

INDIGENOUS WOMEN, INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE & HOUSING

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PATHWAYS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

- Youth are effective leaders in primary prevention.
- Understand how to establish and maintain healthy relationships.
- Support survivors and community members to increase safety and lessen harm.
- Traditional healing circles and group counselling.¹

DEFINITIONS

- Gender-Based Violence: involves the use and abuse of power and control over another person and is perpetrated against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender.²
- Intimate Partner Violence: includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats of physical or sexual violence, stalking, and emotional or psychological abuse by a current or former intimate partner.³
- Homelessness is used to refer to:
 - Chronically homeless: individuals who are currently homeless and have been homeless for six months or more in the past year.⁴
 - Episodically homeless: individuals who are currently homeless and have experienced three or more episodes of homelessness in the past year.⁵
 - Rapid re-housing: is focused on getting people into housing and out of shelters as quickly as possible.⁶
 - Precariously housed: individuals who are living in unstable, insecure, substandard, overcrowded and unaffordable homes.⁷

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN ONTARIO

There are three constitutionally defined Indigenous groups in Canada including First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI). To reflect the diversity of Indigenous peoples and to include all, regardless of status, nationhood, membership or community affiliation, the terms Indigenous and FNMI are applied interchangeably. It is acknowledged that many FNMI people refer to themselves differently and in their own languages.

“Access to safe, quality affordable housing—and supports necessary to maintain that housing—constitute one of the most basic and powerful social determinants of health.”

- Housing is the Best Medicine: Supportive Housing and the Social Determinants of Health, Kim Abercrombie.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN & VIOLENCE

RATES OF VIOLENCE

First Nation, Métis and Inuit women in Ontario experience domestic violence, assault, homicide and sexual exploitation at significantly greater rates than other women in the province.

Indigenous women and girls are three times more likely than non-Indigenous women to report having been a victim of violent crime; this higher rate of victimization was seen in stranger, acquaintance, and intimate partner violence.⁸

“Ontario is one of the major hubs for sex trafficking in Canada. This type of sexual exploitation affects vulnerable people everywhere. Those most at risk are young women, many of them Indigenous women and girls.”⁹

ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

Deep-seated colonial attitudes perpetuate racism and discrimination. These factors are compounded by the misogyny and sexism feeding violence against women across Ontario. Colonialism is more than attitudes. It results in laws, regulation and policy that has existed in different iterations now and into the future.

Colonialism imposed patriarchal attitudes on traditional societies. These views disrupted Indigenous cultures that had long honoured and respected women in their balanced roles with men.

Attempted assimilation included "the abuses of the residential school system. These schools operated in Ontario for more than 150 years. This system cut generations of youth off from their cultures, values, families and communities. The lingering impact continues to affect families and communities to this day."¹⁰

WHAT IS ONWA DOING?

ONWA provides culture based services for the families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. ONWA and other provincial Indigenous organizations are partners on the Executive Committee (EC) to End Violence Against Indigenous Women. The EC is a coordination body that seeks to end violence against Indigenous women through its oversight and guidance to the provincial implementation of initiatives under [Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women](#).

ONWA has been monitoring the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and has been accepted for standing in its capacity as a regional organization.

ONWA and the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) launched a public awareness video in September 2016 titled [Breaking Free, Breaking Through](#) ONWA hosts a Sisters In Spirit vigil each October 4th to honour the lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.¹¹

VIOLENCE FACTS

- 75% of survivors of sexual assault in Indigenous communities are young women under 18 years of age.¹²
- Indigenous women are approximately 3.5 times more likely to experience some form of spousal violence than nonindigenous women.¹³

- Indigenous women make up only 1.2% of Ontario’s population yet 6% of female homicide victims.¹⁴
- 88% of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Ontario were mothers.¹⁵
- Indigenous women and girls are more likely to be killed by a stranger than non-Indigenous women; almost 17% of those charged were strangers.¹⁶

“Woman is the centre of the wheel of life. She is the heartbeat of the people. She is not just in the home, but she is the community, she is the Nation.”

