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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



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.

“ 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

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.



#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)

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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)

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?

How do you ensure families in your care know they are 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. What do you know about intergenerational trauma and the Canadian Colonial policies? How will you find out more?

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?

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

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

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

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 there 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?

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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?



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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