# RESEARCH REPORT

# Literature Review: Aboriginal Peoples and Homelessness

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# LITERATURE REVIEW: ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND HOMELESSNESS

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# *LITERATURE REVIEW: ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND HOMELESSNESS*

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# PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to undertake a comprehensive literature review on Aboriginal peoples and homelessness, to complement the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) research into the development of a homeless data collection and management system. The literature review was supplemented by telephone interviews with experts in the field, including both academics and service providers. This literature review will expand CMHC's understanding of the causes of homelessness for Aboriginal peoples, especially those causes that are distinct from the non-Aboriginal homeless population.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Profile of the Aboriginal Population

- The Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) undertaken by Statistics Canada in 1991 revealed that there were more than one million Canadians of Aboriginal origin—3.8% of the Canadian population.

- The Aboriginal population illustrates considerable differences when compared to the non-Aboriginal population, including higher birth and death rates, shorter life expectancies, a higher proportion of lone-parent families, lower levels of education and income, and higher unemployment and poverty levels.

- Aboriginal households are also more likely to be renters, and their housing is generally in poorer condition than the general population.

The Extent of the Literature

- There is very little literature that addresses the issue of Aboriginal homelessness in Canada *per se*. Other bodies of literature that may be relevant are: the general literature on homelessness in Canada; the research of Aboriginal socio-economic conditions and housing; the literature on urban Aboriginals and street youth; the literature on Aboriginal health issues; and the research on the Aboriginal "skid row" lifestyle.

Definitions of Homelessness

- Homelessness can be divided into three categories: situational (or temporary) homelessness; episodic homelessness; and chronic (long-term) homelessness.

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the ranks of the homeless are growing in number and diversity. Homelessness is caused by both "personal" and "structural" factors, including family problems; addiction; poor health; landlord-tenant conflict; the "lure of adventure"; unemployment; low pay; condemnation/demolition of rental units; release from jail and deinstitutionalisation. Aboriginal persons in Canada suffer acutely from all these "causes" or "sources" of homelessness.

Risk Factors in Aboriginal Homelessness

- Not all people who experience the problems listed above become homeless. However, the evidence suggests that the factors below result in many Aboriginals being "at risk" of becoming homeless.

- *Socio-economic factors*, including high unemployment, welfare dependency and extreme poverty, with single-parent families, large families and women hardest hit by these adverse economic circumstances.

- *Poor housing and severely depressed conditions on reserve and in remote communities*, which lead to rural-urban migration in search of jobs, education and better housing, but leaves Aboriginals vulnerable to poverty, depression, addiction and crime. Continued attachment of urban Aboriginals to reserves may result in hypermobility—regular alternation between city (winter) and reserve (summer), necessitating regular searches for urban accommodation.

- *Racism and discrimination* is a theme that recurs in the literature, although the extent and seriousness of discrimination is hard to measure.

- *Substance, domestic and sexual abuse* are frequently cited risk factors for homelessness. Substance abuse and addiction figure in descriptions of all segments of the Aboriginal homeless population. Eight out of ten Aboriginal women have suffered family violence and research by the Canadian Council on Social Development (1984) found "high incidence of family violence, sexual assault and incest in many Native communities" among women and runaway youth.

- *Physical and mental health problems* can lead to homelessness, and Aboriginal health status remains significantly poorer than that of the non-Aboriginal population. The socio-economic marginalization and abuse factors noted above contribute to higher incidences of physical and mental health problems among Aboriginal people.

Who Are the Aboriginal Homeless?

- *Numbers and geographical distribution.* In general, the research that has been done on the extent of homelessness in Canada does not take ethnicity into account. Homelessness, however, appears to be endemic in the Aboriginal population, urban and rural, on and

off reserve. Virtually all the research to date has been done in Canadian Western cities, although the literature indicates that there are also large numbers of Aboriginal homeless in Eastern cities like Toronto and Montreal.

At-risk Populations

- *Families, youth, women and elders.* Although no research has been done specifically on homelessness among Aboriginal families, there are data to suggest that urban Aboriginal families exhibit distinctive features that place them in the "at risk" population. Several studies indicate that the majority of runaways and street youth in Prairie cities are Aboriginal, with more females than males. The abuse suffered by women in Aboriginal society has been noted above. Elders are a segment of the Aboriginal population that has been virtually overlooked by the literature, but the diminishing role and importance of the extended family may leave them "at risk."

- *Skid row residents and ex-offenders.* The literature reveals that a large majority of "skid row" residents with entrenched lifestyles of crime, alcohol, drug abuse and homelessness are Aboriginal. There appears to be no literature regarding the housing problems of Aboriginal ex-offenders, a group that is clearly vulnerable to homelessness.

Addressing Aboriginal Homelessness

- *Solutions are multi-dimensional.* More affordable housing alone will not solve the Aboriginal homeless problem. Community development which provides jobs and empowers individuals, self-government which may assist Aboriginals to address their own needs, reduced discrimination in the housing and labour markets, and culturally appropriate programs and services must also be part of the solution.

Next Steps

As very little research has focused specifically on Aboriginal homelessness, an ongoing research program is required. General theme areas are outlined below.

- *Developing a better profile of the homeless population.* Attempting to "count" and characterize the number of homeless Aboriginal people in Canada is probably an unrealistic objective given the time and cost involved. A better strategy to develop a more complete

profile may be to work with agencies that provide services to the homeless and "at risk" populations.

- *Focusing on causes.* Determining the extent of discrimination through "fair housing audits," looking more closely at the relationship to the nature and extent of abuse, the role of housing market circumstances, and the relationship to physical and mental health problems are all useful areas of research. These causes may not be unique to the Aboriginal population, but some may play a more important role in causing homelessness among Aboriginal people.

- *The appropriateness of current services.* There is very little research on the appropriateness of existing services. Are they culturally appropriate? Does the philosophy of shelters create barriers for the Aboriginal homeless? Is there a role for traditional healing techniques? Will self-government help Aboriginal people to address their homeless? These are only a few of the questions that could be the focus for additional research.

It may be that many of these questions can be answered by working closely with service agencies.

Conclusions

- Aboriginal homelessness has many features in common with homelessness in the general population, but it also has several distinctive features (e.g., rural-urban migration, racism and discrimination, "Third World" on-reserve housing). Similarly, many of the same strategies are recommended to address both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal homelessness. However, the literature indicates that the Aboriginal homeless have special needs (e.g., cultural appropriateness, self determination, traditional healing techniques).

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# *Profile of the Aboriginal Population in Canada*

In 1991, Statistics Canada conducted the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) which included a demographic and socio-economic profile of all those who reported North American Indian, Métis or Inuit origins, either as a single response or in combination with other origins. The results of the APS revealed that more than one million people reported they had Aboriginal origins and/or Indian Registration in the census—they identified themselves to be North American Indian, Metis or Inuit and/or were registered under the Indian Act.

For this document only those individuals who indicated single response or multiple responses to Aboriginal Origins were included in the analysis, which represents 1.002,670 people or 3.8% of the entire Canadian population. According to Statistics Canada, this total represents no duplication of individuals, and therefore represents any individual with complete or some Aboriginal ancestry.

## Demographic Profile

According to the 1986 census, Canada's Aboriginal population totalled 711,720 people. Compared to the 1991 figure of 1,002,670 this represents an increase of more than 41%; however, Statistics Canada has indicated that the reason for this substantial increase is that more individuals who had not previously reported their Aboriginal origin did so in 1991. This increased reporting is probably a result of the heightened awareness of Aboriginal issues and extensive public discussion of these matters in the time leading up to the census (Castaways, 1993, p. 67).

Of the population identified as Aboriginal with either single or multiple Aboriginal origins, the breakdown is as follows: North American Indian origins, single response, 365,375; and multiple responses, 418,605, which together made up 78% of the entire population. Population with Métis origins was 75,150 for single response and 137,500 for multiple response, which together made up 21% of the entire Aboriginal population. People of Inuit origins included 30,090 for single response and 19,170 for multiple response, representing 5% of the Aboriginal population.

Table 1 below compares the age distribution of the Aboriginal population and the remaining Canadian population, revealing some significant differences between the two groups. The Aboriginal population is much younger than the remaining population; for example, the age group of 0-14 years of age contains 36% of the Aboriginal population, but only 20% of the non-Aboriginal population.

**Table 1:**
**Age Group Comparisons**

| | Aboriginals % | Non-Aboriginals % |
|---|---|---|
| 0-14 years of age | 36 | 20 |
| 15-24 years of age | 19 | 14 |
| 25-64 years of age | 42 | 54 |
| 65 years and older | 3 | 11 |

Even more interesting is the low percentage of adults over the age of 65 years in the Aboriginal population. The population distribution of Aboriginals reflects higher birth and death rates. Higher mortality rates are even more obvious when we consider that the average life expectancy for Aboriginals is 68 years for men (compared to 75 for non-Aboriginal men) and 75 for women (compared to 81 for non-Aboriginal women) (Hiller, 1996).

## Socio-economic Characteristics

### *Families*

There are some striking differences between Aboriginal Families and the remaining population. For Aboriginals, slightly more than 63% of all families are two-parent families compared to 83% in the remaining population. Common-Law couples makeup 23% of Aboriginal families, but only 10% of families in the remaining population. Some striking differences exist between the proportion of single-parent families. For Aboriginals, over 18.1% of the families are headed by a single parent (13% headed by a female parent), compared to 7% in the remaining population.

### *Education*

There are some major differences in the levels of educational attainment between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Just over 50% of the Aboriginal population more than 15 years of age have not attained a high school equivalent diploma, compared to 38% for the remaining population. The percentage of those who have obtained a high school diploma is about 11% for Aboriginals and 15% for non-Aboriginals. About 5% of Aboriginals have a university degree, compared to just more than 10% of the remaining population.

### Employment

Participation and unemployment rates vary considerably between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals (see Table 2). More male non-Aboriginals participate in the economy than Aboriginal males. In addition, the unemployment rates are significantly higher for Aboriginal males than non-Aboriginal males (21% compared to 10%). For females, the situation is similar, although participation rates are lower for both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals and the gaps between unemployment rates for the two groups are not as large. In 1991, the unemployment rate among all Aboriginals was nearly double the rate for all non-Aboriginals.

Table 2:
Labour Force Activity by Sex and Ethnic Origin - 1991

| | Aborig. % | Non-Aborig. % |
|---|---|---|
| Males - Participation Rate | 72 | 76 |
| Males - Unemployment Rate | 21 | 10 |
| Females - Participation Rate | 57 | 60 |
| Females - Unemployment Rate | 18 | 10 |
| Total - Participation Rate | 64 | 68 |
| Total - Unemployment Rate | 19 | 10 |

### *Income*

It was not possible directly to measure income differences between Aboriginals and the remaining population due to the lack of statistical data. Comparisons could only be made for males and females of the total population and Aboriginals. However, the numbers once again show significant disparity between the two groups. For Aboriginal males, the median income for 1991 was $15,875, compared to $25,571 for the total population; for Aboriginal females, the median income was $10,338 compared to $13,565 for females in the remaining population. For Aboriginals, 78% of income was from employment, 18% from government transfer payments and the remaining 4% from other sources. For the total population, 78% of income was from employment, 11% from Government Transfer and the remaining 11% from other sources.

