



Native Women's
Association of Canada



L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

'The Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples'

Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

17 June 2020

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Introduction

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) hereby submits information to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in response to the call for inputs for the upcoming General Assembly report on *'The Impact of Covid-19 on Indigenous Peoples.'* This submission is largely based on NWAC's May 2020 survey work titled *'The Impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous Women and Gender-Diverse People in Canada'*, which provides invaluable information around the following broad-based issues (as highlighted in the UN Special Rapporteur's call for inputs):

- Impacts of lockdown, quarantines and other responses on access to food, livelihoods, education and justice; and
- Impact of the pandemic and related responses on Indigenous women, elders, children and persons with disabilities.¹

The intrinsic value of the current submission is that the up-to-date information contained therein conveys to the UN Special Rapporteur a snapshot of the real-life impact of the on-going Covid-19 pandemic on Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people in Canada. In particular, the results illustrate the significant extent to which the absolute right to physical and mental integrity is being violated in Indigenous communities. In short, a steep rise in domestic violence has shadowed the current Covid-19 pandemic in Canada, as has also regrettably been the case elsewhere.²

Disturbingly, this surge in violence is taking place at a time when the Canadian authorities are meant to be tackling all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls head-on. The much-anticipated report, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, was finally published in June 2019. The broad scope of the National Inquiry's mandate allowed it to address a range of interrelated issues concerning all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls in a holistic manner.³ The report contained 231 clusters of recommendations, known as Calls for Justice, which have been described in the Final Report as 'legal imperatives', namely that they are not optional for government.⁴

¹ Please see: Call for inputs - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples to the General Assembly: Impact of COVID-19 on indigenous peoples: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/SRIndigenousPeoples/Pages/Callforinput_COVID19.aspx> accessed 10 June 2020.

² See: UNDP, *Gender-based violence and COVID-19* (May 2020); and UN Women, *COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls* (April 2020).

³ *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Volume 1b* (June 2019) 1b 58.

⁴ *ibid* 168.

The National Inquiry presented its raft of recommendations by different themes and actors. As the limits of this submission do not allow for these themes to be set out in detail, the UN Special Rapporteur should consult the official National Inquiry document, *Calls for Justice*, for more detailed information.⁵ Nonetheless, the individual Calls for Justice are strategically targeted at righting past human rights wrongs and avoiding their repetition across an array of social themes. Significantly, multiple Calls for Justice directly refer to the pressing need to counter domestic abuse in Canada.⁶

In December 2019, the Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett publicly stated that the Canadian government was developing a National Action Plan to act on the 231 Calls for Justice, which would be published by June 2020.⁷ Regrettably, however, on 26 May 2020 Minister Bennett announced that this deadline would not be honoured by the federal government. As a result, on 3 June 2020 - the first anniversary of the publication of the Final Report - NWAC issued a press release and a so-called *Report Card* to the Canadian government, critically evaluating its performance in ensuring swift, meaningful and concrete follow-up to the National Inquiry Final Report.⁸

In April/May 2020 NWAC also published two related reports which focused on concrete follow-up to the Final Report titled *NWAC's National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Highlights of the Key Findings & Recommendations and Reparations & Remembrance in Canada for Indigenous Women, Girls & Gender-Diverse Persons*, both of which are attached as annexes 1 and 2 of this submission. Both reports make key recommendations regarding the National Inquiry Action Plan and follow-up process.

The Absence of Follow-up to the National Inquiry Final Report

In view of the on-going public health emergency as well as past Canadian government lack of action in relation to state-sponsored inquiries, it is entirely understandable that there now exists considerable skepticism concerning the likelihood of meaningful follow-up to the Final Report, including the numerous Calls for Justice aimed at countering all forms of violence against Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people.

⁵ National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, *Calls for Justice* (June 2019).

⁶ *ibid*: please see the following Calls for Justice: 4.7, 5.3, 5.5 iii, 5.6, 5.7, 5.9, 5.18, 5.19 and 5.25.

⁷ Global News, *Action plan on missing, murdered Indigenous women inquiry to be released in June: minister* (Global News, 4 December 2019): <<https://globalnews.ca/news/6255882/missing-murdered-indigenous-women-inquiry-june/>> accessed 20 May 2020.

⁸ Please see: NWAC, *Report Card on Government Follow-up to Reclaiming Power and Place: Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (3 June 2020); and *Covid-19 May Have Stopped The Government But It Hasn't Stopped Indigenous Women* (3 June 2020): <<https://www.nwac.ca>> accessed 10 June 2020.

It can only be hoped that the worrying survey results below add renewed impetus to the stalled National Action Plan process and that the Canadian authorities redouble their efforts to address widespread violence against Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people in the country.

Overview - ‘The Impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous Women and Gender-Diverse People in Canada.’

