



*Written Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on  
the Status of Women for its Study on Intimate Partner and Domestic  
Violence in Canada*

## 1. Introduction

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is committed to developing concrete actions to end the cycle of violence that affects Indigenous communities – particularly violence which may lead to the disappearance or death of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people. NWAC advocates on behalf of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people to provide adequate long-term funding for healing and support services for families and communities. Ultimately, strength and resilience can be fostered by providing families and communities with a place to heal and receive support.

The legacies of colonization such as residential schools, the 60s scoop, and socio-economic conditions like poverty, sexism, racism, and discrimination have all played major roles in the breakdown of healthy Indigenous families and communities. This is especially noticeable in the high rates of violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people, as they face life-threatening gender-based violence, and experience more violent crimes than non-Indigenous women. Indigenous women who find themselves in abusive relationships often lack the means or ability to remove themselves from their situation.

On June 3, 2019, *the Final Report from the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (MMIWG) was released. In that report, the Inquiry made 231 Calls for Justice. It also concluded that the acts of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada constitutes “genocide.”

In addition, with COVID-19, the frequency and severity of domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) increased worldwide, creating what activists refer to as a “shadow pandemic.” DV may include abuse in the form of physical, sexual, financial, emotional, psychological, cultural, spiritual, or reproductive violence between a parent and child, sibling(s), or roommates within a residence. IPV is patterned behaviour meant to gain or maintain power and/or control among romantic partners. IPV can occur between people who either live in the same or different houses. It is the most prevalent form of gender-based violence. The implementation of pandemic restrictions was intended to curb the spread of COVID-19. However, it resulted in many Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people becoming more vulnerable to violence as their access to support and safety was affected. NWAC submitted information to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on June 17, 2020, in this regard.

When it comes to combating intimate partner and domestic violence in Canada everyone has a role to play.

## 2. Toxic masculinity

Due to colonization, many men, and boys experience toxic masculinity. This is a term for how men are taught that to be masculine is to be unfeeling, violent, and aggressive. Toxic masculinity is harmful to men as it doesn't allow for healthy Indigenous gender roles to be honoured. Often media portrays men and boys through a lens of toxic masculinity and shames men who communicate and express their feelings. Toxic masculinity is harmful to women, girls, and gender-diverse people. It is important to identify how gender roles have been taught and reinforced to understand how to take apart the harm and violence created by toxic masculinity.

It is also important to understand that everyone plays a role in ending violence against Indigenous women girls and gender-diverse people. Men and boys experience violence and harm from colonization, racism and toxic masculinity and can work to address these harms and build safer communities.

Decolonizing toxic masculinity and engaging with boys and men in this work is paramount.

## 3. Supports and protection for Indigenous women and girls and gender-diverse people who are living in unsafe environments

The United Nations defines violence against women as gender-based violence that can result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering. Violence can happen in all cultures, religions, and communities, but due to Canada's history of colonization, Indigenous women face higher rates of violence than non-Indigenous women. Once held in high regard as leaders and givers of life, Indigenous women are now devalued because of their race and gender. This has led to disproportionately higher rates of experienced violence, spousal assault, family violence and sexual assault towards Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

*You Are Not Alone: A Toolkit for Aboriginal Women Escaping Domestic Violence*, provides Indigenous women with community safety planning resources to address domestic violence. The toolkit provides understanding and knowledge of various topics relating to family violence, background knowledge on the impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities, and community safety plans to help women, girls, and gender-diverse people identify their support networks and strategies for leaving an abusive situation.

The toolkit provides “[I]nformation and strategies to make healthy and positive changes,” and includes:

- Signs of an abusive relationship: to help identify DV, IPV, and signs of an unhealthy relationship;
- Safety planning for women and gender-diverse people leaving an abusive relationship; and
- Tools and exercises for self-care and building self-esteem.

In addition, NWAC's Resiliency Lodge in Chelsea, Quebec, offers in-person and virtual Elder-led support and empowered-healing intervention geared toward violence prevention. The Resiliency Lodge also provides navigational support for legal and social services for women and gender-diverse people impacted by DV and/or IPV.

Every person deserves to feel respected, safe, and happy in their day-to-day lives. Many women, girls, and gender-diverse people have managed to build healthy, safe, and happy lives for themselves and their children by leaving violent relationships.

#### 4. Strategies to prevent intimate partner violence and to educate survivors and perpetrators of violence

Connecting to culture is healing and can provide a framework for a long-term strategy to prevent intimate partner and domestic violence.

NWAC supports parliamentary interventions that will provide a safer Canada. This inevitably includes implementing the MMIWG's Calls for Justice, specifically:

- 15.1 Denounce and speak out against violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.
- 15.2 Decolonize by learning the true history of Canada and Indigenous history in your local area. Learn about and celebrate Indigenous Peoples' history, cultures, pride, and diversity, acknowledging the land you live on and its importance to local Indigenous communities, both historically and today.

Senator Mary Jane McCallum sponsored Bill S-219, *An Act respecting a National Ribbon Skirt Day*, which would designate the 4<sup>th</sup> day of January in every year as "National Ribbon Skirt Day". The Bill would celebrate Indigenous culture, pride, and resiliency. The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (APPA) presented the report without amendment on March 29, 2022.

#### 5. Recommendations:

- Engage with communities through a culturally relevant gender-based analysis to address and end the systemic violence that impacts Indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse people and their families and communities.
- Provide Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people with the option and opportunity of removing themselves from abusive relationships through community and network support.
- Enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people.