### Housing Characteristics

There are no striking differences between Aboriginals and the remaining population in terms of the type of dwelling in which they reside. Sixty-six percent of Aboriginals live in

single-detached dwellings compared to 65% for the remaining population. Only 3% of Aboriginals reside in apartments of five storeys or more, compared to the 6% for the remaining population.

Major differences occur in tenure, i.e., whether the dwelling is owned-occupied or rented. The percentage of Aboriginals who own the dwellings where they reside was only 44%, compared to 71% for the remaining population. As for tenant-occupied dwellings, more than 44% of Aboriginals lived in a dwelling they rented compared to 29% for the remaining population. In addition, 12% of Aboriginals live in band housing. Overall, these statistics reveal that Aboriginals outside their reserves are more likely to be tenants than homeowners compared to Non-Aboriginals.

Even more important than the differences between the two populations is the condition of the dwellings in which they reside. Forty-nine percent of Aboriginals live in dwellings that need only regular maintenance, compared to 68% for Non-Aboriginals. More than 30% of Aboriginal homes need minor repairs and over 20% need major repairs. In total, over 50% of Aboriginals live in dwellings that need some type of repair, compared to 32% for the remaining population (24% minor repair and 8% major repair) (see also CMHC, August 1996a).

Since the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH) in 1987, a corpus of literature on homelessness in Canada has begun to emerge (e.g., McLaughlin, 1987; Ontario Ministry of Housing, 1988; Ward, 1989; Ouelette, 1989; Fallis and Murray, 1990; Charette, 1991; Baxter, 1991; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Hewitt, 1994; Bentley, 1995). Some of these studies explicitly recognize that Aboriginals are a significant component of the homeless population (e.g., Fallis and Murray, 1990, pp. 23, 28-29; Major, 1974). In general, however, the commentary on Aboriginal homelessness in Canada tends to be minimal, and confined to brief remarks like the following:

> . . . the housing problems of native Canadians are similar to those in many developing nations of the Third World. Special measures must be taken to address this situation (Ontario Ministry of Housing, 1988, p. 61).

> Native Canadians, particularly in Western Canada, who have moved to the major cities in search of jobs and better living conditions, . . . are significantly at risk because of limited skills and problems coping with urban life (Oberlander and Fallick, 1991, p. 17).

> Native people don't have a hope of getting a place outside of the downtown eastside. There's so much of that 'not in my neighbourhood' stuff (Karen O'Shannacery, quoted in Baxter, 1991, p. 46).

Very few studies specifically address the topic of Aboriginal homeless populations at any length (exceptions are: Northwest Territories Housing Corporation, 1987; Native Women's Association of Canada, 1995), although there are a large number of media reports on this issue (e.g., Lecki, 1991; Mitchell, 1988; Morrow, 1989; 1990a, b; Richard, 1994; Santoro, 1991; White, 1993; Woodward, 1991). Those studies that do touch upon this topic agree that, while Aboriginal persons may experience homelessness for many of the same reasons as the non-Aboriginal population, Aboriginals appear to be particularly vulnerable to many of the risk factors associated with homelessness, and Aboriginal homelessness has some unique features. These will be described later in this review.

In order to supplement the little literature there is on the topic of Aboriginal homelessness, interviews with "experts," both academics and service providers, were undertaken as part of this review. The comments of both sets of respondents are summarized in Appendix A, and occasionally integrated into the text of this review. In cases where the testimonies of academics or service providers supplement the literature review, the source is clearly indicated. It should be noted that of a dozen academics with expertise in homelessness or Aboriginal issues contacted, only five felt well enough informed to respond, and *none* regarded themselves as "experts" on the subject of Aboriginal homelessness. The interviews with service providers were more fruitful and informative, and some of their comments are cited in the text of the review, especially in the section on "Addressing Aboriginal Homelessness." However, of necessity, the comments of the service providers are partial and anecdotal, and require considerable follow-up and supplementation by future research.

Since there is so little literature that deals directly with Aboriginal persons and homelessness, other bodies of literature have been considered in this review. The topic is

obviously related to the research on *Aboriginal socio-economic conditions and housing*, both on and off reserve. The literature on *urban Aboriginals* and *street youth* in Canada is relevant, as is some of the literature on *Aboriginal health issues*. The literature on *discrimination against minorities in the housing market* should also be considered. Finally, there is a small body of literature on *the Aboriginal "skid row" lifestyle* that is highly pertinent.

For the purposes of this review, an Aboriginal person will be defined as anyone of Aboriginal heritage, status or non-status, Métis or Inuit, who describes him/herself as such (cf. Clatworthy, 1996, p. 26). The terms Aboriginal, First Nations and Native will be used interchangeably, as they are in the secondary literature. Where specific groups are mentioned explicitly in the literature (e.g., Métis, Inuit), this will be noted.

Homelessness is a relative term. Brundridge (1987, p. 15) distinguishes between three categories of homeless people:

- the *situational* homeless, who are homeless temporarily due to an acute life crisis (e.g., family conflict, divorce, eviction, release from prison);
- the *episodic* homeless, who alternate for different periods of time between being sheltered and unsheltered (e.g., skid row residents, runaway youth, prostitutes);
- the *chronic* homeless, persons who are homeless for extended time periods (e.g., "bag ladies," chronic substance abusers, de-institutionalized mentally ill).

The United Nations definition of homelessness includes both those who have no homes (street people, victims of fire and other crises) and those whose shelters do not meet U.N. standards, which include: "adequate protection from the elements, access to safe water and sanitation, secure tenure and personal safety, affordability, and accessibility to employment, education, and health care" (Hewitt, 1994, p. v).

## Causes of Homelessness

Recent research on homelessness in Canada indicates that the homeless population is growing in numbers and diversity. Homelessness affects not just transient men and "bag ladies," but includes families, especially single mothers with children and runaway youth (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993, pp. 18-20).

Floyd (1995) argues that the causes of homelessness include both "personal" and "structural" factors (p. 12). Among the "personal troubles" that may lead to homelessness are (ibid., pp. 15-19):

1. Family-related problems, e.g., death of a relative, divorce, domestic abuse.
2. Addictive behaviour (drug and alcohol abuse).
3. Poor health, including mental and emotional problems, and debilitating illness or disability.
4. Landlord-tenant conflict, resulting in eviction.
5. The "lure of adventure." Floyd classifies these as voluntary exiles from the mainstream.

Floyd lists as "structural sources of homelessness":

1. Unemployment.
2. Minimum wage jobs.
3. Condemnation/demolition of rental units.
4. Release from jail.
5. Deinstitutionalisation.

Floyd's list of "causes of homelessness" is useful, but it could be argued that the factors that he classifies as "personal," especially for Aboriginals, are actually the result of underlying "structures" such as colonization, racism and discrimination, patriarchy, cultural displacement, the reserve system, *etc.* (cf. O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993, p. 38). Aboriginal persons in Canada, both on and off reserve, suffer intensely from all of the "causes" of homelessness listed above: family problems, including domestic and sexual abuse;

substance abuse; poor mental and physical health; landlord-tenant disputes; the lure of the big city; unemployment and low income; shortage of affordable rental units; high rate of imprisonment. In addition, many First Nations people, both on and off reserve, live in unaffordable, inadequate and unsuitable housing, and fall well within the U.N. definition of homelessness (Morrow, 1990b; Scott, 1993; CMHC, August 1996a). Literature dealing with both on- and off-reserve populations will be reviewed below.

Although some might argue that the U.N. definition is too broad, poor housing conditions certainly figure as a risk factor for homelessness (e.g., caused by rural-urban migration, health problems, condemnation/demolition of rental units). Therefore, literature dealing with both the broader and more specific definitions of homelessness will be covered below.

Since there is so little literature specifically on the Aboriginal homeless, this section will survey the literature on what Floyd calls the "causes" or "sources" of homelessness. However, since not all people (Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal) who experience these problems become homeless, the term "risk factors" will be used henceforth.

## A Multi-faceted Issue

The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1993a) quotes a Toronto social service worker who remarks on the scope and complexity of Aboriginal homelessness:

> Everybody treats the issue as if it can be compartmentalized into easily dealt with areas. The housing department treats it as a problem in housing. The health department treats it as a health problem. The social services department treats it as a social service problem. But homelessness isn't an easy issue. It's a problem for all these departments, including the city works department, all at the same time, and they have to realize that (ibid., p. 82).

### *Socio-economic Factors*

Unemployment and low-income are salient risk factors for homelessness. As the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1993a) has observed, Aboriginal people "have been and continue to be on the bottom rung of the economic ladder in Canada" (p. 90). Aboriginal people have higher rates of unemployment, earn less, depend more on welfare, and suffer from extreme poverty more than non-Aboriginal Canadians (p. 91). Single-parent families, large families and women are hardest hit by adverse economic conditions (pp. 91-92). (For more detailed statistical information, see the Profile of the Aboriginal Population in Canada above).

### *Housing*

The Canadian National Report on Habitat II (1996, p. 14) succinctly sums up the housing situation of many Canadian Aboriginals:

> Many Aboriginal households occupy substandard housing and living conditions. This is particularly true for both on- and off-reserve communities in remote and northern locations where economic opportunities are often limited. Government housing support and Aboriginal funds have not been able to meet the needs due to a number of factors and problems contributing to poorer housing and living conditions such as low income, high unemployment, poor quality construction and overcrowding.

Poor housing conditions on reserves frequently result in migration to urban areas, where the housing available to migrants is not necessarily much better. According to DIAND, only half of on-reserve housing units are adequate and suitable for habitation (cited in CMHC, December 1992, p. 11). CMHC data indicate that 35.2% of the off-reserve Aboriginal population live in core housing need, especially those living in rural areas (where 44.2% of Aboriginals are in core need, as opposed to 35.2% of non-Aboriginals) (see ibid., p. 13).

A recent study of the housing needs of Aboriginal migrants in major Canadian cities (Clatworthy, 1996, p. 247-54) provides a good overview of urban Aboriginal housing issues experienced by this population:

- An average of 50.3% of urban Aboriginals across all areas experienced at least one housing deficiency (defined as National Occupancy Standard not met; major repairs needed; affordability problems).

- Housing problems were most common in Prairie cities. More than 60% of Aboriginals in Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg reported at least one deficiency; Aboriginals in these three cities were also the most likely to report more than one housing deficiency. Overall, "more than 10 percent of all Aboriginal households in each of the major urban areas of Western Canada experienced more than one housing deficiency" (p. 250).

- Lone-parent families were much more likely to experience housing deficiencies than other household types (75% across all study areas). Housing problems were lowest among couples without children (29.3%).

- Aboriginal households that moved during the 1986-1991 period were more likely than non-movers to report one or more housing deficiencies. Residential mobility did not seem to improve the housing experience of respondents.

(This study does not provide comparisons with the non-Aboriginal population).

Low income, Clatworthy concludes, is a the root of most Aboriginal housing problems (p. 268).

As noted earlier, by some of the broader definitions, the extremely poor housing conditions experienced by many Aboriginals could be classified as homelessness.

