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Report finds violence against indigenous women in Canada at genocide levels

By Meredith Betz

Non Profit Quarterly (10.06.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Iqn4Ic> - Last week on Monday, a long-awaited report from Canada's two-year National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) was released, stating what many indigenous women knew all along. The findings cited the failure of the government to seek and provide justice to these victims and their families and called for widespread systemic change in governmental policies and processes.

The report was announced by the inquiry's commission at a ceremony with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the families of victims. Facing an audience holding red flowers above their heads in memory of those victims, the prime minister acknowledged the report's conclusion that Canada's treatment of missing and murdered women and girls is equivalent to genocide.

"For too long, indigenous women and girls have experienced violence at a rate that is staggering compared to non-Indigenous women," Trudeau said. Shouts from the audience demanded, "Then do something about it!"

The following day, the Commissioners made this statement: "This is an important moment in the Truth and Reconciliation journey. The acceptance of our findings of fact by the federal government, especially our finding of genocide, is an acceptance of the truths shared by families and survivors. They no longer need to convince others that genocide is a part of Canadian history."

The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability reported that between 2001 and 2015, indigenous women were at elevated risk of homicide. Homicide rates for women and girls were approximately six times higher than those for non-Indigenous women. According to the group, other research indicates that indigenous women are 16 times more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to be murdered or go missing.

Sagkeeng First Nations youth Tina Fontaine could have been just another statistic. In August 2014, Fontaine's body was pulled from Winnipeg's Red River. During the 24 hours before the 15-year-old's disappearance, she was seen by provincial child welfare workers, police officers, and healthcare professionals. Her violent death and the subsequent acquittal of her white murderer resulted in a groundswell of outrage across Canada over the disproportionate number of indigenous missing or murdered women and girls.

Protests ultimately precipitated government action. In 2016, Prime Minister Trudeau allocated \$53m to create the MMIWG inquiry to investigate and report on the systemic causes of all forms of violence against women and girls—a group that explicitly includes lesbians, bisexuals, transgender women, “two-spirit” individuals, and other people who aren't cisgender men.

Approximately 1,500 families of the victims and survivors gave moving testimonies, many citing the failure of social services to protect them. The final report demands a total of 18 “calls to justice” and gives 231 recommendations, including the creation of a national ombudsman for Indigenous and human rights, as well as the establishment of Indigenous civilian police oversight agencies.

The Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, Ghislain Picard, had a tempered response to the report, stating that there is much work to be done. “Let us be clear, although the work of the National Inquiry, including its final report and recommendations, has provided some light and national awareness, it will certainly not be able to resolve, on its own, the vestiges of policies aimed at the extermination of First Nations. The situation requires major changes at all levels, starting with positive and urgent actions. The answer lies with governments, including our own.”

Canadian Muslim organisation against “honour” crimes

By Marc Montgomery

RCI (07.03.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Czola1> - Just released is a new study on gender-based violence (GBV) called, “Dishonourable Violence: Changing the Narratives on Honour and Shame Among Muslim Canadian Communities”.

It is the product of Islamic Relief Canada a non-profit humanitarian aid group and came following a year of study of GBV within Canadian-based Muslim communities.

It is an analysis of the concepts within the Muslim community (and other patriarchal cultures) of “honour” and “shame”.

he report notes that many Muslim women may be reluctant to speak about any violence or intimidation because of how that might reflect on the Muslim community, or on the family itself within the community, itself a form of bringing “shame” onto both. There is also the fear they might become isolated from their family if they expose violence.

