something to strive for.”

« L’argent donné va à la prévention. Il y a beaucoup de programmes de prévention. Les programmes subventionnés vont bien mais le suivi n’est pas là car il n’y a pas de financement. »

« Il n’y a pas de suivi du tout. On peut référer à des centres de dés-intox mais au retour pas de soutien. »

“There’s a twelve week tracking period after the shelter. Are the kids ok? Is the job ok?”

Furthermore, childcare and transportation services may be sketchy and unreliable, and women who leave reserves or small rural communities and arrive on their own in the city may be at an increased risk, perhaps because they are hitchhiking, or adjusting to life on the street. Among focus group participants from St George, this is considered to be a particularly important issue, due to that region’s proximity to the “Highway of Tears”.²

“Transportation is a barrier for getting to these sessions. Bus tickets would help.”

The police (RCMP) may be hours away. Police are also often associated with racism, with favouring the perpetrator above the victim, and simply with not caring. As such, they may also be seen as ineffectual.

² An isolated stretch of highway 16 that runs between Prince George and Prince Rupert, on which at least nine young women, eight of whom were Aboriginal, have been murdered or kidnapped while hitch-hiking since 1974.

“I don’t find them helpful, but it depends on the type of call. Someone who is stabbed, they’ll come within ten minutes. Someone is killed; they’ll be there in five minutes. If you call saying I’m about to be killed, you can end up dead.”

First Responders

First responders also cite a similar variety of barriers to women accessing the resources available to them. Like focus group participants, they see logistical issues like transportation as a big problem for some women, particularly those in small communities that are isolated from larger urban centres where health and crisis services are often located. In some areas, resources are concentrated in cities, and although social workers and courts may make occasional (monthly) trips to outlying communities, these may be difficult to access in an immediate sense, especially for Inuit women in the North. Some services make an effort to provide transportation, but this is by no means universal.

“I know for our office, we’ll pay for taxis for people to come. So we tried to eliminate that barrier. But for some others, say, you can’t get a taxi to legal aid.”

“The shelter can only give transportation in a certain area. So often women in outlying communities would need the RCMP or a social worker to transport them. Then if the woman isn’t comfortable with the social worker because they’re judgmental, the woman may not report the violence.”

First responders also note that a lack of staff training can be a barrier for some Aboriginal women, who perceive inexperience at some of the available resources.

“Most staff have little knowledge about things like social assistance, or where other services are located ... Knowing things like the differences in the system for status and non-status women, and how to appeal funding decisions, can be quite complicated.”

First responders note that for a few of the more isolated communities, basic policing and medical resources are available on-site. However, there is often a lack of Aboriginal staff, particularly among police, which can be discouraging for Aboriginal women seeking help for this sensitive matter. Nonetheless, part of the problem is that hiring Aboriginal staff in small communities may mean that the victims are related to the staff, and therefore feel that privacy is compromised.

“I know that was a big issue in the police force, there is a lack of Aboriginals in the police force, so they didn’t trust us that much ... I don’t think it stopped them from calling us though, they just wanted to get the guy out of the house.”

“A female Aboriginal RCMP officer who’s based in the community can be quite judgmental and brutal with the victims, because she believes she has empowered herself, and that these victims should be taking more control of their lives.”

Privacy issues in general can also prevent Aboriginal women from seeking services to help them deal with male violence. This is particularly the case in small communities, where someone will always be there to witness a victim contacting the police or victims services. The complex familial relationships in small Aboriginal communities exacerbate this problem, increasing the possibility that someone in a community-based centre will be related to the victim.

“In some communities they’ll have a worker there who’s from the outside, so there’s no conflict, but then there’s less trust. If there are services within the community there will be a number of people there to whom you are related.”

“Confidentiality here is a big issue, because we’ve had bad workers over the years, who have given information out after they leave the centre. We really need to respect their confidentiality when we stop working here. It’s a really big problem.”

The fear of escalating violence or of reprisals, both from the abuser and from his family, can be a serious barrier to accessing services. First responders believe that women often avoid coming for help out of fear that the abuser will make things worse. This is related to safety concerns in general, which first responders think can be an issue for women who want to seek help.

“The women go back to their spouses eventually, and then they get blamed by their family and friends ... but they have nowhere else to go, most of the time.”