### *Rural-Urban Migration*

The sources agree that urban Aboriginal homelessness is frequently the result of the migration to cities of people from severely depressed conditions on reserves and other rural communities, who come to the city in search of jobs and education (Brody, 1970; Reeves and Frideres, 1981; Falconer, 1990; Morrow, 1990; CMHC, August 1996b). The latest research on this topic (Clatworthy, 1996) indicates that Aboriginal urbanization continued in 1986-91 (although to some extent, movement *to* reserves due to the repatriation of Aboriginal women married to non-Aboriginal men under Bill C-31 also characterised this period). Aboriginal migrants, unfamiliar with the city, find it difficult to find accommodation and health and social services. As marginalized, inner-city dwellers, urban migrants are vulnerable to poverty, depression, addiction, crime and varying degrees of homelessness. Once off the reserve, these people are no longer under federal jurisdiction, and lose, among other things, their right to free or subsidized housing (Morrow, 1990, p. 31). Aboriginal housing programs in urban areas are inadequate to meet the need (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993a, p. 85). Clatworthy (1996) found that although the educational level of Aboriginal migrants tended to be *higher* than that of the non-migrant population, Aboriginal migrants experienced high rates of unemployment in their new communities (ibid., p. 266). Migrants to Prairie cities experience this trend most acutely: "More than one-half of all Aboriginal migrant households in Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon and Edmonton reported incomes below the Statistics Canada low income cut-off in 1990" (ibid., p. 66). This leaves them at the mercy of over-extended municipal social service agencies, reluctant to take on responsibility for the special needs of this population, unfamiliar with urban living and non-Aboriginal values. High rents, low vacancy rates and inadequate shelter

allowances make periodic homelessness almost inevitable for Aboriginal migrants (Morrow, 1990, p. 32).

The continuing attachment of many urban Aboriginals to their home reserves often results in "hypermobility," the regular alternation between city (winter) and reserve (summer), necessitating regular searches for urban accommodation (Comeau and Santin, 1990, pp. 42-43). This may help to explain why in Canada, length of residency does not necessarily correlate with improved adaptation to urban life (McCaskill, 1981, p. 189; Clatworthy, 1983, pp. 41-42).

### *Racism and Discrimination*

Racial discrimination is a theme that recurs in the literature on Aboriginal issues (e.g., Comeau and Santin, 1990, pp. 46-47; Morrow, 1990, p. 32; Travis, 1991; Woodard, 1995). However, the extent and seriousness of discrimination against Aboriginals, and the impact of this on homelessness, are hard to measure. A few statistics are suggestive:

- A 1982 study of homeless women in Montreal found that about 25% of the total sample of 448 women were non-White. Clearly, 25% represents a disproportionate representation of women of colour among the homeless. However, only "a few" were Aboriginals from a nearby reserve (Ross, 1982, p. 11).

- A report on the health status of the homeless in Toronto in 1992 (Ambrosio *et al.*, 1982, p. 3) found that one third of all respondents were Aboriginal, Black or Asian.

- Hauch (1985) estimated that about 72% of the homeless men that he studied in Winnipeg's skid row were Aboriginal.

- In a study of 60 homeless women in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, half identified themselves as Native (Kinegal, 1989, p. 119).

These fragmentary data suggest that race is a significant factor in vulnerablity to homelessness in Canada. In his discussion of the housing difficulties of Aboriginal migrants in Edmonton, Morrow notes that the general population bears an "ingrained resentment" against the idea of special treatment for indigenous people (1990, p. 32; cf. Woodard, 1995).

A great deal of research on discrimination against racial minorities—especially African-Americans—has been done in the U.S. (see Beavis, 1995, pp. 7-8; Hopper, 1995). In the U.S., there is also a small body of academic research literature on homelessness and ethnicity (e.g., Leda and Rosenheck, 1995; Travis, 1991). Unfortunately, very little empirical research on the extent of racism and discrimination in the Canadian housing market has been undertaken.

A particularly useful tool for estimating the discrimination faced by minorities in the housing market is the "fair housing audit," in which two researchers, one White and one non-White, pose as prospective renters/homebuyers, and successively seek accommodation from a landlord or realtor, noting any systemic differences in treatment (Beavis, 1995, p. 8). Research teams are carefully matched for characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, number of children, profession, *etc.*, so that ethnicity is the only salient difference between the pairs of investigators. Such audits have proven to be effective in detecting discrimination at the initial stages of housing transactions, but have rarely been done in Canada, and only on a much smaller scale than in the U.S. (see ibid., pp. 7-8).

A small-scale audit undertaken in Winnipeg by the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties in 1985 (MARL, 1988) rendered the following evidence of discrimination against

Aboriginal clients by two commercial housing agencies:

- non-Aboriginal testers were warned about "bad parts of the city" when they inquired about housing in the North End of Winnipeg;
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal testers were given different listings by the housing agencies;
- Aboriginals were consistently referred to fewer addresses in poorer neighbourhoods;
- One agency responded to a question from a researcher as to whether it was possible to be referred only to non-minority areas by stating that listings for "Waspy neighbourhoods" only could be supplied.
- In one instance, an Aboriginal couple was given only a cursory viewing of an apartment; 15 minutes later, their White counterparts were given a detailed tour of the suite, told they would be "ideal" tenants, and offered the apartment pending a credit check.
- At the same building, an Aboriginal couple was told that an apartment had already been taken, while a White couple, who applied later the same day, were told that it was still available (MARL, 1988, pp. 3-4).

This evidence, while extremely limited, suggests that the widespread perception that Aboriginals face discrimination in the housing market is justified.

***Substance Abuse***

Substance abuse is frequently cited as a risk factor for homelessness (e.g., Floyd, 1995, pp. 16-17; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993, p. 39; Bairstow, 1987, pp. 69). Substance abuse and addiction figure in descriptions of all segments of the Aboriginal homeless population. The Bairstow report (1987) noted that while registered Indians made up only 5% of the population of Manitoba, they made up 27% of admissions to the Alcoholism Foundation of Manitoba (p. 67). A study of substance abuse in cities undertaken by the National Association of Friendship Centres in 1985 found that it was prevalent among urban Aboriginals of all ages and target groups, with alcohol abuse being the most prevalent. Figures gathered by Aboriginal court workers in the NWT, Yukon and Quebec showed that 80-95% were substance abusers (cited in Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993, pp. 68-69). Research undertaken in Anchorage, Alaska (Travis, 1991, pp. 248-49) found that the Aboriginal homeless surveyed had a much higher rate of alcoholism than the ethnically mixed samples of homeless persons studied earlier in Portland (1983) and Seattle (1989). There were about 2.4 times as many substance abusers among Anchorage respondents as in Portland, and 4.3 times as many as in Seattle (ibid., p. 48).

The abuse of alcohol and solvents is a feature of reserve life that is often carried over into the city by migrants (Dosman, 1972, p. 75, 78; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993, pp. 67-68). According to several researchers, a feature of substance abuse by Aboriginals that seems to be distinctive is its social aspect: "the solitary Indian drunk is an exception, and . . . drinking among Indians is intensely social" (Dosman, 1972, p. 79; cf. Morinis, 1982, pp. 96-97), a behaviour pattern found both on and off reserve. It has been argued that urban Aboriginal drinking patterns may bear some relationship to traditional, pre-colonial customs, e.g., generosity, feasting and status building among peoples of the Northwest Coast (Lemert, 1954), but, as Morinis (1982, p. 96) observes, "these connections are tenuous at best. . . . Traditional society is more a force on Skid Row by virtue of its absence." Dosman

interprets Aboriginal drinking patterns as a form of protest adopted by a marginalized subculture against the dominant society (1972, p. 79). The social aspect of alcoholism among Aboriginals may help to explain why this risk factor is so prevalent in the Aboriginal population, since group drinking is an important feature of social interaction. Aboriginal drinking patterns may result in higher evictions among Aboriginal tenants due to rowdiness, or simply because alcoholism interfere's with a tenant's ability to pay the rent.

Health problems, particularly disabling ones, are also cited as placing people at-risk of homelessness. Solvent abuse among youth can have especially devastating health effects, including irreversible brain and nerve damage, which makes treatment programs difficult to follow through: "these youngsters either quickly tire of the treatment program and leave, or forget when they're supposed to be there" (Graham, 1987, p. 11). Pregnant women who abuse alcohol run the risk of bearing children with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), an irreversible condition which includes "growth retardation, central nervous system dysfunction and certain cranio-facial features" (Bray and Olson, 1989, p. 42). Although there is a general perception that FAS is epidemic among Canadian Aboriginal children, Bray and Olson (1989) caution that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that the condition is more prevalent among Aboriginals than among non-Aboriginals. A survey of 123 Aboriginal people in Vancouver and Victoria found that nearly all respondents (96%) knew that drinking during pregnancy could harm the fetus, and 85% believed that there was no safe level of alcohol consumption for pregnant women; 58% of males and 75% of females had heard of FAS (Robinson and Moczuk, 1992).

*Domestic Abuse*

According to a study undertaken by the Ontario Native Women's Association (1989), eight out of ten Aboriginal women have suffered family violence. The national average is variously reported as one in eight or one in ten (cf. SPR Associates Inc., 1994, p. 50). The scarcity of shelters in rural Aboriginal communities forces women either to tolerate the violence and remain with their abusers, to resort to temporary refuge with relatives or friends, or to flee to cities where shelters and second-stage housing may be available (Native Women's Association of Canada, 1995, p. 9). Women's shelters founded on White feminist theories and principles may not address the social and cultural needs of Aboriginal women (ibid., pp. 21-23): "Native women do not want to fight for equality with men when they do not even have equality amongst other women" (ibid., p. 36). Colonialism and genocide, rather than patriarchy, are seen as the root causes of violence within the Aboriginal community (ibid., p. 23). Family violence is seen as a relatively recent import from White society (ibid., p. 30).

The report of the Native Women's Association of Canada (1995) points out that Aboriginal women from small rural communities require sensitivity to their unique experience of the extended family. A battered woman's entire home community may know that she is being abused and do nothing about it, giving rise to feelings of shame and confusion about the role of the family and community that the abused woman's culture has taught her to depend upon for well-being and survival: "they are receiving conflicting messages that this is her place in life, yet at the same time she knows that the abuse is not right" (ibid., p. 18).

A very high proportion of Aboriginal women within the Canadian prison system have histories of domestic and sexual abuse (Native

Women's Association of Canada, 1995). Aboriginal women may run afoul of the criminal justice system when they retaliate against their male abusers, or seek refuge in urban settings where they resort to criminal behaviours such as drug abuse and prostitution (ibid., p. 31). On release from prison, Aboriginal women are afflicted by sexism, racism, the psychological damage resulting from abuse, and the stigma of being an ex-offender. These factors clearly dispose Aboriginal women to the risk of homelessness (the majority of the homeless women in Ralston's study had engaged in crimes such as prostitution, shoplifting and break and enter [1996, p. 4]). The Native Women's Association of Canada report (1995, pp. 30-32) recommends second-stage housing as a means of effecting the transition of female ex-offenders into the community. (It is important to note that Aboriginal women are over-represented among inmates in federal and provincial penitentiaries; LaPrairie, 1991, p. 260).

*Sexual Abuse*

A background of sexual abuse is a known risk factor for homelessness, especially among women and runaway youth. LaPrairie (1991, p. 261) cites research by the Canadian Council on Social Development (1984) that found "high incidence of family violence, sexual assault and incest in many Native communities." Anecdotal evidence cited by LaPrairie (ibid., p. 262) indicates that gang rapes are a regular feature of life on some isolated reserves. It should be noted, however, that overall, there is a lack of research on this issue with respect to the Aboriginal community (cf. LaRocque, 1993, pp. 72-89).

