

# CANADA: End forced sterilizations of Indigenous women

By Nickita Longman

The Washington Post (4.12.2018) – <https://wapo.st/2G2uH69>– Last month 60 Indigenous women sued the Saskatoon Health Region, the province of Saskatchewan, the Canadian government and medical professionals for their experiences with coerced, forced or pressured sterilization in Saskatchewan over the course of 20 to 25 years. The procedures, which occurred from about the 1930s to as recently as 2017, targeted Indigenous women specifically. Each claimant is filing for \$7 million in compensation, citing psychological and physical damage since the procedures.

While some women do not recall giving consent for sterilization, others say they consented because of post-delivery exhaustion and persistence from health staff. Some women state that they were unclear about the permanent damage such procedures would have or were told that the sterilization could be reversed later. Others cite that health officials leveraged the procedure as a means to be able to see their newborn children immediately after birth.

This is plainly an act of genocide and should not be labeled as anything less, in accordance with Article II of the United Nations convention on genocide which prohibits “imposing measures intended to prevent birth within a group.”

In November 2015, two Indigenous women contacted local media to tell their personal experiences with the sterilization procedure within the Saskatoon Health Region. Brenda Pelletier reported that after providing consent post-birth, she had done so to relieve the badgering and pestering of health staff. Once on the operating table, the exhausted mother once again contested the operation, but the procedure was carried out despite her protest.

In an interview on Oct. 27, 2017, Alisa Lombard, a lawyer with Maurice Law who filed the statements, posed the question: Where would our communities be if not for the coerced or forced sterilization of our women? The procedures have larger implications for our community and its ability to thrive and work toward self-determination.

Sen. Yvonne Boyer, a Métis lawyer and former nurse who has conducted an external review on tubal ligations in the Saskatoon Health Region, has suggested that if this happened in Saskatoon, it has likely also happened in other cities on the prairies where the Indigenous population is dense. The government of Canada has had a long history of violence and oppression against Indigenous people, and this is especially true on the prairies. Saskatchewan in particular has one of the highest incarceration rates of Indigenous people of any province in Canada; most victims of police shootings in Saskatchewan were Indigenous; it also has one of the highest rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and alarming rates of poverty, including child poverty, both on and off reserve.

The harm of ongoing colonization, including theft of land, resources and children, is no secret on the Canadian prairies. It should be noted that the child welfare system is big business in Canada. As it stands, there are more Indigenous children in the government's care than there were at the height of Canada's infamous residential school era. In fact, Saskatchewan hosted the last of the residential school closures as recently as 1996. Is sterilization the government's attempt at addressing the very social conditions it has created over time? Is forced sterilization of Indigenous women the Canadian state's most reasonable solution to a population living in enforced poverty?

The Canadian government, the province of Saskatchewan and the Saskatoon Health Region have remained complicit in yet another form of contemporary genocide under the guise of eugenic ideology. It has attempted the erasure of Indigenous motherhood and in turn has limited the growth of the Indigenous nation. In the House of Commons on Nov. 21, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the "coerced sterilization of some Indigenous women is a serious violation of human rights" and acknowledged the systemic discrimination and racism that Indigenous people face within the health care system. But at this time, the Liberal government has not taken concrete action as it continues to sidestep the nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous people it promised in its platform.

Sen. Boyer has called for a nationwide review; Lombard, the lawyer, has delivered her findings in Geneva to the U.N. Committee Against Torture. Before the lawsuit cases hit the courtroom in 2019, the physicians performing these procedures, as well as the nurses and social workers who are assisting by pressuring for consent, should be prevented from practicing

medicine. All levels of government need to immediately address this issue and ban sterilization without free, prior and informed consent from each patient.

Forced, coerced or pressured sterilization of Indigenous women breaches the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' definition of "free, prior, and informed consent," which in Canada is often cited in relation to land. It is important to note that in many Indigenous traditions, the land is viewed as mothering. The ravaging of the land and water in the name of colonization and capitalism has devastating effects on the living. It stunts our growth and, in some cases, our survival. This same lens can be used when understanding the damaging effects that sterilization can have on a woman physically.

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# EU: Sexual harassment: The elephant in the room

By Madi Sharma

The Parliament Magazine (22.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/20XUcoa>– Soothing words are spoken, policies are put in place, victims are encouraged to come forward, protection is promised and then boom, you may as well be assaulted again, this time in front of an audience.