- “The Women’s Part” Art Solomon.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN, HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS FACTS

- 74% of the Aboriginal population live outside of a reserve.¹⁷
- 20-50% of homeless people in most urban areas are Aboriginal¹⁸ and the range may be much wider – from 11-96%.¹⁹
- There is a high death rate among Indigenous homelessness.²⁰
- More than 50% of homeless youth across Canada experience mental health issues, 75% of these youth are unable to access adequate housing as a result.²¹
- 25 – 40% of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ2S.²²
- Over 8.3% of shelter users are 55 and over and tend to have longer shelter stays compared to younger adults.²³

UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (UNDRIP):

Article 21 – Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.²⁴

LINKS BETWEEN VIOLENCE & HOMELESSNESS

Violence is the leading cause of women’s homelessness in Canada. Indigenous women are almost three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be violently victimized (sexual and physical assault, and robbery with a weapon or threat of violence), regardless of whether it occurred by strangers or acquaintances, or within a marital/common-law relationship.²⁵ Abuse in the home has pushed 61% of young females who are homeless onto the streets.²⁶

Precarious housing not only increases Indigenous women’s risk of experiencing violence, it also contributes to the risk of being trafficked and the high numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women.²⁷ Aboriginal women often migrate to urban centres to escape violence and poverty and become victims of Canada’s race, class and sex discrimination.²⁸

Systemic barriers to advancing education, gaining employment, fleeing violence, and caring for physical, mental, and cultural health all contribute to poverty and lack of affordable and safe housing for Indigenous women.²⁹

Poverty and homelessness place Aboriginal women and their children in unsafe situations.³⁰ The status of being homeless puts children at risk of apprehension from child welfare authorities. To avoid child

apprehension, Aboriginal women will often deal with physical or sexual abuse to keep their children safely in their care.³¹

HOUSING & POVERTY REDUCTION FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN & THEIR FAMILIES

ONWA supports the ongoing requirement of improving access to safe affordable housing while advocating for a Housing First approach that removes barriers for Indigenous women and their children experiencing homelessness into being rapidly re-housed. ONWA's focus is on providing housing policy, research, analysis and recommendations that are informed by a culturally relevant gender-based lens to support Indigenous women and their children in attaining culturally appropriate housing.

Housing as it relates to Indigenous women children and youth intersects with all policy work and issues pertaining to poverty, violence, mental health, addictions, child welfare, justice, etc. Indigenous women face myriad systemic barriers and challenges when faced with the prospect of accessing and retaining safe affordable housing options.

ONWA's continues to advocate that particular priority needs to be given to Indigenous women and their families. In particular, Indigenous women who are fleeing violence and sex trafficking require swift access to safe and affordable housing and is the center of ONWA's discussions.

NIHDAWIN "MY HOUSE – A PLACE WHERE I LIVE"

The Nihdawin program assists the Indigenous population in Thunder Bay that are at risk of homelessness and those experiencing homelessness. The intent of this program is to work with and support Indigenous women 15 years of age or older during their interactions with the criminal justice system and who are at risk of homelessness in the City of Thunder Bay.

Women living in poverty, in danger of being homeless or who are homeless are at a greater risk of losing their children to the child welfare system. The Nihdawin Program assists Indigenous women in these circumstances and supports their traditional roles as life givers and caretakers.

One of the greatest outcomes of the program is keeping Indigenous mothers and their children together as family units and working with them to promote recovery and overall well-being. Nihdawin adopted the Housing First philosophy which is a recovery model that focuses on ending homelessness. Housing First believes that everyone has the right to safe and secure housing and that housing is not determined by readiness.

SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Intake, assessment, referrals, goal setting, home visits and follow up supports
- Assistance with housing search, housing placement, securing and maintaining housing
- Relocation assistance upon eviction
- Support and advocacy
- Access to cultural programming, teachings and healing
- Assistance with basic needs start up, budgeting and life skills

THE STOLEN FEMININE

By Nikki Auten (July 5, 2015), Published in Strong Hands Stop Violence: Poetry Book, ONWA

The stolen feminine generations of women lost upon years of enslavement. The sacred womb Mothers love protection from the devastation, damnation, domination of man. Fear instilled in the heart of her, mother, daughter, sister hear me now aunties and grandmothers cry your tears scream your pain mourn your stolen feminine.

