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## Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women: Inquiry and Action



“She is spitting a mouthful of stars  
She is holding the light more than those who despised her  
She is folding clouds in her movement  
She is new to the sound  
She is unbroken flesh  
She is spitting a mouthful of stars  
She is laughing more than those who shamed her  
She is ten horses breaking open the day  
She is new to these bones  
She is holy in their dust”

– Excerpt from nikâwi’s song by Gregory Scofield



## module summary

*This module will provide Indigenous perspectives into the personal experiences and community impacts of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We explore the root causes leading to increased levels of victimization experienced by Indigenous women and girls as well as the ways they can be addressed by shelters and other organizations.*



## video summary

(48:18 minutes)

Lewis is joined by Elder Tina Fox and Stephanie Harpe to discuss the MMIWG Inquiry, the underlying issues of violence against indigenous women and girls, and the role shelters can play in supporting Indigenous women, their children, families and communities.

Elder Tina Fox is an Elder and counsellor at Nakoda Elementary School. She has been with the Stoney Education Authority for almost 15 years. Elder Tina earned a degree in First Nations and Aboriginal Counselling from Brandon University in 2003. During her 14-year tenure as a Councillor, Elder Tina chaired the Social Service Committee that helped build the first on-reserve women's shelter in Alberta.

Stephanie Harpe is from Fort McKay First Nations. She is an actress, singer songwriter, inspirational speaker, survivor, missing & murdered Indigenous peoples advocate and leadership coordinator for The Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women.



## key concepts

- Cycles of Abuse
- Residential Schools
- Chronic Underfunding
- Systemic Dehumanization
- Individual and Intergenerational Trauma
- Education
- Resilience
- Self Esteem
- Safety Planning
- Awareness Raising
- Healing Individuals and Communities
- Importance of Family and Community

All too often women in Canada go missing or are murdered. Although Indigenous women make up only 3% of Canada's female population, they represent 10% of all female homicides in Canada (NWAC, 2010). Sadly Alberta has the second highest number of cases 84% of which are murder cases (NWAC, 2010). The final report on the National Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry released in June 2019 reveals that persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses are the root cause behind Canada's staggering rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people. It also concludes that Canada has committed genocide on Indigenous women. With more than 200 Calls for Justice in the report there is much work still to be done to address these staggering numbers. This is not just a Canadian problem, as we know across the globe women are dying or going missing at alarming rates. The violence we see happening to women is not only disturbing and concerning, but it is also an act of violence against humanity and those responsible for ensuring the future of humanity.

Women are the backbone of any family and when a woman hurts, her family also hurts, the two are not separate entities, but rather a whole. We need to find ways to begin to change the mindset that women are inferior to men. This history of violence against Indigenous women in Canada is a long sad story and many factors come into play when we look at root causes. We have already discussed worldview and how all cultures have a worldview specific to them and within those worldviews we can see the differences in how women were perceived. We know that Canadian women weren't given the right to vote until the First World War in 1918, and it was actually only certain woman that had that right: Indigenous women where not granted universal franchise until 1965!

In European traditions, most women were viewed as property and not given a voice, their main roles were to raise their children, they were caregivers and homemakers and many husbands felt they had no clue as to what was going on in the world, this is one worldview. For Indigenous women this was not the case and traditionally most, if not all, Indigenous Nations were matrilineal societies with teachings on how powerful a woman is with her ability to create life and ensure the future generations survived. Women were responsible for the upbringing of children and therefore they held the future of their culture in the palms of their hands. Indigenous communities understood that if we were to have a good future, we had to have thriving women. To strike a woman or child was unheard of. There was a basic understanding that because a woman could create life, she was to be treated with the upmost respect.







“ Our children have to hear our survival stories from the Elders. We are not a dying race. We are very much alive, and we will continue to exist. ”

– Theresa C. Wildcat,  
Elder Ermineskin Cree Nation



#NotInvisible campaign was started by North Dakota Senator Heidi Heitkamp in 2017 to draw awareness to the 84% of Native American women who have faced some kind of violence in their lifetime. (Racine, 2017)

Today, Indigenous women have been pushed away from this worldview and have somehow ended up caught between how we are defined by the modern patriarchal standards and the struggle to define ourselves. As women we will carry many labels, some good, some not so good and it is up to us to decide which labels we choose to carry. We can choose to believe that we are somehow less than men or we can see that we each have gifts and a purpose, and how as men and women we can honor those gifts.

We have all heard the saying, “it takes a village to raise a child” and it very much does, that is how we keep children safe, with many eyes watching them. Safety planning is vital within our families and rallying the village is sometimes needed to do that. A good exercise to do when safety planning is a brainstorming exercise where we ask, “Who are the people are in your village? Who would you like to have in your village?” Once a woman gets a sense of who the people are that she can look to for support the sooner she can begin to make solid safety plans.

