

The background of the left page features silhouettes of hands and a tree against a dark blue background. The word 'Far' is written in a large, white, serif font at the top left. The word 'from' is written in a smaller, white, lowercase serif font in the middle. The word 'the House' is written in a large, white, serif font at the bottom left.

Far

from

the House

**Domestic Violence as Faced by
Indigenous Women**

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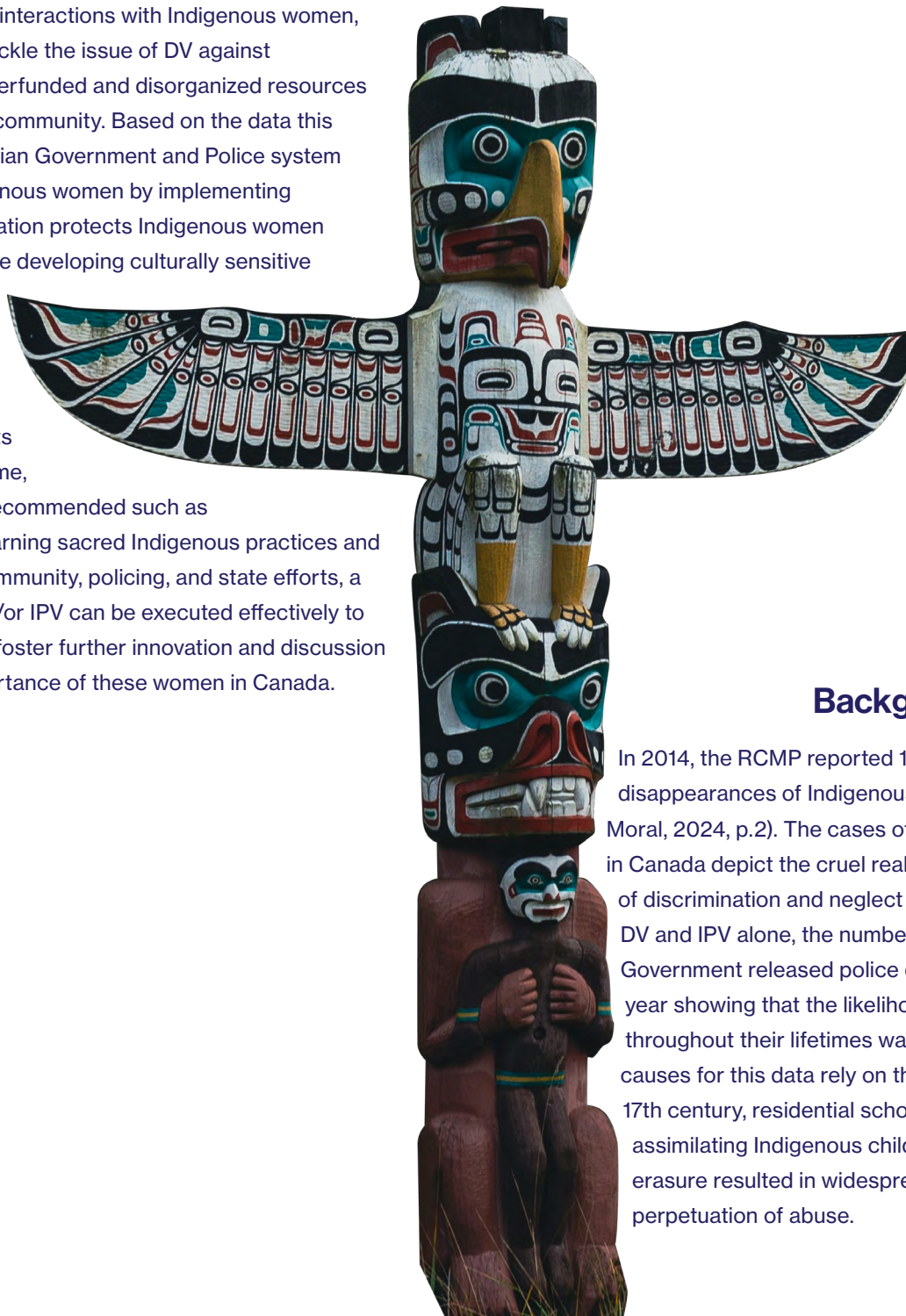
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Executive Summary