Childcare issues are also a big stumbling block for some women. Concerns about who will look after the children if a woman leaves to report an act of violence, and whether the children might be taken away by children services as a result of the disturbance in the home, can prevent some women from seeking help.

“In our centre, we don’t have child-care for the women. It’s really hard to get it from Health and Social Services.”

Simple lack of awareness of the services that are available for them can be an obstacle for women who need help with male violence. Although there have been efforts to educate women about the services provided for them, many still do not know where to go and who to talk to. Furthermore, they are sometimes unaware that they are eligible for the services provided.

“Not everybody knows what’s available and how to access services. We try to give them some education, but lots of people still don’t know.”

Some first responders point to the culture shock that some Aboriginal women experience when they leave their home community to seek help. Again, this is often more acute for Inuit women from isolated communities in the North.

“Fear of the unknown is a big thing, if you’re a traditional woman from a small community in the North and you’ve never been to a large centre.”

For First Nations women on reserves, a lack of involvement in dealing with the issue by the band leaders and the rest of the community are also cited as problematic by some first responders. The lack of engagement can lead women to despair that their community is not interested in the problem. However, others point to encouraging signs that the tide is turning, with band leaders and community members becoming more aware that male violence against women is unacceptable.

“Women always think that the community doesn’t care. In the past, the community has given more support to the man, so women might think they won’t get involved now.”

“They’re becoming more and more cognizant of the needs within their own communities, and there’s more of an effort to deal with these social problems ... they’re looking for healing within the communities, and they recognize that family violence is part of that.”

Suggested Ways to Increase Reporting and Access to Services

Focus Group Participants

PUBLICITY AND AWARENESS:

Many communities have already instituted initiatives of various kinds to encourage Aboriginal women to report acts of male violence against them, including a wide range of educational efforts and awareness raising. Among focus group participants, a variety of suggestions were offered to increase awareness of resources and to discourage

violence against women, including publicizing names of perpetrators, educating children about family violence, expanding available resources, and changing funding allocations.

“I read the newspaper everyday and never see anything about violence against women ... Point out the abusers, ‘so and so is a wife beater’.”

EDUCATION:

Among focus group participants, education is a particularly popular way of interrupting the cycle of violence. This can involve teaching adults to respect each other within relationships, as well as training children to understand that violence is unacceptable. Providing opportunities for teenagers to socialize in a sober environment is also a key suggestion.

“You have to educate boys. When they grow up to be men, they are good men. The school system should put it in their curriculum.”

“Teenagers need a place they can call their own. No drinking or drugs.”

FUNDING:

Women who fear losing shelter and the financial ability to care for their children are less likely to report acts of violence against them. Providing funding for women in need to purchase goods and services, as well as to pay for housing, is thought to be a particularly useful way to encourage them to report and act on incidents of violence. In addition to the logistical benefits of such funding, the psychological impact of knowing such a safety net exists would be uniquely helpful, providing a clear impetus for reporting acts of violence.

“There should be a supplement for working families. People who aren’t working don’t qualify.”

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY TRAINING:

Existing resources, such as crisis centres, should be expanded to incorporate more sensitivity to Aboriginal women, according to focus group participants. This would help overcome cultural and linguistic barriers to reporting and acting on violent incidents.

“There should be a transition house that can service Aboriginal women. Some women can’t speak good English.”

GENDER BALANCE IN COMMUNITY INFLUENCE:

Focus group participants also suggest providing more opportunities for women to hold positions of influence within the community. For instance, men dominate First Nations band councils, and participants think that allowing First Nations women to participate in band and community decision-making might help indirectly in preventing abuse.

“There are no women band councillors, they’re all men. If they had more women leaders, women might get more help.”

LEGAL CONSEQUENCES:

Some focus group participants raise the possibility of more punitive justice measures. Enforcing sentences and “peace bonds” is particularly important; some women point out that men are frequently able to dismiss the seriousness of the problem because the legal consequences are light.

“It’s [the justice system] too lean on the males.”

“If they have a peace bond, they don’t really care. If they broke the peace bond, nothing is done to enforce it.”

First Responders

SPECIALIZED WORKSHOPS AND PROGRAMS:

Among first responders, a variety of initiatives are in place to encourage reporting and preventing violence against Aboriginal women. Some victims’ services centres hold workshops to raise awareness and teach Aboriginal women how to deal with and prevent violence against them. Others have created special programs and courts to deal with male violence against women.