***Physical and Mental Health Problems***

As noted earlier, health problems, especially disabling ones, can lead to homelessness, especially when illness leads to loss of employment, economic opportunities and family problems. The breakdown of the Aboriginal family, in turn, may remove an essential support from the lives of persons with mental or physical health problems. As O'Neil (1993, p. 29) points out, the North American Aboriginal population was decimated by post-contact epidemics, and hundreds of years later, Aboriginal health status remains significantly poorer than than of the non-Aboriginal population. For example, although infant mortality among status Indians and Inuit is in decline, these rates are still double the Canadian average (ibid., p. 30). Overall mortality is from two to four times higher in the Aboriginal population than for non-Aboriginal Canadians (p. 31). The Aboriginal Peoples Survey conducted in 1991 found that of 388,900 self-identified Aboriginal respondents, 31% had been told that they had a chronic health problem by health care professionals (Statistics Canada, 1993, p. 157). Rheumatism/arthritis (14.9%), high blood pressure (11.5%) and bronchitis (8.4%) were the most commonly reported chronic health problems, followed by heart problems (6.6%), diabetes (6.0%), emphysema/shortness of breath (5.7%), asthma (5.7%), tuberculosis (3.0%) and epilepsy/seizures (1.5%) (p. 157).

Most of the risk factors for homelessness discussed above—socio-economic marginalization, substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse—are also contributory to mental illness, which has also been identified as a risk factor for homelessness. The suicide rate for Aboriginals in Canada is about three times higher that that for the general population (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995, p. 11; see also Brant, 1993). Socio-economic deprivation and mental illness are mutually reinforcing, resulting in a vicious circle:

> Substandard living conditions and limited life chances are associated with depression and feelings of

> helplessness and hopelessness. Conversely, depression and other mental and cognitive disorders prevent people from acting to change their life circumstances (ibid., p. 24).

## Numbers

In general, the research that has been done on the extent of homelessness in Canada does not take ethnicity into account (see Bentley, 1995). This is unfortunate, since U.S. research has shown that race is a significant risk factor in homelessness, and that the numbers of Black homeless in U.S. cities are extremely high (see Hopper, 1995).

Some statistics that are of relevance to the question of numbers have been extracted from the literature under consideration:

- A Toronto social service worker estimated that there are between five and ten thousand Aboriginal homeless in Toronto (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993, p. 82).

- Estimates of numbers of runaways and street youth in Saskatoon by social service workers ranged from 100 to over 2,000, with an entrenched population of 200 - 300 youth (Caputo, Weiler and Kelly, 1992, p. 13).

- Hulchanski *et al.* (1991, p. 27) report that residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside are 68% Caucasian, 18% Oriental, 11.7% Aboriginal, 0.6% East Indian and 1.9% Other.

- A survey of homeless persons in Calgary was undertaken on May 26, 1996 (City of Calgary, 1996). For the survey, homeless persons were considered to be those who lived on the street, or who did not have a permanent shelter to go to. On the night of the survey, 615 homeless persons were counted by the 19 organizations that provided data. Of these, 73% were White (n=448); 20% were Aboriginal (n+121); 3% were Asian (n=19); and 3% were Black (n=18). The ethnicity of nine of the persons surveyed was unknown. Overall, there was a 33% increase in the number of homeless persons counted in 1996 compared to figures gathered in 1994.

(See also the estimates cited in the interviews with service providers, Appendix A).

A somewhat puzzling feature of the estimates of the Aboriginal homeless population is that while some sources suggest that females (especially youth and single mothers) are at greatest risk of homelessness, the agencies and organizations consulted to supplement this literature review estimated that the majority of homeless Aboriginals are males in the 30-45 age category (see Appendix A, below). This apparent discrepancy may be explained by the fact that many of the groups surveyed (e.g., DERA in Vancouver, the George Spady Centre in Edmonton, the Main Street Project in Winnipeg and the Salvation Army in various cities) tend to serve the "hard core" skid row population, which is predominantly male.

## Geographical Distribution

Homelessness appears to be endemic in the Aboriginal population, urban and rural, on and off reserve (cf. the comments of service providers summarized in Appendix A). Virtually all of the research done on urban Aboriginal homelessness has been done in Western cities with large urban Aboriginal populations: Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Edmonton and Vancouver. The literature indicates that there are also large numbers of Aboriginal homeless in large Eastern cities like Toronto and Montreal, although these populations have not been studied as intensively as those in the Western cities (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples,

1993, p. 82; Native Women's Association of Canada, 1995, p. 13).

## At-risk Populations

### *Families*

Although no research has been done specifically on homelessness among Aboriginal families, there are data to suggest that urban Aboriginal families are much worse off than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, and exhibit distinctive features that place them in the "at-risk" population. Some of these data will be surveyed below.

The prevalence of young, single-parent families headed by women is a distinctive feature of urban Aboriginal populations (Clatworthy, 1980, 1996; Clatworthy and Gunn, 1981; Clatworthy and Hull, 1983; Peters, 1984; Falconer, 1990; Sparling, 1992). A study by Falconer (1990) based on 1981 Census of Canada data found that Prairie Aboriginal households were considerably more likely than non-Aboriginal households to be families with children: "Among urban Natives, . . . families with children . . . comprise a large majority" (ibid., p. 194). Aboriginal single-parent families were roughly twice as common as non-Aboriginal families led by single parents, with a higher proportion of Aboriginal lone parents residing in urban areas (ibid., pp. 194-95). Aboriginal single mothers consistently outnumbered single fathers, and this tendency was greatly intensified in urban settings. Among registered Indians on reserves, single mothers outnumbered single fathers by a ratio of three to one; in major cities, the ratio was twelve to one. Among non-status Indians, on-reserve single mothers outnumbered single fathers four to one; in major cities, the ratio was fourteen to one (ibid., p. 195). Both parents and children in Aboriginal single-parent families were found to be significantly younger than their non-Native counterparts in major Prairie cities (ibid., p. 196). Falconer also found that Aboriginal two-parent families fared better in urban settings than on reserve, but that the economic status of Aboriginal single parents was worse in cities than on reserve, perhaps due to the relative youth, welfare dependency and low educational attainment of these households (ibid., p. 197). Falconer cites Hull's (1990) finding that less than 40% of Aboriginal children with parents not in the experienced work force will complete high school (Falconer, 1990, p. 200). These data, he concludes, strongly suggest that Aboriginal single-parent families "are central mechanisms through which urban disadvantage is perpetuated" (ibid., p. 200). The implications for action and research arising out of this study are: (1) urban Aboriginal single mothers must find a political voice; (2) the dynamics of the over-representation of Aboriginal single mothers in cities must be understood; (3) the extreme poverty of Aboriginal single-mother families must be addressed by "unprecedented responses from government" (ibid., pp. 203-5).

A more recent study by Driedger (1995) on lone parent families in Winnipeg confirms the ongoing plight of Aboriginal single mothers. Aboriginal single mothers, compared with their non-Aboriginal counterparts, are younger, less likely to ever have been married, less likely to have completed high school, less likely to be employed, with lower incomes, and higher mobility rates (ibid., pp. 88-91).

In an analysis of the socio-economic and housing conditions of Aboriginal single parents in Winnipeg, Sparling (1992) concluded that the low socio-economic status of this group, along with the shortage of social housing, places this population predominantly in private-market rental housing with affordability, adequacy and suitability problems (ibid., pp. 102-12).

These data suggest that the extreme economic hardship characteristic of young, single Aboriginal parents (mostly mothers) and their children places them at high risk of homelessness, particularly when the children reach an age when street life becomes attractive.

***Youth***

A study of runaways and street youth in Saskatoon (Caputo, Weiler and Kelly, 1994) observed that the majority of runaways and street youth in that city are Aboriginal; non-Aboriginal youth "on the streets" tend to be "curbsiders" or "wannabes" who spend considerable time on the street, but live at home (ibid., p. 11). Service providers estimated that there were more female (60%) than male (40%) street youth; estimates of actual numbers ranged from 100 to over 2,000, with an entrenched population of 200 - 350 young people (ibid., p. 13). Most share a background of multi-problem families on social assistance, rife with substance abuse, and "emotionally, physically and sexually abusive behaviour" (ibid., p. 14); even so, most street youth maintain regular contact with their families, on or off reserve.

These youth occupy a continuum from short-term runaways to "entrenched street youth" who sleep in improvised shelters such as abandoned cars and vacant buildings or under bridges (ibid., p. 11). Many are engaged in dangerous or criminal behaviours including substance abuse (glue and gasoline sniffing and marijuana are the most common), prostitution, break and enter and theft. The sex trade begins with children as young as eight, mostly female (ibid., p. 14).

A needs assessment on homeless children and youth undertaken in Winnipeg in 1990 (Social Planning Council, 1990), based on a sample of 127 young people, yielded the following figures on ethnicity:

| *Ethnic background* | *Percent* |
|---|---|
| Caucasian | 35% |
| Métis | 32% |
| Treaty Indian | 19% |
| Non-status | 7% |
| Black | 3% |
| Asian | 1% |
| Other (East Indian, Latin) | 3% |

As in the Saskatoon study, the homeless youth in Winnipeg were largely of Aboriginal heritage (58%), and the majority of runaways (60%) were female (ibid., pp. 13-14; on Winnipeg, see also Graham, 1987).

The Winnipeg needs assessment concluded that an effective response to the problems of runaway youth should integrate initiatives at three levels (Social Planning Council, 1990. p x):

1. *prevention*, including programs with the goal of reducing the incidence of runaway behaviour and preventing some youth from running away;
2. *intervention, including protection*, programs protecting youth on-the-run, as well as referring youth to appropriate service agencies; and
3. *repatriation*, programs assisting youth to return to their home communities.

Another youth population that may be classified as "homeless" are children with alcoholic parents, both on and off reserve, who are allowed to roam the streets unsupervised, day and night, or young children left alone by parents without adequate food, heat, access to emergency services, *etc.* (cf. Comeau and Santin, 1990, pp. 35-36).

*Women*

A recent qualitative study published by Meredith L. Ralston of Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax, N.S. (1996) sheds some interesting, if very partial, light on the lives of homeless Aboriginal women. Ralston conducted in-depth interviews with 20 drug- or alcohol-addicted homeless women in "an eastern city with a population of 250,000" (ibid., p. 3). Of this sample, two were Aboriginal and three were Black (ibid., p. 4).

There was some commonality in the experiences of the five "women of colour," in that both Aboriginals and Blacks believed that "being a black or Native American woman was to be doubly oppressed" by both sexism and racism (ibid., p. 82). As one woman noted, "Blacks and Natives have similar experiences as minorities" (ibid., p. 85). The women of colour held that, paradoxically, they were both highly visible in a White-supremacist society, and *in*visible in terms of their isolation from the dominant society (ibid., p. 82). One Aboriginal woman observed that all institutions in White society are racist, particularly the courts, which typically impose harsher sentences on Aboriginals (ibid., pp. 82-83), and the police, who, one woman felt, had treated her "like some sort of animal" rather than as a woman (ibid., p. 85). The women of colour felt that they had more in common with men of their race than with White women (ibid., p. 85). Both Aboriginals and Blacks thought that White counsellors and service providers could not relate to them credibly or appropriately: "Social workers?? Young white girls!! How are they going to help me?" (ibid., p. 86). From an Aboriginal perspective, it is important to remember that older persons (Elders) are highly respected for their wisdom and experience (Native Women's Association of Canada, 1995, p. 29; cf. Waldram, 1993, p. 350). The feelings of alienation from White service providers expressed by non-White women may inhibit Aboriginal women from resorting to services that could help them to avoid, or escape from, homelessness.

