

Violence Against Aboriginal Women

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Executive Summary

This paper discusses violence against Aboriginal women. An extensive literature review was conducted from a variety of sources, including universities, resource centres and agencies. The focus has been placed on materials by Aboriginal individuals and agencies.

The paper is divided into six main sections. After a brief introduction, the first section discusses definitions and forms of violence. Although there does not exist a clear consensus for a definition of violence, it has been recognized that violence includes physical, sexual, emotional/psychological and financial abuse. There are similarities in women's experiences of violence but there are also unique aspects to violence in Aboriginal communities.

The second section looks at the extent of violence. Available information clearly shows that the extent of violence against Aboriginal women is extraordinarily high, more so than for non-Aboriginal women.

The third section provides historical information. It is argued that the history of colonization must be taken into account in order to understand violence in contemporary Aboriginal communities.

The fourth section explores theoretical insights into violence against women. In order to better understand violence against Aboriginal

women, various theories are presented. The historical colonization of Aboriginal peoples is continually raised in documents seeking to explain violence. The impact of residential schooling is of particular importance. This section includes a discussion of the role of alcohol.

The largest section of the paper is on intervention and healing. For clarity, this section is subdivided into community responses, services for women, programs for men, and the criminal justice system. One theme which emerges from the literature is a call for holistic, community-based approaches. Programs, resources and support specifically for Aboriginal women are clearly needed. Issues surrounding shelters and safe houses are examined.

It is necessary to confront the violence by men. Treatment programs for men and the use of the criminal justice system are discussed. The experiences of women with the criminal justice system as well as the controversies surrounding the use of the legal system are highlighted. One recurring recommendation is that men who are abusive be given treatment and counselling as part of their sentence.

The paper's conclusion highlights some of the areas that could be further explored.

Introduction

This paper discusses violence against Aboriginal women. Such a vast and complex topic touches many areas and raises many questions. An overview of key issues is provided based on an extensive literature review.

Information for this literature review has been gathered from a variety of sources. Materials were obtained from universities, resource centres and selected agencies across Canada. The focus has been placed on material from Aboriginal individuals and agencies. I have made extensive use of quotes in order for other voices to be heard.

The paper begins by looking at definitions and forms of violence. This highlights the fact that a clear consensus for terminology and meaning does not exist. The second section assesses the extent of family violence.

The nature and extent of violence against women must be placed within an historical context which is the topic of the third section of this paper. To understand contemporary violence in Aboriginal communities, the history of colonization must be taken into account.

The fourth section presents theoretical insights into violence against women. The final section discusses intervention and healing. This is the largest portion of the paper which is subdivided for clarity into community responses, services for women, programs for men and the criminal justice system.

The conclusion highlights some areas which could be further

researched. It would be impossible to discuss every aspect and related issue in depth in one document. I have the modest hope that this informational paper will provide useful insight into the dynamics of violence against women that will spark further discussion and action.

Definitions and Forms of Violence

Violence is not a "family" issue, it is not a "domestic" issue, it is not a "women's" issue. It is an issue for all of society to address (Peterson, 1992:18).

This background paper, in accordance with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, will use the term "Aboriginal" which includes status and non-status Indians, Metis and Inuit peoples. It is acknowledged that Aboriginal peoples do not comprise a homogenous group. It is vital to recognize that there exists a diversity of many culturally and linguistically distinct Aboriginal Nations throughout Canada.

Violence within the home has been given various labels: family violence; domestic violence; conjugal violence; spousal assault; wife abuse; wife battering; woman abuse; etc. Typically definitions include violence between married couples as well as between common-law partners and live-in partners. Although such terms can refer to a one time incident, most often the abuse is ongoing and escalating.

The broad term "family violence" should include "all forms of

violence that take place within the family, from wife assault to childhood sexual abuse of both girls and boys, and the abuse and neglect of elderly people. It includes physical and sexual violence, emotional and financial abuse, and deliberate neglect" (Jaffer, 1992:46).

It is important to emphasize the fact that violence takes different forms besides physical abuse and to recognize that all forms can have devastating consequences. "There are different ways to be battered, different styles that can be used to make another person feel ashamed, humiliated, and worthless. Battering can be physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual. Or any combination of those" (Laraque quoted in Bayly, 1985:8)

In their National Family Violence Survey, the Indian and Inuit Nurses of Canada drew upon various sources to discuss the definitions and forms of family violence. They saw the definition of abuse as "a situation of power and control involving violent methods to dominate a person who is less powerful ... includes various forms such as physical, sexual, neglect, psychological\ emotional abuse and material\financial exploitation" (Dumont-Smith and Sioui-Labelle, 1991:4). Physical abuse includes such behaviour as hitting, kicking, burning, and using weapons. Sexual abuse includes any sexual act without a person's consent. Neglect involves not adequately meeting family member's needs. Psychological and emotional abuse includes such acts as intimidating, humiliating, threatening, degrading, isolating partner from others, destroying property or pets, or not showing love and understanding. Material or financial abuse includes exploiting a partner's money and belongings. It can be noted that

"violence is often used as a controlling and disciplinary means to secure the victim in the relationship" (Bayly, 1985:7).

A model of a continuum has been advanced which started with emotional abuse at one end, then physical abuse and finally sexual abuse at the high end (for a discussion see Kelly, 1987). It was an important theoretical contribution for it helped bring crimes against women into open discussion and it linked the different types of male violence. A continuum can also be utilized to assess the severity of violence from "mild" to "severe" (eg. Currie, 1988:17-18).

However, using a linear model has disadvantages. One of the most serious problems with this model is that certain forms of abuse are judged as more serious. Survivors of abuse are saying, for example, that emotional abuse can be just as destructive or even more so than physical abuse.

Thorne-Finch (1992) proposes instead a circular model so that links are still made between the different forms of violence yet no one type is prioritized. This is an interesting perspective, one which could fit into Aboriginal worldviews where the symbol of circles are highly significant.

Feminists have argued that terms such as "family violence" and "spousal assault" are inappropriate for they disguise the gendered nature of the violence which predominately occurs within homes. That is, most often it is the male partner who abuses the woman. Thus, feminists argue that the violence should be named and confronted for what it is through the use of such terms as "violence against women", "women abuse", or "wife battering". Wife abuse involves violence

"by a man against his female partner in an attempt to control her behaviour or intimidate her. It can include only one episode with significant physical or emotional damage, but more frequently involves repeated, escalating incidents" (Ontario Medical Association, 1991:1).

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (1991:5), for example, has defined violence against women in the following manner:

Violence against women is a multifaceted problem which encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violations of women and which is integrally linked to the social\economic\political structures, values, and policies that silence women in our society, support gender-based discrimination, and maintain women's inequality.

There are both similarities and differences in the experiences and consequences of violence for women of different cultural, racial, and class backgrounds. "The voices of aboriginal women who have been battered attest to the same victimization and brutality echoed by other women in violent circumstances ... But family violence in aboriginal society also has its own unique dimensions. It is not simply aboriginal women who have been rendered powerless - it is aboriginal society" (Canadian Council on Social Development and Native Women's Association of Canada, 1991:2).

It has been argued that Aboriginal family violence is not well defined (Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres, 1992). Based on

consultations with Aboriginal communities across Ontario in 1992, the following definition of family violence was established:

Aboriginal people in Ontario define family violence as consequent to colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural genocide, the learned negative, cumulative, multi-generational actions, values, beliefs, attitudes and behavioral patterns practised by one or more people that weaken or destroy the harmony and well-being of an Aboriginal individual, family, extended family, community or nationhood (Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres, 1992:6).

Turpel (1993) also refers to the unique meanings violence has for Aboriginal peoples. She states that for Aboriginal peoples, terms such as "domestic violence" not only refer to violence against women by men "but also mean domestic (that is, Canadian State) violence against First Nations ... To have lived through the summer of 1990, with the spectacle of police and army intervention in Mohawk communities... is to have a real sense of the other signification of 'domestic violence'" (Turpel, 1993:183).

