

2013

Northern Society for
Domestic Peace

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[CRITICAL CHOICES: RURAL WOMEN, VIOLENCE AND HOMELESSNESS]

A local research study to examine factors influencing rural women, with a focus on Indigenous women, to stay in or leave their communities when fleeing violence and facing homelessness and the supports they require.

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Introduction

When I began this project, I thought I would uncover the major challenges presented to women fleeing violence and facing homelessness. However, what I also discovered was the humanity of women who experience violence in their lives and that a home is but one of the major necessities required in surviving this kind of trauma. The other, is love. I heard from mothers about the absolute love they have for their children and the determination to keep them from suffering. I heard from service providers who saw the determination manifested in the unbelievable strength women bring to their experiences. Strength was embedded in love for their families, their pets, their people, and their futures while being held up by maybe one friend, one supporter, or someone who was no longer alive. The reality is that love will keep a woman going for great periods of time and through many challenges that mainstream society would call unfathomable. However, society expects women to pick themselves back up again, time after time, while government systems fail and the root causes of violence remain unaddressed. It is clear women are inspired by love and humanity, even in the worst of circumstances; however, when the person who is supposed to love you and protect you is abusing you and holding you down, a woman needs support to take the steps necessary to be able to walk away from violence and homelessness.

This research project was contracted through Northern Society for Domestic Peace, a non-profit organization based out of Smithers, B.C, and also servicing Houston and Hazelton, B.C. Northern Society for Domestic Peace worked in partnership with BC Housing to make this

project possible through Homelessness Knowledge Development funding. The research contract was awarded to me, a local researcher within the community, and an Indigenous woman who has experienced violence and homelessness.

To be most inclusive, I began with the United Nations definitions of absolute and relative homelessness:

People who are absolutely homeless are living outdoors, on the street, in parks, under bridges -- and are literally without shelter...also referring to people who rely on emergency shelters and hostels for temporary shelter.

People who are relatively homeless are considered at risk of homelessness because they are paying too much of their income for rent and/or are living in unsafe, inadequate or insecure housing. Often people in these households are one step away from homelessness.¹

However, I allowed women to define for themselves, what violence and homelessness meant to them.

Executive Summary

The objective of this research project is to provide communities with information regarding the experience of women, particularly Indigenous women, fleeing violence and facing homelessness in rural or remote communities; to identify existing supports for women in rural communities; identify factors that contribute to women's decision to leave or stay in their communities; and identify the nature of the supports needed for women to successfully migrate or live in their home communities.

Women's experiences of violence in the north were mostly intergenerational, learned and continuous violence with many women migrating back and forth between the rural communities of Burns Lake and the Hazeltons. The main challenges specific to living in rural communities were a lack of housing, lack of accessible services, lack of transportation and social barriers such as racism and discrimination in conjunction with personal and structural challenges surrounding violence and homelessness. Structural influences were mostly comprised of negative influences like a lack of access to services and housing thus forcing women to make decisions in conflict with their personal responsibilities, affecting their personal relationships and support systems. Additionally, Indigenous women identified impacts of colonization such as shame and fear as social and emotional barriers they face accessing supports and services.

¹ Patricia Begin and others. *Homelessness*, (Ottawa: Library of Parliament, Parliamentary Research Branch, Document PRB 99-1E), www.parl.gc.ca/36/refmat/library/PRBpubs/prb991-e.htm

The following discussions stem from the reality that formal services—that specifically address women’s migration to and from communities after fleeing violence—barely exist in the rural north. The realities for women fleeing violence and facing homelessness are laid out in *Crisis: Violence and Homelessness in the Rural North*, and the *Overview of Services* sections. Women identified the need for a series of strategies out of violence and homelessness, which have been organized into manageable steps. In this report, these steps have been identified as beginning with 1) *Crisis Response* services, which discusses response time, financial support, transportation, and emergency shelter; 2) *Sustained Support*, which encompasses healing, stable housing, and changes in policies and procedures and 3) *Breaking the Cycle* through education and awareness, which addresses colonization as a structural root of violence in Indigenous communities necessitating community education and awareness of the cycles of violence and homelessness, as well as the awareness of available services to better address women fleeing violence and facing homelessness in rural communities. Attached to these steps are recommendations to implement or improve supports and services. The establishment of these strategies and the attached recommendations will provide women with the security of knowing they may choose to stay in or leave their community as a result of fleeing violence and will be safe doing so. The implementation of these strategies would provide many women with options, where few are currently available.

Based on the research findings, the following chart summarizes the factors influencing women to stay in or leave their communities when fleeing violence as well as what influences women to return to their communities.

Push/Pull Factors for Women Fleeing Violence and Facing Homelessness

Influencing Factor	Leaving Community	Staying in Community	Returning to Community
	<i>Personal</i>		
Family	*Women felt they had no other choice but to leave the community for the safety of their family.	*Women felt they had no choice but to stay because they had family responsibilities.	*Women wanted to be near their families.
Role Modeling	*Women wanted to show their children they do not have to live in violence.		*Women wanted their children to be near their community and learn their culture.
Impacts on Relationships	*Women were isolated and distanced from their families and support networks. Women were also more distanced from children	*Women became closer to family and friends who they had previously been isolated from.	*Women wanted relationships in their home communities.

	who were not in their care.		
Normalized Violence	*Women were blamed in the community for “breaking up the family.”	*Women felt judged for “breaking up the family.”	Women continued to feel judged by community upon returning.
	<i>Structural</i>		
Housing	*Women left their communities to travel to safe homes and transition houses because they lacked a safe space in their community.	*Women who stayed did so because they had a safe place to go.	*Women faced accessibility challenges acquiring housing in attempts to return to their community.
Financial	*Women who left did so because they had the financial means to get to a safe place where none were available in their community.	*Women who stayed did so because they didn’t have the financial means to leave.	*Women often returned to their communities because they could not afford to live in the city.
Transportation	*Women who left did so because they had access to transportation to access safe homes and services outside of their community. Many women hitchhiked to flee violence.	*Women stayed in their community or in the violence because they lacked transportation to a safe place.	*Women who returned to their communities took into account access to transportation to required services.

Summary of Methodology/Methods

The data for this study were derived through qualitative research methods and an Indigenous research methodology, based on women’s experiences as a legitimate way of knowing, respect, reciprocity and accountability. Outreach to community members in the villages between Burns Lake and Hazelton, BC were constant throughout the entire research process. Twenty one interviews were completed with women who had experienced violence and faced homelessness, two vision board focus groups were held with six participants total, and 17 service providers were interviewed. A demographic survey was completed by 22 women (Appendix A). Data collection methods included training peer interviewers to conduct in-depth personal interviews with women who experienced violence and faced homelessness, based on

their own definitions through self-selection. In depth interviews were also carried out by the lead researcher with women and service providers who work in the communities within the study area. Vision board focus groups took the place of focus groups with women who experienced violence and faced homelessness to address the challenges with social dynamics of conducting sensitive research in small communities. Analysis followed by grouping and theming data and triangulating the results of a demographic survey, the service provider data, and women's experiences of violence and homelessness. Overall, the research design presented demographic challenges and social challenges based on the dynamics of small rural communities. For a detailed methodology/methods section see Appendix B.

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to understand the intersection of experiences of women who choose to stay in their communities and those who choose to leave, while identifying best practices to support these women in whatever decisions they make. The literature on violence against women, homelessness in general, Indigenous women's experiences with violence (colonization) and migration are all very complex issues and are beyond the scope of this review. Included is general information in order to contextualize the relationship between these broad topic areas. However, there is limited literature available that deals specifically with the relationship between influencing factors and support services for women in rural areas, with a particular focus on rural/remote British Columbia.

In summary, homelessness, violence against women, and factors influencing migration in relation to fleeing violence has not been addressed within the existing body of literature. The experiences of domestic violence dominate the literature on violence against women; however, this study remains open to all experiences of violence. The literature on violence against women reveals the urgency to which this matter must be addressed, and is compounded by the experiences in the rural north, in which rates of domestic abuse are higher, there are higher percentages of Indigenous women at risk, and women face greater structural barriers to accessing services than in urban areas. Factors influencing women's decisions to stay or leave their communities are fear based in relation to homelessness, which adds to the urgency of this research. Migration patterns are also bidirectional and must be analyzed in reference to fleeing violence and facing homelessness in rural areas (See Appendix C for full Literature Review).

Crisis

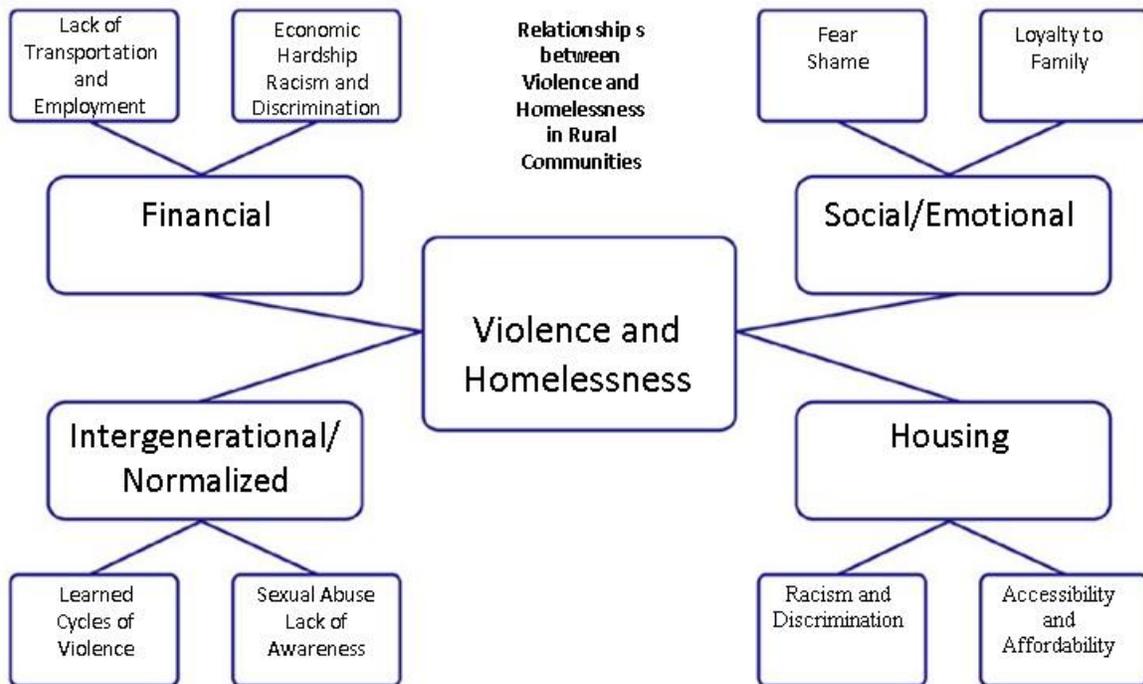
Most women I talked to had accessed shelters, treatment centers, or stayed with family or friends immediately upon fleeing violence. One woman describes the situation saying, “A woman leaving abuse is homeless.” Over two thirds of women who participated in the demographic survey component of this study said they had relocated due to violence, 73 percent said they experienced homelessness after fleeing violence and 59 percent still consider themselves homeless. Upon fleeing violence most women in this study said they have experienced fear, alcohol use, economic hardship, and problems accessing housing. Looking forward, women identified inadequate, unstable, unsafe, and unaffordable housing as a longer term consequence to fleeing violence. Specific to the Smithers area, Lois Hobley in, *Is There a Better Way? Homelessness and Housing Issues in Smithers*, says separation from a spouse or partner due to domestic abuse was cited as one of the highest causes of losing housing.² According to Hobley’s report, many women returned to their abusers at some point as a result of not being able to make it on their own. Aysan Sev’er in, *Flight of Abused Women, Plight of Canadian Shelters: Another Road to Homelessness*, confirms that women are also more likely to return to their abusive partners because they can’t find employment or alternative housing.³ Women who shared their experiences of violence described them as complex and often intergenerational (See Appendix E for women’s definitions of violence and homelessness).

² Lois Hobley, *Is There a Better Way? Homelessness and Housing Issues in Smithers*. (Smithers: Smithers Community Services Association, 2005), 26.

³ Aysan Sev’er, *Flight of Abused Women, Plight of Canadian Shelters: Another Road to Homelessness* (Toronto, University of Toronto, 2000), 5.

The following chart represents the relationship between violence and homelessness based on the research findings.

Figure 1 Relationship between Violence and Homelessness



Influencing Factors

It wasn't surprising that the main influence to leave a violent relationship and/or leave their community was the extended family. For many Indigenous women, this influence included their ties to their community and the traditional territories they belong to. Despite the fact that much of the violence and dysfunction stemmed from their experiences in their community, they continue to be of great importance. Out of the 68 percent of women interviewed for this study who relocated, all but 2 returned to live in their home community at some time. In fact women often chose to leave or stay in the community based on the needs of their family and their desire to be near them. However, intertwined with family responsibilities are the structural influences such as finances, housing, and access to services and support. Simply put, structural influences shape the decisions women can make based on their personal wants and needs.