I am sickened that since the #MeToo movement, nothing has changed. There are known cases in all of the EU institutions. But how many prosecutions? None.

Gender-based violence, sexual harassment, harassment, are all abuses of power and amount to psychological violence that may or may not be associated with physical abuse. Intimidation, humiliation, a reduction of an individual's worth, are all acts of the perpetrator. This leads to stress, an inability to work and time off work.

The majority of victims are women, but more and more men and LGBTQI individuals also suffer. "We cannot act without names" says the human resource director (and the journalist).

Yet once the name was out, the individual becomes the target. The victim is urged to: "think of your career, you will never

get another job in Brussels, no one else has reported abuse, you are the only one, it would be better not to make a formal complaint.”

Of course, as there are no other formally reported cases, the victim remains helpless, feeling it was their mistake. Meanwhile the perpetrator is free to continue their activities, even more empowered as they have got away with it yet again. Now, the human resource director is also complicit. The cover-up becomes more powerful than the disclosure.

I have to commend Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament, for clamping down on any hint of harassment – sexual or otherwise. However, as parliament employees rightly say, more needs to be done, and they have launched their disclosures blog.

At the same time, I have to condemn Luca Jahier, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, for allowing harassment to continue despite numerous reports. I shocked the House of Civil Society when I dared to make a formal complaint about another member, listing their abusive activities towards both staff and members.

I was told: “there are no procedures in place to deal with a member, there is no legal framework.” An internal investigation has taken place that has been filed as “internal and confidential”, the staff have been offered medical services and I have a nice letter admitting there is a problem. Action? None.

These cases of harassment and sexual harassment continue and go unpunished for one reason: "the reputation of the institution will be damaged if it enters the public domain." Where are our values, our morals, our respect for dignity? Where do we show that we value our employees?

I was forced to contact OLAF, and I would ask those with harassment cases to report their situation to OLAF. OLAF is responsible for addressing harassment as well as its duty to ensure there is no abuse of public funds. Institutional funds used to defend institutional reputation and members is a misuse of public funds.

In 2016, €55,000 was used to defend a case of harassment regarding an MEP and an employee of the EESC. The institution lost the case and had to pay compensation and costs. The same member has had further harassment allegations levelled against them.

An institution that investigates and prosecutes perpetrators is one with an effective ethical code of practice. The rest are complicit in the crimes.

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## **KENYA: Woman jailed for six years for circumcising twin daughters**

By Nita Bhalla

AllAfrica.com (23.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/20fR4ts>– The mother said she wanted her daughters to undergo female genital mutilation to avoid a curse from her deceased grandfather

A woman in central Kenya was jailed for six years for forcing her 13-year-old twin daughters to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) in a rare conviction in the east African nation, a charity which helped rescue the girls said on Friday.

Florence Muthoni from Tharaka-Nithi county was arrested on Wednesday after a tip-off from the charity Plan International. She was sentenced by a magistrates court in Chuka on Thursday after admitting to taking her daughters to a circumciser.



A senior aid worker at the charity said Muthoni told the court that she wanted her daughters to undergo FGM to avoid a curse from her deceased grandfather who had instructed all girls in the family undergo the procedure.

“A community member alerted us when they had heard the mother was organising the girls to undergo the cut, so we informed the local authorities,” Mercy Chege, a director at Plan International, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“Unfortunately, we were not able to prevent the circumcision as by the time the police conducted the raid and rescued the girls, they had already been cut.”

The twin girls are receiving medical treatment and counselling while police are still investigating as the mother had refused to name the circumciser, said Chege.

According to the United Nations, one in five women and girls aged between 15 and 49 in Kenya have undergone FGM, which usually involves the partial or total removal of the genitalia.

In some cases, girls can bleed to death or die from infections. FGM can also cause lifelong conditions such as fistula as well as fatal childbirth complications.

Kenya outlawed the practice in 2011, but it continues as communities believe it is necessary for social acceptance and

increasing girls' marriage prospects.

While some arrests have been made and cases brought to court, campaigners say implementation of the law remains a challenge, largely due to a lack of resources and capacity of law enforcement agencies and difficulties reaching remote areas.

U.N. data shows 75 cases of FGM were brought before Kenyan courts in 2016 but only 10 cases resulted in a conviction.

Campaigners said this week's conviction proved that public awareness campaigns run by charities were essential to curbing FGM as they could lead to community members reporting the crime.

