



Pauktuutit is the national representative organization of Inuit women in Canada. Pauktuutit leads and supports Inuit women through advocacy, policy development and community projects. Our mandate is to address the social, cultural, political and economic betterment of Inuit women, their families and communities.

Violent crime across the Canadian Arctic is the highest in the country at 11 times the national rate. Violence experienced by Inuit women, at 14 times the national average, is higher than that experienced by any other group of women in Canada. The unconscionable level of violence against women has far-reaching implications for victims, their families and communities and it is contributing to inter-generational trauma. Those experiencing violence and abuse in their homes often have no place in their community to seek safety. More than 70 per cent of the 53 Inuit communities across the Canadian Arctic do not have a safe shelter for women.

Due to the crushing inadequacy of existing shelters and the absence of second stage and transitional housing, Inuit women can come into conflict with the law when they have no other option than to remain in an unsafe home. This can result in Inuit women being left to defend themselves with force, by meeting violence with violence. At the same time, because of the lack of available and affordable housing, Inuit women fleeing unsafe environments can end up homeless, sexually exploited, or returning to violent partners. Both circumstances increase the likelihood of contact with the law.

The challenges to addressing violence and crime are acute, complex, and interrelated as Inuit often face a broad range of intersecting, unresolved trauma and abuse including childhood physical and sexual violence, low educational attainment, high rates of unemployment, and health issues like FASD and PTSD. These circumstances are compounded by many factors, including a lasting colonial legacy representing the steady erosion of Inuit legal order through the imposition of a foreign vision of justice and the process of achieving it, language barriers, high turnover and ‘burn-out’ among police officers and criminal justice workers, lack of community infrastructure and extensive social service gaps.

Given the fact that many Inuit live in geographically isolated, under-resourced communities across the North, strategies to address violence and crime must reflect the unique challenges associated with delivering services in this environment.

Improving the criminal justice system for Inuit women requires addressing the routinely underexamined impacts of economic, social and political inequality that bring Inuit women into contact with the law.

Henceforth, all recommendations will be gender-specific. It should, however, be noted that there is a significant dearth of literature with respect to the experience of Inuit women in the federal justice and correctional systems. There is a specific need for further research to be undertaken with Inuit women, and those that support them, to determine what would improve their experience within the federal justice and correctional systems.

## **Recommendations**

- Implement existing culturally relevant healing resources and supporting activities in federal institutional programs that include addressing the legacy and impact of residential schools on Inuit women, and the PTSD that is a common result of a lifetime of unresolved trauma and abuse.



- Enhance cultural connections for women in prison with increased use of Inuit visual images and materials, cultural programs and supports such as sewing circles for Inuit women using traditional materials the extent possible, provide access to Inuktitut print materials and other resources such as radio broadcasts in Inuktitut to support connections to families, communities and Inuit culture generally.
- Enhance regular communication with family members in the offenders' home communities through access by all federally sentenced Inuit women to supports such as the CSC CHILD LINK program.
- Provide CSC staff working with federally sentenced Inuit women with an orientation to Inuit culture, history, language and contemporary issues.
- CSC should explore releasing more federally sentenced Inuit women on parole to the Ottawa area to take advantage of culturally relevant supports and expertise not yet available in other urban areas. In conjunction with this, federally sentenced Inuit women in prison should be made aware of the additional Inuit-specific supports and services that are available in Ottawa while they are in prison and considering their release plan options.
- Case management for Inuit women on release must take a holistic approach that integrates supports for previous unresolved physical and sexual trauma and abuse, including the legacy of residential schools, and tailored supports for PTSD, self-esteem, addictions, anger management, parenting, theft prevention, education, life skills, etc.
- For those federally sentenced Inuit women who are ready and able to re-enter the workforce upon release, CSC should explore opportunities for parole-related work placements with Inuit organizations to offer a culturally relevant work environment that would support closer ties with healthy Inuit individuals who can act as role models and mentors.
- Where funding is not available to provide Inuit-specific services, the staff of transitional institutions and service providers need access to cultural sensitivity training and information about the unique needs of and barriers faced by Inuit women offenders.
- Inuit women must be made aware of their rights to access targeted services or supports and must be made to feel comfortable in requesting these supports.