Personal Influences

When I asked women what influenced their decision to stay or leave the community many women talked about family responsibilities and the needs of their children. Of the women who participated in the demographic survey, 86 percent had children. Most of the women surveyed for this study between 16 and 34 years old had their children in their care, while most women from the ages of 35-65 did not have their children in their care. Some women were caring for their grandchildren; some were caring for older members of the family, and some were struggling to get their children back from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). However, the majority of women said they wanted to break the cycles of violence within their families and act as role models for future generations. For example, Amy, a young mother who had taken in children on the reserve told me she stays in the community for the youth she is actively caring for.⁴ "If I'm not their teacher, I'm not going to give up on finding their teacher," she says. "They only know what they've seen. Until I show them different, that's all they'll know." Alternatively, some women simply missed their families and friends and felt homesick for their communities. Nancy Janovicek, in *"Assisting Our Own": Urban Migration, Self-Governance, and Native Women's Organizing in Thunder Bay*, describes the differences in world view, in which Indigenous communities focus on protecting the entire family as a unit in contrast to mainstream individualistic values.⁵ However, some Indigenous women were desperate to get away from their reserve communities because of the violence and many women who were displaced from their communities and families felt they had no family support at all. Yet, these women still valued their families and community connections. The push and pull factors around family and support networks can make the decision to stay or leave a serious struggle for women.

The findings conclude that women are forced to relocate due to a lack of options in their community and would rather stay close to their family responsibilities and community. Women who have fled violence considered cities like Terrace and Prince George too far away from family responsibilities. Most women interviewed for this study felt that cities like Terrace and Prince George were too violent, and filled with predators and drugs. Martin Cooke and Danièle Bélanger's, *Migration Theories and First Nations Mobility: Towards a Systems Perspective*, conclude that communities with more structure and services on reserve experience less migration to urban communities.⁶ Some Indigenous women said there was no help on their reserves, but no culturally relevant support in the cities either.

⁴ Pseudonyms used in place of actual names of participants.

⁵ Nancy Janovicek. "Assisting Our Own": Urban Migration, Self-Governance, and Native Women's Organizing in Thunder Bay, Ontario, *American Indian Quarterly* 1972-1989 27, no. 3/4 (2003): 548-565.

⁶ Martin Cooke and Danièle Bélanger. "Migration Theories and First Nations Mobility: Towards a Systems Perspective," *Canadian Review Of Sociology & Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (2006): 141-164.

Women talked about the negative impacts of leaving their community on their relationships in terms of being away from family and friends, but also talked about how leaving their violent situations and staying in community can draw them closer to family and friends who they had previously been isolated from. Unfortunately, most women who left their communities said they experienced negative impacts on their family and personal relationships, particularly with children. Women who left without their children or who had their children removed from their care, said they saw less of their children as a result of fleeing community. Despite the fact that some relationships grew stronger after fleeing violence, many women identified feelings of isolation as a result of changes in housing. A few women said they felt abandoned by their children after deciding to leave, while some women felt their families were generally unsupportive of the decision and others lost touch with family members. In a few cases, women felt they didn't have positive relationships with their families to begin with, so family considerations neither impacted their decision to leave nor did leaving change their relationships with their families.

In addition, I asked women if they felt they had a choice in the matter. Women's perception of choice was largely shaped by structural factors like safety, housing, and supports. Many women felt they didn't have a choice to leave the community, as they had experienced severe physical harm and had no safe place to go. As one woman put it, "I didn't think about it. I had to make quick decisions." Most of the women who did feel they had a choice made decisions based on fear for their children or pets or fear that the severity of violence would increase. Fear has been cited as one of the overpowering influences in housing for women. Sylvia Novac in, *On her own - young women and homelessness in Canada*, identifies that, "personal safety was the first priority in accessing housing security."⁷ Thus, women who felt they had a choice made decisions based on the fact that there were safe options available to them.

Intergenerational/Normalized Violence

One of the most prevalent experiences women and service providers shared with me was the fear, shame and stigma women wear as a result of fleeing violence in their homes or communities. In addition, Indigenous women said this comes from a long history of colonization. Women talked about the fear of physical harm, and the fear of being a single parent, but also the fear that prevented other community or family members from intervening when violence was happening. Women said community members would often be ostracized for becoming involved and "breaking up the family." Similarly, women told stories about their grandmothers who also suffered from violence, and parents who attempted to convince them

⁷ Silvia Novac. *On her own - young women and homelessness in Canada* (Ottawa, Status of Women Canada, 2002), 2.

to stay in the abuse for the sake of the family. For example, one woman was told that she needed to earn her respect and should stay with her husband who abused her. She told me she didn't want to live that way, which influenced her to stop the abuse. Women said they thought violence was normal for most of their lives. Now, they want a better future for their children.

Housing/Services

Unmistakably, personal influences were tied to structural influences like financial stability and the housing situations where women were living at the time they experienced violence. Generally, most of the influences on women have been negative influences like lack of housing, lack of safety and awareness of services, lack of transportation and lack of employment opportunities for women. Most women experienced challenges accessing housing due to racism and discrimination, which will be explored in greater detail later.

Women interviewed believe the lack of supports and services in their communities influenced them to stay or leave community. Women who left said they had a lack of support and safety where they were while women who stayed did so because they did not feel they had other options or because they felt they had a good support system.

Clearly, the conversation around housing is central. As one of the main physiological human needs, most support services and healing or educational services will not be effective if a woman does not have safe, stable housing. Throughout the remainder of the discussion I refer to housing as safe, stable, affordable, appropriate, and accessible housing, otherwise it is not considered appropriate housing for women who have experienced violence.

Summary

Personal and structural factors interact to influence whether or not women leave or stay in their community when fleeing violence. Women felt greatly responsible to their families and communities, but decisions took into account the realities of local housing accessibility and support services as well as their economic standing. Women's experiences of fleeing violence and homelessness are complex, and interwoven with particular histories, emotions, and the realities of the rural north, which offers a landscape designed by geographical distance between communities and isolation from the cities. It is clear women do not wish to leave their families and support systems but are forced to make hard decisions based on a lack of safe alternatives.

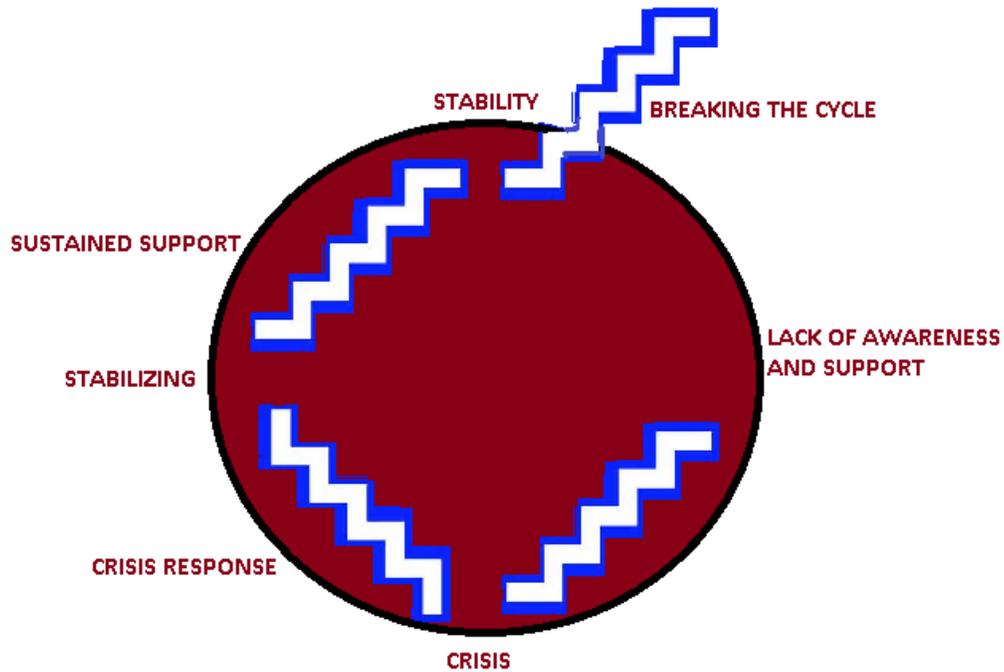
Overview of Existing Services

This section looks specifically at the existing services and supports available to respond to women fleeing violence and facing homelessness as well as the supports and services women have identified as necessary. These supports include formal support services by government and non-profit organizations, as well as informal supports that exist such as friends and family members.

Overview of Services

I asked women what services they have accessed and asked service providers what services they offered to women. Given the response, the stairs model is used to describe and illustrate the struggles and successes women have shared and the process women see as a way to break the cycle of violence and homelessness. The results are categorized into services that address women while they are in immediate crisis situations, continued support services, and finally, education and awareness as a strategy for prevention. This idea was described to me by a participant, who was also a peer interviewer and was complemented by a comment a service provider shared about creating manageable steps out of violence. Jackie, a woman who has experienced violence her entire life told me that people always expected her to get back up after being beaten down over and over again. In response, she said, “But we need the stairs to get back up.”

Figure 2: Cycle of Violence and Homelessness



Available Services

Generally there are a variety of services available to women fleeing violence and facing homelessness; however, many are not specific to violence *and* homelessness and do not address the overall needs of women. In fact, when I asked service providers what services they provided specifically to women fleeing violence and facing homelessness, they identified more challenges with accessing services than actual available services. For a list of services identified within the research, by women and service providers, see Appendix D. For sure, service providers are working above their mandates to provide women with crisis support and shared their frustration at the limitations they felt. The focus of services that did exist was services provided through Transition Houses located in Burns Lake, Smithers, and Terrace. Interviewees felt there were adequate services available in Smithers, which was the largest of the communities in the study area; however, women and service providers said access to these services from surrounding communities was a challenge, and identified improvements within these services. For the most part, service providers went the extra mile to ensure women felt supported; however, they too faced challenges.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

Included among recommendations are “Creative Practices Used by Service Providers” which have been identified by service providers who engage in these practices within or outside of their regular duties as well as practices women have identified as useful and supportive. To be clear, these are not “solutions” to the problems of violence and homelessness in rural communities; however, they are tools that can assist women in feeling more supported and can address some of the issues on the ground. Some of these practices may be common to some service providers and new for others. Rather than assuming every practice will fit perfectly for every service provider organization, these recommendations should be approached from a holistic perspective, focusing on the strengths of the service providers and looking towards new learning and growing.

Fear and Emotional Challenges

The biggest challenges service providers focused on were the social and emotional barriers women experienced fleeing violence and facing homelessness. Many women and service providers identified fear, shame, denial, feelings of a lack of security and a general lack of trust that kept women from accessing services and supports, or kept them from leaving their violent situations at all. Fear has been cited by women, service providers, and researchers as one of the overpowering influences in housing for women. Novak says this comes from experiences of violence in their past with a high rate of family breakdown, and the likelihood that women will experience more violence once they become homeless.⁸ Included in this analysis were small town gossip, blaming mentalities and the shame and stigma of domestic abuse and homelessness, which service providers say is re-victimizing for women. One service provider also said that women fear the unknown and often feel there is nowhere else to go. In addition to personal issues such as alcohol, drug use, and isolation, that women identified, women are also more likely to be affected by the weakening of family ties, in terms of how they deal with violence in their lives.⁹ Fear was certainly an emotional response to violence and homelessness, as women knew they would become homeless if they left the violence.

Indigenous Specific Services

In order to understand the experiences of women fleeing violence and facing homelessness in the rural north, a discussion about the unique experiences of Indigenous women is necessary. Indigenous women are overrepresented within this study (almost all of the participants were Indigenous women) and within statistics on violence against women and homelessness. For example, people with Indigenous ancestry are over-represented at nine

⁸ Novak, 2.

⁹ Begin and others, 19.

percent of the Intimate Partner Violence victims while they only represent five percent of the total population in B.C.¹⁰ Further, Indigenous women face specific challenges in accessing relevant services, since services are rarely staffed by Indigenous women, and often do not provide culturally relevant support. Tracy Byrne and Wade Abbott in, *Stopping Violence against Aboriginal Women: A Summary of Root Causes, Vulnerabilities and Recommendations from Key Literature*, say a lack of services are compounded for Indigenous women who often have further distances to travel, and lack adequate transportation to access services in surrounding communities. These factors prevent Indigenous women from leaving violent relationships.¹¹

Of the service providers I interviewed, 58 percent of services were not specific to Indigenous women. Twenty-five were specific to Indigenous people, but were open to everyone, and seventeen percent were specific to Wet'suwet'en families. One service provider said that all of her clients were Indigenous and that the organization was supposed to be servicing one of the nearby reserves, but had no funding to do so. Many service providers saw the need for services that met the specific needs of Indigenous women and their families.

Yet, several service providers responded to the question around specific services for Indigenous women with caution. Well intentioned caution as to not "single out" any one particular group. However, denying the specific histories of Indigenous women erases the history of colonization that Indigenous women have and continue to experience (See Appendix F for a further discussion on Impacts of Colonization). This is not to say that each Indigenous woman should be treated differently than other women; however, the availability of Indigenous specific services should be an option, delivered by Indigenous women within mainstream organizations or through Indigenous organizations. Every Indigenous woman shared their experiences of historical and intergenerational trauma and abuse, as well as the very real impacts of racism and discrimination. Women and service providers said racism and impacts of colonization continue to be a major challenge that Indigenous women face and thus, will be central to the discussion on services for Indigenous women.