“Sometimes communities ask us to come in and do workshops. Recently there was a forum that was held that was for Aboriginal women, and we talked about violence in the communities and so on ... We run a group here in the city, and probably a lot of people benefit from that.”

“We did have a ‘Stop the Violence’ night, there were probably 150 people there, we just gave out information about why family violence shouldn’t be happening. We had all the students at the elementary and the high school do posters about family violence, and it was really an eye opener for people to see all these posters.”

“We’re about to start a counselling group in the fall. We’re going to start a violence education program, to make men and women aware.”

“Substance abuse workshops for both men and women. We’re running a two-week program for women with substance problems now.”

EDUCATION AND SUPPORT:

When asked what is left to be done to solve the problem of male violence against Aboriginal women, most first responders talk about increasing the available support services, and more importantly, better education about how to deal with this issue, both for the women victims of male violence, and for the next generation. Many suggest educational initiatives in the schools attended by the children of women at risk, in order to prevent the development of a new generation of abusers and abused. Others think it is really an issue of community education, of teaching the Aboriginal community to be self-sufficient and to treat each other honourably.

“I think we really have to do more work in the schools. To help children that are in those situations, but also to really teach other methods of working out your problems ... I think we really have to start working with kids who have been damaged so we don’t keep repeating the cycle all the time, so they don’t keep feeling helpless. I think lots of education in terms of the fact that it’s wrong, that it’s not normal and it shouldn’t be tolerated.”

CRIMINAL JUSTICE CONSEQUENCES:

A lack of consensus exists among first responders on the criminal justice aspect of this issue. Some suggest that harsher punishments from the courts are an area to focus on, but others believe that a more restorative and less punitive approach is called for. Sentencing circles, as a method of engaging the community and discussing the many issues, consequences and grievances related to violent abuse, are considered by some to be a particularly fruitful way of dealing with the issue of violence against women.

“Just stricter punishment, more severe punishment. And it needs to happen more quickly. If it was part of the education system from the moment they’re little, if they were taught that it was wrong, that would help.”

“I think the courts have to take a more restorative approach to dealing with the issues of family violence, with more of a view to healing the community and families, instead of strictly enforcement and incarceration.”

RESOURCES:

First responders strongly suggest that insufficient financial resources are a significant part of perpetuating the problem of male violence against Aboriginal women. First responders call for increasing the number of crisis centres and services, as well as focusing the justice system more closely on the problem. Ultimately however, the consensus rests on dramatically increasing educational programs, both in communities and in schools, as the key to resolving the problem of male violence against Aboriginal women.

APPENDIX I: RECRUITMENT SCREENER

Group Screener - Project # 60-0727-37

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is _____ and I am calling from Ipsos-Reid, a national marketing research organization. We are a professional public opinion research firm that gathers opinions from people. From time to time, we solicit opinions by sitting down and talking with a group of people. We are having one of these discussion sessions with women and are calling to see if someone in your household would be willing to participate. This discussion session will take about two hours and those who qualify and attend will receive **\$75** as a token of our appreciation.

Would you be/Is there someone in your household that would be interested in participating in one of these groups which would be held at a location in _____ on _____?

- Yes **CONTINUE**
- No **THANK AND TERMINATE**

Location	Date/Timing	Composition	Facility
Sydney, NS	May 2 5:30	Off reserve	
Sydney, NS	May 2 7:30	On reserve	
Prince Alberta, SK	May 2 5:30	Off reserve	
Prince Alberta, SK	May 2 7:30	On reserve	
Rouyn, Quebec	May 2 5:30	Off reserve	
Rouyn, Quebec	May 2 7:30	On reserve	
Prince George, BC	May 4 5:30	Off reserve	
Prince George, BC	May 4 7:30	On reserve	

Now, I would like to ask you a few questions to see if you qualify to attend.

1. "Are you a woman who is at least 18 years of age or older?"

- Yes **CONTINUE**
- No **THANK AND TERMINATE**

TRY FOR A MIX OF AGES

2. And, could you stop me when I get to your age category.

- 26 – 35
- 36 – 45
- 46 – 55
- 55 – 65
- 65 – 75
- 76 plus

IF 76 PLUS – “Thank you, that age category has been filled.” *Otherwise, try for a mix of ages – these can be considered soft quotas.*

3. Do you or does anyone in your household work in any of the following areas? (READ LIST)

IF "YES" TO ANY - THANK AND TERMINATE

- An advertising agency
- A market research company
- The media, that is for TV, Radio or a newspaper
- The Government of Canada
- Band Council (work for/member of)

IF "YES" - THANK AND TERMINATE

4. Would you say that you are very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned about issues that affect women today?