The purpose of NWAC’s survey was to measure the impact of the global pandemic on Indigenous women and gender-diverse people in Canada. Through different advocacy activities NWAC will strive to ensure that the lives of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women and gender-diverse people across Canada are taken into account in decision-making by governments at all levels.

Methodology

The on-line survey was completed using *SimpleSurvey*. The survey was posted on NWAC’s social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, and Google Ads.

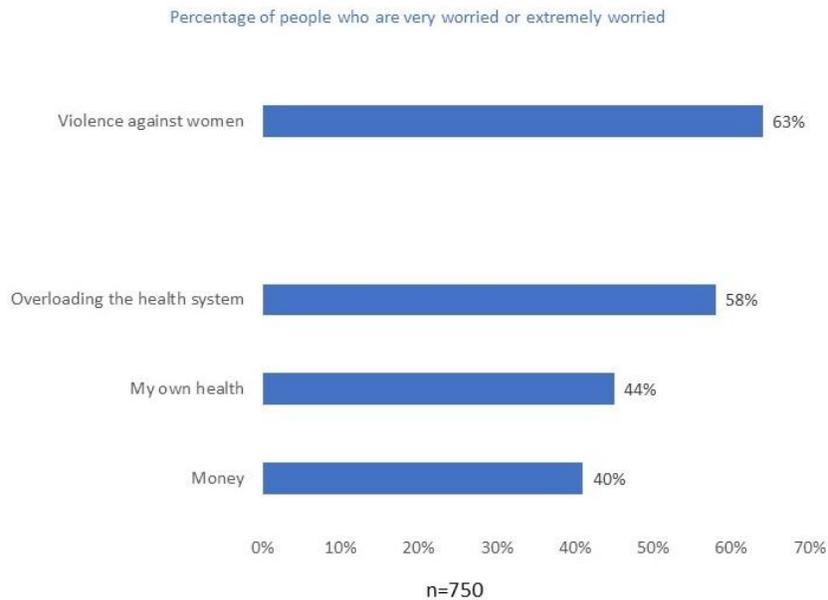
The field dates for this survey were May 1 to May 29, 2020. In total, a sample of 750 Indigenous women and gender-diverse people aged 18 and over completed the survey. Unless stated otherwise, the responses reported below are only those of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.

Key Highlights of the Survey

1. Indigenous women are more worried about domestic violence than they are about most COVID-19 issues.
2. Many more Indigenous women are experiencing violence during this pandemic than usual.
3. Indigenous women most vulnerable to violence in the past three months are in the North, under 35, and have been financially impacted by COVID-19.
4. Romantic partners are overwhelmingly seen as the biggest source of violence.
5. The financial impact of COVID19 is strongly correlated to violence against Indigenous women.

The overall conclusion of this survey suggests that actions from government at all levels are needed to address the issue of systemic violence against Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.

Indigenous Women* are more Worried about Domestic Violence than they are about most COVID-19 issues



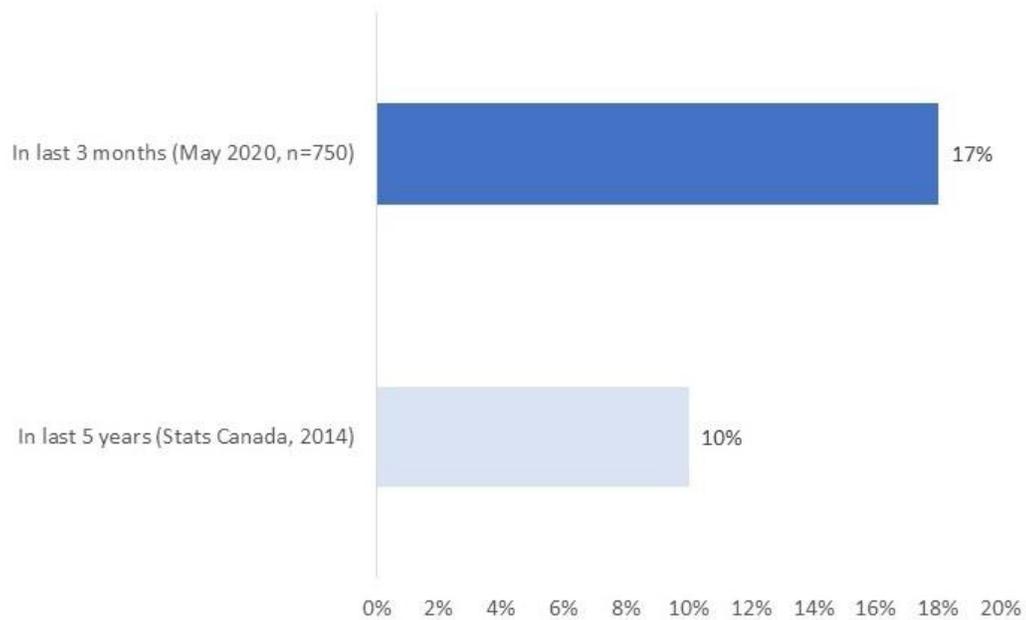
*Throughout this report, "Indigenous women" includes Two Spirit and Gender Diverse people

Overall, Indigenous women are more worried about domestic violence against women than they are about COVID-19.