Rural Specific Challenges

When I asked women if there were any specific challenges living in a northern rural community, and asked service providers if they faced any additional challenges providing services and support in a rural northern community, both groups of women identified similar issues. Firstly, women identified the lack of access to housing. Women said they faced major challenges with landlords, and felt that racism and discrimination were specific to living in a

¹⁰ Ministry of Justice. *BC Coroners Services Releases Domestic Violence Research*, April 17th, 2012, 2, http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2009-2013/2012JAG0046-000488.htm

¹¹ Tracy Byrne and Wade Abbott. *Stopping Violence Against Aboriginal Women: A Summary of Root Causes, Vulnerabilities and Recommendations from Key Literature* (Ministry of Citizens Services, February 23, 2011), 11.

rural community. Secondly, women identified financial or economic challenges due to the nature of the region's focus on industry and lack of access to education and training. Service providers seconded that. Finances to obtain food and shelter are mandatory when women flee violence, yet this research finds that women are not receiving the financial support they need. Thirdly, both women and service providers identified social and interpersonal phenomena, such as the stigma of violence and homelessness in small communities as well as generally racist attitudes and issues with confidentiality. Women who have experienced fleeing violence and faced homelessness described all of these challenges. Finally, women and service providers identified a lack of services such as programs for men, detox or treatment centers, lack of support on reserves, and a general lack of services everywhere but Smithers, which is the largest community within the study area. There is at least one organization delivering services or outreach for domestic violence in each community; however, organizations are not mandated or funded to provide enough support for housing women or assisting women in accessing housing to address the existing need.

Crisis Response Services

Generally, there were not many services specific to fleeing violence and migration; however, there were services that are essential to address women's physiological needs such as food, emergency shelter in some communities, and clothing. Highlighted here are some formal and informal services, identified challenges or accessibility issues, as well as realistic recommendations to ensure that the services and supports available meet the needs of women fleeing violence and facing homelessness.

Timely Response

To preface the conversation about crisis response services, a concern over time surfaced throughout discussions about services for women fleeing violence and facing homelessness. Women felt the response time for accessing services was too slow, and that they spent too much time waiting. One service provider accurately describes this experience saying, "Time can be a toxic process." She believes people need to be met at the moment they are ready or need help or they easily become defeated. Rarely do crises occur between 8:30 and 4:30 on Monday through Friday. More realistically, they occur during the evenings or on the weekends. Although there are some crises interventions available in some communities, mostly by phone, service providers say women are often isolated during times they are most vulnerable. Thus, the ability to offer services and supports that are flexible and time sensitive is critical to influencing the decisions women make regarding the violence in their lives.

Recommendations

- Assess the flexibility and time sensitivity of existing policies and services.
- Create new policies and services with flexibility and immediacy as core principles.

Fleeing Violence, Fleeing Community

Justice System Services

Service providers discussed a variety of supports available to women fleeing abuse, such as the new Family Law Act, Victims' Services and the courts, but most were unaware of the details of these services. Interestingly, when I asked women what services they accessed, most did not identify services within the justice system. Several women did talk about RCMP officers and said they felt judged and treated poorly as though they were the criminals. One woman went so far as to ask an RCMP officer to leave her property because she felt as if she was being accused and judged. Another woman said male RCMP officers always ask, "Why didn't you just leave?" She says she just stopped reporting the abuse, "because they break your spirit down." Another woman talked about the justice system with her childhood experiences of sexual abuse and said she was disgusted and embarrassed by the courts. Thus, not only do crisis response service providers, like RCMP, require further training and awareness of violence and homelessness but service providers require a better understanding of what services are available through the justice system.

Recommendations

- Increase coordination and awareness between service providers and justice system staff so service providers are able to inform women of supports provided through the justice system.
- Implement/increase training to RCMP officers and crisis response service providers.
- Work with RCMP to develop effective intervention strategies for domestic abuse.

Transition Houses

Transition houses were identified by women and service providers as one of the most important formal services available while in crisis. These services include crisis lines, safety planning, and other services available within each respective transition house or emergency shelter. Most women felt that shelters and safe houses were supportive and safe places to get support. One woman said that if the support from the transition house did not exist in her community, she would have left town. Women said transition houses offered some critical time to assess their situation and access other services like counseling, drug and alcohol

services, and support to find housing. Although these services were the most supportive and accessible, women experienced challenges around these services such as the 30 day stay limit and homogenous services at some locations.

Both women and service providers identified the 30 day stay limit at transition houses as problematic. Most service providers said they thought the 30 day limit was too short; however, most were flexible with this policy and treated it more as a guideline. Many women said they did not feel safe or stable enough to look for work and housing while they were also attempting to process the trauma they experienced. Particularly for women with children, finding affordable, safe and appropriate housing was essential to ensuring their children were not at risk for apprehension during this process. One service provider said, “Women need more time to get grounded, realistically. It takes longer to go from being in a crisis to being ready and feeling safe to move on. It takes longer than 30 days to find a new home while supporting children. Two months is more realistic.” Longer stays would allow women to meet their physiological needs with food, shelter, and physical safety, while working towards stability in housing, employment and security for their families.

For the most part, all women found transition houses and shelters supportive and welcoming; however, some Indigenous women felt that with one particular transition house, they encountered some staff that were racist, judgmental, and unsupportive. One woman described this transition house as a toxic environment, and said that transition houses reminded her of residential schools. This is not representative of all Indigenous women’s experiences at all transition homes. Most women found that transition houses provided essential services and credited transition house staff with helping them see an alternative life, free from violence. However, many Indigenous women did say they would like to engage with Elders, culture and traditional and holistic healing in addition to the supports that are currently available through transition houses. One woman wondered why Indigenous women couldn’t have their own healing centers and safe places for women, to ensure that services are culturally appropriate and reflect Indigenous definitions of wellness. The women interviewed also felt that it would be helpful to have some of these healing centres closer to Indigenous communities to allow women who wish to stay in their home communities the option to do so and access supports they need.

Recommendations

- ✓ Create holistic services to address the multi-challenges women are facing.
- Increase the duration of stay in Transition Houses to 60 days to give women more time to heal before seeking appropriate housing, employment, childcare/educational needs, etc.

- Establish Indigenous run and operated transition houses that include support from Elders and offer access to holistic/traditional healing. These centers should include drug and alcohol support and education about colonization. In the short-term, consider developing partnerships with Elders or other Indigenous organizations to ensure culturally-appropriate services are available to Indigenous women who access existing transition houses and safe homes.
- Establish and fund supportive housing for young women with children and expecting mothers in smaller Northern communities. This should include drug and alcohol, mental health and trauma support as well as prenatal and postnatal services.
- Increase outreach and awareness of transition house services.
- Transition houses and shelters should recruit, hire and train Indigenous women to create more career options.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Provide extra time and care to women with families to ensure children remain with family and connect with other services and supports.
- Host or co-host “clan” or “nation” nights at Transition Houses, with local Elders or Indigenous Service Providers, focusing on language, arts, and music.
- Provide lists of housing options, local service provider information, and offer to assist with referrals to help women feel more comfortable connecting with local support services and build trusting relationships.
- Create an environment where women are welcome to return any time to access food, eat, access groups and services, and get support from staff.

Financial/Economic

Financial Services like Ministry of Social Development emergency grants and new programs for “Persons Fleeing Abuse,” allow women to access Income Assistance through an expedited process and receive a crisis supplement for moving to improve living conditions. Should a woman disclose domestic abuse (physical, emotional, psychological, intimidation or stalking) her application for income assistance is fast-tracked to stage two of the intake process. If this were a crisis situation, the woman is seen within 24 hours. The file takes 24-48 hours to assess and she could have crisis supplement funds to move within 4-5 days. “New applicants are exempt from the work search, two-year financial independence requirement, and employment obligations for up to six months and proceed directly to Stage 2 of the intake process.”¹² In addition to this, women with families may be eligible to receive assistance

¹² Ministry of Social Development, *Persons Fleeing Abuse*, http://www.gov.bc.ca/meia/online_resource/application/fleeabuse/index.html

through the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD). Women also said they accessed financial support through Employment Insurance, First Nation band services and employment service agencies.

However, women do have to be otherwise eligible for Income Assistance to receive monies through MSD, which requires documentation from doctors and social workers who support relocation. Access to funds continues to take into account any assets a woman might have in her name. Assets could disqualify women from being eligible for assistance. One woman had all of the family assets in her name and was unable to access Income Assistance in her time of need. She also did not feel stable enough to work, but was forced to live in shelters and with family and friends while she looked for work to survive. Throughout this process she did not have funds for travel to and from the nearest available services. Not only do women not always have access to financial supports, but the lack of financial options leave women feeling trapped and will often force them to return to their abuser or prevent them from leaving at all. Sev'er affirms that women are more likely to return to their abusive partners because they can't find employment or alternative housing.¹³ Service providers also say that these types of funds are often not released for various reasons and are largely dependent on women's relationship with the service providers or social workers.

In addition, when setting up a new home, women need to access furniture and other household items, which can be very expensive. Many women talked about the "starter kits" available through transition houses as critical for their new homes; however, core funding for this has been cut. One transition house uses donations and fundraises to acquire these necessities for women starting over.

Recommendations

- ✓ Assess and remove barriers women face accessing funding through government ministries.
- Increase awareness of financial supports through Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), so women know they can ask for support and know what they need to disclose to access fast-tracked services and additional financial supports when fleeing violence.
- Provide emergency relocation funds to women fleeing violence regardless of their eligibility for Income Assistance.
- Provide emergency "flexible funding" for unanticipated costs delivered through service provider organizations (Example: funding for unanticipated transportation costs).

¹³ Sev'er, 5.

- Create and ensure access to funding for starter kits through transition houses.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Assist women in navigating financial assistance websites, such as MCFD or MSD.
- Provide women with a list of financial assistance options and offer support throughout the application process. For example, the Loans for Life from Canadian Women's Foundation.
- Advertise for donations to create starter kits for women fleeing abuse in transition houses.

Transportation

One of the greatest challenges facing northwestern British Columbia is the lack of accessible and affordable transportation, particularly in an emergency situation. Women feel that transportation is a challenge specific to the north as there are large geographical distances between communities and no formal transportation system to get from place to place other than the Greyhound bus service and Via Rail, which do not provide daily accessible and affordable service. Service providers said that often women and families cannot afford travel and transportation, which creates further risk by forcing them to hitchhike for food and services and isolates women from supports. Several women told me they were and are forced to hitchhike while pregnant as there are no other options to get to Smithers where the closest available services are. The Greyhound bus lines recently cut back on 15 routes, one of which is the stretch of highway between these communities, which is well known as the "Highway of Tears," where women have been going missing and being found murdered for the last 20 or so years. Most of the women who have gone missing along this highway have been Indigenous women hitchhiking. Women are also being exploited by family and community members for travel monies to get to appointments in towns where services are available. The money women are forced to use to get to services is taken directly from the money they use to feed themselves and their children.

If women are able to get transportation to larger centres where they can access support services, those interviewed said they often have insufficient funds to travel back to their home communities. Many women may want to travel back to their home communities from time to time to maintain their connections, especially with their social networks.

Recommendations

- ✓ The Province should take the lead on affordable transportation between rural and reserve communities to address the consequences such as violence against women and access to services, education, and employment opportunities.

- Establish emergency transportation services in rural communities through partnerships with existing transportation services, or by funding service providers to provide transportation.
- Fund transition houses to obtain and maintain their own transportation systems in order to respond to women fleeing violence and facing homelessness in a timely manner.
- Continued transportation allowance should be included for “Persons Fleeing Abuse” through MSD. Financially assist women and their children to visit family and support networks while they are away from the community.
- Transition houses and service providers could create a network of communication to ensure women are making it safely from place to place given the lack of access to transportation. Create a communications network between service provider agencies and transition homes to ensure the safe arrival of hitchhiking women.
- Request donations from taxi and other transit services, where available.
- Include informal transportation costs in funding applications.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

Certainly, transition houses and service providers are addressing the transportation needs as best they can with the resources they have. Some organizations fundraise in order to buy phone cards so women can call service providers when they arrive in another town. One organization takes photos of the women and asks fleeing women to check in once they have arrived at their destination. Fundraised dollars also go towards taxi rides from surrounding communities, or even from within the town itself. Service providers go outside their service areas, and have even been known to wake up in the middle of the night to drive women to the nearest transition house.

Informal Supports

The women and service providers interviewed as part of this study identified informal supports for both women leaving their communities and those who wish to stay. In both situations, women and service providers said that family and friends, as well as service providers and community members provide important informal supports. Informal supports for women fleeing violence and leaving their communities include transportation to transition houses and other support services required by women. For women who stay in their communities, community members and church groups support women by bringing them into their homes to address emergency situations and housing needs. Both service providers and

women said family and friends also provide informal emotional supports to women who choose to stay in their communities, and when possible to those who choose to leave as well.

There are challenges around the provision of information supports. Firstly, family and community members who take women fleeing violence into their homes put themselves at risk. Moreover, informal supports cannot always be counted on, as families and friends were often already supporting their own families. Other women felt their families can also part of the problem. One woman described her relationship with her mother and described a long history of violence saying, “My Mother taught me how my own people could hurt me and turn on me.” Therefore, although community and family are considered important informal support systems, and are necessary for a sense of belonging and security, there are also challenges within communities that must be address through more holistic services and supports. Also, while churches and family members can be supportive in providing some women with new beds, groceries and starter supplies in their new homes, these supports are not accessible to all women and can come with strings attached.

Recommendations

- Identify and assess informal supports in community during the development of new programs and services, and empower these supports in the delivery model.
- Assess existing services in terms of how informal supports can work together with service providers.

Fleeing Violence, Remaining in Community

Crisis response supports consist of emergency shelter supports, emergency financial supports, and informal supports like family and friends. While in crisis, women also accessed food services like food banks, soup kitchens, and community gardens, as well as medical services, clothing services, and counseling. Women and service providers were not aware of other supports that existed specifically to address the needs of women fleeing violence, facing homelessness, and wanting to remain in their communities.