"It is very important that FGM laws are properly implemented as this sends a message out that FGM will not be tolerated," said Ann-Marie Wilson, executive director of 28 Too Many.

The U.N. estimates 200 million girls and women worldwide have undergone FGM. It is practised in about 27 African nations, parts of Asia and the Middle East – and is usually carried out by traditional cutters, often with unsterilised knives.

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## **WORLD: Why home is the least safe place to be a woman**

By Emma Charlton

World Economic Forum (27.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2FJ6pxD>– Where's the most dangerous place to be a woman?

At home, according to new research from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which shows almost 6 in 10 women intentionally killed are murdered by an intimate partner or a family member. That equates to 137 killed every day, by people they know. And the number is increasing.

Women in Africa and the Americas are most at risk of being killed by intimate partners or family members, the report shows. In Africa, the rate is 3.1 victims per 100,000, while in the Americas it was 1.6. The lowest rate is found in Europe. Most worryingly, the study highlighted how little

tangible progress has been made in recent years.

“Gender-related killings of women and girls remain a grave problem across regions, in countries rich and poor,” Yury Fedotov, executive director at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime writes in the report. “While the vast majority of homicide victims are men, killed by strangers, women are far more likely to die at the hands of someone they know.”

The findings are underpinned by figures from the World Economic Forum’s wide-reaching [Global Gender Gap Report](#), which looks at the status of women in society and seeks to quantify the differences between men and women in four key areas: health, economics, politics and education.

In the Forum’s report, the Health and Survival sub-index reflects violence against women. One part looks at the sex ratio at birth, to capture the phenomenon of “missing women” prevalent in many countries where families prefer sons. Another part looks at differences in male and female life expectancy, to capture years lost to factors including violence, disease and malnutrition.

Many countries score well, when assessed using this index and 34 out of 144 have reached parity, suggesting little difference exists. Azerbaijan, Armenia and China are the lowest ranked countries, the data shows, with some of the lowest female-to-male sex ratios at birth in the world.

Violence against women – particularly intimate-partner

violence and sexual violence – is a major public health problem, according to the World Health Organisation. It estimates that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

So why are so many women being killed? As well as domestic violence, the UNODC report cites honour-related killings, dowry-related killings and deaths resulting from armed conflict as some of the reasons. It notes that violence against women is often under-reported to the police and that a large share of it remains hidden.

The UNODC findings, which are part of a larger report on homicide due for release in 2019, have implications for policymakers around the world. The agency says women need access to specific resources that enable them to leave a violent relationship. Women also need specialized support services, including shelter, protection orders, counselling and legal aid, which are effective in helping women to leave abusive relationships.

“Across the world, in rich and poor countries, in developed and developing regions, a total of 50,000 women per year are killed by their current and former partners, fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters and other family members because of their role and status as women,” the report concludes. “Women need access to a comprehensive range of services provided by the police and justice system, health and social services, which need to be coordinated to be effective.”

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## **SOUTH AFRICA: The link between violence against women and children matters. Here's why**

By Shanaaz Mathews

AllAfrica.com (22.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2000Hun>– Nearly half of women across South Africa are subjected to violence by an intimate partner. This in turn negatively affects about one in four children. A child who is exposed to violence in the home also risks being abused and will, quite reasonably, fear for their own safety.

The country's government and civil society recently responded to the scourge of violence against women by hosting a summit to galvanise political support and develop solutions to end this sort of violence. Also recently, the [#TotalShutDown movement](#) embarked on protests across the country demanding an end to violence against women.

This focus is a critical step towards addressing South Africa's immense problem of gender based violence. But it's important for campaigners to recognise that the problems of violence against women and violence against children are deeply intertwined.

There's an increasing global recognition that violence against women and children often occur together in homes, and are driven by the same factors. For instance, young boys who witness their mothers being abused in the home or who are abused themselves are more likely to harm women and children later in life.

In South Africa, as in many other places, social and cultural norms promote a gendered hierarchy: men are in a superior position over women and children. These social norms provide considerable space for men's violence towards women and children to be tolerated. They are manifested in expressions of masculinity, enforcement of gender norms and the way that children are disciplined.

### ***Intergenerational violence***

Evidence shows that men's use of violence and controlling behaviour towards an intimate partner often extends to physically punishing their children as a means of discipline. Importantly, research is now revealing that women who experience violence at the hands of a partner are more likely to use physical punishment to discipline their children. This further drives the cycle of intergenerational violence.