The book says violence can take a variety of form including:

-psychological/emotional: coercion, insults, belittling, shaming, threats of violence
divorce or exclusion

-physical: hitting, slapping, genital mutilation, severe dress codes, limiting access to sufficient food, locking women inside the home

-sex: forced sex, violent sex, forced marriage, denied control over reproductive matters

-isolation/neglect: locking woman inside home, restricted activities (eg phone calls, movement outside home), restricted social contacts,

-economic: withdrawal of financial support, denial of access to finance, given a strict "allowance", forced handover of earnings, excessive scrutiny of expenses

-spiritual/religious: misinterpretation of Qur'an to encourage and/or justify abuse, reinforcing climate of control and fear, chastisement using religious/spiritual language

-control of legal/migration status: forced marriage, confiscation of legal documents eg-passport, threats to "send back to home country" if abuse not tolerated or male demands not met, woman returned to home country and abandoned

The document also notes that the stresses of immigration to a new and much different society, employment issues, and the fact that some people and families arrive from conflict zones perhaps already suffering from degrees of trauma, any and all of which may play out in violence against close family members.

More importantly however, the study shows how religious texts are being misinterpreted to justify domination and gender-based violence.

The organisation says they are clearly against gender-based violence in all forms and document is designed to shed light and direction on the issue.

Woman or girl murdered every 2.5 days on average in Canada during 2018: femicide report

A goal of the report is to acknowledge that circumstances surrounding women's violent deaths differs from those of men so that femicide can be better prevented

By Nicole Thompson

The National Post (20.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2MDr0TQ> - A woman or girl was killed every 2.5 days on average in Canada last year, according to an inaugural report on femicide that argues the issue must be better understood in order to reduce the number of slayings.

The first annual report by the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability — titled "#CallItFemicide" — was released Wednesday and answers a call from the United Nations for countries to better track gender-related killings of women, said lead author Myrna Dawson, the observatory's director and a professor at the University of Guelph.

"It really drove home how often this was happening when we were monitoring this on a daily basis," she said. "Women are still most at risk of men that they are intimate with or who they should be able to trust."

The goal of the report, at least in part, is to acknowledge that the circumstances and motivations surrounding women's violent deaths differs from those of men so that femicide can be better understood and prevented.

"The context in which women and girls are killed is vastly different because they're most often killed by people they know, and that's in contrast to males who are most often killed by acquaintances and strangers," Dawson said. "Calling it for what it is and recognizing the distinctiveness underscores the fact that we need different types of prevention."

The report said 148 women and girls were killed in 133 incidents in 2018, with 140 people accused in their deaths. In 12 of the 133 incidents, no accused has been identified. Some cases involve multiple accused.

More than 90 per cent of those accused were men.

In many cases, a police investigation is still ongoing, Dawson said, adding that researchers intend to follow the cases through the justice system the coming years to better understand the factors that went into each.

The statistics include a van attack that left eight women and two men dead in Toronto last year. The accused in that case, Alek Minassian, has been charged with 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 of attempted murder. He is set to stand trial in February 2020.

The women who died in the van attack are among the 21 per cent allegedly killed in 2018 by a stranger. By contrast, 53 per cent were allegedly killed by intimate partners, according to the report. Another 13 per cent were allegedly killed by other male family members.

That includes the case of Krassimira Pejcinovski and her 13-year-old daughter Venallia, who were allegedly slain by the elder Pejcinovski's partner in May 2018. Her 15-year-old son Roy was also killed in the incident, but is not included in the statistics.

The numbers and demographic information were pulled from media reports of the deaths, the study said. Dawson said information from the media was more handily available and at least as accurate as information from official sources. But the report notes that in coming years, as these cases progress through the justice system, researchers will look at court records to track updates.

Dawson said there are some demographics disproportionately represented in the statistics. For instance, the report indicates Indigenous women represent only about five per cent of the population, but made up 36 per cent of the women and girls killed by violence. Thirty-four per cent of the women and girls were killed in rural areas, where only 16 per cent of the population lives, the report said.

Understanding these issues is key to preventing further femicides, said Julie Lalonde, a women's rights advocate and public educator.

For instance, she noted, funding for sexual assault centres and women's shelters is distributed on a per capita basis in Ontario, which puts women in sparsely populated areas at an even greater disadvantage.

"The argument is there's less of a need (in rural areas). Perhaps in terms of numbers, but you have a more complex need in rural communities that requires more resources,

because you have to travel long distances. You don't have public transit for people to get away," Lalonde said.