The main challenge with no specific services for women who choose to stay in their community after fleeing abuse is that there isn't a safe place to go to on reserves or in smaller communities. This means that most women must leave their community to access emergency shelters in a time of crisis and transition. One woman told me she had to flee violence on her reserve several times and was forced to sleep outside. She said she had no idea where to access a safe place or even access a phone to call the RCMP. Safety for women who wish to stay in community is heavily reliant on the establishment of safe houses, access to emergency shelter, housing, and sustained support and education. One service provider said that she has a policy

not to disclose to anyone if a woman is at her organization. Then, at the very least, a woman knows she has a safe place to be during the day.

Recommendation

- Establish protocols within service provider organizations to address the safety of women accessing services who stay in the community.

Sustained Support: Healing, Housing, and Relationships

Once women have their physiological needs met they can begin to stabilize their lives. This section focuses on continuous support services that assist women in creating stability in their lives with a focus on healing as a necessary step towards breaking the cycle of violence and homelessness. Throughout my discussions with women and service providers it has become apparent that women need stability, safety, and time to assess their situations from a non-crisis perspective and look towards longer term goals.

Healing

Women's experiences often stem from years, and sometimes generations of violence within their own homes and broader society. Thus, it isn't surprising women would identify healing as a necessary step out of violence that leads to homelessness. Most of the participants said they were accessing counseling as a way to heal from the trauma they experienced. Women also accessed treatment centers outside of their communities for alcohol and drug use. These include programs like AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). In terms of sustained support services, most women identified counseling and community services and gathering spaces like Friendship Centres, Smithers Community Services Association, Northern Society for Domestic Peace, and Positive Living North. All of these services are based in Smithers, the largest of the communities. This creates accessibility challenges for women outside of Smithers who lack transportation to access long term support. Thus, women felt this was not enough. Specific to Indigenous women, healing must be addressed holistically with a focus on culture and community.

Several Indigenous women who were living within their territories said they wanted to stay in their own territory and have access to the land for healing purposes. Jackie says, "Why do we always need to get sent away?" Women said they had a desire to engage in traditional healing ceremonies and practices like smudging, sweat lodge ceremonies, drumming and

singing and being able to access sacred spaces. Jackie went on to say, “We need an army of strong women to heal ourselves.” Women felt the people involved in healing were important.

Women said they require support from their Elders, strong women, clan members, and cultural teachers to heal. One woman described a program her daughter had been involved with called, “Circle of Aunties.” She said this program relied on strong women in the community who gathered together to provide support for others experiencing violence, and was successful at integrating culture and education with support from local women prior to funding being cut. I was told by women that space and time to learn and have cultural teachings and gatherings is essential for women during the healing process. One woman said, “It feels safe around First Nations people.” Some Indigenous women have said they would not be comfortable accessing services from their community members; however, less direct supports like women’s groups create a bridge for access to other services. Moreover, they also bring opportunities to create awareness and education among women of various ages. Women said they would enjoy cultural activities and events such as making drums, crafts, and medicine bags. Indigenous women said they would like access to these types of services on the reserve as well as within transition houses and other services outside of their communities.

Both women and service providers felt that confidentiality, or the perception of confidentiality was a challenge in the rural north when accessing support services around healing. Women coming from small or reserve communities felt there was a lack of confidentiality within the community. One service provider said this is partially a result of losing trust within the community due to colonization. Many women said they did not feel comfortable sharing their experiences with people they knew. Similarly, service providers said they thought women perceived a lack of confidentiality stemming from a lack of trust in general with mainstream services. However, some service providers felt that women preferred mainstream services outside of their community, as there is an assurance that the service provider would not be related or well known to the women’s social networks in her home community.

Recommendations

- ✓ Empower Indigenous women in community to develop and deliver healing programs and women’s groups according to their culture and traditions.
- Integrate traditional healing practices and support people into existing transition homes and shelters.
- Create options (including access to transportation) for Indigenous women to access services on reserve or through mainstream services.

- House services under one roof to avoid stigmatization and combat fear of accessing services.
- Create opportunities for nurturing women, including Indigenous healing practices led by knowledgeable Indigenous people.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

Women have said they need to feel safe to heal, and have established trusting relationships with service providers. One of the biggest complaints has been that women can feel judged or not understood when they are first received by service providers, whether in their time of crisis, or while they are healing. One woman who had experienced extreme violence her entire life told me about a service provider who supported her during a parenting course. Amy said she trusted the service provider because she had seen her at her worst and still didn't judge her. She believed in her and stood by her no matter what. She was able to help with everything from filling out forms to getting groceries and made a huge impact on Amy's life. Amy said she believed in herself because the service provider believed in her.

- Reflect on your practice: Ask yourself "What's limited in my practice?" Not, "what's limited in her?"
- Be cognizant of the way you receive women into a space and engage with them. Be open, and understanding, without judgment.

Housing

Both service providers and women identified challenges with housing that are particular to the north. Both identified the lack of affordable, adequate, and accessible housing, while women focused more on problems with landlords like racism and discrimination and not enough social housing or housing for single women. Serious challenges discussed in this section are racism and discrimination, as well as challenges specific to families.

Many women faced extreme racism and discrimination in accessing housing in their communities which often resulted in inadequate housing. Some women said they experienced racism from landlords and were not permitted to view a rental once the landlords saw they were Indigenous. This is particularly challenging for younger women with children, as they face greater discrimination for being young mothers according to women and service providers. This led women to accept any housing that was available, which was often substandard, unsafe, and unstable. Furthermore, women who had problems with alcohol or had been evicted because of violence then faced greater barriers accessing alternative housing due to their tainted record. Similarly, service providers said that many small town landlords have blacklists and keep records of women who would be considered "hard to house" because of their histories with

alcohol and/or violence. Therefore, although there may be housing available in some communities, accessing housing that is appropriate is more of a challenge for women getting back on their feet.

This also creates huge problems for women who have children and have experienced violence. Service providers said women are losing their children because they become homeless after fleeing violence. One service provider says, “It’s challenging to keep appointments and get a babysitter when you don’t have a home.” At the time of the study there were several single moms living in transition homes because there was simply no accessible housing. Moreover, women who previously had their children removed due to violence must prove they have stable and safe housing before they can get their children back. One woman lost her daughter due to inadequate housing. Another service provider says families are being forced into “ghettoized” (or poor) housing neighborhoods and are moving around from place to place until they become secure or until they get whittled down. She says, “It gets too hard and the default is going back.” Additionally, service providers feel that young women with children are often set up for failure when they are provided with housing but not provided with the supports necessary to live on their own. Some young women do not have the life skills to make it on their own with their children. One service provider said, “When this happens they are viewed as incompetent to care for their children and their children are often removed from their care.”

Women who also suffer from mental health or other health related issues like HIV often become permanently lost because they don’t have the stability in their lives to access or follow through with treatment. One service provider adds that Indigenous women are at greater risk of contracting HIV and are also overrepresented as HIV positive, often because of trust and housing issues. She says, “It’s just one more blow.”

Service providers have identified “slumlords” as meeting a housing need in Smithers. They are providing unsafe, exploitive, and inadequate housing for women who are hard to house, are living in poverty, or experiencing crisis and create an increase in child protection issues for women with children. Often times this type of housing is the only option for women fleeing violence.

Recommendations

- Increase/establish low income housing for families and single women based on a scattered-site housing model.¹⁴

¹⁴ Hobley, 42.

- Establish supportive housing for hard to house women and families, or women and families addressing multi-challenges like alcohol and drug use, health issues like HIV and Hepatitis C, mental health challenges, and the intergenerational impacts of colonization.
- Fund a housing liaison position within each community to assist women accessing appropriate housing, which will also provide support for women and families relocating to nearby communities. This position should be specific to women fleeing violence and facing homelessness. The liaison position should include referrals and relationships with other service providers to provide “wrap around” holistic services to ensure women’s success in maintaining appropriate housing. See an example of this type of position in the Homelessness Outreach Program (HOP).¹⁵
- Work with landlords in rural communities to enforce discrimination laws within the Residential Tenancy Branch of the Province of British Columbia.
- Create a support position to assist women moving out of transition homes and establishing themselves in the community.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

Since there is currently no one person responsible to assist women fleeing violence in accessing housing, most service providers are doing this work off the sides of their desks. Service providers are creating pamphlets and lists of housing options for women and liaising with landlords as best they can to secure women with housing.

- Provide lists of available vacancies and contact information.
- Pass on information about the BC Tenancy Act and play a supportive role.
- Visit potential new rental units with women to ensure the unit includes safety features such as working locks and intercom systems (for apartment units).

First Nations Bands

Many of the Indigenous women I spoke with talked about their First Nations bands and the reserves they come from. These women felt they did not receive adequate support services from their band offices. Women identified a lack of confidentiality and judgment from band office staff. One woman felt she should be more supported from her band, but instead felt the staff looked down on her and judged her. Women also addressed the lateral violence happening in their communities. However, some women felt disconnected from their cultures and hoped to become more involved. In addition, women said their Elders, women in the community and leadership were critical supports they needed in their lives. As previously discussed, Indigenous women looked to their elected and traditional leadership as support

¹⁵ BC Housing, *Homelessness Outreach Program*, <http://bchousing.org/Initiatives/Access/HOP>.

people and also identified the impacts of colonization within their communities. Thus, education and awareness of the link between violence and homelessness in their communities would help in decreasing judgment and re-victimization.

Recommendation

- Create more education and awareness within reserve communities, including band council staff, about the cycles of violence and homelessness and the role of colonization.
- Include Elders and leadership in the delivery of healing, education and awareness.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Stay connected with women who leave the community due to violence.
- Follow up with women to let them know, “We are here for you.”
- Offer moral support for women returning to the community.

Returning to Community

When I asked service providers what services existed for women who were returning to their communities after fleeing violence, most said there weren't any specific services or they didn't know of any. There is one formal service called the Reconnections program through the Office of the Wet'suwet'en in Smithers. This program focuses on creating relationships in community, and features important connections through face-to-face gatherings and a “welcome home” celebration. However, this program is not specific for women who have experienced violence and focuses more on youth and children who have been in care of MCFD. The challenge for women, who wish to return to their community after fleeing violence, is that there is no housing. Likewise, there is no housing on reserves for Indigenous women.

An example of more informal support systems for women who have experienced violence and are returning to their communities was the use of social media and cell phones. One transition house I visited had a cell phone specifically for texting women, as many women only have pay as you go cell phones which allow them to text for free. This was used as a way to keep in touch with women in an informal way and allowed for emergency contact if required. Another transition house uses petty cash or fundraised money to buy phone cards for women to stay in contact with the house. One transition house also had a Facebook page where women could keep in contact with service providers and gain access to information about services and supports advertised online.

Recommendations

- Implement pay as you go cell phones for continuous communication and support when women return to their community.
- Create contacts and relationships with service providers in the community and routinely follow up for 3 to 6 months after women return to their community.
- Explore and develop a safe home/safe space within community for women returning, including transportation to access services and employment or education opportunities.
- Assess relationships and collaboration by service providers within and between communities.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

One thing service providers stressed was the need to stay in contact and follow up with women and other service providers. Get involved with women and be open to creating a long lasting relationship that women can count on for support.

- Get in the habit of following up with women who may have returned to their community.
- Keep women updated about services, workshops and programs that are available.

Policies and Procedures

Service providers are most familiar with the policies and organizational challenges they face providing services to women fleeing violence and facing homelessness. Some of the main challenges service providers identified were around the nature of services, connections with other service providers, and funding.

Most service providers were well aware of the nature of services being homogeneous. One service provider says, "Services are irrelevant to Indigenous women because they come from a homogenous world view that 'we're all just the same.'" This was prevalent throughout the women's experiences and was echoed by the service providers who work in community. Byrne and Abbott recommend that, "All levels of government should provide the necessary resources for recruiting and training Aboriginal counselors and other personnel."¹⁶ Additionally, service providers felt they were challenged by a lack of trust with First Nations communities, lack of funding to coordinate, and a lack of involvement or knowledge about Indigenous specific services.

¹⁶ Byrne and Abbott, 29.

One of the main problems with migration and services are the challenges with the referral process and connections with other service providers. One service provider criticized how services were crisis driven and how, “nothing natural is happening. Everything is so by the book,” referring to the referral process through government ministries like MCFD or MSD and found that Ministries weren’t referring, or that the process of referrals was creating gaps within the system. One service provider said simple things like following up with referrals can help alleviate some of the problems. Some service providers even go with women to personally introduce them to other service providers, as they found some women were being referred but never showing up to services. Some service providers also said they felt there were challenges with confidentiality within the referral process, and that service providers were working in silos, were overworked, and underfunded.

To address this issue, service providers felt the need to be creating more dialogue and flexibility within and between organizations with funding from governments to make this a reality. Each and every service provider I spoke with had creative stories of how they provided support for women with diverse needs. Many go outside of their services areas or create supports that aren’t mandated or funded because the need exists. One service provider described this problem saying, “You need to be flexible because there’s no alternative. People have left and come back to violence because they are exhausted.” She was referring to the need to be flexible and meet women where they are at physically and emotionally. Services and supports that are available are going to influence the decisions women make in very impactful ways. For the most part, women have strong ties to their families and prefer to stay near and service providers are doing what it takes to help them do so. However, often policies and funding make this challenging.

