

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Lead

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Structural barriers and negative trends

Indigenous women in Canada continue to be uniquely impacted by historical and ongoing colonialism. Canadian colonial policies such as the Residential School System and the Indian Act were deliberate attempts to eliminate Indigenous people. Indigenous women were specifically targeted as a part of this process. Indigenous women have been dehumanized and systematic attempts to undermine their roles as mothers and leaders have been a big part of historic and current colonial policies. Colonialism has and continues to disrupt relationships with land, families, communities and nations and has created the conditions in which Indigenous women are marginalized, impoverished and subjected to extreme levels of violence in their homelands. With colonization also came the imposition of patriarchal structures, systems and norms on Indigenous women and their communities. This continues to be a significant barrier to the realization of Indigenous Women's rights.

Missing & murdered indigenous women & girls (MMIWG): The number of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada speaks to the extreme levels of gender and racial violence that Indigenous women continue to face. Indigenous women are **12 times more likely to be murdered** or missing than non-Indigenous women in Canada and 16 times more likely than Caucasian women. We know that Indigenous women are roughly seven times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be murdered by serial killers.

Extreme poverty and housing: In urban centers, the lack of supply of affordable, adequate, safe housing from the private sector, coupled with sexism and racism are the predominant causes of core housing need for Indigenous women. The data proves that systemic barriers to advancing education, gaining meaningful and equitable employment and earnings directly affects the median income for Indigenous women. **Indigenous women aged 15 and over**

on average earn \$19,289, which is about \$5,500 less than the median income for non-Indigenous women. These barriers, when compacted with having to flee violence, and caring for both themselves and their children contribute to an inability for Indigenous women to access safe affordable housing. Indigenous women in rural and remote areas living in poverty face additional challenges fleeing violence due to a lack of access to personal vehicles and non-existent transit which means they often have to rely on hitchhiking.

Child welfare: Indigenous women have been targeted through legislative policies that have directly impacted their ability to maintain their role as mothers. The crisis of child welfare involvement and apprehension of Indigenous children is rooted in systemic poverty. In Canada, **52.2% of children in foster care are Indigenous, but account for only 7.7% of the child population.**

Human trafficking: Indigenous women and girls comprise a disproportionate number of those sexually exploited in Canada. Poverty, racism and sexism, trauma and discrimination create environments in which Indigenous women are targets of violence. The child welfare system has been grooming Indigenous girls for human trafficking as they are removed from the protection of their family and communities. Many children are moved very far away from their home communities with no or very little access to their families, community and culture.

Sexual violence: Indigenous women are **3 times more likely** than non-Indigenous women to experience sexual assault. Sexual violence is one of the unspoken tragedies in many Indigenous communities that needs to be addressed. The over-sexualization of Indigenous girls and women has targeted their sacredness and sexual violence has become normalized.

Family violence: Indigenous women are more than **three times more likely** than non-Indigenous women to experience spousal violence – **almost 60%** of those Indigenous women who experienced spousal violence reported experiencing sexual assault, being beaten, choked or threatened with a gun versus 32% of non-Indigenous women. Family Violence negatively impacts all family members and community and increasing supports and services are needed to address these issues. In Canada, many women are turned away from women's shelter houses, particularly Indigenous women due to the geographic accessibility of shelter houses.

Justice: The fastest-growing prison population in Canada is racialized women, particularly Indigenous women. More than **one in three** women in federal custody are Indigenous. Indigenous women are more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators and experience **higher rates** of violent victimization. Despite the fact that men are more likely to be perpetrators of crimes than women, the representation of Indigenous women in custody is **greater** than it is for men. Indigenous women's involvement in the justice system is tied to intersecting factors of discrimination based on both race and gender.

Indigenous women's health is connected to environmental impacts. Indigenous women are disproportionately impacted by climate change as many are still living off the land and need access to strong and sustainable forests. Indigenous women face food insecurity when their traditional lands are degraded. This, coupled with trauma, poverty and lack of access to

social determinants of health manifests itself in high inequities in chronic disease, mental health and addictions. We look at the violence against mother earth and the resulting impacts on our communities and we make direct links to the many types of violence against Indigenous women. We cannot look at the violence against mother earth without seeing the connection to violence against Indigenous women.



Recommendations beyond Beijing+25

- To achieve gender equality we must recognize the importance of Indigenous women's voices and create spaces within society at large, the women's movement and the Beijing +25 process for Indigenous women's voices. Specific funding, time and space needs to be allocated to support Indigenous Women, Roma Women and Sami Women's rights advocates. True equality gives space for women to speak on their own behalf. Women are the experts in the issues facing them and have the knowledge to develop their own solutions. True allyship gives up space to create space.
- Restore balance through critical investments in marginalized women's groups (Indigenous Women, Roma Women and Sami Women) and fund public services and social protection systems led by the women affected by the issue, based in community. For example, through investment in health and healing specific services and programs (for example in Canada the reinstatement of The Aboriginal Healing Foundation). Indigenous Women, Roma Women and Sami Women need to represent themselves and have investments into their political and social development to address the extreme levels of violence and poverty they face daily due to the intersection of Race and Gender. We need to invest in women in order to make systemic change
- Restoring safety through the restoration of voices of women that have been silenced. The more racialized women are more likely to be targeted for violence. The oversexualization coupled with the dehumanization of Indigenous Women, Roma Women and Sami women is a root cause of this crisis. Women need culturally specific services in their communities which meets their needs. Women need a coordinated, integrated approach to addressing sexual violence that includes healing and accountability based on community needs.

SRHR of Roma women

Sexual and reproductive health outcomes for Roma women in Europe are consistently poor. In addition to experiencing ethnic segregation and racial harassment and abuse in maternal health care settings, as mentioned above, Roma women also face racist and sexist verbal abuse and harassment in other sexual and reproductive health care settings in Europe. Financial, practical, social and policy barriers also have serious implications for their access to sexual and reproductive health care. Roma women are regularly denied access to relevant health services due to their perceived inability to pay medical bills or travelling lifestyle, a lack of health insurance or relevant identity documents. Roma girls experience disproportionately high teenage pregnancy rates and in some contexts face high rates of early or child marriage.