

A Longing Call to Prioritize the Safety of Indigenous Women Against Violence in Canada

Pritika Lally

Donald A. Wilson Secondary School

## Introduction

In Canada, according to a 2015 United Nations report, Indigenous women are five times more likely than other non-Indigenous women to die as a result of violence, and the numbers of Indigenous women who are currently missing are alarming (Brake, 2019). Furthermore, it is reported that Indigenous women report rates of violence 3.5 times higher than non-Indigenous women (Brake, 2019). As a result of their racial and gendered statuses, Indigenous women have been a target of violence throughout Canada's history, with a disproportionate number going missing and being found dead - known as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (Brake, 2019). Over the last three decades, the Native Women's Association of Canada has documented more than 4,000 cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada. Despite the severity of the problem, it appears to be overlooked, especially by the Canadian government (Ellsworth, 2021).

Many Indigenous women are born into a society that faces complicated socioeconomic challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, social isolation, and a high rate of substance misuse (McNab, 2020). According to studies, Indigenous females who have been sexually exploited or trafficked are caught in cycles of poverty and abuse (McNab, 2020). Because of the poverty and addictions that influence the lifestyles of certain Indigenous women, Canadian society further marginalizes and dismisses the violence they experience (McNab, 2020).

### Systemic Failure to Ensuring Safety

The Canadian government has acknowledged the threats faced by Indigenous women, but has yet to put any effective strategies in place to assist them. While the federal, provincial, and territorial governments offer some programs and services for Indigenous women in Canada, the overall response has been fragmented, piecemeal, and ultimately inadequate to address the scale

and severity of the violence, according to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women's report regarding violence against Indigenous women in Canada (Brake, 2019). The report determined that Canada had committed a "grave violation" of Indigenous women and girls' rights due to its "prolonged failure" to provide them with the protections through public policies and resources they require (Brake, 2019).

#### The Need for Long-Term Action Policies

The set of actions—plans, rules, laws, and behaviors—adopted by a government is known as public policy (Bernard, 2014). Some policies to safeguard the safety of Indigenous women have been developed over time, but many have not been administered and/or given the attention they require, resulting in their failure (Brake, 2019). The Pickton murders, the Tina Fontaine murder, and the attack on Rinelle Harper are all clear examples of governmental and legal failures to protect Indigenous women (CBC News, n.d.).

As a future leader, when developing or reviewing policies, I would collaborate with Indigenous women, representative bodies, and provincial and territorial officials to create and implement a comprehensive, coordinated national plan of action and policies that reflect the scope and severity of violence and discrimination faced by Indigenous women. According to reports, most cases of violence against Indigenous women are either ignored in court or rejected because they are regarded of “minor importance” which contributes to the continual target of Indigenous women and the lack of trust Indigenous women have in the Canadian judicial system (CBC Radio, 2018). One of the first policies I would implement would be to collaborate with the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to make sure that the timeframe for hearings is adequate to ensure a thorough and effective examination within the judicial system, and for affected families to be heard. Aside from the lengthy and debilitating

legal proceedings, numerous victims have revealed that they were subjected to insulting comments or statements during the trial (CBC Radio, 2018). I would make and implement a policy that makes it mandatory for all law students, lawyers, judges, and paralegals to receive gender and race sensitivity training, and I would work with provincial and territory governments to make that happen. By doing so, this will target the systemic racism that has been built in our judicial system over decades, and expose our future legal leaders to the difficulties Indigenous women face.

One of the major recurring themes that came up frequently in a survey that recorded what Indigenous women believed they lacked was a lack of support in times of need (Gamez, 2021). Due to a lack of resources and, ultimately, policies, most Indigenous women are unable to obtain the guidance or support they need. In addition to implementing policies that promote efforts that make services such as child care free or inexpensive for those in poverty, I would set up a free telephone service that would allow Indigenous women and girls to report abuse. Indigenous women often do not know who to contact or what steps to take, therefore enacting this policy would be extremely beneficial. In order to ensure the success of this policy, professionals from the Department of Women Equality would collaborate with female Indigenous leaders to devise a strategy that would make it easier for Indigenous women to seek out professionals such as psychologists and lawyers.

#### Conclusion: Moving Forward

Because they are women, Indigenous, and are generally less financially stable, Indigenous women are sadly vulnerable to violence. Colonialism, racism, poverty, sexism, marginalization, and inequality are all elements of the historical and ongoing suffering these women face (McNab, 2020). A goal worth pursuing is establishing and carrying out real steps of

change that all Canadians can be proud of. The 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, as well as the National Inquiry on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, have begun paving the road for change for all Canadians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, however, more has to be done (McNab, 2020). The clear path forward is the creation and revision of policies and laws, followed by deliberate action. It is time for a comprehensive approach that addresses our decades of failures to build policies that acknowledge and protect all women as equals deserving of respect and dignity.

## References

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