Funding

Service providers felt that funding for women fleeing violence and facing homelessness was challenging, either because funds did not exist or because of mismanaged funds, inconsistencies with funding or inadequate funding. For example, one transition house was funded for only ten beds, yet provided services for over 20 beds, and is regularly at maximum capacity. Similarly, other service providers felt that funding should exist for emergency services that are not mandated through the organization or transition house. For example, funding should exist for emergency transportation costs or partnerships with businesses that provide transportation. One woman told me she had finally left her husband in the middle of the night after a violent outbreak. She packed up her grandchildren to get to the nearest transition house but when she arrived she found the transition house full. She did not have enough fuel in her vehicle to travel to the next safe house and was forced to drive her grandchildren back home

during the early hours of the morning to her violent husband. While writing this report, she remains in the home because she feels there are no alternatives.

Service providers also identified the lack of ability to be flexible and creative with the funds to address women's needs. Sarah Cunningham's research, *Bridging Gaps: Connecting and Coordinating Public and Non-Profit Social Services in the OBAC Region*, confirms this reality saying that government funding is often inaccessible and results in rural organizations giving up on accessing funds for programming. In addition, she reports that a lack of control or influence over financial and other resources limits the capacity of communities to address their needs themselves.¹⁷ In terms of fleeing violence and fleeing the community, service providers felt that funds should be accessible to address the immediacy of the situation and be flexible to meet women's needs.

Recommendations

- Increase flexibility for service providers to provide services to women who may not fit within their mandate.
- Increase existing outreach services to include on call, emergency contact people within each community.
- Create outreach materials for women who are 'fleeing community' and women who wish to 'remain in community.'
- Fund Indigenous specific services within and outside of reserve communities, including positions and programs within mainstream organizations to increase awareness and accessibility.
- Increase flexibility and local control over funds for local service provider organizations.

Building Relationships

Service providers have emphasized the importance of relationships between themselves and clients. It is extremely important that service providers create relationships which are intentional and work well to respond to the immediacy of women's experiences. Of the literature that exists, best practices include integration and coordination of existing services, which are necessary to ensure women's safety and well-being.¹⁸ In addition, coordination should increase collaboration and engagement among all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, service agencies, justice systems (including courts and police forces), and National and other Aboriginal organizations with the goal of developing more

¹⁷ Cunningham, *Bridging Gaps: Connecting and Coordinating Public and Non-Profit Social Services in the OBAC Region*, 13.

¹⁸ Byrne and Abbott, 11.
Hobley, 9.

coordinated and comprehensive approaches.¹⁹ Generally, service providers felt they had positive working relationships with government agencies and non-profit service providers, yet they said they would like to build stronger relationships to support the migration of women. These relationships ranged from good in Smithers, to more challenging in Houston. As one service provider stated, this is necessary because, “we can’t be all things to all people.” Certain services are only available in some communities, such as transition houses and treatment centers for drugs, alcohol, and trauma. However, it is necessary that service providers create consistency as much as possible between communities but also maintain the flexibility required addressing all women’s needs. Service providers spoke about more holistic “wrap around” services that include support in various communities working together and breaking down silos.

Likewise, Cunningham’s report recommends that strategic actions towards building capacity to work collaboratively require the implementation of a regional event, establishing working groups, and financial support. In addition, she also recommends that community service providers integrate requests for funding into their funding applications.²⁰

Meanwhile, the Wet’suwet’en People, through the Anuk Nu’At’en B’glgh’iyi z’ilhdic (ANABIP) program at the Office of the Wet’suwet’en, are focusing on building relationships, rooted in traditional values to create the healthy relationships and support networks women have clearly identified influence their decisions to stay or leave the community. Family and friends were highly influential when women were fleeing violence and were often the reason women made the choice to leave violence. Therefore, it makes sense to build strong connections within community to foster a deep-rooted support network that can include crisis support, healing, and education and awareness while strengthening cultural values and connections.

Recommendations

- ✓ Create and maintain consistent connections between service providers across rural communities to address violence and homelessness.
- Allocate Provincial and Federal funding for non-profit, First Nations and all levels of government to create working relationships and connections among and between communities. The regions should surround the largest urban center where services are currently available for women who experience violence and homelessness, and should take into account the traditional territories of the local First Nations group(s). All parties should meet at least twice annually.

¹⁹ Byrne and Abbott, 27.

²⁰ Cunningham, Handout #1.

- Create an online tool for all service providers to use to share ideas, communicate, access up to date research and information, and network with one another.
- Include funding for coordination within funding applications.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Organize brown bag lunch social gatherings to meet other services providers in the community and break down silos, focusing on areas of intersection.
- Connect women with strong women Elders in the community at every opportunity.
- Recognize your limitations and celebrate what you can do together.

Breaking the Cycle

We've seen what isn't working, and the multitude of barriers women face accessing services and support when they are fleeing violence and facing homelessness. This section focuses on what women and service providers have said will support breaking the cycle of violence and the resulting homelessness by creating opportunities for education and awareness of colonization, violence, and homelessness.

Addressing Colonization

As previously discussed, the majority of women I spoke with were Indigenous women. These women have said that the violence they experienced was learned throughout a history of violence within their communities. Some women have talked directly about the impact of the Catholic Church and the change that has occurred over time in their communities. This is a critical piece of education in terms of understanding the history of violence that Indigenous communities have experienced and, in turn, not internalizing the experience of violence and shame as a phenomena that is cultural or inherent to Indigenous communities. Women have also identified the need to address the root cause of the violence they experience, looking towards the men in their communities that are committing violence against them.

Many women talked about addressing one of the roots of the problem; the men's behavior. This includes addressing the stigma and silence around domestic violence and how the focus remains on women instead of addressing what's really going on in the community. For example, one woman would like to address the stigma through education and awareness about domestic violence and says, "People talk about breaking up the family, but men's behavior is not talked about." Similarly, another woman wondered why time and money aren't spent on men who are perpetrating the violence instead of just removing the women. Suggestions were made to address the silence through 1) proper education about healthy and

abusive behavior and, 2) addressing the lack of responsibility by leadership either traditional, governmental, or elected. Therefore, the root of the violence and the men perpetrating violence must be addressed through education and awareness in conjunction with strong responsibility by leadership.

Recommendations

- Increase funding to Indigenous organizations to create and deliver education and awareness around the impacts of colonization, as well as power and control, with a focus on intergenerational impacts on families.
- Include education of the impacts of colonization within existing programs, delivered by Indigenous people.
- Increase education on the impacts of colonization as an integral part of collaboration and relationship building.
- Increase funding for workshops such as the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia's piloted *Aboriginal Women's Safety* workshops.²¹ Include experiences specific to the rural north.
- Create Indigenous specific programs for men focusing on the violence in their relationships. These programs should be delivered by Indigenous men and co-created with Indigenous women.

Education

Women who have experienced violence and homelessness have identified the need for education and awareness to break the cycle of violence they have experienced. They talked about the necessity to “unlearn” violence and create awareness and opportunities to address the root of the problem. Since most of the violence these women experienced was continuous and intergenerational, both service providers and women talked about creating awareness to break the cycle of violence, as well as address the shame, silence, and stigma women fear and carry when leaving violent relationships and facing homelessness.

In addition, service providers identified the need to learn life skills, awareness about HIV, mental health and healthy relationships. Women have said they believe education around violence, sexual abuse, and diseases should be available.

Education and skills training for employment were also identified as desired outcomes of the research. Women said they wanted access to education and training for employment,

²¹ EVA BC. *Indigenous Communities Safety Project*, <http://endingviolence.org/node/1360>

particularly in northern communities, so they could become financially independent in their home communities.

Women identified a variety of ways to transmit this knowledge and education. Some women thought workshops were an appropriate method for family violence issues. For Indigenous women, these workshops should be led by other Indigenous women, “telling our own stories.” Janovicek says that cultural events help women find social and political networks.²² She also says that services should be family centered.²³ Some service providers said they thought peer helping training would be helpful. Similarly, women felt it was important to have workshops that brought generations together, such as the “Circle of Aunties” programs or a circle of Grandmothers.

Recommendations

- ✓ Implement an intergenerational approach to learning, including children, mothers and grandmothers.
- Create awareness of the cycles of violence and homelessness through workshops led by Indigenous women in reserve communities and rural towns.
- Use social media through short films and images to create awareness about the cycles of violence and homelessness to reach younger generations.
- Increase accessibility and availability of workshops in community about the cycles of violence and homelessness.
- Create holistic programming by including life skills, mental and physical health information, and skills to build healthy relationships.

Creative Practice

- Engage women in mentoring processes, learning facilitation skills and group dynamics to offer peer support.
- Create space for family to be involved at every opportunity.

Awareness of Services

Women thought it was important to create awareness about available support services to feel as though they have options if they are in violent situations and facing homelessness. For example, if women were knowledgeable about services which were communicated in a clear fashion, some women feel fewer would return to violence. One woman described a time

²² Janovicek, 553.

²³ Ibid., 555.

she was fleeing violence, stepped off the bus in Terrace and immediately saw a poster with information about the safe house. She says if it hadn't been there she wouldn't have known where to go or who to ask for help. She was in a crisis situation and found support because it was advertised in a critical location. One service provider also added that a description of services should be clear and include the limitations of what a service provider can offer. Furthermore, another woman said she thought services should be clearly communicated in high schools, with a focus on one service per month. Clearly, women have identified a need for an increase in outreach to younger generations and an increased awareness about the services available in their community.

Recommendations

- Post service provider information, such as safe house contact information, information for transportation, and other crisis related information at key locations such as bus stops, bus stations, taxi services, telephone poles on the outskirts of communities, 24 hour businesses, and medical clinics or hospitals.
- Create ongoing connections with high school students and their families, presenting monthly on various community services for healthier families.
- Host an annual healthier family's forum to gather service providers in an informal setting. Invite families to participate in events and presentations, including fun interactive activities.
- Increase outreach services to include more interaction with band offices, reserve communities, and urban Indigenous organizations, high schools, as well as create ongoing connections with other service providers.

Closing

Building on Strengths

Service providers identified strong personal attributes to women they've been in contact with, saying how resilient, powerful, and strong they are to survive violence and homelessness. They attribute much of the motivation and strength to their love for their children and families. They also focused on how resourceful and supportive these women are. Additionally, they mentioned their ability to grasp onto hope and work towards their dreams. For example, one service provider explained the reality for mothers facing violence and homelessness saying, "It blows my mind how they can still be a bright and shining light for their children." Women fight hard to break the cycle for their families and create stability while acting as role models for their children and grandchildren. These women deserve the support they require.

Women are also sharing and pooling resources to support each other to survive. Some women are sharing homes with each other and relatives to subsidize the cost of housing, and others are sharing knowledge of resources. Within the research itself, many of the participants were referred to the study through friends, family, and other women who have had the same experiences of violence and homelessness. Finally, women have immense emotional strengths like courage, compassion, dreams, creativity, and understanding of the issues they face.

Recommendations

- Create supports that build on women's compassion for each other.
- Account for commitment to and importance of family and children within the nature and delivery of services.

Responsibility

When I asked women who they felt was responsible to provide useful services they felt the responsibility should be shared amongst themselves, community, First Nations bands, traditional leadership, and governments. They believe that governments are responsible for providing services such as, shelters, counseling, education, housing, and programs for men. Women felt it was up to them to access services but that services must be made more accessible. Referring to accessing services like programs or counseling, one woman said, "... if you don't have housing or jobs, then the programs won't be worth the paper they're drawn up on." Therefore, although supports and services are necessary for moving forward in wellness, housing and financial securities are necessary first steps.

Conclusion

The research has clearly identified influences on women who choose to stay or leave their communities when fleeing violence.

- Women choose to stay or leave their communities in the rural north because they lack safe alternatives.
- If provided with a safe alternative, some women would choose to stay in or near their communities because of family and community responsibilities.
- There are a lack of services and coordination of services for women migrating between communities who are fleeing violence and facing homelessness.

Thus, most women who choose to flee violence also become homeless in the rural north and face greater risk of long term absolute or relative homelessness. To address this issue women have identified strategic services and inherent changes in services in the rural north to address the needs of women, including Indigenous women who are overrepresented in this research study and in violence against women in general. The structural and personal determinates of

violence and homelessness include impacts of colonization for Indigenous women, such as shame, fear, and intergenerational and normalized violence, as well as lack of appropriate and accessible, or affordable housing and challenges accessing services. However, women do see a way out of violence and homelessness through healing, education and awareness, and holistic services and supports which help guide women through the manageable steps towards a safe, healthy home.

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Appendix A: Demographic Survey Results

Question	Result
1. Please indicate which age bracket you belong to:	18% = 16-24yrs 9% = 25-34yrs 32% = 35-44yrs 18% = 45-54yrs 18% = 55-64yrs 1% = 65+
2. Do you have children?	86% have children.
3. If so, how many children do you have?	Average of 3.6 children.
4. Are your children currently in your care?	23% of women had their children in their care. Most of these women were between the ages of 16-34.
5. Do you currently consider yourself homeless?	59% said yes. 23% of women who replied yes also had children in their care.
6. Have you ever experienced homelessness as a result of fleeing violence after leaving your home community?	73% said yes.
7. Have you ever accessed shelters, safe homes, or transition houses as a result of fleeing violence?	68% said yes.
8. Have you ever had to relocate as a result of fleeing violence?	68% said they relocated.
9. If you did relocate, have you returned to live in your home community at some time?	Only 1% who relocated after fleeing violence did not return to their home community at some time.
10. Approximately how many times have you had to flee violence?	1% = 1 time 27% = 6 times 46% = too many to count
11. Do you identify as an Aboriginal (Inuit/Metis/First Nation) or Indigenous woman?	96% Indigenous/Aboriginal

N= 22

Note: The results are made up of women who participated in interviews and vision board focus groups.