In a presentation to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, The Manitoba Women's Directorate spoke of the forms of abuse brought about by colonization. They referred to one woman who "had been abused by being deprived of her history, her family and her language" (quoted in Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:482).

I will generally not be using the term "dysfunctional" but I found it interesting to discover that "dys" is pain in latin,

"therefore what is being said is that we are a people functioning in pain. To understand that concept is part of the healing process" (Hey-way'-noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions Society, quoted in Jaffer, 1992:191).

Incidence

Violence and abuse in Aboriginal communities has reached epidemic proportions (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:481).

The women's movement has brought issues of violence against women and children into the public and political arenas over the last 25 years. One fact which has emerged is that women and children across different classes, races and cultural backgrounds experience startling amounts of violence within their own homes. Although statistical figures are only estimates of the incidence of violence, particularly due to issues of under-reporting, they do provide insight into the enormity of the problem.

It is generally stated that at least one out of every ten women in Canada is physically and/or sexually assaulted by her husband or live-in partner each year (Lupri, 1989; MacLeod, 1980). In trying to take into account the fact that many women do not report abuse to official agencies, it has been estimated that approximately one million women in Canada are battered each year (Lupri, 1989; MacLeod, 1987).

There is a lack of information on the incidence of violence specifically experienced by Aboriginal peoples. The Task Force on

Spousal Assault for the Northwest Territories went to over 30 communities and found that no one could say with confidence "how many victims there were or the frequency of spousal assault" (Bayly, 1985:10). This inquiry utilized indicators of spousal assault to state that "it is a problem of serious proportions although the incidence varies from community to community" (Bayly, 1985:11).

Available data indicate that the extent of violence against Aboriginal women is extraordinarily high, more so than for non-Aboriginal women. In one study presented to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, in comparing the statistic of one in ten women being abused in Canada, it was felt that the figure for Aboriginal women is closer to one in three (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:482). In another document submitted to this inquiry, it was stated that "rape is a common and widespread experience" (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:481). "Aboriginal women and their children suffer tremendously ... They are the victims of racism, of sexism and of unconscionable levels of domestic violence" (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:475).

Important findings have recently been provided by Aboriginal agencies which have undertaken their own studies. The Ontario Native Women's Association (1989:85) states that "it is evident that Aboriginal women suffer excessive and unnecessary hardships in the context of family violence. The incidence of family violence is eight times higher than for the non-Aboriginal population". In their 1989 survey of Ontario reserves, it was found that 80% of the women had been abused (Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989:19).

The Native Women's Association in Nova Scotia interviewed Micmac women living on reserves and found that 70% of married couples and 80% of common-law relationships experienced mental and physical abuse (quoted in Dumont-Smith and Sioui-Labelle, 1991:18).

Another study by an Aboriginal agency in Vancouver found that 86% of those surveyed had experienced or witnessed family violence and most often it was the wife who was abused (Kiyoshk, 1990).

It has been clearly established that women are often the victims of violence. However, there are some cases where men experience abuse, an area which has caused controversy and debate (see MacLeod, 1989:51-53). Information and discussion has rarely been extended to Aboriginal men in particular. Overall, there is very little, if any, written literature which specifically discusses violence against Aboriginal men.

The Task Force on Spousal Assault in the Northwest Territories acknowledged the fact that women most often experience the violence occurring in homes but they also point out that there are "men who suffer from physical and mental assaults inflicted upon them by wives and lovers ... carry an additional burden of embarrassment, for the battered spouse is often the object of ridicule" (Bayly, 1985:4).

Aboriginal women, like their non-Aboriginal counterparts, are sometimes violent through self-defense or retaliation against abusive men. Insight has been offered by federally sentenced Aboriginal women, many of whom have committed violent crimes: "I got sick and tired of being beat up so I stabbed him. I was charged with attempted murder" (quoted in Sugar and Fox, 1989-1990:473). "There is no

accidental relationship between our convictions for violent offences, and our histories as victims. As victims we carry the burden of memories: of pain inflicted on us, of violence done before our eyes to those we loved, of rape, of sexual assaults, of beatings, of death. For us, violence begets violence: our contained hatred and rage concentrated in an explosion" (Sugar and Fox, 1989-1990:473).

One area in which there is very limited information is elder abuse. It seems that the most common forms of abuse involve financial exploitation and neglect (Dumont-Smith and Sioui-Labelle, 1991:11-15). In one community study, elders who were interviewed said that elder abuse was prevalent, citing mental or psychological abuse, financial exploitation, and physical abuse in that order (Grier, nd). Elder abuse has only recently emerged as a problem which warrants specific attention.

Historical Background

Our family structures have been systematically undermined by the Canadian State in every way imaginable - forced education at denominational residential schools, imposed male-dominated political structures, gender discrimination in determining who is to be recognized as an "Indian", and the ongoing removal of First Nations children by child welfare authorities (Turpel, 1993:181).

Violence within contemporary Aboriginal homes and communities cannot be understood without acknowledging the uniqueness of Aboriginal cultures and the devastating impact of colonization on those cultures. It is beyond the scope of this paper to adequately

discuss the processes of colonization but it is vital to highlight the fact that every part of traditional Aboriginal society was attacked. Government policies and practices have attempted to assimilate, "civilize", and Christianize Aboriginal peoples who were viewed as "pagan", "child-like", and "primitive" versions of white people. This was done through legislation such as the Indian Act, the establishment of reservations, forced schooling in residential schools, the banning of spiritual practices and the imposition of the Euro-Canadian criminal justice system (eg. Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991; Miller, 1989; Tobias, 1983).

All members of Aboriginal societies were profoundly affected by such acts of genocide. The roles and status of elders, women, men, and children were all altered. Traders, missionaries, settlers, and government officials brought with them values from a patriarchal, capitalist society which often conflicted with cultural values of Aboriginal peoples (Allen, 1986; Leacock, 1981; Etienne and Leacock, 1980). For example, traders had difficulty dealing with Aboriginal women who, in some societies, were in charge of the furs and whose consent was required before men could complete bargains. Missionaries tried to instill values of a nuclear family with the husband as the authority and where children and wives are to be disciplined. This contrasted with the values of Aboriginal extended families and closely knit clans where individual autonomy was respected and children were sacred.

Men's and women's traditional roles were certainly altered and both were affected by the brutality of racism which inevitably

accompanies colonization. Women, however, were also affected by sexism and the imposition of a patriarchal system. In many historical accounts, there is not a full appreciation of Aboriginal society prior to white contact, particularly the role of women. Too often, gender is a factor which is simply not considered at all, resulting in an incomplete picture. Worse, assumptions about gender are inserted into written accounts. In this latter case, Aboriginal women and their roles are seen through European, white, middle-class eyes.

There is controversy and debate concerning the roles and status of Aboriginal women prior to European contact. Gaining insight into the lives of Aboriginal women in early times is limited by a number of factors: Aboriginal women did not record their experiences; there is a scarcity of materials which directly discuss issues concerning gender; those that did record information interpreted events from a European, male, Christian perspective which could result in ethnocentric biases; and finally, "traditional" societies were quickly transformed through the processes of colonization (Brodribb, 1984; Etienne and Leacock, 1980).

Racism and sexism have clearly worked to deny Aboriginal women their unique histories and experiences. "Our picture of how Native American women live and function from the cradle to the grave lacks not only clarity but also a realistic basis" (Green, 1980:265). Aboriginal women are now entering "a new era" where their experiences and perceptions are being published and where Aboriginal women are leaders in the resistance against assimilation and the healing necessary within their communities (Kirkness, 1987-1988:408; Faith,

Gottfriedson, Joe, Leonard, and McIvor, 1990; Monture, 1986).

Now that Aboriginal women are beginning to be heard, one of their messages is: "we are absolutely different! ... We must somehow get them to empty their heads of what they may think they know about us, so that they are prepared to begin to learn the truth" (Osenontion and Skonaganleh:ra, 1987:7). It must be recognized that "the meanings ascribed to family, community, autonomy, and equality have a different history and context for First Nations women than they do for white women. The difference begins in culture and is unrecognizably transformed through racism" (Razack, 1990-91:456).