Very concerned

Somewhat concerned

Not very concerned

Not at all concerned

IF NOT AT ALL CONCERNED – THANK AND TERMINATE

Thank you - as part of the discussion you may need to read some printed materials if you wear glasses for reading can you please remember to bring them to the group so that you can read the materials.

At the facility, you may be asked to produce photo identification, so please remember to bring something with you. **Only those with photo ID will be able to participate in the discussion group**

(INTERVIEWER NOTE: If respondent says they do not have photo ID, then any other form of ID will do).

We are reserving a special place for you at this session. There will only be 8 or 9 people attending, so if for any reason you cannot attend, please call **(READ FIELD SUPERVISOR NUMBER, XXXPHONENUMBER)** as soon as possible so that we can select someone else to take your place.

Also, someone from our office will be calling you back to confirm these arrangements. Could I please have your name and phone number where we can reach you during the evening and during the day?

NAME: _____

DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER: _____

EVENING PHONE NUMBER: _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

RECRUITED BY: _____

CONFIRMED BY: _____

APPENDIX II: MODERATOR'S GUIDE

Introduction (5 Minutes)

Explain to participants:

- Ipsos-Reid Corporation
- the length of session (2 hours)
- taping of the discussion
- one-way mirror and colleagues viewing in back room. *There are observers from INAC. They are simply here to watch and do not participate in the groups, or report on anything that any one individual has said.*
- results are confidential and reported in aggregate/individuals are not identified/participation is voluntary and *we want you to feel comfortable*
Moderators: If a participant is uncomfortable take a break, talk with them, and if they want they can leave)
- the role of moderator is to ask questions, timekeeper, objective/no vested interest
- role of participants: not expected to be experts, speak openly and frankly about opinions, no right/wrong answers. _
- Get participants to introduce themselves and their occupation/hobbies etc.

Warm-up (10 Minutes)

- What are some of the most important issues facing women in your community?

Perception of Family Violence (15 Minutes)

Note to Moderator: Please frame violence as “male violence against women”.

- Next, I would like to ask you what comes to mind when you think about family violence. [*Note to moderator: no direct probing for personal experience*]
- What constitutes an act of violence? Male violence against women? (verbal attacks, ridicule, isolation from family/friends, threats to children, jealousy, unwarranted accusations, physical abuse – kicked, hit, beaten, sexually assaulted, use of weapons)
- Is violence against women an issue?
 - Community experience?
- What do you think causes or leads to family violence/violence against women?
 PROBE:
 - Family experience/personal experience/lack of parenting skills
 - Substance Abuse?
 - Other contributing factors (Sexism, indifference within the community or within the family, racism or stereotyping)?

Do you think that women who experience family violence report it, or are there a lot of incidences that are likely unreported? If so, why? Probe: Specific of report – Who, where, barriers?

Coping Mechanisms (65 Minutes)

Note to Moderators: While there are many probes built into the following section, they are meant to act as a guide, particularly where participants may be quiet.

Experience and Consequences – 20 minutes

- Generally speaking, when family violence occurs what impact does it have on:
 - Women
 - Children
 - Other family members
 - Individual who caused/ committed act of violence.
 - Community

- Are there any consequences for [INSERT INDIVIDUAL]? Why/ Why not?
 - Women
 - Impact on health (physical and emotional)
 - Financial impact or standard of living
 - Leave/lose Matrimonial home, or stay with abusive partner?
 - Leave community/reserve to get help/shelter? Consequences?
 - What happens if they have to leave the reserve? Self-guilt as parent?
 - Stigma?
 - Children
 - Emotional impact/learning the cycle of violence?
 - Impact on competencies – ability to learn/access to education/cultural barriers/experience elsewhere – register kids in school elsewhere – esp. urban area?
 - Other family members
 - Grandparents/extended family – as alternative caregivers (*Family conflict, financial burden, lack of accommodation*)
 - Individual who caused/ committed act of violence.
 - What usually happens? Something? Nothing?
 - Indifference due to sexism and sense that community and society are indifferent.
 - Justice issues: Court vs. sentencing circles?
 - Stigma?
 - Community
 - Reaction of community? Acknowledged or not? Supportive?
 - Local police?
 - Band Council?