Appendix B: Detailed Methods/Methodology

The data for this study were derived through qualitative methods based on the lived experiences of women who have experienced violence and faced homelessness as well as service providers providing services to these women. The research design was developed by Northern Society for Domestic Peace, in communication with BC Housing. However, although

the design was previously established, themes of Indigenous research were followed at every stage in the research process. The Indigenous epistemology guiding the research affirms that: 1. Experience is a legitimate way of knowing, 3. Receptivity and relationships between the researcher and research participant is a natural part of the research methodology, and 4. Collectivity is a way of knowing that assumes reciprocity.²⁴ The methods of data collection included In-depth personal interviews, a demographic survey and vision board discussion groups.

Outreach

During the initial outreach stages, letters of introduction were sent to First Nations organizations and service provider organizations. Follow up was done by telephone and email. The second phase of outreach included presenting the research project to community and community service providers from Burns Lake to Hazelton. The presentation was approximately a half hour long with time to discuss the methods of gathering knowledge that would fit the women in the community. This was also a way to become familiar with people in the community and identify 5 peer researchers that would participate in gathering knowledge. Finally, less formal outreach included the distribution of informational posters and brochures at community bulletin boards in all communities, as well as at service provider organizations. In addition, several ads were run in local newspapers and classifieds, as well as using social media to post invitations for participation, and aired radio interviews with local radio stations.

Peer Interviewers

Part of the research design was to have up to five peer interviewers assist with data collection. Originally, there were four women interested in becoming peer interviewers; however one woman became employed before the training and another was taking other training at the time. Thus, one day training took place for two peer interviewers, one from Smithers and one from Burns Lake. The training consisted of an introduction to the research and the outreach presentation, followed by training on the methodology of the research, ethics and methods of data collection and then an afternoon of in-depth interviews and mock interviews. In addition, each woman co-conducted an interview with the lead researcher before she conducted interviews with women on her own. Peer interviewers were given a \$40.00 honorarium for each interview.

Interviews

²⁴ Shawn Wilson, *What is an Indigenous Research Methodology?* *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25, no. 2, 2001:175.

Interviews were carried out face to face either in the home of the woman, or at spaces such as libraries, band offices, and service provider organizations. The exception to this was that peer interviewers were to conduct interviews at offices or public spaces that the lead researcher had arranged. Interviews were approximately one to one and a half hours long with some lasting as long as two hours, either audio recorded or recorded manually. Each participant signed a consent form and women who experienced violence and homelessness were invited to fill out a short demographic survey. Women were also provided with a \$20.00 honorarium for participation. Participation was completely voluntary and through self-selection. Interviews with service providers were carried out in the same fashion with a different set of questions and without honoraria.

After each interview, I made field notes of my experience with the interview as well as documented anything that stood out for me during the interview process. This allowed me to reflect on the overall feeling of the interview and record subtleties like body language, mood, and the impact of stories and experiences on myself and the interview participant.

Expected participation was 100 participants made up of 40 personal interviews with women who have experienced violence and faced homelessness, 12-15 interviews with service providers, and 60 women in groups of ten participating in focus groups. The final participation consisted of 21 in depth interviews with women who have experienced violence and faced homelessness (53% of target), 17 in-depth interviews with service providers (exceeded target), and six participants in vision board focus groups (1% of target). Overall, participation was 44% of the targeted participants.

Vision Boards

The visioning boards were an informal way to have women use images and words to describe how they envision a safe home, free from violence. I included suggestions of things to think about for the board that would facilitate discussion on the issues we were illuminating; however, women were free to create their vision how they liked.

Analysis

To begin, I entered all of the notes and data into sections related to the questions asked. Next, I looked for themes and new or interesting information. I then triangulated these findings with the data gathered from service providers and the demographic findings. Finally, I listened to recordings and reviewed the interview notes to ensure I had not missed key pieces of knowledge and to ensure my representation of what women and service providers shared with me was accurate.

Challenges

Given the geographical distances between communities and budget constraints, it was difficult to establish and build trusting relationships, which are necessary with such a sensitive topic. Time and budget constraints also created challenges with peer interviewers. Although one peer interviewer was nearby, the other peer interviewer was a two hour drive away and had unreliable telephone access. This created communication and support barriers with this peer interviewer, who was then not able to continue with the research process. In theory, peer interviewers are empowering; however, it is difficult to assess whether or not a woman who has experienced violence and faced homelessness has the necessary supports to continuously hear the stories of abuse, violence and homelessness that can be re-traumatizing. Another challenge with the design was the focus groups. Given the nature of small rural communities, it was difficult to ask women to come together with others they may or may not know in the community and share experiences of violence and homelessness.

Appendix C: Literature Review

This literature review is intended to analyze literature that addresses the relationship between violence against women, and homelessness in rural or remote areas with a focus on Indigenous women, including migration between communities. The literature on violence against women, homelessness in general, Indigenous women's experiences with violence (colonization) and migration are all very complex issues and are beyond the scope of this review. I include more general information in order to contextualize the relationship between these broad topic areas. However, there is limited literature available that deals specifically with the relationship between influencing factors and support services for women in rural areas, with a particular focus on rural/remote British Columbia.

The purpose of this literature review is to understand the intersection of experiences of women who choose to stay in their communities and those who choose to leave, and to identify best practices to support these women in whatever decisions they make. This literature review is meant to inform the research process, questions and interactions with community members and knowledge holders. Firstly, I briefly discuss the topics in general, and then weave the relationships together according to the literature. In addition, I identify where the gaps exist in literature and how this informs the research.

Homelessness

Homelessness has many faces and varying definitions. As defined in Lois Hopley's, *Is There a Better Way: Homelessness and Housing Issues in Smithers*, Absolute Homelessness is

“living outdoors, on the street, in parks, under bridges, and are literally without shelter and people who rely on emergency shelters and hostels for temporary shelter.”²⁵ Relative Homelessness is defined as, “at risk of homelessness because they are paying too much of their income for rent and/or are living in unsafe, inadequate or insecure housing. Often people in these households are one step away from homelessness.”²⁶ Those who are paying more than 30 percent of their income to shelter are considered ‘at-risk’ or ‘inadequately housed.’²⁷ In addition, the United Nations definitions further differentiates, including chronic homelessness, which is mostly due to drugs/alcohol/mental illness, and cyclical homelessness, which is situational and temporary (violence, loss of employment etc.)²⁸ This research will specifically focus on cyclical homelessness, which can be absolute or relative. The literature review also revealed that homelessness is considered an urban phenomena and needs to be addressed rurally.²⁹ Therefore, this research will focus on the experiences of women living rurally, and migrating from their home communities, or choosing to stay in a rural area.

Violence against Women

The diverse experiences of women fleeing violence are vast and beyond the scope of this project. Most studies are related to health, substance misuse, and lack a focus on migration and interrelated influential factors. These experiences of violence are not limited to domestic violence; however, research on other types of violence is limited. As an overarching theme of the literature on violence against women, Intimate Partner Violence is defined by the BC Coroners Services as, “intentional harm or injury inflicted by a current or former spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, or other romantic partner of the victim.”³⁰ The literature predominantly provides statistics, risk factors, and best practices for women experiencing domestic violence, but largely ignores the relationship with rural homelessness, and the unique experiences of these women in making decisions about their safety.

The statistics show that young women, women with disabilities, and Aboriginal women are particularly at risk, and that immigrant women may be more vulnerable to domestic violence. For example, Indigenous women are eight times more likely to be killed by their

²⁵ Lois Hobley. *Is There a Better Way? Homelessness and Housing Issues in Smithers* (Smithers: Smithers Community Services Association, 2005), 3.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Cited in Lois Hobley. *Is There a Better Way? Homelessness and Housing Issues in Smithers* (Smithers: Smithers Community Services Association, 2005), 21.

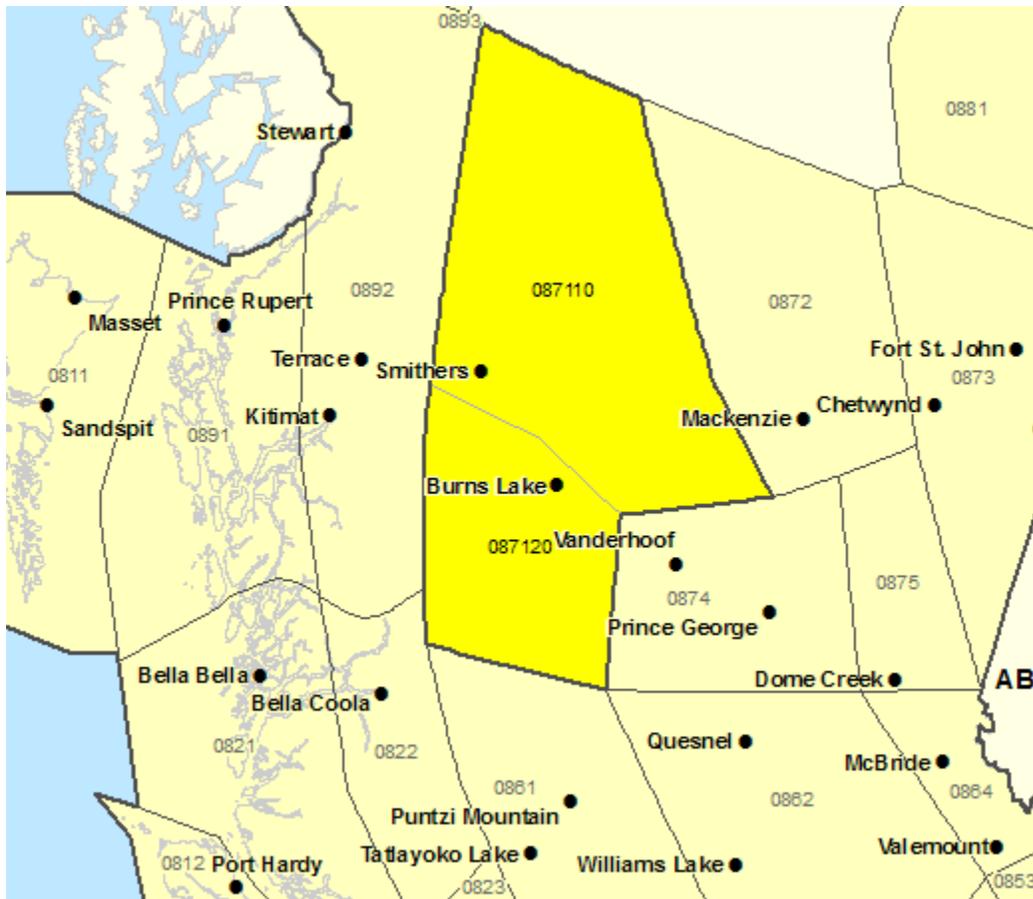
²⁸ Maureen Callaghan, Leilani Farha, and Bruce Porter. *Women and Housing in Canada: Barriers to Equality*. (Toronto: Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, 2002), 2.

²⁹ Hobley, 9.

³⁰ Ministry of Justice. *BC Coroners Services Releases Domestic Violence Research, 2012, 2*, http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2009-2013/2012JAG0046-000488.htm

intimate partner than non-Aboriginal women.³¹ In addition, people with Indigenous ancestry are over-represented at nine percent of the IPV victims while they only represent five percent of the total population in B.C.³² According to a news release by the BC Coroners Service, women are eight times more likely to be murdered by their spouse than men. The average age of IPV victims is 44.9 years old.³³

Communities in the Bulkley Valley



Communities in the Bulkley Valley face greater risk as rates of Intimate partner violence are highest in the north.³⁴ In addition, remote northern communities face many structural barriers, such as a lack of services or access to those services.³⁵ There are limited housing options for women fleeing abuse in the northern region. For example, within the research area, from Burns Lake to Hazelton, there are only two transition houses for women and their

³¹ Canadian Women's Association. *Fact Sheet: Moving Women Out of Violence*, <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence>

³² Ministry of Justice, 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁴ Ministry of Justice, 2.

³⁵ Holey, 9.

children. One in Burns Lake through Elizabeth Fry, and one in Smithers through Northern Society for Domestic Peace.

The situation for Indigenous women in the north is compounded by the existing personal and structural risk factors. For example, many Indigenous women are living off reserve, and make up a higher percentage of the population compared to the rest of B.C. In the Bulkley Valley, Indigenous people make up 18.8 percent of the population compared to the 4.8 percent of B.C overall. The Bulkley-Nechako region has a higher percentage of status Indians, and lower percentages of Métis and Inuit than in B.C overall which impacts access to on-reserve housing.³⁶ Therefore, it is imperative that the violence against women living rurally in the north is addressed, with a specific focus on Indigenous women.

Experiences of Fleeing Violence (Personal and Structural)

The literature has overwhelmingly focused on the personal and structural experiences of fleeing violence and facing homelessness as separate issues, but has failed to identify the relationships between these influences. The research on best practices and strategies to end violence against women and homelessness has predominantly focused on an increase in holistic strategies that address both personal challenges and structural challenges. This study directly addresses the relationship between personal and structural factors that influence women's decisions to stay or leave their communities.