She said statistics like those in the report also help cut down on misconceptions about violence against women, such as the idea that women in abusive relationships should just leave.

"We don't talk about things like criminal harassment or the fact that most women are killed after leaving or declaring that they're going to leave a partner," she said. "We have to challenge all the myths and stereotypes that tell women it's their own fault."

End forced sterilizations of Indigenous women in Canada

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.

Burkas, niqabs pose public safety risk

The new bill in Quebec banning the niqab has drawn much criticism. Here Tarek Fatah talks about the reasons he supports the bill. More links below on other perspectives.

By Tarek Fatah

The Toronto Sun (24.10.2017) q- <http://bit.ly/2iFaT9K> - The slur of "racism" has been hurled at Muslims who support Quebec's Bill 62 — the new law banning face coverings, for example the burka and niqab, when giving or receiving government services.

From Ontario Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne to Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown, many white politicians and liberal media commentators have been quick to label any support of Bill 62 racist.

Since I, a Muslim, support Bill 62, I guess that makes me a racist.

Indeed, it's not uncommon to hear whispers suggesting Muslims like me who support the burka and niqab ban are "sell-outs" within the Muslim community.

And that white politicians who oppose Bill 62 are trying to salvage the reputation of our community, despite our supposed betrayal.

After all, what do these politicians have to lose?

The political race to the bottom to curry favour with the so-called "Muslim vote bank" in Canada, as they see it, has worked well for both Conservatives and Liberals.

Charmed as they are by many second-generation radical Muslims who were born in Canada, some of whom hate western civilization more than their parents do.

But none of the attacks on Quebec's burka/niqab ban was more disingenuous than one told by a well-coiffed hijabi on Canadian television recently, dismissing the public safety aspect of people wearing facemasks.

This young Muslim woman claimed there has not been a single incident where someone wearing a burka committed a crime.

To set the record straight, here are just a few examples of criminal activities committed by men and women wearing burkas and other face coverings in Canada:

- Two months ago, on Aug. 17, 2017, an armed robbery took place at a Scotia Bank branch in Milton, Ontario. Police said one of the two suspects was wearing a balaclava.
- On Sept. 9, 2015, two burka-wearing male teens charged into a Toronto bank in the Yonge Street and Highway 401 area. Both were later arrested in Ajax.
- On Oct. 14, 2014, two men wearing burkas robbed a Toronto jewellery store in the York Mills and Leslie Street area, and walked away with \$500,000 worth of gold and precious stones.
- On Aug. 18, 2010 an armed robbery by two masked men took place at a Scotiabank branch in Vaughan, north of Toronto.
- Ottawa police have in the past cited a handful of robberies in that city involving male suspects using Muslim women's religious garments as disguises.

Some of us will never forget how a young Toronto Muslim woman, Bano Shahdady, threw off her burka as she was divorcing her husband, only to be stalked by him disguised in a burka. He entered her apartment building and killed her in July, 2011.

It was a story few media were willing to delve into, but because I knew the family, one journalist did report about this burka-related murder that almost went unreported.

Around the world, numerous criminals have fled arrest wearing burkas, everywhere from London's Heathrow airport to the infamous Lal Masjid armed revolt by jihadis in Islamabad.

My plea to vote-grabbing Canadian politicians of all political stripes in English-speaking Canada is, for once, be honest.

Put the racist card aside and recognize burkas and niqabs pose a serious public safety risk.

Further reading:

[Quebec veil law Bill 62 sparks protests and confusion](#)
[Women in niqab speak: A study of the niqab in Canada](#)

NAFTA must include gender equality protection, Trudeau says

By Janet McFarland

The Globe and Mail (12.09.2017) - <https://tgam.ca/2h2g728> - Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says it is crucial to include protections for women in the renegotiated North American free-trade agreement because gender equality is an economic issue.