In uncovering the historical experiences of Aboriginal women, a picture is emerging where women in many societies traditionally played a central role in family, government, spiritual ceremonies, and creation stories (Allen, 1986; Leacock, 1981; Sanday, 1981; Etienne and Leacock, 1980). In some societies, Aboriginal women held a significant, complementary, even at times superior, place next to men. The Iroquois, for example, is a well documented matriarchal society (Osenontion and Skonaganleh:ra, 1989; Allen, 1986; Baskin, 1982; Brown, 1975). Women owned the land, the crops and the houses, and they were essential to both the tribal economy and political organization. Women played a key role in the political organization of the Iroquois Nations which included determining who were to be Chiefs, removing any leaders who did not carry out their responsibilities, addressing councils, and making decisions on war and peace. Two Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) women share the following: "In our community, the woman was defined as nourisher, and the man,

protector, and as protector, he had the role of helper. He only reacted; she acted. She was responsible for the establishment of all norms - whether they were political, economic, social, or spiritual" (Osenonction and Skonaganleh:ra, 1989:12). Divorce was easy for a woman who did not want to continue living with her husband since she would only have to put his personal belongings outside the longhouse door (the children stayed with the mother).

There is evidence that in some societies violence between spouses was condemned and laws existed to deal with someone who was abusive.

It seems that Aboriginal women in some societies would retain her self-respect and could leave marriages without stigma by either making him leave her lodge or moving back to her relatives. Rape within some tribes was "considered a gross sexual violation" (Niethammer, 1977:224).

Records have provided examples of women's prominence in numerous tribes including the Coastal Algonkians, the Cherokee Nation, the Montagnais-Naskapi and the Hopi (Allen, 1986; Etienne and Leacock, 1980; Sanders, 1975). Throughout the period of contact, women's power and autonomy were undermined by the imposition of European values and models of gender roles, government policies and legislation, and Christianity.

One blatant illustration of the oppression and differential discrimination of Aboriginal women was the determination of status in the Indian Act. Up until 1985, an Aboriginal woman who married a non-Aboriginal man automatically lost her Indian status but this did not apply to Aboriginal men marrying non-Aboriginal women. In

fact, in such marriages the woman gained Indian status (Silman, 1987; Jamieson, 1978; Sanders, 1975). This was discrimination based on race, gender and marital status and it was the enforcement of patriarchal concepts of the family. This piece of legislation has had devastating consequences for Aboriginal women and their children.

They lost their rights, homes, cultural identity, and tribal network. Aboriginal women have had to fight hard to gain their rights, taking the government to court and into the international arena (Silman, 1987). Unfortunately, the fight was not only against the Canadian government but also against male-dominated Aboriginal groups.

Another important example of discrimination under the Indian Act was the removal of any matrimonial rights for property on reserves (Supernault, 1993:17; Turpel, 1993). Husbands were given authority over family assets. Provincial statutes do not apply to reserve lands which come under federal jurisdiction. Thus, Aboriginal women do not have legal protection to keep their homes when there is an abusive situation. This removal of rights coupled with attitudes whereby women are stigmatized and blamed for abusive husbands means that women are often forced to leave their communities.

It is imperative to keep in mind that Aboriginal peoples, let alone Aboriginal women, do not form a homogenous group and have not experienced a uniform history. Cultural and spiritual practices vary across Aboriginal societies as do the roles and position of women.

Some Aboriginal cultures had social classes which included nobles and slaves (see eg. Morrison and Wilson, 1986). Not all Aboriginal women belonged to matriarchal or matrilineal societies (for a review

see Brodribb, 1984). There have been accounts of abductions and rapes of women from other Nations, such as when there was an attack by a war party. A Northwestern explorer in the 1770s observed that women were taken by force and he recounts that his Chipewayan guide beat to death one of his eight wives when she protested against him taking another wife (quoted in Brodbribb, 1984:88-89).

It would be a romanticized view of Aboriginal people to argue that violence never occurred in traditional societies. There is little information available which reveals the extent and nature of family violence in early Aboriginal societies (for a review see Whipp, 1985; Brodribb, 1984). There is also not enough information regarding how societies traditionally dealt with violence against women.

The Task Force on Spousal Assault in the Northwest Territories reported:

Native people across the north told us that although it was far less frequent than in modern times, spousal assault did take place in their cultures in the past. Some instances, apparently motivated by perceived need to chastise a lazy mate, were condoned to the extent that they did not give rise to action by the group or community. Others, perhaps because the beatings were more severe or administered more openly for less acceptable reasons, caused both criticism and group action. Spousal assault was not encouraged and under some circumstances, the offender was severely disciplined and sometimes threatened with banishment (Bayly, 1985:9).

Perhaps it could be concluded that "wife abuse, was not an entirely unknown phenomenon, however it is possible that the relative autonomy of women, the practical ease of marriage and divorce and the overall strength of the community structure possibly constrained its occurrence" (Jamieson, 1978:56). Colonization led to the introduction of certain forms of abuse in some societies and to an increase in violence in societies where abusive situations existed.

More information from the perspectives of Aboriginal women is necessary to more fully appreciate the historical significance of and changes to women's position. What seems clear, however, is that male dominance is not universal nor inevitable, an insight which brings much hope to the possibilities of changing current gender relations.

Understanding Violence: Theoretical Insights

Understanding violence against women has predominately come from women who have had the courage to break the silence surrounding their abuse and from feminist theorists. "Feminists were the first to see that battering is not a gender-neutral experience" (Schechter, 1988:300). Feminist perspectives on wife abuse are said to have the following common dimensions: "(1) the explanatory utility of the constructs of gender and power; (2) the analysis of the family as a historically situated social institution; (3) the crucial importance of understanding and validating women's experiences; (4) employing scholarship for women" (Bograd, 1988:13-14, emphasis in original).

It must be noted that while the term feminist is being employed throughout this paper, there are many different feminist positions, such as liberal, marxist, socialist, radical and postmodern, which will not be reviewed here (see eg. Tong, 1989). However, it can be said that power and control are key concepts for feminist theorists working in the area of violence (Walker, 1990; Yllo and Bograd, 1988; Stanko, 1985; Martin, 1981; Dobash and Dobash, 1979; 1992; Brownmiller, 1975). Violence in the home is not seen as a problem of individual pathologies. "Violence against women is rooted in control. And violence against women is perpetuated by the fact that women do not have power in our society. The economic, political, and social inequality of women both fuels and justifies violence against women in a society which values power and control" (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1991:16-17).

Feminists are generally very critical of what has been termed "family systems" or "family dysfunction" approaches which evolved in the mid-1970s (eg. Bradshaw, 1988; Satir, 1983). The family systems model was an important step forward from models which looked at violence as a problem of individual pathology. According to the family systems perspective, violence is seen as a relationship issue in that abuse is a symptom of a pathological or dysfunctional family.

Thus, attention was paid to the whole family. Since all members of a family participate in the "system", abusive behaviour is maintained by all family members who carry responsibility for the dysfunction. Family systems techniques have become popular for treatment of male batterers and involve therapy sessions with both

the man and woman.

The strengths of a family systems approach include the fact that learned behaviours are stressed rather than individual pathologies and that abuse is seen as generational. However, there are very important criticisms from feminists which need to be acknowledged (see Thorne-Finch, 1992; Avis, 1988; Luepnitz, 1988; Bograd, 1984).

One of the most critical problems with this theoretical perspective is that it holds a woman partially responsible or else blames her for the violence. Violence, in the family systems approach, is not necessarily even seen as the priority for it may be deemed only one of many problems within the "dysfunctional relationship".

Another important criticism of family systems approach is that the societal context in which the violence takes place tends to be ignored. By identifying the couple or family as "deviant" or "dysfunctional" and a closed unit, the social factors which contribute to the violence are minimized.