Fear has been cited as one of the overpowering influences in housing for women. Sylvia Novac in, *On her own - young women and homelessness in Canada*, identifies that, "personal safety was the[ir] first priority in accessing housing security."³⁷ This comes from women's experiences of a high rate of family breakdown, and the likelihood that women will experience more violence once they become homeless. In addition to personal issues such as alcohol and drug use, and isolation, women are also more likely to be affected by the weakening of family ties, in terms of how they deal with violence in their lives.³⁸

Structural challenges have been cited at the forefront of risk factors for both violence against women and homelessness. These risk factors are the same across the board. They are, inadequate education, inadequate access to employment opportunities, which lead to poverty,

³⁶ BC Stats. *Aboriginals in BC's Region: 2006 Census*, 2-6,
<http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/StatisticsBySubject/AboriginalPeoples/ArticlesResources.aspx>

³⁷ Silvia Novac. *On her own - young women and homelessness in Canada* (Ottawa, Status of Women Canada, 2002), 2.

³⁸ Patricia Begin and others, *Homelessness* (Ottawa, Library of Parliament, January 8, 1999), 19.

lack of affordable housing, overcrowding, lack of services, and lack of funding for shelters and services by the provincial and federal governments.³⁹

In addition, we must contextualize Indigenous women's experiences within their unique colonial history. Indigenous women who are experiencing violence often face compounded structural and personal challenges, due to Canada's history of colonization which has created extensive social dysfunction, poverty, and feelings of low self-worth. For example, due to the removal of a high number of Indigenous children, in past and present years, Indigenous women have cited a fear of losing their children as a powerful barrier to reporting family violence.⁴⁰ Indigenous women also face further humiliation from community members as a result of community gossip, and may be in closer proximity to their abusers or their abusers family while they remain in their community.⁴¹ Indigenous women also do not trust that the justice system will adequately address the issues.⁴² In addition, lack of services are compounded for Indigenous women who often have further distances to travel, and lack adequate transportation to access services in surrounding communities. These factors prevent Indigenous women from leaving violent relationships.⁴³

Further, Indigenous women face specific challenges in accessing relevant services, since services are rarely staffed by Indigenous women, and often do not provide culturally relevant support. Janovicek describes differences in world view, in which Indigenous communities focus on protecting the entire family as a unit in contrast to mainstream individualistic values.⁴⁴ Contextualizing this research project within Canada's colonial experience will not be explored on its own, but will be taken into consideration throughout the entire research process.

Migration

The literature on migration focuses mostly on the migration patterns of Indigenous people from reserves to urban centers, and is shaped by the specific Indian Act legislation

³⁹ Aysan Sev'er, *Flight of Abused Women, Plight of Canadian Shelters: Another Road to Homelessness* (Toronto, University of Toronto, 2000), 1-22.

Nancy Janovicek. "Assisting Our Own": Urban Migration, Self-Governance, and Native Women's Organizing in Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1972-1989, *American Indian Quarterly*, 27, no. 3/4 (2003): 548-565.

⁴⁰ Tracy Byrne and Wade Abbott. *Stopping Violence Against Aboriginal Women: A Summary of Root Causes, Vulnerabilities and Recommendations from Key Literature* (Ministry of Citizens Services, February 23, 2011), 1-43.

⁴¹ Martin Cooke and Danièle Bélanger. "Migration Theories and First Nations Mobility: Towards a Systems Perspective," *Canadian Review Of Sociology & Anthropology*, 43, no. 2 (2006), 141-164.

⁴² Byrne and Abbot, 11.

Hobley, 37.

Government of Canada. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 1996, http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071115053257/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm_e.html

⁴³ Byrne and Abbot, 11.

⁴⁴ Janovicek, 2003.

affecting all Indigenous people.⁴⁵ In addition, migration is gender specific in some cases. However, there are a few Indigenous researchers who have focused on the politics around migration to cities and the challenges that urban Indigenous people face.⁴⁶ Of specific interest to this research is the focus on influential factors for those women who choose to stay or leave their reserve communities. Nowhere do any of these research topics specifically focus on Indigenous women, or non-Indigenous women fleeing violence and facing homelessness. Homelessness is often identified as a consequence of rural to urban migration, yet these factors are also bidirectional, in that Indigenous people often face housing crisis on reserves.

In relation to the Indigenous experience, Susan Lobo, in *Urban Clan Mothers: Key Households in Cities*, expresses two key factors in migration patterns of Indigenous people into urban centers: 1. The destination city, and 2. The proximity to the reserve. She says, "The importance of being close to a reserve, was not so much to be close to that land specifically, as Indigenous people's traditional territories span much farther than the reserve boundaries, but to have more access to tribal activities, politics, and family responsibilities."⁴⁷ Cooke and Bélanger's work seconded the importance of spacial factors in determining migration of Indigenous people. They conclude that communities with more structure and services on reserve experience less migration to urban communities.⁴⁸ Similarly, Indigenous women are more likely to move back to the reserve due to racism and poor conditions in the city.⁴⁹ However, the literature reveals that a large number of people move back and forth between urban and reserve communities depending on geographical proximity.⁵⁰ Thus, a closer look at this relationship and the causal factors is required to fully understand women's experiences.

Relationship between Women Fleeing Violence and Rural Homelessness

The relationship between women fleeing violence and facing rural homelessness is complex and bidirectional. Research on the relationship between factors and the types of homelessness experienced is necessary. Throughout the literature, personal and structural factors influencing this relationship are presented from a gendered lens; however, the specific

⁴⁵ Cook and Bélanger, 2006.

⁴⁶ Jim Silver, *In Their Own Voices: Building Urban Aboriginal Communities* (Halifax, Fernwood Publishing, 2006), 1-174.

Bonita Lawrence, *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2004), 1-301.

⁴⁷ Susan Lobo, "Urban Clan Mothers: Key Households in Cities," in *Keeping the Campfires Going: Native Women's Activism in Urban Communities*, eds. Susan Applegate Krouse and Heather A. Howard (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 1-21.

⁴⁸ Cook and Bélanger, 2006.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Lawrence, 2004.

⁵⁰ Silver, 15.

relationship between the factors and the experiences of women fleeing violence and facing homelessness has lacked attention.

Factors that have influenced these women are fear based.⁵¹ The literature tells us that women are fearful of facing absolute and relative homelessness, or facing further violence should they leave their communities and look for alternative housing.⁵² Indigenous women are more likely to leave the reserve due to a loss of housing or because they are fleeing violence.⁵³ For example, in one study over half of the respondents said they didn't leave due to a fear of being homeless.⁵⁴ In addition to this, women are also more likely to return to their abusive partners because they can't find employment or alternative housing.⁵⁵ The literature is echoed in Smithers, where separation from a spouse or partner due to domestic abuse was cited as one of the highest causes of losing housing.⁵⁶

Novac describes the linkages between structural risk factors, which inform policy, and biographical realities, which inform services, as difficult to make, but critical to addressing the needs of women facing homelessness. Therefore, this research will provide insight into this relationship between personal and structural factors and the services or supports that are required to address this issue.

Best Practices

The literature provides recommendations for best practices for women fleeing violence, and individuals facing homelessness, as well as for Indigenous peoples' migration to rural or urban spaces; however, there is a lack of synthesized literature on this topic that can provide realistic, holistic recommendations as to what services would look like in addressing this specific need in rural communities.

Of the literature that exists, best practices include integration and coordination of existing services, which are necessary to ensure women's safety and well-being.⁵⁷ In addition, coordination should increase collaboration and engagement among all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, service agencies, justice systems including courts and police forces, and National and other Aboriginal organizations with the goal of developing more

⁵¹ Sev'er, 18.

⁵² Vision Link Consulting, *Faces of Homelessness in Rural Area: Housing Issues and Homelessness in the West Kootenay Region*, 2002, 44-45, <http://hvl.ihpr.ubc.ca/pdf/Kootenays2002.pdf>

⁵³ Begin, 19.

⁵⁴ Qtd. In Sev'er, 19.

⁵⁵ Sev'er, 5.

⁵⁶ Hobley, 26.

⁵⁷ Byrne and Abbott, 11.

Hobley, 9.

coordinated and comprehensive approaches.⁵⁸ Also recommended was a coordination of services specifically accessible to Indigenous women, located on or off the reserve. Indigenous people are more likely to stay connected if they are able to easily access the community.⁵⁹ Of significance, Callaghan, Farha, and Porter in, *Women and Housing in Canada: Barriers to Equality*, recommended that victims of family violence be given priority to low income housing.⁶⁰

The purpose of this project is not to keep people from migrating, but to support women's transitions away from violence into safe and adequate housing. Requirements contributing to smoother transitions were money, moving assistance, support from friends and family, counseling, and furniture/housewares.⁶¹ Lobo describes how specific households provided a degree of stability and permanence for urban Indigenous people. Strengths identified in these key places were food, short term and extended housing, a gathering spot for advice, entertainment, ceremony, spiritual and emotional support, as well as a resource for communication about transportation. These homes, run by 'clan mothers,' were considered spaces that provided vital linkages between the rural and tribal communities.⁶² The literature emphasized the need for services to be analyzed based on the philosophies that informed their services. Programs should emphasize cultural retention and pride in Indigenous culture. For example, Janovicek states, "Holistic approaches would address the colonizing practices that perpetuate poverty and social problems so that Aboriginal families could thrive in contemporary society."⁶³

In summary, homelessness, violence against women and factors influencing migration in relation to fleeing violence has not been addressed within the existing body of literature. The experiences of domestic violence dominate the literature on violence against women; however, this study will remain open to all experiences of violence that women deem relevant. The literature on violence against women reveals the urgency to which this matter must be addressed, and is compounded by the experiences in the rural north, in which rates of domestic abuse are higher, there are higher percentages of Indigenous women at risk, and face greater structural barriers to accessing services than in urban areas. Migration patterns are also

⁵⁸ Byrne and Abbott, 27.

⁵⁹ Cook and Bélanger, 2006.

⁶⁰ Maureen Callaghan, Leilani Farha, and Bruce Porter, *Women and Housing in Canada: Barriers to Equality*, (Toronto: Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, 2002), 44, http://www.equalityrights.org/cera/?page_id=179

⁶¹ Holey, 22-23.

⁶² Lobo, 1.

⁶³ Janovicek, 552.

bidirectional and must be analyzed in reference to fleeing violence and facing homelessness in rural areas.

Appendix D: Available Services

Community	Service Provider	Available Services
Burns Lake	Eagle's Nest Transition House	Shelter, Food, Counseling
	Prince George & District Elizabeth Fry Society	Stopping the Violence Counseling, Support groups, education around violence, outreach, Children Who Witness Abuse, victim services
	College of New Caledonia	Healthier Babies, upgrading
	Lake Babine Nation	Drug and Alcohol Counseling
		Church
		Legal Aid
Houston	Houston Friendship Centre	ECE, Counseling, Programs for families, safety plans
	Northern Society for Domestic Peace	Outreach, Stopping the Violence counseling, healthy relationships workshops, Children Who Witness Abuse
	Northwest Community College	Upgrading
	Baptist Church	Emergency housing for women
Smithers	Northern Society for Domestic Peace	Stopping the Violence counseling, 16 Steps program, education around violence, outreach, Children Who Witness Abuse, victim services
	Passage House Transition House	24 Hours Crisis Line, safety plans, shelter, childcare, taxi service within Smithers, clothing services
	Positive Living North	Meals, education about HIV and Hepatitis C, harm reduction, healthy relationships workshops
	Broadway Place Shelter	Emergency shelter, outreach, housing support, designated room for women
	Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre	Drug and Alcohol counseling, traditional and holistic healing, taxes, Healthy Relationships workshops
	Smithers Community Services	Family Preservation, harm reduction, counseling,

		community kitchen and garden
	Kopar Employment Services	Funding for skills training
	Office of the Wet'suwet'en	A.N.A.B.I.P, Reconnections Program
Hazeltons	Hospital	Medical support
	Northern Society for Domestic Peace	Outreach
Terrace	Ksan House	Shelter,
Terrace	Ksan Society	day programs, Stopping the Violence counseling, outreach, victim services, workshops and planning
Government	Ministry of Social Development	Employment Insurance, Income Assistance
	Ministry of Health	Mental Health and Addictions
	Ministry of Children and Family Development	Emergency funds

*Note: this is not an exhaustive list of available service agencies or their services in each community, but a list of services that women and service providers identified. Women did identify services, like counseling, which were accessed through various service providers.

Appendix E: What is Violence and Homelessness?

Women have a clear and complex understanding of what violence is to them. I asked women to define or explain what violence meant to them and they responded with complex understandings of what violence means and the impacts it has in their lives. The experiences of violence women shared with me were mostly domestic violence situations; however, they were not limited to domestic violence and included experiences of childhood violence, lateral violence and gang violence. The types of violence women experienced were intergenerational, physical, spiritual, financial, emotional, verbal, mental, sexual, and violence to self. These experiences covered a wide range of acts of violence such as rape, molestation, gossip, intimidation, manipulation, choking, hitting, and attempted suicide. Although the stories impacted me deeply, I was not surprised at what I was hearing from women. They described violence to me as normalized, intergenerational and often tied to alcohol. Most women have experienced violence in many forms, and have experienced it throughout their entire lives; often beginning in childhood and carrying on into their adult relationships. One woman described its normalcy saying, "It was normal to be violated in all ways."

When I asked service providers what they thought the relationship between violence and homelessness was they also identified the intergenerational effects of violence and abuse as central to this relationship. They agreed that violence is mostly learned in the home through a history of violence stemming from a lack of stability and often included sexual abuse. Women

described homelessness as a range of having no safe place to go, couch surfing, staying in a shelter or staying with friends and family. Women identified alcohol as being a problem in many cases of violence. They also said women used alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal with the consequences of violence and homelessness. Women said they felt unsafe, and fearful as a result of homelessness. In addition, women also felt trapped, disempowered, abandoned, and lost as a consequence of homelessness.