Despite these women's feelings of common cause with minority men, they also agreed that they had been discriminated against by their families and by men in general because of their sex (Ralston, 1996, pp. 77-81). The women's opinion that female addicts are less tolerated by society than male addicts, Ralston observes, is backed up by research findings (ibid., p. 77; cf. Woodland, 1989). One Aboriginal woman observed that, tragically, Aboriginal institutions were "male-dominated," although this was changing: "Native men and women are working together now" (Ralston, 1996, pp. 78-79). These women's perception that Aboriginal organizations are patriarchal may also prevent homeless or at-risk women from accessing services in their own communities.

*Skid Row Residents*

There are several Canadian studies that discuss the lowest stratum of the urban homeless population, so-called "skid row" (or "skid road"), a run-down inner-city area made up of transients, mostly male, with an entrenched lifestyle of crime, alcohol and drug abuse, and homelessness (Brody, 1971; Dosman, 1972, pp. 68-83; Morinis, 1982; Hauch, 1985). These ethnographic studies all took place in Western Canadian cities: Vancouver (Morinis), Winnipeg (Hauch), Saskatoon (Dosman), and an unnamed "prairie city" (Brody). Not surprisingly, in view of variations in time and location between the studies, estimates of the proportion of Aboriginals living on skid row vary; the most recent (Hauch, 1985, p. 12), estimated that a large majority of skid row residents in his study were Aboriginal (72%, including both treaty and non-treaty).

Morinis (1982) describes skid row as the ideal "reception centre" for Aboriginal migrants to the city. Skid row provides an escape from a

bleak reserve life, while maintaining several "important socio-cultural features" of the reserve, including "unemployment, welfare and drinking as well as the intense and vital interactions among people that characterize reserve society" (ibid., p. 96). According to Morinis, "Indians on Skid Row are very friendly to the newly arrived, and make him welcome anyway." With its large Aboriginal population, skid row functions as a buffer between the migrant and "the forces of the dominant white, middle-class society" (ibid.).

Hauch's (1985) participant-observer research on Winnipeg's skid row rendered some interesting findings. In contrast to other studies of skid row, Hauch found little evidence of racism within this community: Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals mingled freely and showed the same pattern of behaviour, and, since Aboriginals were the majority, Whites tended to favour what they regarded as "the traditional Indian way of life" (ibid., p. 75). Although Aboriginal family members frequently reside within the same skid row community, Hauch found, contrary to social scientific theorizing, that the extended family does *not* function as a system of mutual aid (ibid., pp. 77-79). That is, among skid row Aboriginals, extended family members do not support each other by sharing resources, making cash loans, pawning personal goods among neighbours and relatives, *etc.* (ibid., pp. 77-79). Thus, on skid row, the presence of family members does not necessarily provide a buffer against homelessness. He found skid row society to be undifferentiated and radically egalitarian. Most skid row residents are chronic alcoholics, dependent on periodic day labour and petty crime for whatever income they receive. It is very difficult for skid row residents to accumulate any savings, since hoarding is resented by the community, and renders an individual highly vulnerable to retribution. This vulnerability to attack is exacerbated by the chronic homelessness of the population; the majority are transients, living on the street and periodically resorting to emergency shelters, or marginally accommodated in rooming houses or single room occupancy (SRO) hotels (ibid., p. 35; however, the relatively expensive hotels are only used periodically in the case of windfall earnings or referral by welfare authorities [pp. 30-31]). Hauch interpreted the pattern of binge drinking and spending characteristic of skid row residents to be a rational response to redistributing income within this socio-economic setting (ibid., pp. 44-51). This pattern of drinking and binge spending is regarded by social workers as evidence that an individual is unable to manage his/her affairs, and so skid row residents (especially single men) tend to be ineligible for any but sporadic and temporary welfare benefits (ibid., pp. 86-96).

On the basis of his experience working with the Main Street Project in Winnipeg, a shelter that serves the skid row area of the city, Brundridge (1987, p. 16) points out that the chronically homeless, especially, have a shortened life expectancy, and "are at great risk of dying by most tragic means," including suicide, foul play, drug or alcohol poisoning, vehicular accidents and drowning.

*Ex-offenders*

With the exception of the report on second stage housing by the Native Women's Association of Canada (1995), which emphasizes the need for culturally appropriate programs to address the needs of women ex-offenders, there appears to be no literature regarding the housing problems of ex-offenders, a group that is clearly vulnerable to homelessness. Waseskun Canada Inc., based in Kahnawake, Quebec, is an organization that directly addresses the needs of Aboriginal male offenders and ex-offenders, which, among other things, exists "to initiate development in prevention, intervention and community re-integration." Waseskun House runs a "totally Native community residential

centre (CRC) . . . for First Nations men" that seeks to re-integrate ex-offenders into the community. Waseskun also operates a moving and transport company, which employs Waseskun residents and other (Aboriginal) members of the community. The idea of healing and the restoration of balance are strongly emphasized in Waseskun programs. The Waseskun home page is accessible at http://www.infobahnos.com~waseskun.wascan.html (see also National Forum Report, 1994; on Waseskun, see also Solicitor General of Canada, 1995, pp. 49-61).

*Elders*

This is a small segment of the urban Aboriginal population at risk of homelessness that has virtually been overlooked by the little research that exists. One reason why the elderly do not figure prominently in discussions of Aboriginal homelessness is that life expectancy is considerably shorter for Natives than for non-Natives (National Advisory Council on Aging, 1994, p. 23; cf. Hiller, 1996). Disability is another factor associated with aging and housing disadvantage. The average Canadian spends about 13 years with a disability; Aboriginals are likely to be disabled for twice as long (ibid., pp. 23, 26).

A newsletter article on Ke-ki-nan, a residence for Aboriginal elders in Winnipeg, describes the plight of elders who have migrated to the city (Sanders, 1991, p. 22; see also National Advisory Council on Aging., 1994). Elders who migrate to the city often do so for economic or medical reasons. For Aboriginal elders, especially, the city is alien territory, isolated from family and community ties, and from the Aboriginal cultural norm of reverence for the elderly. A needs assessment undertaken by the Manitoba Indian Nurses Association and the Indian and Metis Senior Citizens Groups of Winnipeg in 1983-84 (cited in Sanders, 1991, p. 22) found that Aboriginal people over the age of 50 had poorer health than their counterparts in the general population, but turned to medical services only as a last resort. According to one witness, Aboriginal elders unable to care for themselves remain in hospitals, or live in SRO rooming houses, excluded from social, medical and housing services by cultural barriers. Certainly, according to the definitions cited above, this population can be described either as homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Sanders cites the Ke-ki-nan centre, a provincially funded project offering 30 self-contained, one-bedroom housing units opened in September 1991, as an appropriate way to address the housing, social, spiritual and medical needs of the Aboriginal elderly. The centre, the first Aboriginal geriatric facility in Canada was "initiated, planned and directed to the greatest extent by the Native Elderly," and appears to be a useful model for addressing the needs of urban Aboriginal elders.

There is very little literature *per se* on the extent of homelessness in Aboriginal communities (both reserves and rural non-reserve communities; exceptions are Northwest Territories Housing Corporation, 1987; McLaughlin, 1988; Major, 1974). However, the information about on-reserve housing conditions cited earlier suggests that many rural Aboriginals live in conditions well within the U.N. definition of homelessness. "Third World" conditions on reserves are often cited as the primary reason for rural-urban migration and its resulting problems (Morrow, 1990b; Scott, 1993).

## Shelters in Rural Communities

The need for shelters for abused Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in rural communities is emphasized in the report of the Native Women's Council of Canada (1995) and reports on Project Haven shelters undertaken for CMHC by SPR Associates Inc. (1994a, b). A salient feature of the latter research is its extensive comparison of the characteristics of shelters in seven Aboriginal and six non-Aboriginal communities, mostly rural, across Canada (SPR Associates Inc., 1994a, b, Appendix), which clearly shows that there are differences between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in community needs, clients targeted, root causes of abuse, match between shelter project and community needs, obstacles to addressing family violence in the communities, opportunities for flexibility and innovation, availability of second-stage housing (there was none in the Aboriginal case study communities), impact of locating the shelter in the community, impact of shelter in changing women's behaviour, impact on changing men's behaviour, community support for the shelter, extent of service networks to address family violence in the communities, service links between community agencies and shelters, philosophy of shelters, residential and non-residential shelter services provided, factors affecting the type of service, and service needs of communities.

As one of the academics consulted in the course of this review commented, in view of the depressed socio-economic status of the Aboriginal population, "jobs, money and education" are fundamental to addressing Aboriginal homelessness (Higgitt). Another mentioned income support off reserve, employment assistance and low-income housing as the "top three" means of confronting the issue (Peressini).

## Housing

Obviously, one of the primary reasons for Aboriginal homelessness in all its guises is the shortage of affordable, adequate and suitable housing, both on and off reserve. Clatworthy (1996) specifies two main housing types that are in short supply for urban Aboriginals: larger, low-cost housing suitable for families with children (presumably, including lone-parent families); and low-cost apartments for Aboriginal singles (p. 254).

One of the academics consulted in the course of this review emphasized the importance of culturally appropriate housing (Peters). She cites factors such as "the difficulty for large, extended and shifting family and kin groups to be accommodated in either the rental or public housing sector, the unavailability of short-term shelter opportunities administered by Aboriginal organizations, the shortage of Aboriginal shelters for abused women and their children, the lack of provision of culturally supportive homes for Aboriginal youth who leave adoptive homes or abusive family situations for the street, the lack of supportive housing for Aboriginal people who leave jail, and the lack of suitable housing for any type of household on reserves." She also suggests that "a very important element would be to increase Aboriginal family's, band's and urban organization's abilities to provide culturally appropriate housing of a variety of types for their people. If homelessness is linked to personal and cultural dislocation, which I think it probably is, then strategies which support individual and community healing are important." Some of these healing strategies are discussed below.

An interesting initiative from a service provider is the Main Street Project's housing referral program, in which an outreach worker mediates between the (mostly Aboriginal) clients and landlords. Donations are accepted to help clients make homes for themselves (see Appendix A).

## Community Development

Aboriginal authors, especially, emphasize the importance of family and community in the lives of Aboriginal people (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995, pp. 80-81). Services and programs geared toward the Aboriginal homeless must do more than empower individuals; they must seek to integrate people back into families and communities (National Forum Report, 1994; Native Women's Association of Canada, 1995). Front line workers must serve as mediators between client, family and community (National Forum Report, 1994, p. 3). The community is the appropriate locus of services geared towards Aboriginal peoples: "Native women should not have to leave their home communities to seek help for the violent situations they are living in" (Native Women's Association of Canada, 1995, p. 34; cf. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995, pp. 43-67, 76). Although many reserves are plagued by the socials ills enumerated in this review, some have developed into self-reliant and prosperous communities (Hiller, 1996).

## Self-Government

Although it is not directly addressed in most of the literature, Aboriginal self-government is an issue that is relevant to the homeless population. One report notes that "the related processes of Aboriginal self-government and the revitalization of traditional Native culture has resulted in a strengthening of Aboriginal communities' sense of communal responsiblity for issues in their communities, including family violence" (SPR Associates Inc., 1994, p. 7). Implementation of self-government, defined by the National Round Table on Aboriginal Urban Issues as "the recognition by Canadians that Aboriginal peoples have a right to determine their own lives through their own institutions within their own cultures, communities and lands" (1993, p. 78), by enabling Aboriginals to address housing and socio-economic issues in their own communities, might stem the flow of rural migrants to the cities, and take some of the pressure off of social service agencies and welfare budgets in urban centres (see Eisler, 1996).