Finding ways to incorporate programs for young boys and men can help stop the intergenerational violence we see being played out in many communities. Pain is usually the root of all anger and addiction. Once we can identify the source of the pain, we can alleviate the anger and abuse. Once we have put our men back into their place as protectors, they will no longer be perpetrators. We need to look at ways to preserve and protect the families that we serve, individually we will not have all the answers, but together we can find solutions.

## 2

## Individual Self-Reflection Questions for MMIW

What are the direct and indirect impacts of indigenous women being murdered and going missing?  
(think in terms of personal/family/community/next 7 generations)

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What are some ways you can support Indigenous women and children facing impacts like grief, addiction, etc. because of losing a loved one to murder or disappearance?

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How do you ensure families in your care know they are valued?

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Elder Tina and Stephanie talk about colonization and intergenerational effects of trauma, including residential schools, as one of the root causes of missing and murdered women. What do you know about intergenerational trauma and the Canadian Colonial policies? How will you find out more?

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What are some ways you can involve Elders, Knowledge Keepers or Grandmothers? Are you aware of how to offer protocol to an Elder? If not, how can you access this information?

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How do you create safe spaces for Indigenous women and children?

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What current relationships do you have with Indigenous organizations and communities near you? What are the ways you nurture those relationships?

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What was your most important take-away from this video?

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How will this knowledge inform your work going forward?

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## Staff Sharing Circle Discussion Questions for MMIW

How do we support Indigenous women and children we serve facing grief, addiction, etc. because of losing a loved one to murder or disappearance?

## How can we support families in our care to feel valued?

Elder Tina and Stephanie talk about colonization and intergenerational effects of trauma, including residential schools, as one of the root causes of missing and murdered women. How can we educate ourselves, our clients and our communities about intergenerational trauma caused by Canadian colonial policies?

Elder Tina and Stephanie talk about poverty, lack of access to transportation and communication, and underfunded education as root causes of missing and murdered women. How can we address these barriers for women and children seeking services? What is our role in advocating change and supporting our on-reserve sister shelters?

What are some ways our organization can involve Elders, Knowledge Keepers or Grandmothers?

How can we reach Indigenous women and girls with our educational initiatives?

As a woman-centered and woman-serving organization, what is our organization's role in boy's and men's healing?

## How are we creating safe spaces for Indigenous women and children?

Are their Indigenous organizations and communities that we can build better working relationships with?

What are some questions you still have? How can we find the answers?

What was your most important take-away from this video?

How will this knowledge inform your work going forward?

## 2

## Women's Sharing Circle Discussion Questions for MMIW

What makes you feel valued?

Stephanie talks about safe spaces that helped to change her life as well as feeling safe while testifying at the Inquiry. Was there a time, place, person or situation that made you feel safe? How could it be recreated here in the shelter? How can you recreate it for yourself?

Elder Tina and Stephanie talk about colonization and intergenerational effects of trauma, including residential schools, as one of the root causes of missing and murdered women. What do you know about intergenerational trauma? Does that resonate with you?

How can the shelter involve Elders, Grandmothers, Knowledge Keepers and community in healing?

What are some questions you still have? How can we find the answers?



## 2

## References

*Fact Sheet: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls.*

(2010. Native Women's Association of Canada)

<https://www.nwac.ca/resources/violence/>

*Fact Sheet: Alberta MMAWG.* (2010. Native Women's Association of Canada)

<https://www.nwac.ca/resources/violence/>

*Just Facts: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.* (2017. Research and Statistics Division, Department of Justice, Government of Canada)

<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/jf-pf/2017/july04.html>

*Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.* (2019. National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry) <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/> Executive Summary and Calls for Justice documents. The full Final Report is comprised of the truths of more than 2,380 family members, survivors of violence, experts and Knowledge Keepers shared over two years of cross-country public hearings and evidence gathering. It delivers 231 individual Calls for Justice directed at governments, institutions, social service providers, industries and all Canadians. Testimony from family members and survivors of violence spoke about a surrounding context marked by multigenerational and intergenerational trauma and marginalization in the form of poverty, insecure housing or homelessness and barriers to education, employment, health care and cultural support. Experts and Knowledge Keepers spoke to specific colonial and patriarchal policies that displaced women from their traditional roles in communities and governance and diminished their status in society, leaving them vulnerable to violence.

*#NotInvisible: The Plight of Native American Women and Sexual Violence.* (2017. Racine, Eliza) <https://www.lakotalaw.org/news/2017-12-05/notinvisible>

### Further Learning Materials:

*Quiet Killing* (2017 APTN Documentaries) Run time: 1:10:03

<https://aptn.ca/documentaries/video/quietkilling/>

Documentary looks at the lives of sex trade workers, victims of family violence, activists and the loved ones of missing or murdered women. You will hear firsthand the reality some of the reasons we have so many missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada

*Taken: The Series* (2019 CBC Documentaries) Run time: 21:58

<https://gem.cbc.ca/season/taken/season-1/73dd7ed8-28c7-438c-9f90-576ee7f38f15>

Each episode takes you through the lives of various Indigenous women who have gone missing or have been murdered. You will hear from the families and law enforcement the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of loved ones.

ISBN 978-1-927125-20-5