There have been heated debates and polarized views concerning the different theoretical approaches to understanding and treating violence against women in intimate relationships. Feminists have brought many issues to public attention and have advocated for the rights of women. While they have been highly critical of traditional approaches which do not take into account gender and power differentials within mainstream society, feminists themselves have been criticized by women of colour, including Aboriginal women, for not taking into account race and culture into their analyses (Johnson, Stevenson and Greschner, 1993; Razack, 1990-1991; Monture, 1986;

Osenonction and Skonaganleh:ra, 1987).

It is time that theorists, including feminists, see that battering is not only gendered but is also not "race-neutral". Feminist perspectives must include race. One of the biggest gaps in the literature on violence against women is that race, culture and class are not incorporated fully into analyses nor is there an appreciation of the historical contexts of Aboriginal women's experiences.

At an even more fundamental level, although there is a great number of studies on family violence in general, little attention has been given specifically to Aboriginal family violence. Dekeseredy and Hinch (1991:28) note that ethnicity and race was considered in only two of all Canadian woman abuse surveys and these were both conducted by the same individual. Studies which do not take into account both race and gender will only provide a limited understanding of violence.

Aboriginal women are only beginning to break the silence regarding the violence they are experiencing in their communities (eg. Canadian Council on Social Development and Native Women's Association of Canada, 1991; Flood, nd). As such, descriptions of violence predominate and theoretical analyses are only in their early infancy. Virtually every document, however, points to the historical colonization of Aboriginal peoples as at least part of the root cause of family violence. The attack on traditional cultures and the imposition of a foreign Euro-Canadian society, as discussed in the previous section, must be taken into account if violence in contemporary Aboriginal communities is to be understood.

Part of the process of colonization which is frequently cited as having a direct link to violence occurring in Aboriginal communities today is the imposition of residential schooling. Forced residential schooling had a devastating impact on Aboriginal peoples (Hodgson, 1991; Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991; Haig-Brown, 1988; Kellough, 1980).

Starting in the 1890s through to the 1960s, the federal government forced the removal of Aboriginal children from reserves with the help of government agents and police to church-run schools. Removing children broke the unity of Aboriginal communities and the traditional relations between grandparents, parents and children.

Not all children had the same negative experiences. However, overall, these institutions "were at best a poor substitute for the home and at worst brutal places where the children were subject to physical and, all too often, sexual abuse. It is no surprise that many of these children for several generations grew-up without the skills necessary to look after their own children" (Nuu-chah-nulth Health Board quoted in Frank, 1992:7).

Children in the residential schools were taught to despise everything integral to Aboriginal culture and to adopt the values of Euro-Canadian, Christian society. They were not allowed to speak their own language nor to practice any of their spiritual beliefs.

Very strict discipline, shaming, and fear were used to try and "civilize" and assimilate the children into mainstream society. Children, who had been traditionally viewed as sacred and who were taught to learn from their mistakes and from watching role models, were thrust by force into a quasi-militaristic regime. They were

subjected to various forms of violence: physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal. One man who later became an abuser said in a workshop: "when I wet the bed the Priest would take me to his room and rape me and then he would beat me for wetting the bed" (quoted in Hodgson, 1991:13).

Some children returned to a community they no longer knew years later, some never returned or saw their parents again. The main feelings that result from such experiences have been described as loneliness, pain, fear, guilt, anger, hopelessness, and shame. These feelings typically contribute to such things as alcoholism and violence.

The children of today, their parents, and their parents before them have all been impacted by the residential schooling system. Parenting skills were lost as was identity and pride. The rules that were learned included "Don't feel; Don't talk; Don't trust" (eg. Supernault, 1993:12-13). The physical and often sexual abuse taught children that violence was "an acceptable method of reprimand and social control" (Feinman, 1992:141).

It has been almost seven generations since the residential school system was imposed on Canada's First Nations. It will take at least another three to five generations to fully heal the cycles of dysfunction and suffering that resulted from this shattering experience ... Study after study has exposed distressingly high rates of suicide, drug\alcohol abuse, family violence, physical, emotional and sexual abuse within the native

community, yet it is only recently that these symptoms of social breakdown have been traced to the impact of residential schools (Professional Native Women's Association quoted in Jaffer, 1992: 191-192).

Such an argument fits with learning theorists who "basically argue that witnessing or suffering violence teaches people to use violence to try to solve problems or deal with stress" (MacLeod, 1987:39; Hughes, 1992; Dobash and Dobash, 1979). There is a history in the sociological and criminological literature in which crime has been viewed as normal learned behaviour, such as Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory (see Vold and Bernard, 1986:205-231).

Lenore Walker (1979) is one feminist theorist who utilized social learning theory in her analysis of violence against women.

The Task Force on Spousal Assault in the Northwest Territories is one example where evidence was brought forward in support of learning theory. "Victims, batterers, observers and professionals gave us their opinions that spousal assault is learned behaviour, that it is passed from one generation to another by example and that children who witness spousal assault between their parents are more likely to become batterers and victims than they would if they were raised in homes free from violence" (Bayly, 1985:7).

There are criticisms that can be made about this perspective but it does provide an alternative explanation to theories which argue that the individual perpetrators or the family structures are deviant or pathological (Dobash and Dobash, 1979:20-25). A learning conception emphasizes the environmental influences on normal learning

and fits with the argument that humans can be "products of socially structured institutions, institutions that often reward and encourage aggression" (Dobash and Dobash, 1979:22-23). I would argue that residential schools can represent an institution, the functioning of which served to perpetuate and reinforce violence. Perhaps this is one component which can be further incorporated, as part of the historical context, into analyses of violence against Aboriginal women.

There are many factors which need to be considered when trying to understand such a multi-faceted, complex phenomenon as violence.

One factor which I will consider here is alcohol for it is frequently raised in discussion of violence against Aboriginal women. The Indian and Inuit Nurses of Canada, for example, identified alcohol and substance abuse as one of three leading contributors to family violence (Dumont-Smith and Sioui-Labelle, 1991:43). MacLeod (1987:25) states that "alcohol has featured prominently as a major cause or factor in most violence in aboriginal communities".

On the other hand, a study of the Navajo found that "alcohol was considered to be a factor in, but not a cause of women battering.

Both alcohol abuse and battering were seen as problems with similar roots" (Feinman, 1992:142). The Law Society of British Columbia also reported that "while alcohol or drug abuse may frequently be associated with wife-battering, these addictions are not regarded as the underlying cause of the abuse. Most victims report their husbands also assault them when sober" (Hughes, 1992:7-7). This is clearly shown in one Aboriginal woman's personal story: "His drinking stopped

but he found out that he could get angry and violent without drinking. It didn't make a difference" (Rose quoted in Canadian Council on Social Development and Native Women's Association of Canada, 1991:11).

Another woman's personal testimony provides insight into the role of alcohol for women who drink. She states: "I wouldn't drink but I ended up getting black eyes. I don't think I have a rib in my body that hasn't been broken. I had a broken leg, a broken arm. I started drinking. I tried to get drunk faster than him because I knew as soon as he'd get half-cut, he'd be in a bad mood. And then he'd end up hitting me although he had no reason to" (Jean quoted in Canadian Council on Social Development and Native Women's Association of Canada, 1991:14). Often, women use alcohol as a defense mechanism so that the beatings do not hurt so much (Bayly, 1985:53).

The role of alcohol and substance abuse in violence requires further research. The Tl'ast'en Nations report: "It is estimated that the combination of substance abuse and family violence is far higher in native communities, 85% to 95%. We are still at the stage of exploration and discovery in regard to the relationship between the two" (quoted in Frank, 1992:6).

Nevertheless, I agree with those theorists who maintain that violence and alcohol can be associated but that alcohol is neither the cause of violence nor an adequate explanation of it. "Many believe the primary myth that alcoholism is responsible for physical and sexual violence. This myth has to be dispelled because drinking is too often used as an excuse for violent behavior" (Hodgson, 1990:35).

Intervention and Healing

For too long the victims of spousal assault and their families have suffered in silence and isolation. This must not be allowed to continue. We must encourage victims to seek help and when they do, we must be prepared to provide it. Similarly, we must develop methods to deal with the problems of batterers. We must be prepared to do more than impose criminal sanctions through the courts. We must reach out to them with counselling, therapy and family life education (Bayly, 1985:5).