Indigenous women and gender-diverse people who have experienced violence in the past three months are far more worried about COVID-19 contributing to violence in the home than those who have not experienced violence.

Why? Violence doesn't Stop for COVID 19, in fact, it is Intensifying!

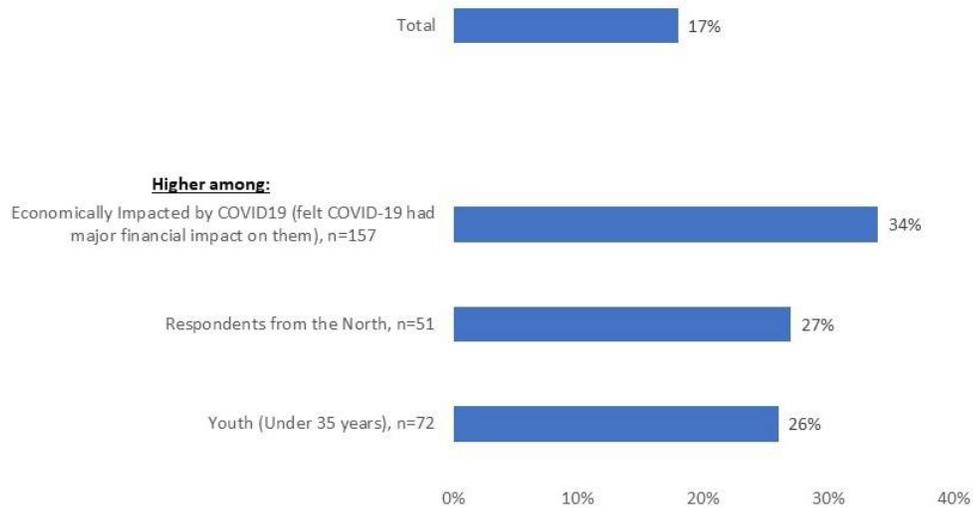
Percentage of women saying they have been victim of violence



Indigenous women are reporting more violence during this time of sheltering in place. In May 2020, 17% have experienced violence (physically or psychologically) in the past three months, compared to 10% reporting violence from their spouse over the past five years since 2014.

Indigenous Women in the North*, Under 35, and those Economically Impacted by COVID-19 are even more Likely to Have Experienced Violence

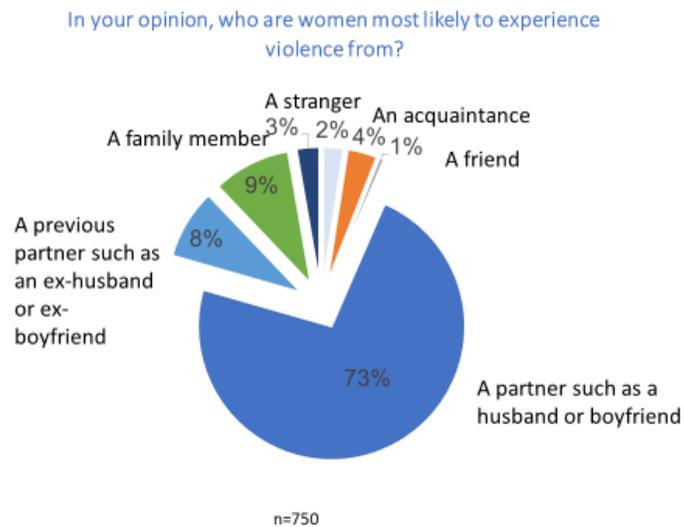
Percentage of women saying they have been a victim of violence in the past 3 months



*North = Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon

Indigenous women are not all the same: some sub-groups are especially at risk of violence at this time. Those who have been financially impacted by COVID-19, those in the North, and those under 35 are even more likely to have experienced violence in the past three months.