Aboriginal women in Canada are at significantly higher risk than non-Aboriginal women for all forms of violence, including stranger-violence, spousal violence, and spousal homicide (Goulet et al., 2016). Multiple risk factors at individual, communal, and societal levels intersect to place these women in vulnerable situations that are only exacerbated by systemic state incompetence and neglect. Historical legacies of colonial control and oppression influence the way Indigenous women are treated and idealized. Despite multiple efforts to protect Indigenous women from Domestic Violence (DV) and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), the current system in place lacks a multifaceted understanding of Indigenous culture and sovereignty which imposes non-Indigenous values and mainstream designed strategies that end up further traumatizing and hurting Indigenous women experiencing DV and/or IPV. Available data shows Indigenous women's disproportionate subjection to violence is a dated, ongoing issue, however, most of the information is fairly recent which proves the need to further examine and expand the strategies and situations of violence Indigenous women experience currently.

This brief analyses data regarding police interactions with Indigenous women, the lack of a strong legal framework to tackle the issue of DV against Indigenous women and girls, and the underfunded and disorganized resources and shelters assigned to the Indigenous community. Based on the data this paper recommends reforms in the Canadian Government and Police system assessment of DV and IPV against Indigenous women by implementing corrections to the way policing and legislation protects Indigenous women and girls. These recommendations include developing culturally sensitive interventions for Indigenous women in situations of DV and/or IPV, pushing for more representation of Indigenous women in police forces, and reforming court and legal procedures and judgments rooted in colonialist ideas. At the same time, personal and community tactics will be recommended such as promoting positive self identity and re-learning sacred Indigenous practices and ceremonies. Only with clear personal, community, policing, and state efforts, a cohesive system of prevention of DV and/or IPV can be executed effectively to protect Indigenous women and girls and foster further innovation and discussion surrounding the representation and importance of these women in Canada.



Background: A History of Oppression

In 2014, the RCMP reported 1,017 police recorded murders and 164 disappearances of Indigenous women between 1980 and 2012 (García-Del Moral, 2024, p.2). The cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada depict the cruel reality many Indigenous women live as a result of discrimination and neglect from the Canadian authorities. Focusing on DV and IPV alone, the numbers are no less worrying. In 2019, the Canadian Government released police data, registering self-reported data for the same year showing that the likelihood of Indigenous women experiencing IPV throughout their lifetimes was 6 out of 10 women, a 61% (Hallett, 2024). The causes for this data rely on the history of oppression in the country. Since the 17th century, residential schools existed in Canada with the sole purpose of assimilating Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture. This cultural erasure resulted in widespread trauma, intergenerational harm and the perpetuation of abuse.

Klingspohn gives a direct quote from The Manitoba Justice Institute (1999) which provides insight to this historic violence, “[r]esidential schools laid the foundation for the epidemic today of domestic abuse and violence against Aboriginal women and children” (Klingspohn, 2018, p.2). The residential schools acted as a base, but there are multiple other risk factors that target Indigenous women in cases of DV and IPV such as social background, situational characteristics, and patriarchal structures. In terms of social backgrounds, Indigenous women can be young, have low education, and have previous marriages/common-law unions, all elements that have been associated with DV (Brownridge, 2008). Situational characteristics can be seen in the lack of state support of Indigenous communities, perpetuating high rates of poverty, insufficient access to services like clean water and healthcare, low education, and unemployment (García-Del Moral, 2024). Lastly, patriarchal structures of power are deeply rooted in the historic settler colonial order, and these get reflected as state violence against Indigenous women and girls through direct and indirect actions maintaining systemic racism and heterosexism (García-Del Moral, 2024). It is certainly crucial to take into consideration historical and present factors when discussing the securitization of Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence against Indigenous women; if not, atrocities are to be repeated. The focus of this brief, then, is to analyse the available data regarding DV and IPV against Indigenous women and provide a sensible understanding of how Indigenous culture and spirituality play a role in implementing effective preventive methods for DV and IPV and improve the existing services for victims. The Canadian Government and Royal Canadian Mounted Police need to expand their understanding of the importance of implementing Indigenous women’s voices in tackling DV and IPV and readjusting their strategies to better fit Indigenous culture and needs. The implementation of these measures could close the gap between the Indigenous community and law enforcement, fostering trust and understanding which can build a stronger foundation for Indigenous women to speak up confidently if ever exposed to DV and/or IPV. Aboriginal women need to be supported both by the government and law enforcement in order to stand their ground in a world that constantly diminishes their autonomy, these solutions aim to establish said ground.