Over the last decade, there has been significant changes with respect to responses to family violence. For example, public awareness has increased, shelters have opened across Canada, programs for men who batter have been established, and in 1983, a nation-wide police charging policy against men who batter was instituted. This does not mean, however, that a multi-dimensional problem such as wife abuse has been effectively confronted. Indeed, those who experience violence and those who try to provide assistance continue to face many obstacles and frustrations. Aboriginal peoples face even more difficulties in their challenge to stop the cycle of violence.

There are a variety of ways to respond to family violence and what is deemed the most appropriate approach will depend upon one's theoretical perspective of the causes of violence. One thing is

clear: there is no easy, one solution to ending violence in intimate relationships.

Community Responses

One critical theme which runs through material presented by Aboriginal people is that a holistic approach which is community-based is necessary. The first key word is "holistic". This means that attention must be paid to all aspects of our being: mental, physical, emotional and spiritual. A holistic approach also means looking at "the individual in context of the family; the family in context of the community; the community in context of the larger society (Frank, 1992:8). Thus, services and programs cannot just be developed for individuals but must also be directed at families, communities and society as a whole.

The second key word is "community-based". Due to the great diversity of Aboriginal cultures and communities across Canada, a generic model will not be effective. For example, an Aboriginal community within an urban centre will have different needs from a small, isolated northern reserve. There are differences in cultural and spiritual practices among the different Aboriginal Nations which must also be respected in implementing culturally relevant programs.

Therefore, "there is no 'one' solution that will fit the needs of all aboriginal communities or women of these communities ... If solutions are going to work, they have to be made by, and within, the community, however that community may be defined" (Frank,

1992:17). A community-based approach means that services and programs must be "directed, designed, implemented and controlled by the aboriginal community" (Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres, 1992:7, emphasis in original).

Comprehensive programs require the whole Aboriginal community to come together "because it is the whole community that has been profoundly affected by violence" (Hodgson, 1990:36). A historical perspective shows that Aboriginal family violence "arises from generations of destruction of values, culture and identity ... requires a strategy that is multi-generational" (Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres, 1992:8). Confronting family violence, then, "involves more than the removal of dysfunctional behaviour. Fundamentally, it involves the building of healthy relationships within families and communities" (Frank, 1992:2). As families and communities move forward on their path of healing, needs will change so strategies should be ongoing and flexible (Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres, 1992:8).

Despite the attack on Aboriginal communities and families, traditional values of extended families and "community-mindedness" were never replaced with the nuclear family system of mainstream society (Hodgson, 1990:35). The strength of extended family networks and of community cohesion can be utilized to end violence in homes.

Equally important, however, as said by elder Abe Barnstick, is that "Our greatest strength as an Indian community can be our greatest weakness" (quoted in Hodgson, 1990:37). The great strength of an extended family becomes a great weakness when it is used to prevent

disclosure of violence and leaves victims unprotected.

This lesson and challenge is clearly illustrated when the abuser is protected because he is a member of a powerful family or an elder.

Respect for elders is an important cultural value in Aboriginal communities. This respect, unfortunately, often leads to overlooking or excusing violence committed by older individuals.

This is not because violence is cultural but because respecting Elders is. The power of the extended family to suppress the disclosure when the abuser is an older person is very great. A way to address this issue is to take the perspective that we respect people who act in a respectful way. Reporting all perpetrators of sexual violence to the authorities and referring them to therapy shows respect for them: It allows the abusers to get help, and it also protects innocent victims (Hodgson,

1990:36).

The first step, therefore, that communities must take is to acknowledge that family violence exists and is a serious problem with devastating consequences. "The biggest chain around someone's life is SILENCE. As long as you keep silent, you are leaving the abuser free to harass. Exposure is the first step" (Ktunaxa\Kinbasket Newsletter, 1992:7). It is not an easy step to take for people are "reluctant, ashamed and unsure ... But as we talked about it more, people began to understand that it is not shameful to talk about violence. People began to understand why they are hurting and abusing others and why they themselves were abused. We realize that we need to address this problem to heal our people, to save our children and to make changes in our society" (Flaherty, 1993:11).

Aboriginal women have been at the forefront of bringing the issues of violence within families into the open and demanding that something

be done to stop the destruction. Aboriginal leaders at local, regional and national level are being called upon to make family violence issues a priority. Unfortunately, far too many leaders have not fulfilled their responsibilities and duties. "The unwillingness of chiefs and councils to address the plight of women and children suffering abuse at the hands of husbands and fathers is quite alarming ... the failure of Aboriginal government leaders to deal at all with the problem of domestic abuse is unconscionable ... They must begin to recognize, as well, how much their silence and failure to act actually contribute to the problem" (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:485).

Breaking the silence around family violence will also lead to breaking the isolation that is caused by violence. It has been noted, for example, that although "communities are small and intimate, most victims feel isolated. They are often reluctant to turn to friends or family members. Those close to them are often aware of what is going on but hesitate to interfere" (Bayly, 1985:4).

Women in rural and isolated communities are faced with particular problems. For example, there tend to be even fewer support services and resources, transportation is limited, there is often only sporadic access to the police and courts, officials and service providers are likely relatives or friends, information may be unavailable and public awareness may be low (MacLeod, 1989:28-30; see also Vis-A-Vis, Summer 1993).

There have been various difficulties and barriers identified regarding existing services and programs to deal with family violence. Most fundamentally, in many communities there are simply no services.

A 1992 study of 35 Aboriginal communities across Alberta found that "family violence is seen as a major issue. However, there are very limited, or no resources to deal with it. None of the reserves or Metis settlements has a resource person to specifically deal with family violence issues" (Twin, 1992:5). The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba in reviewing services for women reported that "the contrast in services provided to Aboriginal women is shocking: there are no Aboriginal shelters, other than one in Winnipeg, no Aboriginal safe homes and no Aboriginal second-stage housing anywhere" (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:487).

Where services and programs are available, certain barriers and problems may still exist. In the past, mediation and counselling may have been provided "by mature and respected community members including elders and chiefs ... Those responsibilities are now assumed to be the prerogative of the social service agencies. Those agencies, particularly in the small communities, do not have trained counsellors on staff. Even where a social worker has counselling abilities, there are often so many other social welfare duties that effective counselling is impossible" (Bayly, 1985:4-5). Often there are waiting lists which leads to further problems and perhaps even more damage for those who reach out for help in crises.

Aboriginal peoples who use mainstream services may find that their linguistic, cultural and spiritual differences and needs may not be understood, respected nor met. A report in British Columbia identified the following issues concerning the use of mainstream services: racism; women's fear of losing children; fear of

re-victimization by institutions; fear of not being understood; not culturally relevant; lack of follow-up; fragmentation of services; lack of resources; ineffective communication; and jurisdictional disputes (Frank, 1992:10).

The national study conducted by the Indian and Inuit Nurses of Canada found that various problems which interfere with violence being dealt with in communities included the following: lack of professional resources; lack of funding; lack of community support; low priority of family violence in local politics; lack of firm policies or guidelines; family dynamics (Dumont-Smith and Sioui-Labelle, 1991:49).

Identifying such issues and problems enables improvements to be made to existing programs. It also assists in the development of alternative programs which do meet the needs of Aboriginal peoples.

A theme running through many recommendations is the necessity of education. Education is fundamental to stopping violence and changing prevailing sexist and racist attitudes.

Racist stereotypes continue to prevent an appreciation of Aboriginal peoples and to perpetuate violence. Images of the "savage", "lazy drunken Indian", "beast of burden", and "squaw" have all been non-Aboriginal creations. "The 'squaw' is the female counterpart to the Indian male 'savage' and as such she has no human face; she is lustful, immoral, unfeeling and dirty. Such grotesque dehumanization has rendered all Native women and girls vulnerable to gross physical, psychological and sexual violence" (Emma LaRocque quoted in Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:479).