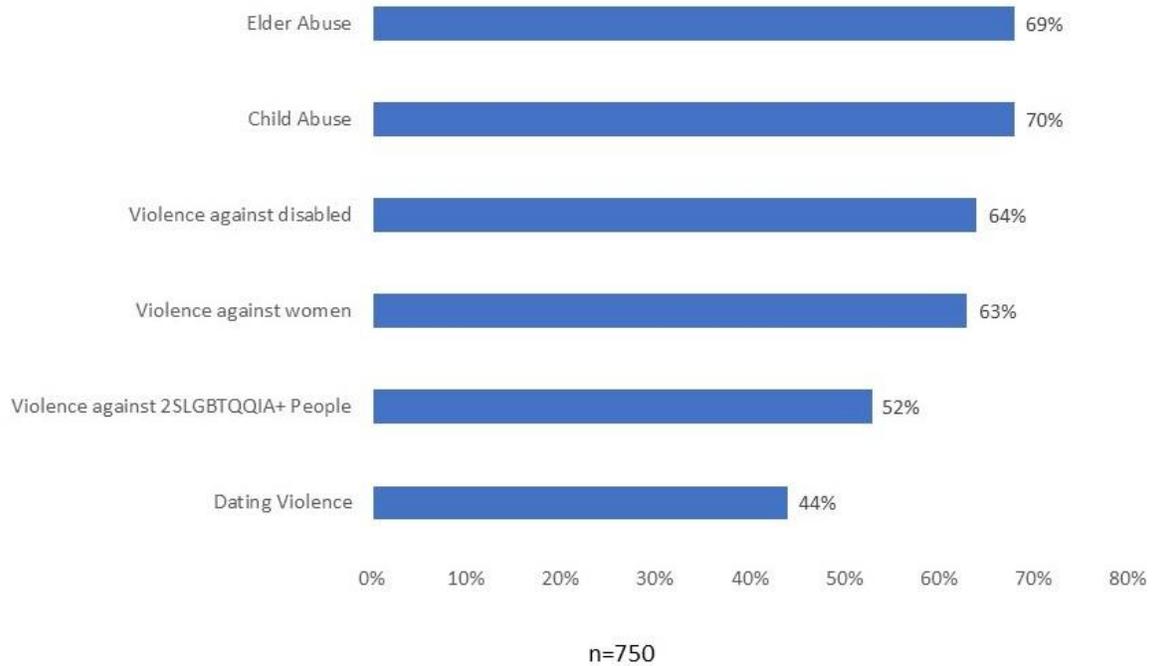
Romantic Partners Considered the Most Dangerous to Indigenous Women



Participants overwhelmingly identify current and past partners as posing the biggest threat of violence to Indigenous women. However, family is also a significant source: victims are twice as likely as non-victims to identify family members as the biggest threat. This may be because women are sheltering with family during the crisis. This is consistent with what we know from the literature: when facing financial hardship and difficulty finding housing, Indigenous women are more likely to stay with family members. As described below, Indigenous women are being hit harder financially than Canadians, in general.

Indigenous Women are also Very Worried about Violence to Elders, Children, and Disabled

In general, how concerned are you about these forms of violence?
Percentage of people who are very worried or extremely worried

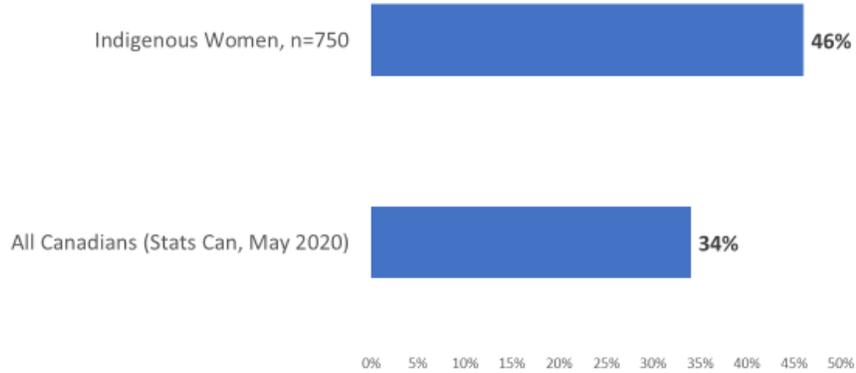


Most Indigenous women are very worried about many different types of violence and are most worried about Elders and children.

Indigenous Women are more Financially Impacted by COVID-19 than Other Canadians

What has been the financial impact of COVID-19 on your ability to meet financial obligations or essential needs, such as rent or mortgage payments, utilities and groceries?

Percentage of women saying moderate or major financial impact



Indigenous women are being harder hit financially in this crisis than other Canadians, and as the literature and this survey show, violence against women is correlated with economic insecurity.

Victims of Violence and those Under 35 are even more Financially Impacted

What has been the financial impact of COVID-19 on your ability to meet financial obligations or essential needs, such as rent or mortgage payments, utilities and groceries?



A majority (70%) of the women and gender-diverse people who have experienced violence in the past three months have been moderately or majorly impacted financially by COVID-19. Similarly, women under 35 are also hit especially hard financially, which is also probably contributing to their higher rate of violence.

Survey Conclusion

Indigenous women need action on violence now more than ever. Financial impact seems to be playing a significant role in making women unsafe. In this time of the pandemic, when shelters cannot always stay open, one of the best ways to help Indigenous women and gender-diverse people experiencing violence is to ensure they know about and can easily access the government's financial support benefits, so they can afford to shelter in safe places.