## Combatting Discrimination

In view of the widespread perception that Aboriginals face discrimination in the housing market, steps must be taken to ensure that the human rights of Aboriginal renters and buyers are protected.

- A great deal more empirical research, in the form of fair housing audits, needs to be undertaken to document the extent and nature of discrimination faced by Aboriginals.
- In a report on housing and racial discrimination in Canada, Henry (1989) recommended "ethnic monitoring," where ethnic records are kept and continuously monitored to ensure that clients are not subjected to stereotyping by housing authority employees.
- The report on racial discrimination in housing undertaken by the Manitoba Association of Rights and Liberties (1985) makes a number of pertinent recommendations: housing counsellors and front line workers should encourage or support clients in submitting complaints to the appropriate agencies when discrimination occurs; Human Rights Commissions and provincial housing authorities should establish outreach offices to facilitate better communication with the community, and monitor complaints of discrimination and how they are dealt with; housing authorities should employ more Natives and other visible minorities; community groups should assist with appeals and arbitration of complaints by ethnic minorities; housing clinics to educate landlords and tenants as to their rights and responsibilities should be set up (ibid., pp. 7-8).

## Cultural Appropriateness

A number of the sources on Aboriginal homelessness agree that services for Aboriginal homeless persons are more effective when they are culturally appropriate and administered by Aboriginal service providers. A very informative overview of the many ways in which Aboriginal traditions differ from Euro-Canadian norms can be found in the report on second stage housing for First Nations women published by the Native Women's Association of Canada (1995, pp. 21-34).

Some themes pertaining to cultural appropriateness that recur in the literature on Aboriginal homelessness are:

- the need for a multi-faceted approach ( addressing low self-esteem, alcoholism/drug abuse, health problems, abuse, depression, *etc.*);

- language may be a factor, especially in providing services to recent migrants from remote communities (e.g., the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal has staff fluent in English, French, Cree, Mi'gmaq and Montaignais; Native Women's Association of Canada, 1995, p. 13);

- the need for Aboriginal visibility among service providers. For example, non-Aboriginals, whose image of reserve life tends to be negative, cannot understand the pull of reserves for Native people (Native Women's Association of Canada, 1995, p. 20). Aboriginal women, especially, do not believe that White service providers can understand their situations.

## Aboriginal Spirituality

Traditional rituals such as sweat lodges, the sweet grass ceremony, the pow wow and the medicine wheel have great meaning for many Aboriginal people, and should be integrated into programs and services for the Aboriginal homeless. A fascinating account of Aboriginal healing traditions and their relevance in the modern world is given by Waldram (1995, pp. 98-121, 204-26). Waldram (1993, pp. 55-58) cautions, however, that while "Pan-Indian" ceremonies are acceptable to Aboriginals from a range of North American cultures, these are foreign to some, especially Inuit peoples. Aboriginals highly acculturated to Euro-Canadian norms may also be resistant to traditional healing techniques. Conversely, these techniques may be sought out by non-Aboriginal persons (see, e.g., CMHC, 1995, p. 29).

Aboriginal Elders/Healers are often highly respected among Natives, but they may not be recognized as legitimate social service providers by service agencies (Native Women's Association of Canada, 1995; National Advisory Council on Aging, 1994, pp. 49-58). Although Elders have been employed by the Canadian prison system since the 1980s (Waldram, 1993), as well as in hospitals (Waldram, 1995: 205-6) their role in addressing multi-faceted problems such as homelessness appears not to be fully appreciated. A study of Aboriginal health care clients in Saskatoon (Waldram, 1989, 1990) found that 60% of the respondents would like to see traditional healers in a urban clinical setting; programs for the Aboriginal homeless should follow suit (cf. Waldram, 1995, p. 213).

# Next Steps

It is obvious from the review of the literature and the selected interviews (see Appendix A) that there is a great deal of work to do in this area. Most of the work on homelessness in Canada has not been ethnic-specific, so efforts must be focused specifically on Aboriginal people. The comments below outline, in a general fashion, some important "next steps" in any ongoing program of research.

1. A necessary first step is certainly to identify who the Aboriginal homeless are and if the profile of the Aboriginal homeless is different from the non-Aboriginal profile. The literature provides "glimpses" and "snap shots" of the types of Aboriginals "on the streets," "in shelters," and "at risk," but there is no comprehensive body of evidence.

   This profile of Aboriginal homelessness has to be developed on a geographical basis—large urban centres, small urban communities, rural, remote and Northern centres, on reserve, *etc.* The limited amount of literature that is available suggests that the profile may be different depending on the geographic area.

2. Although it is difficult, it is also necessary to develop a better understanding of the numbers of homeless or "at risk" Aboriginal people. The literature provides wildly varying estimates in specific centres (often only for specific groups like youth), but nothing that can be considered a sound estimate of numbers, nationally. To date, the research that has been done on the extent of homelessness in Canada does not take race or ethnicity into account, in contrast with U.S. research, which indicates that race is a significant risk factor for homelessness.

   In the development of a better profile of the characteristics and numbers of Aboriginal homeless, it may prove more useful to work closely with service agencies than to attempt a "count" or census on a national basis. The latter approach would be prohibitively expensive and time-consuming. In addition, the episodic nature of homelessness and the hypermobility of many Aboriginal people may make any "count" suspect. Working with service agencies to help them to maintain improved filing systems, and to keep better records of the characteristics and number of Aboriginals they serve, may provide much of the needed information.

3. Identifying who the Aboriginal homeless are might help provide a better idea of the specific causes of Aboriginal homelessness. There is certainly a need to undertake work in this area, particularly to determine if causes are similar to or different from those which cause homelessness in general.

   Causes of Aboriginal homelessness, from the general literature, appear to have some similarity on a geographic basis, but there are bound to be location-specific reasons. As a result, more detailed research on causes may have to be designed more as location-specific projects.

Developing profiles, numbers and causes is important basic research that should be undertaken before developing solutions, but there are a host of other research initiatives that are more specific in nature that will assist our understanding of Aboriginal homelessness and how to deal with the problem. A number of possible initiatives are listed below,

although no effort has been made to prioritize these initiatives in terms of their importance:

- developing a better definition of the "at risk" population, particularly identifying criteria to determine "at risk" households;
- determining the extent of discrimination in the housing market faced by Aboriginals and the importance of discrimination as a cause of homelessness. Undertaking additional "fair housing audits" may be useful;
- determining how existing programs can be changed to make them more culturally appropriate;
- specific work on the housing problem of ex-offenders may be particularly important, simply because so little work appears to have been done in this area;
- a research focus specifically on Aboriginal elders also seems appropriate because of the changing nature of Aboriginal family structure, which appears to be placing many elders in an "at risk" position. The traditional support of the extended family is disappearing, and other culturally appropriate options are not always available in their communities;
- because of the high proportion of female lone-parent households in the Aboriginal population and the very marginalized nature of these households, this group also warrants special attention. The focus should be on assessing the relevance of current programs, development of more culturally appropriate services, and ways of improving accessibility to job skills development and employment.
- further research on the profile and needs of Aboriginal children and youth at-risk of homelessness, as well as on street youth and runaways, with a focus on prevention, intervention and repatriation.
- further research is required on the culture-specific needs of Aboriginal women fleeing domestic abuse, as the conventional "White feminist" approach to treatment and counselling, which sees domestic abuse as an caused by patriarchy, rather than by colonialism, may be inappropriate for Aboriginal women;
- as sexual abuse is a known risk factor for homelessness among women and youth, much more research on the nature and extent of sexual abuse in Aboriginal families and communities, and on methods of prevention and treatment, is required;
- the effect of self-government and how it may enable Aboriginal groups to address the causes of homelessness and provide more culturally appropriate services is also an important area of research;
- "hypermobility"—the regular alternation between reserve and city and its contribution to homelessness—also deserves special attention. What are the causes of hypermobility? Are they associated with the operation of the housing market? employment opportunities? lack of services? or family-based?
- developing a better understanding of the link between shelters and service networks in the community and how these links can be improved may help illustrate how service networks can work together more effectively;
- a better understanding of the philosophy of shelters and the obstacles Aboriginals face in the service system will also be

useful in developing more effective responses to homelessness.

- further, more in-depth, interviews with experts on Aboriginal homelessness (see Appendix A), especially service providers, are required to gain a more accurate picture of the extent and characteristics of Aboriginal homelessness in Canada, as well as a clear understanding of "what works" in addressing the needs of Aboriginal homeless persons.

The field is wide open for academic researchers and research organizations to provide the much-needed information required on Aboriginal homelessness.

# Conclusions

The literature indicates that Aboriginal homelessness has many features in common with homelessness in the general population, but that it also has several distinctive features. Risk factors such as low socio-economic status, lack of adequate housing, substance abuse, physical and mental illness, release from prison, family breakdown, and a history of domestic and/or sexual abuse, can lead to homelessness for both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. However, these risk factors are more commonplace and more intensely experienced among First Nations peoples, due to a long history of colonialism and marginalization. Racism and discrimination are experienced by various ethnic minority groups in Canada, but, again, Aboriginals suffer acutely from entrenched Euro-Canadian prejudices based on stereotypes about "Indians." Risk factors distinctive to Aboriginal homelessness include: "Third World" housing conditions on reserve, rural-urban migration and cultural dislocation.

Similarly, many of the same strategies are recommended to address both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal homelessness: better access to employment and social services, transitional housing, more social housing, refuges for street youth and abused women and children. However, the literature indicates that the Aboriginal homeless have special needs, including improved housing and related conditions on reserves, community development, self determination, and access to traditional healing techniques. Shelters for Aboriginal women need to be located within their own communities, and should be geared specifically to the cultural requirements of the clientele. The need for Aboriginal service providers, including Native Elders/healers, is reiterated in the literature.

It should be emphasized that these conclusions are based on disparate sources; very little research on the issue of Aboriginal homelessness in Canada *per se* (or in North America) exists. The "Next Steps" section of this paper (above) sketches some of the areas where further research is required.

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# Appendix A

# COMMENTS OF EXPERTS ON ABORIGINAL HOMELESSNESS

Twelve academics with acknowledged expertise in homelessness and/or Aboriginal issues were contacted, and asked to answer a brief questionnaire, administered by E-mail or telephone, on Aboriginal homelessness. Only five out of the twelve felt that they were conversant enough with Aboriginal homelessness issues to respond, and none of the respondents considered themselves to be "experts" in this area. A summary of their responses to the questionnaire follows.

1. Are you aware of any literature/reports focusing on homelessness that include information on Aboriginal homelessness? Research underway?

- In general, the academics consulted did not know of any literature on Aboriginal homelessness that had not already been obtained for this review. One mentioned the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples as a possible source of information.

- An interesting outcome of this question was a summary of a proposal by a U.S. researcher (Irene Glasser, Eastern Connecticut State University) to study the role of Native-run agencies (e.g., Friendship Centres) and Native-serving agencies (e.g., the court system) in being cultural mediators. The research will be undertaken in Montreal and Winnipeg.