Support and Resources – 45 minutes

[PROBING GENERAL AWARENESS]

- Is there help for women who experience violence? What is it? Where is it available?

NOTE TO MODERATORS

- When we are probing specific awareness of resources that are available to women/families/offenders who experience violence, we are interested in knowing whether the resources are based within the community or not, or if the participants are aware of any resources that are set up to serve multiple communities.
- For community based resources such as shelters or crisis centres – how does this work within on-reserve communities? (*Location of shelter, issue of anonymity? Issue of safety*)
- We are also interested in knowing whether the resources are structured as a short term and/or long term resources for the women/family and offender. Some shelters may provide accommodations, assistance and relief to women for 28 days. We are interested in knowing if this is long enough, or is a greater continuity of assistance needed?

[PROBING SPECIFIC AWARENESS]

- Now, thinking about the people we have talked about [insert type of individual] where do they go for help (*see common probes below*).

Women
 Children
 Other family members
 Individual who caused/ committed act of violence

For each probe (*as appropriate/as needed*):

What happens? Do they get the help they need? Are they safe?
 Are there any barriers to receiving/seeking help (Fear of homeliness, lack of resources, isolation, lack of economic resources/independence, poor relationship between Aboriginals and police, transportation, leaving matrimonial home, impact on children, other family, perpetrator, and community reaction)?
 What is going on in the community to help get around any barriers? (Transportation by community members – women's groups?)
 Resources within the community? Crisis hotlines? Web based services? Women's organizations?
 Type of assistance and forms of relief (immediate/after care, short/long term)
 Community based? Social workers, Police, Crisis Centres? Role of community leaders/elders? If outside community where do they have to go?

Existence of counselling, education, prevention and (Offenders) treatment programs?
Effectiveness?
Where should the resources, crisis centres or shelters be located?

Program/Information/Support Needs (20 Minutes)

We have discussed how people who experience family violence cope and the resources that are available to them.

- Now I would like to discuss:

Where are the gaps/ problem areas where the most needs to be done to help address the issue of violence against women? Cultural considerations?

What are the key types of support that are required?

As far as you know, how are the resources administered and funded?

Should the funds be allocated to the community or through a local women's organization? Is it important the services are managed by First Nations? If you live on-reserve?

What is the most effective means of getting people the information and support they need? Are there any cultural limitations for those living off reserve?

- Crisis hotlines
- Web bases services
- Crisis centres – probe: location
- Educational/prevention programs
- Audio-visual materials
- Family counselling?
- Men's groups? Support groups for perpetrators?
- Other?

Conclusion (5 Minutes)

Do you have any comments on what we have been discussing here?
Thank you for your participation. Please stop to pick up your incentive.

APPENDIX III: ADDITIONAL QUOTES

Male Violence against Aboriginal Women

Incidence and Severity of Violence against Women in Aboriginal Communities

“I’ve had enough of it!”

“Your own children can be the abusers ... they had a 17 year old son on drugs and he beat his parents up. They tell the cops but they won’t do anything.”

“One time on Mothers’ Day, I didn’t say ‘Happy Mothers’ Day’. He poured hot tea on my shoulder, so I stabbed him.”

“My husband used to wake me up with a rifle to my head.”

“The abuse is really bad. I knew a lady with five kids, if she left her house, her husband would threaten to burn it down.”

“Men want to manipulate women; it’s not just physical.”

The Victims and the Perpetrators: Common Characteristics

“A lot of the women come from homes where violence had occurred.”

“It’s low self-esteem, because when I was in an abusive relationship it was because of my low self-esteem. I thought I would never amount to anything, even though I had good grades. A lot of the women I see are very smart, but they think they can’t do anything with their lives.”

“Some as young as fifteen get assaulted by their boyfriends.”

“It seems to happen along the gamut, I’ve had Aboriginal women who’ve had a lot of money and some who are relatively poor, and I don’t even think that education necessarily makes a difference.”

“The age really varies, it happens to old, old people too.”

“I don’t think there are any consistencies outside behaviour ... there are no demographic consistencies that I can think of ... Alcohol or drug use is definitely a commonality.”