Education must be directed at society at large as well as professionals and community members. "Part of the solution towards eliminating violence from mainstream society and Aboriginal communities is through the process of education and awareness about family violence ... must emphasize the relevance that a community awareness strategy can have on building healthy communities" (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, nd, Section 9, p.2).

Culturally-specific programs are required and those who provide services need appropriate training and support. Service providers need to "have expertise in dealing with extended family systems, as well as with all forms of violence" (Hodgson, 1990:36). Networking and communication with various professionals and agencies at the local, regional and national levels is necessary. "Developing mutual respect between non-Native and Native care givers who deal with violence in our communities is imperative" (Hodgson, 1990:36).

It is also important to have Aboriginal counsellors and service providers within communities. Elders in particular should be used for guidance, teachings, healing, and education. It must be recognized, however, that since so many individuals have been directly affected by violence, that Aboriginal care givers and Elders also need to be healed. "It is important to identify our Native care givers who are untreated for the violence that they have experienced and refer them to a treatment program for survivors" (Hodgson, 1990:37).

One important initiative in this area is the Native Family Violence Counselling and Community Service Project (NFV Training) sponsored by the Native Education Centre in Vancouver (Nadeau, nd).

This program was apparently the first of its kind in Canada. The course is a training program to develop Aboriginal family violence workers who can then go back to their communities and work with issues of violence. Part of the curriculum involves the trainees confronting their own past and healing.

It is important that this pilot project be continually evaluated and that the many lessons learned through this process be recognized.

The NFV Training project's "first lesson concerned the need to start at the community's level of awareness. Before the workers could begin to advocate for and counsel survivors of abuse it was necessary for community members to recognize what was abusive behaviour and what options were available" (Nadeau, nd:Summary, p.2). Basic principles had to be developed for dealing with the resistance that family violence workers met in communities which included "denial, fear, co-worker jealousy and competition, difficulties working with relatives, deep-set community attitudes, politics and power struggles and concern for abuse of confidentiality" (Nadeau, nd: Summary, p.2).

Some communities are still in denial and many obstacles are put up for those who experience violence. "Many communities tend to be trapped in a state of denial which then perpetuates the cycle of violence" (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, nd: Section 9, p.3). On the other hand, some communities are actively confronting the issues surrounding family violence and are developing initiatives for healing. Initiatives range from traditional healing circles and small, focused programs within one community through to extensive initiatives that involve more than one community and numerous agencies.

Alkali Lake in British Columbia is one Aboriginal community which has provided a role model for dealing with alcoholism and violence (York, 1990; Hodgson, 1987). This community utilized the strengths of the extended family and the vision of community health. The first step was to combat the 100% alcoholism which had afflicted the community. Once sober, community members were then able to deal with family violence issues. The "don't talk" and "don't feel" rules were broken and replaced with "talking circles". The approach taken by Alkali Lake is a good illustration of what can be termed a "community development perspective":

This perspective holds that effective prevention must be rooted in community-based programs, but that not all communities have the awareness of wife battering or the willingness to address the problem to make this goal feasible. Even more importantly, not all communities have the base of trust and solidarity which can make an integrated community program work. Therefore, the first step toward effective prevention, according to this perspective, necessarily involves community development ... Once networks for cooperation were established, the same networks could be used to address a variety of issues, including wife battering (MacLeod, 1989:9).

Most Aboriginal communities feel that violence within families cannot be addressed alone but that other problems affecting communities must also be confronted. For example, unemployment and alcoholism are two major issues which should be looked at in

conjunction with violence (eg. Twin, 1992). A multi-disciplinary approach would likely be the most effective. Traditional healing methods could be combined with mainstream insights. Healing would involve "going back to traditional ways and blending them with new learnings" (Twin, 1992:8).

Services for Women

Over the past few years it has become evident that placing the control over domestic violence situations in the hands of Chiefs and Councils has not resolved the problem. Nepotism, favoritism, and corruption within these programs further reinforces violence against women and children. In one situation, elders were sent to encourage one battered wife to return with her children to her husband. In another, a Chief accused of incest had his children sent back to him from a Native Child Care Agency because he was on the Board of that agency. We need checks and balances in Native administrative boards established to provide services to battered women and abused children. What we have said to government is, please involve Aboriginal women (McIvor, 1993:6).

Aboriginal women who are abused often face obstacles in their path to healing. The above quote indicates that at times leaders in their communities not only deny support for women but also impose

further barriers. As part of the solution to eliminating violence against women, "values and social structures which promote and condone violence, as well as values and social structures which emphasize the power of men over women and children must be identified and changed" (MacLeod, 1989:15).

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (1991:19-21) have identified the following general needs of women who have experienced violence: 1) inclusion - women need to be involved, equal, and respected members of their communities and society in general; 2) validation - women's experiences and feelings need to be validated and respected; 3) protection - women need to be safe and have effective options available; 4) information - women need honest, complete and realistic information about violence and options; 5) men's responsibility - men have to take responsibility for the violence they commit and all men have to be part of the solution; 6) just treatment - women need to be treated fairly by service providers, authorities, and community members; 7) empowerment - women need to be able to be independent and to have opportunities to make decisions about their own lives.

In some locations, there are various initiatives and services for women such as safe house networks, shelters, crisis lines, and support groups (eg. MacLeod, 1989:29-30). If services and support are unavailable, women are forced to tolerate the abuse or leave their community. "Until Aboriginal communities create family violence awareness programs and provide resources such as crisis shelters, women and children will have to leave their community. This in itself

poses additional isolation for them. They often become submerged in an urban culture and lifestyle which is often foreign to them" (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, nd: Section 9, p.3). Women who do not leave their communities for help must often stay in the abusive situation due to such factors as lack of money or feeling that abuse is simply part of relationships that must be tolerated.

Battered women and their children require, first of all, and have the right to, safety and protection from violence. "The first services developed specifically for battered women and their children in Canada, to meet this primary need, were shelters, called transition houses, created by small groups of concerned women, many of whom had direct life experience with wife battering" (MacLeod, 1989:36). British Columbia and Alberta opened the first transition houses in 1972 and since then, over 300 shelters have been established across Canada. The sheltering movement has played a key role in increasing public awareness and services for women and their children. Shelter workers were pioneers in confronting wife abuse and they continue to offer "emotional support, counselling, referrals to other services, friendship networks and hope ... Shelter workers have stressed the importance of coordination among community services, of adequate protection, and of follow-up and preventive services along with crisis services" (MacLeod, 1989:36).

In many Aboriginal communities, there is a lack of safe places for women and their children to go when they are in abusive situations.

The Task Force on Spousal Assault in the Northwest Territories found that "there is a need for more crisis shelter accommodation throughout

the Territories. We found almost universal agreement on that point" (Bayly, 1985:28).

Providing safe houses in Aboriginal communities offers certain advantages (Albertson, 1993). They are immediate, safe shelter for women which are familiar and close to their own support systems. Women would be able to stay in their own area so they can continue to work if employed and her children can stay in their own school.

Safe houses can also be used as a stepping stone to transition houses if this is chosen by the woman.

There are also disadvantages in establishing safe houses (Kirkpatrick, 1993). These include the fact that in small communities everyone knows everyone's business so it is highly likely that a woman's husband will find and perhaps further harass her. Women often know the hosts personally and they may be close to her husband. In bringing in women who are fleeing from abusive situations, hosts and their homes may put themselves at risk. If the woman brings her children, they may add stress to the safe home's family. In isolated locations, transportation may also pose a problem.

There are further barriers caused by attitudes and myths about women who are battered. An Aboriginal crisis shelter explains that "contrary to popular belief that we are 'breaking up families', we help women become more aware of the journey that will build a healthy life-style for the whole family. It should be remembered that women who seek shelter at Ikwe do so as a last resort to escape from situations that have become intolerable" (Maracle, 1993:9-10). It should be noted that "homes can also be torn apart, even when the family stays

together. A violent home is a broken home" (Pauktuutit, 1992:11). Stereotypes and misinformation has at times caused Aboriginal women to experience discrimination and racism at some shelters that are run by non-Aboriginal staff with non-Aboriginal residents (MacLeod, 1987:25).