The stolen feminine erased from the stories written for glory of the dominant man. Controlling the future of her mindless, defenseless, careless, needing man to protect her as she fights each day to survive within the grim situation she lives with him holding on for dear life to what little he's left of her stolen feminine.

The stolen feminine, regaining power; no longer blaming; reclaiming power! Finding the truth within, voice to speak. Connecting mind, body and spirit. Manifesting the sacred space, emotion, putting life into motion. Rewriting history as she raises up the next generation. Forgiveness, ready to fight. Power of love, words her weapon, gun at the ready. Commanding respect, standing together with the one who stole her sacred feminine.

ON THE GROUND – SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS WOMEN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

SUBMITTED BY ONWA'S HOUSING FIRST COORDINATOR AND FAMILY SUPPORT WORKERS

Our Nihdawin program is unique in how we are able to support Indigenous women because we meet them where they are at. Nihdawin is a culturally relevant, harm reduction, client driven model that does not have any requirements of sobriety, mental health management, or income. We are able to support women and their families and work on the goals they set for themselves. Our biggest focus is to achieve an address, create a home, and then focus on goals they want to achieve. For example, if managing their addictions is not a priority for the woman, we do not pressure the woman to manage addictions.

Some of the barriers the woman face, are credit checks with landlords and finding appropriate housing for children. This includes the appropriate number of bedrooms, having the income needed to support the family, creating a safe space or area of town that is safe for the children. Nihdawin has helped women through these barriers by providing top ups, making connections to landlords, letters of support in regards to bad credit and working in partnership with child welfare agencies.

A Family Support Worker explains:

“I've been able to help my clients out with a lot of different things. To the lesser involved things that most of us take for granted, to the major things that any of us would find extremely challenging. A client never felt comfortable grocery shopping and she almost never wanted to go unless she absolutely needed food because she had none. I always had to take her shopping. She wanted me to shop along with her as she told me she didn't know how to do it or what to even get. We went on three separate occasions. I showed her how to shop on a budget, buy food that is healthy, and showed her where everything was in the store. Very recently, my client informed me that she went shopping by herself the other day and she was so happy to tell me that. I was so happy for her and knew I had made a difference in her life.”

There are other circumstances with clients that require more extensive supports and services.

A Family Support Worker also explains:

“A client had moved to Thunder Bay with nothing so she could reconnect with her daughter who has been in care for the majority of her life. There were a lot of ups and downs with her overall health and well-being, and a damaged relationship with her sixteen year old daughter. We had some bad luck with housing at first, but rather recently we got her housed. Things are still a bit of a struggle at times, but it’s a lot better than it once was. Since then, her daughter has reached out to mom since she got housed. Their relationship has begun to grow since being housed. Something she thanks me all the time for. On top of that, I’ve gotten her connected with many other services and programs that she is in need of and now attends. For a while I was her only support system but now she has other people helping her with different things and it has made her life so much better than it once was.”

A Support Worker shares:

“I’d also like to share my experience with a client who had been using drugs and alcohol with her abusive partner and father of her two children who decided to change her life. She left her partner, thus becoming homeless spending the night on whoever’s couch she could. This is typical with a lot of our homeless women— unfortunately, her children were subsequently placed in foster care. Her Journey to recovery began. We placed this client in emergency housing at a motel, made several referrals on her behalf to counselling agencies. We worked with her very closely for several months providing all the necessary supports required for her situation. By September 2017, we had successfully housed her in an affordable 2 bedroom unit so the reunification process could begin. I took great pride in my client and job while assisting her in moving in and shopping for the basic necessities for her new home. As of October she has her children on a regular basis and has reconnected with her eighteen year old daughter who comes to visit her. She has taken pride in her unit, developed life skills, and has her family back in a stable environment.”

MENTAL HEALTH & TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

RESILIENCY IS AT THE HEART OF HEALING AND WELLNESS

Trauma-informed care is an approach to engaging people with histories of trauma that recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in their lives.