“Among the younger, there’s probably more violence, probably unemployment doesn’t help, money problems don’t help, all those things, but it certainly isn’t necessarily a predictor of it. I think that probably what is fairly consistent is that a lot of the perpetrators have had violence in the past themselves, in terms of their childhood.”

“Probably 90% of the cases I went to, substance abuse was involved.”

“They tend to be domineering people, to have probably witnessed domestic violence themselves in their own childhood. So they have this opinion that it’s ok to do that.”

Drivers for Male Violence against Aboriginal Women

“Drinking.”

“Alcohol abuse.”

“Mother rules ... Treat their wife like they would treat their mother ... I have seen some of my boys and I can’t believe it. He makes his wife run for his tea.”

“They don’t or can’t change. They have trouble dealing with change. They watched their parents do the same thing, and now I’m doing the same damn thing. In a couple of years my daughter will be doing the same thing.”

“Men’s insecurities. It’s them, not us.”

“Apart from the substance abuse itself, it can lead to other factors such as poverty.”

“Obviously poverty means that the women have fewer options, like other housing and transport.”

“People learn from their family experience, and if there was violence there, it’s a learned behaviour.”

“Not poor parenting skills but just skills that no longer apply ... it’s interpreted as being unfit parents but they just are doing what was done for them.”

“The way they’re brought up, it just seems that they don’t care that much, they don’t care about themselves or their significant other.”

“There is a lot of ‘mother blaming’ in the community.”

“I think it’s just the culture, it’s just normal.”

“If women are deemed ‘bad mothers’ due to substance abuse, they can be given less support. Sometimes people in the community talk about women getting all the support, and they mention that there should be shelters for men as well.”

“The northern communities seem to feel less sympathy for the victim.”

“I don’t think the communities are ‘indifferent’. It’s more of a learned helplessness.”

“Some of the leaders today are the people that went out to the schools, and it’s put them where they are right now. But for other people that were at the residential schools, it’s just been devastating to their lives.”

“That’s [poor parenting skills] probably a big result of the residential schools.”

The Impact of Male Violence against Aboriginal Women

When Violence Occurs

“The woman has to leave and find shelter.”

“A friend of mine left her husband and used all the services. She eventually left her husband, but for a friend’s husband who was also abusive ... She had learned a lot but ended up right back in the same situation.”

“It happened too many times, this is it; I’m going to close this book. It’s a good thing I’m not getting slapped around any more.”

“You always find yourself back in the same situation.”

Barriers to Reporting Violence

“They are afraid to report it. They think someone from the family, a relative, will get involved.”

“The family doesn’t want to hear it.”

“It’s a waste of time. ‘I’ll just live with it.’”

“Working women have to leave, and then they end up on social services.”

The Impact on Women

“We let the men come in and take control. You can’t do this and you can’t do that.”

“The man is controlling clothes and personal papers. He picked me up and strangled me because I let him do this. The cops are on his side.”

“You choose it.”

“I put up with abuse for six years, I did fight back. It did no good.”

“Men feel like they own their wives. It’s a sense of ownership, sitting in his castle holding his flag. Refusing to leave. Women and families have to leave. They have no place to go.”

“The men take the money and drink it up, and you have to start from scratch.”

“The woman leaves the home to find shelter, and then comes back to the family home. While she’s gone, the man is bad-mouthing her around the community.”

“My cousin is now in an abusive relationship ... my daughter is with the same kind of man.”

“My nephew is five, he’s hitting one minute, and kissing and hugging the next.”

“If you get beat up all the time, you can’t be healthy.”

“A lot of times in the community there’s band housing that’s available, and if the people split up, then a lot of times your own band will supply you with a house.”

“I wouldn’t say there are adequate resources but there are some for her to keep the children and survive.”

“You see a phenomenon up here ... that the women are the ones who are working. So sometimes when there’s been violence and the family splits up, the woman actually has more money because she doesn’t have to support him any more.”

The Impact on Family Members

“Often the children are uprooted. They end up going to a place where they have no stability, and they don’t know how long they’ll be there. It causes confusion in the children. Also the financial issues can impact on their nutrition.”

“The children might grow up thinking violence is ok.”

The Impact on the Perpetrator

“One woman was stabbed four times, but wouldn’t lay charges. He got away with it, his family backed him up.”