Aboriginal women emphasize that while they want the violence to end, they want to stay in their home community and they often want to keep their family together. In recent times, there has been a questioning of why abused women are encouraged to go to shelters thereby removing her from her own home for being an innocent victim.

"It is the abuser who should leave, if anyone has to. There should be supports in every community that will assist the abused woman to stay in the home and to have the abuser removed" (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:489). If batterers are removed, for example to a secure treatment centre, it must be ensured that "adequate support and crisis services for women and children are not jeopardized by this shift" (MacLeod, 1989:11).

Programs for Men

We need to rebuild our own houses which have been ravaged by patriarchy, and which have been weakened through paternalism... However, our house also must be rebuilt with First Nations men. It cannot be done alone.

(Turpel, 1993:191).

The majority of abused women want the men who batter them to receive help in order for the violence to end. Treatment programs for men who abuse have developed due to requests from women and the increasing awareness of wife abuse (MacLeod, 1989; Currie, 1988; Browning, 1984). In Canada, the first programs for men who batter began in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Most programs today are run by mental health professionals who take a therapeutic approach, concentrating on the individual.

Most experts feel that it is essential for batterers to receive counselling. "Studies show the batterer will either continue to harass his partner or form another relationship in which he is assaultive, unless some therapeutic intervention occurs" (Hughes, 1992:7-63). Since wife abuse will not end without intervention, "the provision of treatment services for violent men not only provides them with an opportunity to change their abusive behaviour, but also protects the women with whom they are involved both now and in the future" (Currie, 1988:1).

The type of intervention will depend on one's theoretical perspective of violence against women. "The traditional response to male violence has been to either pretend it does not exist, or to accept it, or to seek various physiological or psychological explanations. The problem of male violence has been viewed as insignificant, and attributable mainly to individual - and frequently to female - pathology" (Thorne-Finch, 1992:109).

Many contemporary programs view wife abuse as a psychological problem such as the inability to manage anger (Currie, 1988:3). A

critique of such approaches, particularly by feminists, is that they hold the woman partially responsible for the violence (Thorne-Finch, 1992; Currie, 1988). For example, she is seen as contributing to the man's anger or stress. Individual, psychological approaches do not take into account the social context in which violence occurs.

It cannot explain why men experience such things as anger and stress in many contexts but are often only violent to their wives.

A comprehensive, profeminist framework would include the individual, community responses and societal context (for an example, see Currie, 1988). Intervention will be effective if there is safety, protection, and services for women and their children; the man accepts responsibility for his behaviour rather than rationalizing and blaming others; and all forms of violence stops. Programs should include an evaluation component (Currie, 1988:1-2). "The purpose of counselling for assaultive men is to end the violence against women by encouraging men to accept responsibility for their violent behaviour and learn to change that behaviour" (Hughes, 1992:7-63).

A comprehensive approach should provide treatment for men in conjunction with services for women and children, education, training, and political action.

There is very little written information on Aboriginal family violence treatment programs for men. Programs specifically designed for Aboriginal men are new and few programs currently exist.

Some Aboriginal agencies have extended their services to Aboriginal men who are abusive. Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre in Winnipeg, for example, is a community-based agency which offers services to

Aboriginal families. This agency has developed a comprehensive family violence program that includes both closed and open group programs for men (see Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, nd). Sessions cover a wide range of topics and traditional Aboriginal healing approaches are combined with mainstream or contemporary insights.

Another program for Aboriginal men is a three year pilot project that has begun in Vancouver through Helping Spirit Lodge called "Aboriginal Spousal Assault Program" (ASAP) (personal communication).

This program began in response to women who did not want to leave their husbands nor have them go to jail but did want healthy relationships and families. ASAP takes mainstream concepts and applies them to the medicine wheel thereby providing understandable and culturally appropriate assistance.

One problem is that often men do not go to counselling (eg. Bayly, 1985). Some inquiries and agencies have included recommendations that mandatory treatment be part of court sentences. One Aboriginal agency has provided the following insight:

By not penalizing, treating and working to heal the abuser, the community sends a message that there are no consequences for the offender's abuse. Subsequently he has no opportunity to 'unlearn' negative patterns of communicating and use of power. Moreover, he will likely continue to victimize other partners, moving from one abusive relationship to another, and becoming more isolated and violent each time his relationship fails

(Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, nd: Section 9, p.3).

Criminal Justice System

Wife abuse is not a symptom of a problem marriage, but it is inappropriate, unacceptable criminal behaviour

(Ontario Medical Association, 1991:2).

Canadian laws, legal practices and attitudes were derived from 18th century England (see Dobash and Dobash, 1979). The adopted perspective was that women and children were the property of men who were given the right to control and discipline them. Under early laws, for example, the now famous "rule of thumb" was applied whereby a man could beat his wife as long as the stick or switch was no thicker than his thumb.

It was not until relatively recently that violence against women in their homes was considered an assault to be dealt with by the criminal justice system. Changes have been occurring at all levels of the criminal justice system which reflect growing awareness and pressure from women's groups to view and treat violence against women as a criminal offence. For example, in 1983 sexual assault legislation was finally changed so that a husband could be charged with raping his wife.

Many women, however, do not feel confident nor safe to turn to criminal justice system (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:483). The hierarchical and adversarial orientation of the justice system is often experienced by women "as alienating, oppressive, and psychologically violent" (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1991:18). During its inquiry into gender bias, the Law Society of British Columbia "learned the justice system is failing battered women and victims of sexual assault. Participants in our study often described the response of the justice system as one of 'revictimization'" (Hughes, 1992:7-1).

In another inquiry into gender equality in the Northwest Territories, women's experiences with the justice system reveal that "they felt fear, confusion, intimidation and isolation. They frequently did not understand the process of court and they had no one to turn to explain it to them. They also felt that they had no control, that all decisions were out of their hands. Time and again women said that they felt blamed, that they had no credibility, that they were not taken seriously" (Peterson, 1992:19).

Not only must the responses of the justice system be acknowledged but it is also important to understand the unique position of women who are battered. Most often women do not report such abuse to authorities and "when they do, complainants are caught up in the complex emotions of fear, love, guilt, loyalty and shame" (Bayly, 1985:4).

Such feelings are heightened for Aboriginal women due to the historical oppression of Aboriginal peoples by an imposed, foreign legal system. "It must be remembered that our foundational experience of the entire Canadian legal system has been frustration, oppression, and injustice" (Monture-OKanee, 1991:3; Turpel, 1993). Aboriginal women experience the justice system as not only women but also as Aboriginal so that discrimination "has a cumulative quality ... 'discrimination within discrimination'" (Monture-OKanee, 1991:6). The main form of discrimination has been racism:

Our understandings of law, of courts, of police, of the judicial system, and of prisons are all set by lifetimes defined by racism. Racism is not simply set by the overt

experiences of racism, though most of us have known this direct hatred, have been called 'dirty Indians' in school, or in foster homes, or by police or guards, or have seen the differences in the way we were treated and have known that this was no accident. Racism is much more extensive than this. Culturally, economically, and as people we have been oppressed and pushed aside by whites. We were sent to live on reserves that denied us a livelihood, controlled us with rules that we did not set, and made us dependent on services we could not provide for ourselves (Sugar and Fox, 1989-1990:475).

Racism "is the experience of violence. Racism denies your value as a person, it erases your existence. This is only one way in which the law silences Aboriginal women. It is very similar to the psychological abuse suffered by women abused by their husbands and lovers. This parallel should not be surprising because, after all, we know that the system of Canadian laws is formed from within patriarchal relations" (Monture-OKanee, 1991:10-11).

It should also not be surprising that many Aboriginal people are reluctant to turn to and trust the dominant legal system. Aboriginal women are afraid that their children will be taken away and they do not want to make things even worse for Aboriginal men who are also seen as victims. In addition, Aboriginal people are already incarcerated in greatly disproportionate numbers.