2. What are the causes and factors that contribute to Aboriginal homelessness?

- Aboriginals become homeless for the same reasons as non-Aboriginals; structural factors, especially poverty, are at the root of the problem.

- However, "additional elements have to be their very much greater poverty rates, the social and personal disruptions associated with residential schools, foster homes, assimilationist policies, and their cultural dislocation in cities (Peters).

- One researcher mentioned the contribution of alcohol (10% of the sample in a study of the homeless in Calgary that she had participated in were Aboriginal, and half of these were alcoholic). This researcher also mentioned a category of "weekend homeless"; visitors from the reserves who used the streets as temporary accommodation. She emphasized that the latter have homes back on the reserve (Peressini).

3. What housing market factors play a role in Aboriginal homelessness?

- Low income does not stretch to meet market rents or even subsidized or rent geared to income (Higgitt).

- Discrimination and the cost of housing, but also culturally relevant factors (Peters).

- "There is overt discrimination in renting apartments in Nova Scotia to native people with the assumption that they will skip out, not pay rent or be generally disruptive" (Ralston).

4. How extensive, in your estimation, is the "at-risk" population?

- The academics agreed that Aboriginals must be the population most at-risk of homelessness in Canadian society (one estimated 10%-25%). Risk factors cited were: educational disadvantage, unemployment, low income, health problems, poor housing conditions on reserves, affordability problems, de-institutionalization, violence, alcoholism and addition, racism.

5. What three factors would be most effective in reducing the level of Aboriginal homelessness?

- "Jobs, money, education" (Higgitt).

- Income support off-reserve, employment assistance, low-income housing (Peressini).

- ". . . to increase Aboriginal families', bands' and urban organizations' abilities to provide culturally appropriate housing of a variety of types for their people. If homelessness is linked to personal and cultural dislocation, which I think it probably is, then strategies which support individual and community healing are important" (Peters).

6. What should be the focus of research efforts on this issue?

- One respondent suggested that perhaps we study the Aboriginal population to death instead of addressing the issues (Higgitt).

- One noted the dearth of research in this area, and mentioned the topics of disparity between reserve and city life; motives for migration; the need for a representative (not random) survey; research on the wealth of bands (Peressini).

- "First, identifying who the Aboriginal homeless are, since this might give you and idea of the specific causes of Aboriginal homelessness; second, what are the ways that Aboriginal communities prefer to deal with homelessness? How is it seen in the community, and what are culturally appropriate responses?" (Peters).

7. What departments or agencies should be involved in addressing the problem of Aboriginal homelessness? What department or agency should take the lead role?

- Manitoba Housing, Social Services, Aboriginal organisations, Federal government (Higgitt). (The respondent did not elaborate more specifically on how these agencies should be involved).

- Indian Affairs, Human Resources/Income Support Programs, City social services (Peressini).

- "Aboriginal organizations should take a lead role in addressing the problem—on reserves, the band council, and in cities the Friendship Centres or bodies which have evolved to represent particular constituencies. The federal and provincial departments or ministries involved in supporting these Aboriginal organizations could be quite broad, depending on what you find out about the sources of homelessness, including CMHC, Corrections (re: facilities for released inmates), Secretary of State ( to support cultural initiatives), DIAND, and others" (Peters).

There are a substantial number of agencies and groups that provide life support and treatment programs for homeless persons. The variety of agencies and groups reflect the diversity of needs of the homeless population as well as the diversity of the homeless population. The number of agencies and groups that provide assistance primarily to Aboriginal homeless persons is still relatively low, although Aboriginal persons are able to access programs and services that are offered to the homeless population at large. A selection of agencies and groups in different parts of the country were contacted for their first-hand knowledge and impressions of Aboriginal homelessness, and to provide input for a handful of questions.

1. Are there Aboriginals among the homeless population in your facility? What percentage of the total client group do they constitute? What are the general characteristics of the Aboriginal homeless in your facility?

Among the agencies and groups consulted, there is agreement that the Aboriginal homeless population is not gender or age specific. Those Aboriginals who can be classified as homeless include both males and females as well as adults, youth and the elderly. The majority of homeless Aboriginals tend to be males and many are in the 30-45 age category. The gender and age of Aboriginal homeless persons vary almost daily in shelters and service agencies across Canada.

- At DERA in Vancouver, homelessness among Aboriginals is most common among males over 30-35 years of age. There are not a lot of females among the Aboriginal homeless in Vancouver.

- About 10% of the clientele at men's shelters in the Ottawa-Carleton area are Aboriginal. In a shelter with 100 persons, at least 10 would be Aboriginal. There is also the "at-risk," marginally housed population that lives in cheap housing such as rooming houses.

- In Edmonton, at least half of the clientele of the George Spady Centre is Aboriginal and they appear to be increasingly younger than 45 years of age. Of their clientele, at least 90% are males, while 10% are females.

- At the Main Street Project in Winnipeg, the average age of the clientele is 39 years and considerably more than half of the clientele is Aboriginal. Although their numbers are variable, almost 75% are males and 25% are females.

- Through its member organisations, the Streethealth Coalition serves a large Native and Inuit population in inner-city Ottawa. Together, they make up almost 30% of the clientele. The overwhelming majority are under 50 years of age.

- Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc. provides emergency shelter for runaway, homeless youth in Winnipeg. Approximately 70% of their clientele are usually Aboriginal and their gender is also variable.

- Among the clientele of the Calgary Drop In Centre, 17% are Aboriginal, although their numbers increase and decrease. There are usually more males than females. Almost 60% are males, while about 40% are females.

- The Salvation Army Connection Program in Yellowknife also provides emergency assistance to the homeless including shelter and food hampers. Of those who rely on the Connection Program for emergency food assistance, about 70% are Aboriginal.

- At the YWCA in Saskatoon, the clientele in the emergency and long-term shelter facilities last year included 507 adult women, 55 youth (over 16) and 395 children. Between July 1995 and June 1996, there were 230 women who identified themselves as Aboriginal.

- The Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS) is a community health centre in downtown Calgary. In December 1996, about 51% of the clients using the outreach program and counselling and referral services were Aboriginal. In the Family Resource Centre, less than 50% of the clients are Aboriginal. Aboriginal clients of the outreach program are mostly adults in the 20-49 age category, although they tend to be towards the upper limit of that age range.

The problems of the Aboriginal homeless are in many ways similar to the problems faced by the non-Aboriginal homeless population, although it is acknowledged that Aboriginals stand out as the truly disadvantaged. Common problems indicated related to substance/chemical abuse and addiction and a lack of life and job skills. These can become deep-seated problems, especially for Aboriginal survivors of childhood sexual abuse and the residential school system. In Yellowknife, gambling addiction specifically is a problem; in the far North, unemployment or underemployment is a major problem. Health and particularly mental health problems are also prevalent among the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal homeless population. At the Main Street Project, the number of homeless persons who have mental health problems have become statistically significant, but there is no difference in the numbers for Aboriginals compared to non-Aboriginals. At the Calgary Urban Project society, violence (at home, on the street), substance abuse and mental health issues are prevalent among the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clientele. Aboriginals, in particular, are heavier on the substance abuse side and less on the mental health side, although there are secondary mental health problems that stem from substance abuse.

The problems of the Aboriginal homeless apply to males and females as well as youth. Aboriginal homeless youth and Indigenous females face significant challenges.

- Youth at Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc. usually have family conflict issues, substance and alcohol abuse problems and inhalant abuse problems. Some of these youths also have problems related to gang involvement or association with gang members.

- At the Vancouver Native Health Society, problems among high-risk youths include the sex trade and addiction.

- At the Native Women's Shelter in Montreal, the majority of residents experienced abuse in Northern communities, including both physical and mental abuse. In the city, they encounter language problems, economic difficulties and problems associated with few job skills.

- Since the 1970s, Chez Doris has provided assistance to Inuit and non-Inuit women at risk both on the street and in unstable lives. Inuit women primarily come to the Montreal facility with

drug and alcohol problems. Some turn to Chez Doris to escape incestuous relationships from their homes in the north; some have tested positive for HIV and AIDS.

- The Aboriginal clients of the YWCA in Saskatoon face problems related to family violence, poverty, addiction, hypermobility and a lack of suitable and stable housing.

2. Is Aboriginal homelessness on the increase or decrease in your community?

For ethnic reasons, the Aboriginal homeless are usually conspicuous among the homeless population in Canada. Across the country, however, there is no clear consensus that their present numbers are either increasing or decreasing. Media stories have done much to convince the Canadian public that the Aboriginal homeless population is skyrocketing.

Some notable increases have been reported among youth, while the number of needy Aboriginal families has also increased. Among shelters and service agencies that assist the homeless, there still appear to be strong seasonal variations in the size of the Aboriginal homeless population, especially in the North. In the winter months, shelters and service agencies across the country are regularly at full capacity.

- About 10 years ago, Inuit women made up only 3-4% of the clientele at Chez Doris; five years ago, the percentage had risen to 7-14%; now, they number 14% of the clientele.

- The number of Aboriginals who come to the Saskatoon YWCA and declare their Aboriginal status has remained fairly constant, while at the Native Women's shelter in Montreal, the number of Aboriginal women has increased gradually for at least the last eight years.

- The Salvation Army Family and Community Services Department in Winnipeg provides food assistance primarily to needy Aboriginal families in the Main Street/core area. Between 200 and 300 families rely on food assistance a month and the number has been increasing every year for the last 3-4 years.

- "In 1992, the Annishnawbe Street Patrol in Toronto served 11,534 homeless people. In 1995, this figure sharply rose to 19,399, a staggering surge of 73%. The last nine months of 1995 alone showed a 43% increase over the same period in 1994." On average, 25-30% of their clientele are Aboriginal.

- The homeless population in the Ottawa-Carleton region is estimated to be about 5,000. In the last eight years, there has been explosive growth in the Native and Inuit clientele of the Streethealth Coalition.

- Over the last six months, the Native Men's Residence Street Patrol in Toronto reports that the number of Aboriginals has gone from 30% to 20%. On a recent night out, the Street Patrol recorded 118 persons; of these, 33 were Aboriginal.

- On Baffin Island in the eastern Arctic, the size of the homeless population and any growth trends is unclear. Homelessness within communities is invisible; lots of homelessness is looked after by relatives and friends. As a result, houses and apartments are commonly overcrowded.

- There are noticeable cycles in the numbers of clients at the Calgary Urban Project Society. The number of Aboriginal clients has just recently increased by about 10%. The increase has been attributed to the closure of an Aboriginal service agency in downtown Calgary.

3. Are the Aboriginal homeless long-term residents of the community or recent arrivals from reserves? Do the Aboriginal homeless have relatives/families in the city?

The Aboriginal homeless clientele are generally not from one specific locale. While the proportions vary, there is a considerable number of Aboriginal homeless persons who are long-term residents of the community and who migrate between cities and from the reserve to the city. Age may be a contributing factor; the older the person, the less likely they will migrate between cities and from the reserve to the city. Across the country, shelters and service agencies that provide assistance to the Aboriginal homeless population report that many are long-term clients and that they tend to frequent those places where they feel comfortable. If they do have families or relatives in the community, it is usually the case that the families and relatives are equally needy. Farther North, income and employment are important factors in the decision to leave a reserve or move to another community, where the situation may be no better. In the North, persons are more likely to move between communities and stay with family and/or friends.

- At Street City in Toronto, half the Aboriginal homeless clientele are from the street and half come from up North. Most do not have families in Toronto; their families are commonly out east or in places like Winnipeg.