Policy Issue: A non-Indigenous, Disorganized Imagining of the Issue

Prevention of Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence against Indigenous women and girls is severely limited. The focus is on acting once the violence has already happened, completely misses assessing the core problem. Barriers such as systemic racism, cultural dissonance, lack of access to resources and support services, and mistrust in the legal, judicial, and policing institutions, all influence Indigenous women’s doubts about seeking help after experiencing violent and traumatic situations (Heidinger, 2021). The disorganized nature of state-level efforts gives room to generalized strategies that are highly ineffective when applied to Indigenous communities and Indigenous women and girls in situations of DV and IPV. The available DV services are designed for the mainstream society, focusing on crisis intervention and stabilization rather than dedicating funding to prevention tied with the fact that these services embrace a feminist model that does not acknowledge nor align with the cultural, communal, and personal needs of Indigenous women, leaving women incapable of recovering from this trauma and condemning them to stay in a cycle of violence (Klingspohn, 2018). Thus, the need for preventive strategies that consider Indigenous approaches and needs is determinant to successfully manage DV and IPV rates against Indigenous women and girls. Recognizing the risk factors negatively influencing DV and IPV cases against Indigenous women, and actively reimagining action strategies at all levels of these women’s lives (personal, communal, legal, state) will greatly help prevent these forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls.



Key Research Findings

I. **Statistics: Disproportionate Targeting of Indigenous Women**

Indigenous women in Canada are targeted in DV and IPV cases. Statistics from Statistics Canada (2021) demonstrate that almost 6 in 10 Indigenous women have experienced some kind of physical violence by an intimate partner or other perpetrator in their lifetime compared with non-Indigenous women (Heidinger, 2021, Chart 2b). In the case of First Nations and Métis women, 58% and 57% experience these forms of violence respectively. The system of oppression dates back to colonial times and the colonists' intentions to control Indigenous people's lands, laws, and lives and impose racial superiority by "civilizing the savage natives" (Hallett, 2024, p.18). There are many instances of institutional violence against Indigenous people and communities, including the forcing of First Nations peoples and Inuit onto reserves and remote areas, the use of residential schools to separate Indigenous children from their cultural values, the large-scale removal of Indigenous children from their families and into mainly White families during the Sixties Scoop, and the prohibition of letting Indigenous people represent themselves in legal matters or practice traditional ceremonies (Hallett, 2024). Currently, Indigenous women still experience institutional violence, however, this violence is displayed in a more indirect way and is accompanied by other risk factors. For instance, the contemporary legal system's failure to provide protection effectively legitimizes violence against Indigenous women (García-Del Moral, 2024). Moreover, the indirect nature of this violence is seen in how survivors are systematically trapped by the institutions that historically enacted the Sixties Scoop; this creates a "protective paradox" where women fear that reporting IPV will result in the immediate apprehension of their children by child welfare services (Kaye & Glecia, 2025). Ultimately, as Bombay et al. (2009) argue, these modern experiences are not isolated incidents but a convergence of intergenerational trauma as a result of the state's long-standing colonial policies.

Available data on DV and IPV against Indigenous women have found recurrent risk factors that tend to make these women more susceptible to experience this type of violence. These factors can be divided into four main categories:

individual, interpersonal or relational, community, and societal/political factors. Some examples include gender, age, socio-economic status, residential school experience, discrimination, and substance abuse, amongst many others (Goulet et al., 2016, p.13-14, Table 2). Oftentimes, these risk factors act together like in the case of socio-economic status and unemployment, with data proving that while both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal women can experience economic instability, higher rates of unemployment/underemployment are present for the latter, impacting their ability to leave abusive relationships and leading to economic dependency on their abusers (Brownridge, 2008).