Violence against women, however, must be stopped. Whether or not it occurs within intimate relationships, behind closed doors or

on reserves, such things as assault, assault causing bodily harm, sexual assault and attempted murder are all crimes that cannot be ignored.

There is much controversy regarding the application of the justice system in cases of Aboriginal family violence. Even in cases where abuse is clearly taking place, there remains debates and criticisms concerning the operation of the criminal justice system.

The first contact with the system occurs through the police. "The police are in a position to facilitate or deny access to the justice system. It is therefore essential that police officers have an understanding of the problems faced by women, particularly victims of spousal or sexual assault ... They must stop assuming that ending the relationship is the desired result and take their cue from the women themselves that the desired result is ending the violence" (Peterson, 1992:23).

Aboriginal women often feel that the police do not understand and are not sensitive to their situation. They also fear that the police will not make a difference or will even make things worse because of retaliation by the man (eg. Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:483-484).

Women in isolated communities have even more difficulties receiving protection and appropriate responses for it may take hours or even a day before police arrive. The police, in turn, often feel frustrated by women who do not want charges to proceed and try to protect their husbands.

In 1983, there was a national policy change which directed police to lay charges in cases of domestic violence without having to gain

victim's consent nor input (Ministry of Attorney General, 1993; Hirschel, Hutchison, Dean, and Mills, 1992; Ferraro, 1989). This aggressive charging policy sends out the message that wife abuse is a crime and will be treated as such, thereby making police officers take violence against women more seriously. However, this policy and its implementation needs to be reviewed. One inquiry in British Columbia found that "police and Crown counsel are not enforcing the wife assault charging policy, and where it is enforced, the justice system does not protect the victim either during the process or after the trial is complete" (Hughes, 1992:7-1; Fournier, 1993).

To evaluate this policy initiative, it is important to find out what the police actually do as well as how the women feel about this.

"We need to question whether these reforms secure safety for all women or simply provide protection for certain women against some forms of men's violence" (Hanmer, Radford and Stanko, 1989:5). Some women have already reported that they may now feel reluctant to call the police if they want protection and assistance but do not desire charges to be laid (Bayly, 1985:43-44). There are also many advantages to this policy which obviously takes a great deal of burden off women who are unable to lay charges for a variety of reasons yet want the man removed. This is an area which requires further study and evaluation.

Once perpetrators of violence are charged, there still remains controversies surrounding courts and sentencing. On the one hand, charging and harsh sentencing sends the message that crimes against women are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Women's safety,

protection and value would be seen as a priority. Currently, "crimes against property are still regarded by our society as more serious offences. If you beat your wife you are likely to receive a non-custodial sentence; however, if you kill someone's flamingos, you will get eight months incarceration" (Hughes, 1992:7-56). Women are being abused in many ways, sometimes brutally tortured. Women need the opportunities and support to heal themselves and should not be expected to carry the responsibility for the abuser as well. The perpetrator cannot simply be allowed to carry on with society's condonation.

On the other hand, "we know from experience that incarceration does not stop abuse, except for the months someone may be incarcerated.

We know that incarceration of some abusers is not a deterrent to other abusers. The application of the criminal justice system is a band-aid or short-term solution at best" (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:496).

One recurring recommendation is that men who are charged must be given treatment and counselling as part of the sentence (Hughes, 1992; Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991; Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989; Bayly, 1985; Nadeau, nd). It is not enough to charge and incarcerate Aboriginal male batterers "because this will only fuel the vicious cycle of violence brought on by the frustration and difficulty of life under the administration of the Canadian government and criminal justice system. When charging is used against the batterer, counselling and treatment in a culturally sensitive manner must be mandatory so the individual can be healed" (Ontario Native

Women's Association, 1989:101).

The answers are neither easy nor clear. There is much evidence that the current criminal justice system is not working. Aboriginal communities, as well as society in general, must take on the responsibility and be part of the solution to end violence against women. It is important that a stand be taken against all violence which is occurring in the home. "Traditional Aboriginal means of punishment may be particularly helpful in these situations. Public ridicule and shunning, if applied with the support of the leadership in a community, may be as effective a deterrent as imprisonment. The physical or sexual abuse of a family member, or anyone else for that matter, must be treated as extremely serious. The community must support that attitude" (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991:488).

There are many ways a community can become actively involved in ending violence. "Community members can hold vigils when a community member dies because of violence, they can hold community meetings to discuss ways to reduce the violence in their community.

They can initiate talking and healing circles for the youth and adults in the community, hold marches that demonstrate violence will no longer be tolerated, and develop treatment and prevention programs in the schools (Ma Maw Wi Chi Itata Centre, nd: Section 9, p.7). "I recently heard of a community where the women came together, clanking their pots and pans in front of a perpetrator's house to shame him into altering his behaviour. Yes, a change of behaviour can be prompted by shame" (MacDonald, 1993:6).

There are certain distinct differences between values and

approaches of Aboriginal cultures and the dominant Euro-Canadian society, the latter which would do well to learn from the former.

There is a contradiction between a solution that seeks harmony and balance, among the individuals, family and community, and one that is crisis-oriented, punishes the abuser, and separates the family and community... we strive to return our people to a time where everyone had a place in the circle and was valued. Recovering our identity will contribute to healing ourselves (Maracle, 1993:4).

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted various issues which relate to violence against Aboriginal women. It has been argued that the historical, cultural and community context of violence must be taken into account in order for theoretical and practical advances to be made. Initiatives need to come from the "grass-roots" level with the support of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders and professionals. The experiences and perceptions of both Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men must be acknowledged.

Violence against women is a complex topic which extends into many areas which will need to be further considered. Indeed, this document is only a small contribution to the necessary dialogue and information sharing that will hopefully help us on our journey to

end violence and heal.

The following are some areas which could be further researched:

1. The nature and extent of violence within Aboriginal communities.

This area could be divided into: a) listening to Aboriginal women's voices and leadership; b) the needs and how best to meet those needs of children who experience different forms of abuse; d) men's experiences of abuse and the consequences of such abuse, especially in regard to child abuse; e) the prevalence of Elder abuse and what should be done for prevention and healing.

2. Historical information about Aboriginal cultures that include women's perspectives and which draws upon the knowledge of Elders. Particular attention could be paid to how abuse was dealt with traditionally.

3. Services and support that are currently available in each community as well as the needs of that community. Evaluation of services is also necessary.

4. Development of community-based initiatives that are culturally relevant. The unique needs of communities that are rural and isolated must be considered.

5. Development of Aboriginal-specific treatment programs for men. One possible approach which warrants attention is the removal of men

who are abusive from the home and putting them in a shelter or secure treatment centre.

6. Legislation and policies which currently exist that impede Aboriginal women from moving toward self-determination. This would include legislation which denies Aboriginal women rights to matrimonial property and which denies status for their grand-children if they "married-out".

7. The feasibility of Aboriginal justice systems. This could include considering different tribal policing models, court systems and conflict resolution methods. It is absolutely vital that women are included in the design and implementation of any justice initiative.

It should be noted that funding for empirical and theoretical work related to Aboriginal peoples needs to be made available. Aboriginal communities and agencies, including Aboriginal women's organizations, need to have access to funding. Projects which utilize a collaborative, action-research methodology seems to hold great potential for research in this area.

There are no easy, clear answers to the many difficult questions and issues which need to be confronted. One word which has come to me in many ways and in many contexts is "responsibility". It seems to be an important teaching for us all to consider. "Responsibility is surely the road less travelled. It is a path surrounded by

obligation, duty and consideration of others. Responsibility is a great distance from privilege and power - and rights" (Diabo, 1993:7).

Responsibility means not blaming others but rather taking positive action. It is up to all of us to take responsibility for doing something to stop the violence.

I will close with the words of one Aboriginal agency (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, nd: Epilogue) who has been working in this area: Ultimately as Aboriginal people inhabiting Mother Earth we are the ones who must be responsible to take control of our lives and stop the violence. The Great Spirit did not create us to leave a legacy of violence. However the Creator did give us free will which includes the choice to be VIOLENT or NOT VIOLENT.

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