Appendix F: Impacts of Colonization

Violence towards women and children was not a staple of Indigenous culture traditionally, but has been imposed on Indigenous communities communally, and through systemically racist legislation throughout Canadian history. Of particular importance here is the impact of residential schools and the forced removal of Indigenous children, often into abusive or racist families. For example, due to the removal of high numbers of Indigenous children, in past and present years, Indigenous women have cited a fear of losing their children as a powerful barrier to reporting family violence.⁶⁴ I use the term racism not only to refer to the outright, blatant racism that we see when women are abused in some way simply because they are Indigenous women and thus viewed as inferior. I also refer to racism as the belief that Indigenous peoples and ways of being in the world are inherently inferior to western ways. Systemic racism is the racism we see in legislation, which mainly consists of legislation within the Indian Act, such as gender discrimination as well as control over Indigenous families and children.⁶⁵ In Jim Silver's, *In Their Own Voices: Building Urban Aboriginal Communities*, he says, "racism is a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies as well as beliefs and actions of individuals."⁶⁶ Institutional racism refers to the policies and procedures which deny the importance of Indigenous ways of being within government and other organizational structures. Services available to Indigenous women often do not reflect an Indigenous model. The erasure of Indigenous women's experience of colonization speaks to the racist belief that Indigenous women and their own ways of healing are not important because Indigenous women are not important.

It is also well known that Indigenous people, and women in particular, experience some of the most devastating poverty in the province and across Canada; however, the biggest challenge Indigenous women talked about was the racism and discrimination they faced accessing services, within broader society and the shame and judgment they experienced in their own communities. When I asked one service provider about challenges to Indigenous

⁶⁴ Tracy Byrne and Wade Abbott, 1-43.

⁶⁵ Bonita Lawrence. *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 7.

⁶⁶ Qtd. In Jim Silver, *In Their Own Voices: Building Urban Aboriginal Communities*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2006), 26.

women she said, “People don’t even know how racist they are. What isn’t a challenge?” One service provider refers to the shame and judgment and says, “Women maintain the silence to try to maintain their dignity.” Indigenous communities have been greatly impacted by messages from the Catholic Church that breaking up the family is shameful and that abusing women is acceptable.⁶⁷ There are also differences in communication and how women access services. For example, one service provider described variances in communication styles saying that some Indigenous women are quiet and not talkative and that often people relate silences as a measure of intelligence and an inability to understand.

Again, this is not to say that Indigenous women should be singled out. Indigenous women’s experiences of colonization vary just as every other woman’s experiences do. However, by not addressing the fact of colonization and the alarming over representation of Indigenous women experiencing violence and homelessness, we perpetuate this inequality and further oppress Indigenous women and their families. Further, equality does not mean the same. One service provider specifically said that they look at each individual on a case by case basis. This should always be the case; however, availability of culturally specific services should be an option, as it is up to Indigenous people to heal Indigenous people according to their values and belief systems.

Healing from Colonization

Service providers have identified many of these issues as impacts of colonization. Many women have also named historical relationships between church influences and the culture of their people as the root of the violence in their families. One woman talked about her experience as an Indigenous woman and service provider saying her culture is respectful and made up of strong families based on traditional values ,yet now, through impacts of government policies, residential schools, the 60s scoop, and the influence of the Catholic Church, has become accepting of violence against women. She says, this power dynamic is still alive and well today and requires a deeper understanding of colonization than what is presented here. She adds that many people are stuck in violent relationships and don’t know why. Service providers and women themselves see this problem leading to feelings of shame which have become normalized and sanctioned within northern rural communities and society in general. Since the denial, acceptance and stigma are so rampant, women are and feel judged when they ask for support and assistance to flee violence. These are very real adversaries that women must consider and face before they even consider taking the actual steps out of violence and toward healing.

⁶⁷ Melanie Morin, *Niwhts’ide’ni Hibi’it’ën: The Ways of Our Ancestors* (Smithers: School District #54, 2011), 249-253.

Appendix G: Overview of Recommendations

Crisis Response

Time and Flexibility

- Assess the flexibility and time sensitivity of existing policies and services.
- Create new policies and services with flexibility and immediacy as core principles.

Justice System Services

- Increase coordination and awareness between service providers and justice system staff so service providers are able to inform women of supports provided through the justice system.
- Implement/increase training to RCMP officers and crisis response service providers.
- Work with RCMP to develop effective intervention strategies for domestic abuse.

Emergency Shelter Services

- ✓ Create holistic services to address the multi-challenges women are facing.
- Increase the duration of stay in Transition Houses to 60 days to give women more time to heal before seeking appropriate housing, employment, childcare/educational needs, etc.
- Establish Indigenous run and operated transition houses that include support from Elders and offer access to holistic/traditional healing. These centres should include drug and alcohol support and education about colonization. In the short-term, consider developing partnerships with Elders or other Indigenous organizations to ensure culturally-appropriate services are available to Indigenous women who access existing transition houses and safe homes.
- Establish and fund supportive housing for young women with children and expecting mothers in smaller northern communities. These should include drug and alcohol, mental health and trauma support as well as prenatal and postnatal services.
- Increase outreach and awareness of transition house services.
- Transition houses and shelters should recruit, hire and train Indigenous women to create more career options.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Provide extra time and care to women with families to ensure children remain with family and connect with other services and supports.
- Host or co-host “clan” or “nation” nights at Transition Houses, with local Elders or Indigenous service providers, focusing on language, arts, and music.
- Provide lists of housing options, local service provider information, and offer to assist with referrals to help women feel more comfortable connecting with local support services and build trusting relationships.
- Create an environment where women are welcome to return any time to access food, eat, access groups and services, and get support from staff.

Financial Support

- ✓ Assess and remove barriers women face accessing funding through government ministries.
- Increase awareness of financial supports through Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), so that women know what they can ask for and what they need to disclose to access fast-tracked services and additional financial supports when fleeing violence.
- Provide emergency relocation funds to women fleeing violence regardless of their eligibility for Income Assistance.
- Provide emergency “flexible funding” for unanticipated costs delivered through service provider organizations. (Example: funding for unanticipated transportation costs)
- Create and ensure access to funding for starter kits through transition houses.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Assist women in navigating financial assistance websites, such as MCFD or MSD.
- Provide women with a list of financial assistance options and offer support throughout the application process. For example, the Loans for Life from Canadian Women’s Foundation.
- Advertise for donations to create starter kits for women fleeing abuse in transition houses.

Transportation

- ✓ The Province should take the lead on affordable transportation between rural and reserve communities to address the consequences such as violence against women and access to services, education, and employment opportunities.

- Establish emergency transportation services in rural communities through partnerships with existing transportation services, or by funding service providers to provide transportation.
- Fund transition houses to obtain and maintain their own transportation systems in order to respond to women fleeing violence and facing homelessness in a timely manner.
- Continued transportation allowance should be included for “Persons Fleeing Abuse” through MSD. Financially assist women and their children to visit family and support networks while they are away from the community.
- Transition houses and service providers could create a network of communication to ensure women are making it safely from place to place given the lack of access to transportation. Create a communications network between service provider agencies and transition homes to ensure the safe arrival of hitchhiking women.
- Request donations from taxi and other transit services, where available.
- Include informal transportation costs in funding applications.

Informal Supports

- Identify and assess informal supports in community during the development of new programs and services, and empower these supports in the delivery model.
- Assess existing services in terms of how informal supports can work together with service providers.

Fleeing Violence, Remaining in Community

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Establish protocols within service provider organizations to address the safety of women accessing services who stay in the community.

Sustained Support and Healing

Housing

- Increase/establish low income housing for families and single women based on a scattered-site housing model.⁶⁸
- Establish supportive housing for hard to house women and families, or women and families addressing multi-challenges like alcohol and drug use, health issues like HIV and Hepatitis C, mental health challenges, and the intergenerational impacts of colonization.

⁶⁸ Hobley, 42.

- Fund a housing liaison position within each community to assist women accessing appropriate housing, which will also provide support for women and families relocating to nearby communities. This position should be specific to women fleeing violence and facing homelessness. The liaison position should include referrals and relationships with other service providers to provide “wrap around” holistic services to ensure women’s success in maintaining appropriate housing. An example of this type of position is the Homelessness Outreach Program (HOP).⁶⁹
- Create a support position to assist women moving out of transition homes and establishing themselves in the community.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Provide lists of available vacancies and contact information.
- Pass on information about the BC Tenancy Act and play a supportive role.
- Visit potential new rental units with women to ensure the unit includes safety features such as working locks and intercom systems (for apartment units).

Healing

- ✓ Empower Indigenous women in smaller communities to develop and deliver healing programs and women’s groups according to their culture and traditions.
- Integrate traditional healing practices and support people into existing transition homes and shelters to support women as they continue to heal.
- Create options (including access to transportation) for Indigenous women to access services on reserve or through mainstream services.
- House services under one roof to avoid stigmatization and combat fear of accessing services.
- Create opportunities for nurturing women, including Indigenous healing practices led by knowledgeable Indigenous people.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Reflect on your practice: Ask yourself “What’s limited in my practice?” not “What’s limited in her?”
- Be cognizant of the way you receive women into a space and engage with them. Be open, and understanding, without judgment.

⁶⁹ BC Housing, *Homelessness Outreach Program*, <http://bchousing.org/Initiatives/Access/HOP>

First Nations Reserves

- Create more education and awareness within reserve communities, including band councils and staff, about the cycles of violence and homelessness and the role of colonization.
- Include Elders and leadership in the delivery of healing, education, and awareness.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Stay connected with women who leave the community due to violence.
- Follow up with women to let them know, “We are here for you.”
- Offer moral support for women returning to the community.

Returning to Community

- Implement pay as you go cell phones for continuous communication and support when women return to their community.
- Create contacts and relationships with service providers in the community and routinely follow up for 3 to 6 months after women return to their community.
- Explore and develop a safe home/safe space within community for women returning, including transportation to access services and employment or education opportunities.
- Assess relationships and collaboration of service providers within and between communities.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Get in the habit of following up with women who may have returned to their community.
- Keep women updated about services, workshops and programs that are available.

Policies and Procedures

- Increase flexibility for service providers to provide services to women who may not fit within their mandate.
- Increase existing outreach services to include on call, emergency contact people within each community.
- Create outreach materials for women who are ‘fleeing community’ and women who wish to ‘remain in community.’
- Fund Indigenous specific services within and outside of reserve communities, including positions and programs within mainstream organizations to increase awareness and accessibility.
- Increase flexibility and local control over funds for local service provider organizations.

Building Relationships

- ✓ Create and maintain consistent connections between service providers across rural communities to address violence and homelessness.
- Allocate Provincial and Federal funding for non-profit, First Nations and all levels of government to create working relationships and connections among and between communities. The regions should surround the largest urban center where services are currently available for women who experience violence and homelessness, and should take into account the traditional territories of the local First Nations group(s). All parties should meet at least twice annually.
- Create an online tool for all service providers to use to share ideas, communicate, access up to date research and information, and network with one another.
- Include funding for coordination within funding applications.

Creative Practices Used by Service Providers

- Organize brown bag lunch social gatherings to meet other services providers in the community and break down silos, focusing on areas of intersection.
- Connect women with strong women Elders in the community at every opportunity.
- Recognize your limitations and celebrate what you can do together.

Breaking the Cycle: Education and Awareness

Addressing Colonization

- Increase funding to Indigenous organizations to create and deliver education and awareness around the impacts of colonization, as well as power and control, with a focus on intergenerational impacts on families.
- Include education of the impacts of colonization within existing programs, delivered by Indigenous people.
- Increase education on the impacts of colonization as an integral part of collaboration and relationship building.
- Increase funding for workshops such as the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia's piloted *Aboriginal Women's Safety* workshops.⁷⁰ Include experiences specific to the rural north.

⁷⁰ EVA BC. *Indigenous Communities Safety Project*, <http://endingviolence.org/node/1360>

- Create Indigenous specific programs for men focusing on the violence in their relationships. These programs should be delivered by Indigenous men and co-created with Indigenous women.

Education

- ✓ Implement an intergenerational approach to learning, including children, mothers and grandmothers.
- Create awareness of the cycles of violence and homelessness through workshops led by Indigenous women in reserve communities and rural towns.
- Use social media through short films and images to create awareness about the cycles of violence and homelessness to reach younger generations.
- Increase accessibility and availability of workshops in community about the cycles of violence and homelessness.
- Create holistic programming by including life skills, mental and physical health information, and skills to build healthy relationships.

Creative Practice

- Engage women in mentoring processes, learning facilitation skills and group dynamics to offer peer support.
- Create space for family to be involved at every opportunity.

Awareness of Services

- Post service provider information, such as safe house contact information, information for transportation, and other crisis related information at key locations such as bus stops, bus stations, taxi services, telephone poles on the outskirts of communities, 24 hour businesses and medical clinics or hospitals.
- Create ongoing connections with high school students and their families, presenting monthly on various community services for healthier families.
- Host an annual healthier family's forum to gather service providers in an informal setting. Invite families to participate in events and presentations, including fun interactive activities.
- Increase outreach services to include more interaction with band offices, reserve communities, and urban Indigenous organizations, high schools, as well as create ongoing connections with other service providers.

Building on Strengths

- Create supports that build on women's compassion for each other.
- Account for commitment to and importance of family and children within the nature and delivery of services.