In remarks at a conference on women's rights in Toronto on Monday – organized by Tina Brown, former editor of The New Yorker and Vanity Fair – Mr. Trudeau said Canada negotiated protections for women's rights in a recently concluded free-trade agreement with Chile and hopes it will be able to persuade the United States and Mexico to add a similar chapter to NAFTA.

Mr. Trudeau said he has heard criticisms of his government's plan – not from U.S. trade negotiators but from conservatives in Canada, who argue that proposals to address issues such as gender equality, environmental protections and Indigenous rights in NAFTA talks are just "rhetorical flourishes" and that he should be focusing on jobs and economic issues. He said the failure to understand that equality is an economic issue "highlights that we still have a lot of work to do, even in Canada."

Ms. Brown has been convening feminist Women in the World Summits such as Monday's event – which was held in Toronto to coincide with the Toronto International Film Festival – since 2010. The events bring together activists, dissidents, artists, business executives and politicians to discuss issues facing women around the world. The Globe and Mail was the media partner for the event, the first of its kind to be held in Canada.

In her remarks, Ms. Brown complained about an emerging "global horror show of toxic testosterone," arguing that rights many have taken for granted are now under attack in the United States and other countries. When she looks at Canada, however, she sees "such an invigorating view of the future."

But Mr. Trudeau cautioned that Canada "is not a magical place" and that attitudes about women still need to change here and around the world.

"There's still so much to do, and we can't stop for a second to say we've done enough – there's so much more to do."

Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland, who also spoke at the summit, said she is "moderately optimistic" about reaching an agreement with the United States and Mexico to include chapters on progressive issues such as gender equality in NAFTA.

She said Canada is seeking to add similar provisions in all its free-trade agreements, including one with Israel that is being renegotiated.

Mr. Trudeau also spoke about his marriage and his family, acknowledging that his wife, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, "had to give up dreams" about her career and about how they would raise their children when he became Prime Minister. For example, he said, she had

always wanted to home school the children while travelling the world on a sailboat. "Except you can't do it when you're Prime Minister and family," he said.

Asked if he would give up his career for hers, Mr. Trudeau replied, "Probably not this job," but "I would love in another life or another step of my life to be able to raise the kids and stay home."

Ms. Brown asked Mr. Trudeau about the role his father played in shaping his feminism. He replied that many people probably would not consider his father a feminist – including his father. He said Pierre Trudeau had some "old school" views and was a product of his time, but he taught his children fundamental values about standing up for everyone's rights and never discriminating against anyone.

Ms. Grégoire Trudeau also spoke at the summit on a panel discussing the representation of women in media and advertising, saying she suffered from eating disorders when she was younger. She said girls today are facing more pressure through social media and are exposed to too much "subtle violence" on television and other media.

"It's kind of what has become normal sometimes, and normal is the hardest thing to change in a society," she said. "I say let's redefine what normal is."

B.C. prosecutor urges 'strong message' in sentencing for child bride case

The Globe and Mail (30.06.2017) - <https://tgam.ca/2sBR233> - A special prosecutor has asked a judge to send a strong message of denunciation in sentencing a man and woman who took a 13-year-old girl over the U.S. border to marry the now-imprisoned leader of a polygamous sect.

Peter Wilson told a B.C. Supreme Court judge in Cranbrook on Friday that Brandon Blackmore should serve a jail sentence of 12 to 18 months, while Gail Blackmore deserves a six to 12 month sentence.

The former husband and wife were convicted earlier this year on a charge of taking a child under the age of 16 out of Canada for sexual purposes.

The trial heard that in 2004, the girl was secreted into the United States to marry Warren Jeffs, the prophet of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, who is serving a life sentence for assaulting two of his child brides.

Wilson acknowledged that it's an unusual case and there's no volume of Canadian law to assist Justice Paul Pearlman in reaching an appropriate sentence.

But he said the sentence must deter other members of the secluded community.

"Deterrence might have particular importance in this case because other persons who could potentially commit the offence are, I would say, a very, narrow group," Wilson said. "The likely group of potential offenders is probably small and could very well be limited to other adherents of the FLDS as it's being espoused by Mr. Jeffs."