- A wide variety of communities are represented in men's shelters in Ottawa-Carleton—persons from farther north, south, east and west. Many stay in the shelters for long periods of time, some just briefly.

- The Main Street Project identifies three generations of Aboriginals in Winnipeg's core area: the group who are long-term residents of the reserves; the group that have spent half their life on a reserve and the other half in the city; and the kids who were raised in the city and who are increasingly having children of their own. In Winnipeg, there is more of an urban Aboriginal population now.

- Inuit women at Chez Doris have generally been living in Montreal for at least five years. Many do not have family in the city who can be of assistance. Some of the Indigenous clientele have children; due to their unstable lives, many do not have custody of their children.

- The origins of the Aboriginal clientele at the Calgary Urban Project Society are mixed. At least 80% of the Aboriginal clientele have been on the streets for some time.

- Many of the clients of the Salvation Army Connection Program in Yellowknife are long-term residents of the community. Due to the high cost of living, they are often forced to stay with numerous other family members or friends in limited accommodations. Most are unable to leave and return to their homes in other communities which may be hundreds of miles away.

- The Native and Inuit clientele of the Streethealth coalition are very mobile. Native clients have come from across Canada; some have come from as far away as New Brunswick.

4. Are the Aboriginal homeless well served by the current facilities? Should facilities be designed specifically for Aboriginals, more culturally appropriate?

Cutbacks at all levels of government have had a detrimental effect on the homeless, and current facilities are definitely challenged in meeting the needs of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal homeless. The provision of culturally appropriate facilities for Aboriginals is an important issue, and shelters and service agencies have become increasingly sensitive to Aboriginal culture in response to the needs of their clientele. Those groups and agencies who provide assistance to Aboriginal homeless persons primarily are taking a lead role in creating culturally sensitive facilities for the Aboriginal population. For example, Anishnawbe Health Toronto incorporates Traditional healers, Traditional healing approaches and teachings and arranges for clients to attend ceremonies and healings at reserve communities. In Ottawa, the Streethealth Coalition is currently working on plans to open an Artists's Co-op for Aboriginal and other homeless artists.

- "The Aboriginal clientele is well served and Aboriginal facilities are well used. We need more of what we have for all homeless persons. We must support Aboriginal-owned and operated facilities in the community." (Salvation Army Family and Community Services Department)

- At the Calgary Urban Project society, an important part of their approach to Aboriginals and their problems is a mix of workers at the centre, including Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Sometimes, Aboriginal clients want to talk to an Aboriginal worker at the centre, while at other times, they want to talk to a non-Aboriginal worker. Since the Outreach Program began in July 1996, two out of five staff were hired because they were Aboriginal, but also because they were qualified for the job.

- In Regina, the Salvation Army has a Casual Labour Program that provides daily employment. Persons sign up for the day while staff try to set them up with temporary jobs as they are required. 90% of those who frequent the program are Aboriginals.

- "There are nowhere near enough shelters for the homeless in the Downtown Eastside and only a few Aboriginal agencies." (Doug Kellan, DERA)

- Aboriginals in the Ottawa-Carleton area have one culture-specific treatment centre and one culture-specific housing organization. In the mental health system, there appears to be an absence of Aboriginal-specific services such as Aboriginal psychiatrists.

- The Calgary Drop In Centre tries to create a safe place for its clients, and provide basic services such as overnight shelter, nursing services, meals, job placements and counselling. Services are provided equally to clients, regardless of ethnicity.

- "Aboriginals are not well served by current facilities. It is more and more difficult for Aboriginals to get into treatment programs. The centre has more of a focus on Aboriginal issues and has changed to accommodate Aboriginal culture." (Cecilia Blasetti, George Spady Centre)

5. Is discrimination in the housing market a factor in creating homelessness among Aboriginal people? What other housing market factors play a role in Aboriginal homelessness?

Aboriginals and the Aboriginal homeless are easy targets of discrimination in the housing market. There is a common perception that Aboriginals on the streets are all drunks. Perceptions can discourage landlords from renting to needy Aboriginal tenants. Discrimination may be a bigger problem between Aboriginals looking for housing and landlords of certain ethnic origins.

There are Aboriginal males and females who fall into the hard-to-house category. They face particular difficulties in locating housing and many never really succeed or are evicted. In most cases, needy Aboriginal families and individuals do not have the financial resources to secure adequate housing. In the North and the far North, housing accommodations can cost the equivalent per month of several pay cheques. Affordable housing demand in the North as well as in southern communities is greater than the supply.

- "Discrimination is a problem for Inuit women especially in Quebec because they have poor language skills and poor English skills." (Marie Day, Chez Doris)

- "Discrimination is a huge problem for Aboriginals. Discrimination is also a problem in social housing projects." (Debra Mearns, Vancouver Native Health Society)

- The Main Street Project runs a housing referral program for their clientele. An outreach worker is the mediator between the client and the landlord. Donations are accepted to help clients make homes for themselves. The majority of persons stabilized as a result of the housing referral program are Aboriginals.

- "A two-bedroom apartment can cost $1600/month in Iqaluit on Baffin Island. Most of the population's income is dedicated to rent, then food. Many rely on welfare for low cost housing. The highest cost of living in the country is in the eastern Arctic." (Markus Wilke, CMHA, Baffin Branch)

- "Yes, probably there is discrimination [in the housing market]. We see lots of Native discrimination in hospital services. The Native homeless do not receive the same level of care as us." (Street Health Coalition)

- "There is discrimination against everyone in a shelter. They are poor. Their skin colour makes no difference." (Canadian Mental Health Association, Ottawa-Carleton Branch)

6. What do you feel would be most important in reducing the level of Aboriginal homelessness?

Among shelters and service agencies, there is agreement that what is currently being done for the Aboriginal homeless is important and needs to be continued and expanded. The top three suggestions to reduce Aboriginal homelessness involve additional housing programs/facilities, employment opportunities and improved life skills.

- "a Native specific centre for detox, federal and provincial support for native housing, 15-20 more beds to help deal with the problem." (Alex Jacobs [Waasaanese], Native Men's Residence)

- "life-skills training, job experience, better literacy, better looking after their families skills and improved morale and pride among the Aboriginal people." (Salvation Army Family and Community Services Department)

- "Social housing programs are important in helping the homeless. These people must have guarantees of accessibility. Aboriginals on the street need a program to learn how to be tenants and how to maintain stable housing." (Debra Mearns, Vancouver Native Health Society)

- "Native women need the skills to work in mainstream society. They need to acquire these skills even before they come to the city—education, employment skills and overall knowledge of functioning in the city." (Native Women's Shelter)

- "In Yellowknife, to reduce the level of homelessness, they need more than a house; they need a goal or reason to be here. What is definitely needed are subsidized single men's living quarters or a single men's hostel. There is also a need for more programs for people to get into the human race." (Peter Skoropad, Salvation Army Connection Program)

- "there is relative homelessness on Native reserves across Canada. There must be a provision of adequate housing. In urban centres, Natives need help to bring up their families. They need to restore the cultural and family structure. The same needs apply to the Inuit." (Streethealth Coalition)

- "jobs and specific training for youths and more funding to enable organizations to help youths" (Kirby Fultz, Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc.)

- "more treatment centres for substance abuse, centres that are capable of dealing with issues specific to Aboriginal peoples." (Calgary Urban Project Society)

- "Outreach is missing in the inner city for new arrivals to the city. There is a need for support services such as supportive housing to help young kids from the reserve and to stop the treadmill from the reserve to the streets." (Cecilia Blasetti, George Spady Centre)

- "what is needed to help Aboriginals is self-esteem building, control of their lives, not to be victimized. They need positive home environments and self-esteem to help them pursue their dreams." (Joanne Coleman Pidskalny, YWCA)

7. What departments or agencies should be involved in addressing the problem of Aboriginal homelessness? What department or agency should play the lead role?

There were several government departments/agencies mentioned which already have a role in addressing Aboriginal homelessness, but no one department or agency stood out in the lead. The list included Health and Social Services departments, Family Service departments/agencies as well as Housing departments/agencies. These areas have not escaped government cutbacks which have had a variable impact on the problem of Aboriginal homelessness. It was suggested several times that the best option to address the problem of Aboriginal homelessness in the future may involve a multitude of Aboriginal agencies.

- In Saskatchewan, there are promising examples of Aboriginal agencies that may be better able to help their own people than non-Aboriginal agencies. One example is the Metis Addiction Council which stresses spirituality. In Regina, there is also talk of an "urban reserve." (Salvation Army Waterston Centre)

- "There is a housing crisis in Toronto. The Native housing responsibility has been transferred from the Federal to the Provincial level. Native persons need federal support to assist native housing." (Alex Jacobs, Native Men's Residence)

- "The Yellowknife Housing Corporation provides social housing. They subsidize those in need and create affordable housing for single parents, for example. There is not enough to satisfy the demand, not even close." (Peter Skoropad, Salvation Army Connection Program)

- There is no department or agency taking the lead on Aboriginal homelessness in Saskatoon. Shelters are still seen as "social services" and are segmented into departments. Two recent Aboriginal initiatives in Saskatoon include the Healing Lodge and the Saskatoon Tribal Council Family Wellness Centre. (Joanne Coleman Pidskany, YWCA)

- Government agencies are moving of of service delivery and more towards allocation of funding to others to provide services. Alberta Social Services would be the lead department on Aboriginal homelessness in Calgary. (Calgary Urban Project Society)

There are a substantial number of agencies and groups that provide life support and treatment programs for homeless persons. The variety of agencies and groups reflect the diversity of needs of the homeless population as well as the diversity of the homeless population. The number of agencies and groups that provide assistance primarily to Aboriginal homeless persons is still relatively low, although Aboriginal persons are able to access programs and services that are offered to the homeless population at large. A selection of agencies and groups in different parts of the country were contacted for their first-hand knowledge and impressions of Aboriginal homelessness, and to provide input for a handful of questions.

# Appendix B

# EXPERTS CONSULTED

## Academics

Nancy Higgitt
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University of Manitoba

Evelyn Peters
Department of Geography
Queen's University

Tracy Peressini
Faculty of Social Work
University of Regina

Meredith Ralston
Department of Women's Studies
Mount St. Vincent University

Irene Glasser
Department of Anthropology
Eastern Connecticut State University

## Service Providers*

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Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc.
(translation: "our relatives' house")
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Paula Dolezal
Street City
Toronto, Ontario

Salvation Army, Family and Community
Services Department
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Doug Kellam
Downtown Eastside Residents Association
(DERA)
Vancouver, BC

Debra Mearns
Vancouver Native Health Society
Vancouver, BC

Markus Wilke
Canadian Mental Health Association
Baffin Branch, Iqaluit, NWT

Marie Day
Chez Doris
Montreal, Quebec

Salvation Army, Waterston Centre
Regina, Saskatchewan

Cecilia Blasetti
George Spady Centre
Edmonton, Alberta

Alex Jacobs (Waasaanese - Roaring Thunder)
Executive Director
Native Men's Residence
Toronto, Ontario

*Some respondents chose to remain anonymous, and their answers may not reflect the views of their agencies.

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Street Worker
Anishnawbe Health Toronto
Toronto, Ontario

Peter Skoropad
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Main Street Project Inc.
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Canadian Mental Health Association
Ottawa-Carleton Branch, Ontario

Calgary Drop In Centre
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Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS)
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