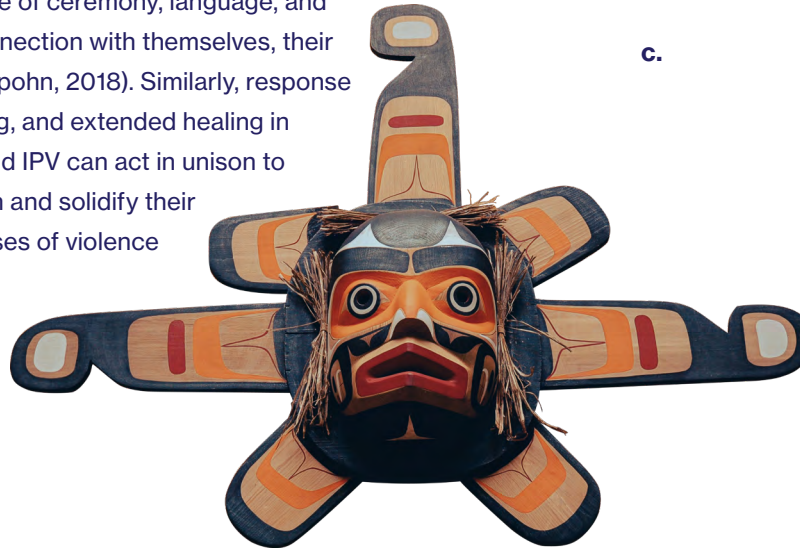
II. **Lacking Response by Canadian Legal System and State**

Apart from the risk factors, Indigenous women are overrepresented as victims by the State and its institutions and constantly experience an abusive relationship with Settler Colonial Canada by itself (Glecia (Demkiw), 2023, p.93). The Canadian Legal System (CLS) upholds the settler colonial state's authority by reproducing the oppression of Indigenous women and failing to address Indigenous women's victimization and the conditions leading to it (Demkiw, 2023). In 2000, out of seventeen distinct cases of individuals charged with physical or sexual abuse in a 30-day period, and nine such cases in the previous period, only 3 out of the 26 cases were taken to court. The legal system argued that because the remaining 23 complainants refused to testify there was nothing to be done (Bopp et al., 2003). This shows how important it is for Indigenous communities to have trust and hope in the CLS, and that State efforts to legally manage DV and IPV cases are ineffective and insufficient. A more focused revision of the data shows that policing activity by the RCMP and other police services also fail to address DV and IPV cases. Delayed police response time to DV calls, mistrust in community-oriented policing, major underfunding, and prejudices are aspects that influence the way police services impact DV and IPV cases in Indigenous communities (Bopp et al., 2003). The current programs created to target DV and IPV lack adequate understanding of Indigenous culture and do not incorporate efforts to support the uniqueness of Indigenous individuals and their communities (Bopp et al., 2003). The CLS is not designed to help Indigenous women, and in contrast, usually leaves them burdened by victimization, trauma, and distress, as they are not provided with the full protection of the law (Demkiw, 2023, p.94).

III.

Effective Methods for Prevention

Research into the impact of Indigenous resources and practices as preventive methods of DV and IPV against Indigenous women shows that without involving Indigenous women into the planning and execution of strategies that embrace their sacred beliefs and culture, DV and IPV against Indigenous women can not be tackled effectively (Klingspohn, 2018). Culturally sensible protective factors at an individual, interpersonal, and community level can help Indigenous women build a safety network of strategies to counteract DV and IPV (Goulet et al., 2016, p. 18, Table 3). Acknowledging the importance of ceremony, language, and traditions aids Indigenous women to reconnection with themselves, their history, family, community and land (Klingspohn, 2018). Similarly, response systems that include prevention, monitoring, and extended healing in Indigenous communities exposed to DV and IPV can act in unison to expand the communities' courses of action and solidify their understanding of how to react towards cases of violence (Bopp et al., 2003, Figure 3).



- a. **Educate Indigenous peoples in the communities on the responsibility to preserve their self-identity and values by implementing re-learning programs and oral tradition practices by the Elders;**
- b. **De-colonize Indigenous community approaches to healing by promoting sacred cultural healing practices that enhance spirituality and connection to the land (i.e. smudging, healing circles, sweat lodges);**
- c. **Develop bonds of trust with Canadian authorities by addressing intergenerational trauma and methods to institutionalize legislation influenced and approved by Elders and members of Indigenous communities.**

Recommendations: What is next?