The impact of experiencing or witnessing violence as a child has wide-ranging and long lasting effects. When a child experiences violence at home, they learn to tolerate violence. They are also at an increased risk of suffering from poor mental health, engaging in drug and alcohol abuse and risky sexual behaviours, and contracting HIV. They are also more at risk of behavioural problems such as aggression, delinquency and poor social functioning.

It's also important to understand that children who have experienced violence are more likely to lack empathy towards others. That means they're more likely to perpetrate violence. It is this aspect of exposure to violence that drives its intergenerational transmission. This has a direct impact on their relationships with intimate partners, as well as their ability to be emotionally responsive parents.

Growing up in violent households affects a child's sense of security, self-worth and how they relate to other children. In qualitative research I conducted among violent men, they spoke about having previously witnessed violence against their mother by a father or stepfather.



Many of the men described feeling scared for their own safety. They also felt powerless to protect their mother. It's important for society to respond to both problems in a coordinated way to reduce their burden simultaneously.

### ***Seeking solutions***

South Africa's response to both violence against women and children has, until now, been happening in silos. It's important that people start to join the dots. It makes sense to integrate approaches to both problems.

The evidence showing what works on joint programmes to address violence against women and violence against children is only starting to emerge in low and middle-income settings. Successful programmes are targeting multiple stakeholders, challenging social norms about gender relations and the use of violence. At the same time, such programmes are also supporting greater communication and shared decision making among family members.

South Africa has signed on to be a pathfinder country, as part of the United Nations' Global Partnership to end violence against children. In line with this commitment, the government is developing a programme of action to end violence against women and children.

If children are to reach their full potential and the cycle of intergenerational violence is to be broken, South Africa must consider collaborative solutions. Any programme of action must

be aimed at preventing violence before it happens and providing an effective response and support to those affected by violence.

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## **ZIMBABWE: Prominent Zimbabwean men volunteer to champion gender equality, fight violence**

United Nations Zimbabwe (26.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Rk3ugn> -The Embassy of Sweden and United Nations in Zimbabwe jointly launched a campaign called “Because I am A Man” today featuring 16 influential Zimbabwean men to lead the way in the fight to end violence against women, girls and boys.

Addressing the media and over 70 participants at the launch held on the Embassy of Sweden's office grounds, Her Excellency Sofia Calltorp, Ambassador of Sweden said, "In order to eradicate gender-based violence, we all need to come together, both women and men. But especially men. In their roles as fathers, brothers, husbands and as fellow human beings, men of all ages are key to bringing this violence to an end."

It is hoped that by involving men in the conversation about the negative consequences of harmful behaviours including violence against women, girls and boys, the campaign will influence the Zimbabwean society at-large to view gender equality as a norm to aspire for.

Co-launching the campaign the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Bishow Parajuli said, "Violence against women, girls and boys is a grave violation of human rights and an affront to the inherent equality and dignity of women. It is high time men hold each other accountable for their actions towards women, girls and boys and prevent the continued normalization of gender-based violence. It is also important for influential men in society to stand in solidarity with women, girls and boys and show their support for them."

The "Because I am a Man" campaign was launched at the Embassy of Sweden with the official reveal of 16 art works featuring the men taking a strong stance against gender-based violence. The showcased men were present at the event and were able to speak about the messages that they represent in the campaign.

It is often the case that women and girls are met with doubt when they speak about the abuse they have faced and even stigmatized by their communities as a result. Under the banner "Because I am a Man" the 16 men are taking a strong stand against all types of gender-based violence, including, but not limited to, physical and verbal harassment, physical and sexual abuse of women and children as well as forced child marriages and other harmful practices.

It is estimated in Zimbabwe that about 1 in 3 women aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence and about 1 in 4 women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. As with any violation of human rights, one is one too many.

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence is an opportunity to mobilize activists, organizations and communities worldwide to take action to end this type of violence. The 16 men representing each day of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence with their key messages and commitment will go a long way in galvanizing communities in Zimbabwe to end violence against women, girls and boys.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence was first launched in 1991 by Center for Women's Global Leadership, making it the longest-running campaign for women's rights globally.

Each year, it starts on 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) and continues through to 10 December (Human Rights Day) with the aim of galvanizing global action to end the violence against women and girls in every corner of the world.

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