Trauma-Informed Care at ONWA is based on an identified community need for effective support services that are non-judgmental and assist Indigenous women with addressing recent and historical trauma that has an impact on their lives. Many Indigenous women have suffered various forms of violence and numerous traumatic experiences throughout their lives, in the form of family violence, abusive relationships, sexual abuse, and the multilayered trauma resulting from colonial violence including systemic racism and intergenerational impacts of residential schools.

Indigenous women face an increased risk of all forms of violence inclusive of sexual violence and human trafficking. Exposure to childhood traumas and varying forms of violence increase the vulnerability of Indigenous women to sexual exploitation, escalated forms of violence and to other forms of victimization. Indigenous women, as all women, have a right to lead lives that are free from violence and trauma.

Prior unresolved trauma compounded with new traumas and a lack of positive coping mechanisms often leads to serious repercussions such as permanent physical conditions, long-term emotional and mental health impairment, addictions, involvement in child welfare systems and involvement with correctional institutions. These long-lasting negative effects can completely disrupt an individual's life and her ability to function; thereby stressing the importance of specifically addressing each individual trauma experienced and the resulting trauma effects (symptoms) in coordination with other supportive services.

ONWA's membership have identified a need for Trauma-Informed Care Workers to provide supportive, culturally sensitive and wholistic services that provide a safe space for Indigenous women to address their trauma, particularly for those women who are survivors of human trafficking and family violence and who want to exit these violent situations.

ONWA focuses on the strengths of our Indigenous women and not the deficits. We empower women to share their story.

With additional support, encouragement, traditional guidance and implementation of integration of western and traditional practices, Indigenous women and their families are gradually able to recognize the strengths in their stories instead of the inadequacies. This builds on the continuity of relationships, based on respect, trust and safety. Trauma-Informed Care supports women in a culturally rooted, wholistic way, with wrap around services. It also creates a climate of hope and validation, in a trauma-informed safe place, that allows women to lead in developing their own individualized culture-based plan of care for healing and recovery.

"The honour of the people lies in the moccasin tracks of the woman, Walk the good road...be dutiful, respectful, gentle and modest my daughter...be strong with the warm, strong heart of the earth. No people goes down until their women are weak and dishonored, or dead upon the ground. Be strong and sing the strength of the great powers within you, all around you."
- Village Wise Man, Sioux

RESOURCES

HELPLINES

[Talk4Healing](#)

Talk4Healing is a free and culturally safe telephone help line for Indigenous women living in Ontario. Talk4Healing is available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week with services in English, Ojibway, Oji-Cree and Cree. 1-855-554-HEAL (4325)

[Assaulted Women's Helpline](#)

Women who need legal help because of domestic violence can call the Assaulted Women's Helpline. The Helpline does crisis counselling, gives emotional support and makes referrals to shelters and legal services. Calls are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and information is available in a number of languages. 1-866-863-0511

[Victim Support Line](#)

To locate services in or near your community, use the Victim Support Line. 1-888-579-2888.

USEFUL LINKS/PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- [Family Law Education for Women](#)
- [Metis Nation of Ontario](#)
- [Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services](#)
- [Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres](#)
- [Ontario Women's Directorate](#)
- [Shelter Safe](#)
- [Victim Services Directory](#)

MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN WEBSITE

[This website](#) provides information, tools, guides and kits to help family members of missing and murdered indigenous women.

REPORTS

[Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada](#)

Indigenous homelessness in Canada is a human condition that describes First Nation, Metis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire such housing.

[Ontario Urban & Rural First Nations, Métis & Inuit Housing Policy Framework \(OUR Framework\)](#)

OUR Framework is a proactive document that calls for renewed commitment, coordination and communication to improve First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) housing and related services in Ontario. The framework advocates for the full devolution of urban and rural FNMI housing programs and related services to FNMI organizations.

[Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women](#)

The Framework addresses eight specific areas for change that integrates a community based, cultural and wholistic healing approach focused on ending violence: research, legislation, policy, programs, education, community development, leadership and accountability.

[Breaking Free BREAKING THROUGH](#)

As a follow-up to the original Breaking Free report, the Breaking Free Breaking Through project has set out to understand protective factors for women experiencing violence and what prompts these women to break free from violence.

SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Access a shareable graphic, web link, and suggested social messages for [this newsletter here](#).

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https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_00tyfy87R3HPbT

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