Strengthen and restore Indigenous self-identity and promote Indigenous healing practices

Guiding Indigenous communities and women towards reclaiming their cultural practices and identity is the most crucial element to consider moving forward. Traditional knowledge and engagement in practices and rituals through oral tradition have been found to effectively protect Indigenous women from DV (Goulet et al., 2016, p.18). Structuring a reliable response system in Indigenous communities should consider the following points:

By adapting current approaches to DV and IPV in Indigenous communities to the suggested response system provided above, Indigenous women are placed in a more stable environment to start addressing their thoughts and emotions which leads to more understanding and trust in having the appropriate measures to prevent these types of violence from happening. Data shows that knowledge, active involvement in sacred ceremonies, and a strong sense of spirituality have been constant factors that create healing (Goulet et al., 2016, p.18). At the same time, it is incredibly important to include key members of Indigenous communities, such as Elders and Indigenous council members, in policies and program services planning and implementation (Klingspohn, 2018).

Reimagine policing in Indigenous communities and State legal management of DV and IPV against Indigenous women

To accompany community efforts, policing services should adapt their approaches to cases of DV and IPV against Indigenous women by developing culturally sensitive interventions. The RCMP is responsible for reimagining policing of DV and IPV cases towards Indigenous women, by establishing a protocol that can harmoniously work with community efforts and legal frameworks. The suggested protocol should include:

- a. Re-educate the police force on Indigenous culture and the history of colonial oppression in order to identify the key points lacking in the current protocols in place (i.e. discuss with Indigenous leaders and council members);**
- b. Promote Indigenous women representation in police services to improve trust and understanding of DV and IPV against Indigenous women in Indigenous communities and policing services;**
- c. Monitor and supervise abusers to prevent recidivism, and offer healing and rehabilitation services for both the victims and perpetrators.**

This protocol is expected to work in collaboration with state-level reforms which ultimately hold the most power in terms of legal action and long-lasting impact. The Government of Canada has to respond accordingly and focus on de-colonizing the CLS and law-making process to focus on Indigenous voices and implement changes systematically. This brief suggests the Canadian Government to:

- a. Allocate appropriate funding for police services to support police efforts and re-education on Indigenous-specific protocols;**
- b. Reform court procedures and sentences on cases of DV and IPV against Indigenous women to prevent any kind of discrimination on basis of re-victimization and skepticism, highlighting previously biased cases of legal incompetence;**
- c. Center Indigenous women’s perspectives and accounts in law making and legal scenarios to diversify the sphere and de-stigmatize Indigenous women and their experiences;**
- d. Provide affordable and accessible legal resources to Indigenous communities, promoting trust and reliance on the CLS and public service**

The role of the Canadian Government and RCMP is essential in expanding the safety net Indigenous communities should build for Indigenous women. DV and IPV is a national issue that should not rely solely on the Indigenous community. Healing the roots of trauma and violence in order to prevent the cycle from repeating is only possible if an adequate community response system works in cooperation with early interventions and monitoring efforts by police forces like the RCMP, and existing systems of legal discrimination are eliminated and reimagined to equally treat Indigenous women by the Canadian Government.

Conclusion

Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence affect Indigenous women in an overwhelmingly disproportionate way. Indigenous women are targeted as a result of colonial systematic legacies of oppression and current risk factors such as underemployment, socio-economic situation, and racism. The Canadian Government and RCMP lack understanding of Indigenous culture and values which results in generalized, mainstream responses towards DV and IPV. Because of these responses, there is increased trauma and mistrust on the state from Indigenous women. This brief proposed that Indigenous communities encourage positive self-identity, sacred practices for healing, and cooperation with authorities; that police services and the RCMP re-educate and curate a culturally sensible police force that include Indigenous women representation to foster trust; and that the Canadian Government reform legal structures to foster equality and just treatment of Indigenous women as members of courts and victims of DV and IPV. Only with total cooperation and organisation, can DV and IPV be prevented and Indigenous women protected.



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