“It seems that way on the men’s side, it’s okay to hit women, you’re allowed to do it.”

“The police talk to him and get his side, and then take his side.”

“I don’t want to see the cop just throw him in the car. I want the cops to kick his ass and throw him in jail.”

“It takes a long time to get to court. He just gets probation ...”

“There are some vigilante style beatings of men.”

“I don’t work with perpetrators, but I sense that a lot of the time they don’t want to be beating their partners ... a lot of the time the perpetrators have some remorse, but it’s usually short-lived ... the court doesn’t tie acts of violence to custody or visitation with the kids. Plus the treatment program is incentive-based, and is quite flexible. So if he can’t make it to a session, it’s quite relaxed.”

“Court dates only happen every two or three months here. So if the cases happen between the court dates, and there’s a no-contact undertaking, a lot of time the victims will make contact with the offender before the court date. Then they often end up not going through with the charge, because they’ve gone back to the home.”

Existing Resources

For Victims and Their Children

“There are absolutely no transition houses on the reserve.”

“I went to “P” House in New Glasgow. I was there for four months, and then shipped to a transition house. I didn’t have to worry when I was away.”

“I stayed there for two months ... The court system at that time was slow, and I had no other place to go, so I was able to stay. The two months was good.”

For the Perpetrator

“Instead of going to jail, they go to the 28 day program.”

“My husband was sent to anger management classes. He was court ordered, but he didn’t go. He’s not supposed to contact me, we now communicate through his mother.”

“The community helps with rehab and with counsellors.”

Gaps and Problems in Resources

“I wouldn’t go if it wasn’t in the community.”

“There are some counsellors but they don’t keep the information private. What happens here should not be communicated to the people living on the reserve.”

“People here won’t talk because they know you too much. Deep inside they want to talk.”

“They will know where it is located.”

“You call the crisis phone, but it’s difficult to tell someone over the phone your problem. ‘Can you come so I can talk to you?’ But they can’t come.”

“My daughter in-law wanted parental classes but the program was full, she was turned away and given a list for the next session. They couldn’t fit her in. Why can’t they just make room?”

“I would feel more comfortable talking on the phone to a native person than a non-native person. A native person can relate to my side.”

“Counsellors should be comfortable speaking either English or Micmac. It’s up to you.”

“Some women workers in shelters are culturally sensitive, they often were abused themselves ... they understand.”

“Sometimes workers can’t get access to company vehicles, to go and see the women, or pick them up. The RCMP officers sometimes help out in the area.”

“Some people would rather see a Aboriginal person. There are Aboriginal organizations of course, that people can go to, but on the other hand ... in some of the small communities, part of the problem is that there might be someone there, but maybe they’re your cousin.”

“Other community members may see them using the service, so if the service is less visible, they may be more likely to use it.”

“It won’t be just the abuser, it will extend to their family.”

“That can be a real thing for some people ... a lot of the time people don’t want to be involved with children and family services, but then you don’t have access to child care.”

“I think that’s a huge one [fear of the removal of the children]. I think the fear is real for a lot of people, maybe not realistic but real.”

“When you’ve been victimized or abused, you’re really not aware of things around you. Or you don’t go out, because you’re so afraid to, so you don’t know what’s out there ... Because of the situation they’re in ... women think there’s no help at all.”

“A lot of the time the women think they’re not eligible to use our services. But they’re for everyone to use.”

“It’s hard for some people to leave their communities, but on the other hand, most of the people do come into Whitehorse for periods of time, just to go shopping, or whatever, and most people have relatives here as well.”

Steps Taken to Increase Reporting and Access to Services

“You have to teach your children, especially girls, to have more respect for everyone.”

“In the community where I come from, I see service workers being paid gas money for driving day care kids around. But if I were sick, I’d have no support. The service workers are spending all the money.”

“All the men on the council are making the decisions. The election is coming in November, they might listen now to the women.”

“Education about how to live, to be honourable, how to be self-sufficient is really important, self-determination.”

“More education is a big part of it. Support services for the offenders and the victims ...”

“I think the biggest one is community support, getting people to realize that the victim is the victim, that they’re not the one committing the crime.”

“I think ok, to promote better reporting and so on ... maybe it needs different court outcomes before you really encourage women to do more reporting, because if you’re not going to get a good outcome there’s no point. Although, maybe not stiffer penalties because often the women don’t want that either.”