Wilson said Brandon Blackmore is more culpable than Gail Blackmore, but both were present at the wedding of the girl and knew what would happen. He said the teen and many women in that church live cloistered lives.

"The fact that the victim was 13 ... had spent her whole life in Bountiful, and was not what I would call a worldly person, which I submit would have rendered her more vulnerable."

Pearlman scheduled sentencing for Aug. 11.

The young woman, whose name is protected by a publication ban, was sitting in the front row of the courtroom.

Brandon Blackmore's lawyer said his client, who is 71, was ex-communicated in 2012 and has no contact with any of the members of his former church.

John Gustafson said his client has begun to have some insight about his actions, but was "taught his whole life that Warren Jeffs was God's representative on earth."

He asked for a conditional sentence, a form of house arrest, for his client.

"He is not in a position, even if he wanted to, to commit these acts again," Gustafson said.

Gail Blackmore, 60, declined to say anything during sentencing but Joe Doyle, a lawyer appointed as a friend of the court, spoke on her behalf.

Doyle said the woman should not be painted with the "polygamist brush." He said she is less culpable because women in the church are taught to have "absolute obedience" to the male head of the household.

"It is now 13 years later. Mr. Jeffs is in jail for the rest of his life," said Doyle.

"She doesn't have a husband who's going to order her to do anything. There's no need for individual deterrence for Mrs. Blackmore."

James Oler, a former leader in the polygamous community of Bountiful, was acquitted of the same charge after the judge ruled there wasn't proof he crossed the border with a 15-year-old girl.

Wilson is asking British Columbia's Court of Appeal to overturn his acquittal or order a new trial.

It's time to address violence against women with disabilities

By Bonnie L. Brayton

Huffington Post Canada (29.11.2016) - <http://huff.to/2fL9Xxi> - November 25, the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, marks the beginning of

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. December 10, International Human Rights Day, marks the end of this international campaign.

Violence against women is an on-going epidemic in our country. Data released last year by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics in a report on Criminal Victimization in Canada revealed that sexual assault remains the only crime in Canada for which there has been no decline in the last decade.

In fact, the Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Women, concerned with "the shortage of statistics and information on violence faced by young women and girls in Canada," is currently doing a study on violence against young women and girls.

When I presented to the committee last week, I pointed out that there are still no resources to speak of for girls with disabilities facing violence, even though they experience violence at higher rates and more frequently than any other group of young women and girls in Canada. The rates of sexual, physical, verbal and systemic violence are at least three times higher for young women and girls with disabilities.

Early results from a DAWN Canada project shows strong evidence of enormous gaps in violence-prevention policy and program delivery for women and girls with disabilities.

Policies tend to be reactive if they exist at all. Legislation specific to disability (for example, the 10 year old Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) is not applied from a gendered perspective. And any policies that appear to have merit are generally just that -- well-written policies with no champions, no funding (read no programs, no services or none specifically for our needs), and consequently no results.

For example, although technology provides great opportunities for supporting women and girls with disabilities, it also represents another avenue through which girls with disabilities are vulnerable to cyber-bullying or exploitation. But once again there is no legislation or policy in place to protect them, despite the fact that the use of on-line communications dominates youth culture today.

The vulnerability of young women and girls with disabilities cannot be underestimated. Last year, CBC reported the story of a young woman with an intellectual disability who was sexually assaulted on a public bus in Winnipeg, while her support worker sat two seats ahead of her, listening to music on her iPod.

If this is possible on a public bus, what can happen in private, unmonitored spaces? It is no wonder that our society has not yet dared to investigate the rate of childhood sexual abuse among girl children with disabilities. No doubt it would be alarmingly high.

Canada must do better. Girls with disabilities need support and encouragement to become the confident, resilient leaders they are capable of being. But this cannot happen until we as a society take collective responsibility for ensuring it does.

Further reading:

[The double-edged challenge for women with disabilities](#)

[Women with disabilities](#)