

ONWA SUBMISSION TO THE STATUS OF WOMEN COMMITTEE - HOUSE OF COMMONS

WRITTEN BRIEF FOR THE STUDY ON RESOURCE
DEVELOPMENT AND VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS
WOMEN AND GIRLS SUBMITTED: MAY 31, 2022



Ontario Native Women's Association



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ONWA's Mandate

Established in 1971, the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) is the oldest and largest Indigenous women's organization in Canada with over 50 years of experience working alongside Indigenous women and their families. The organization's expertise in supporting Indigenous women and their families is extensive, coordinated, and effective despite having to operate as an underfunded non-profit organization. ONWA is mandated to empower and support all Indigenous women and their families in Ontario through research, advocacy, policy development, and programs that focus on local, regional, and provincial activities. ONWA's vision guides this work:

"We celebrate and honour the safety and healing of Indigenous women and girls as they take up their leadership roles in the family, community, and internationally for generations to come."

ONWA's work focuses on eight key safety issues identified by Indigenous women in the community: child welfare, health, housing and homelessness, justice, family violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. These issues are intersectional and directly impact the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being of Indigenous women and their families. ONWA's membership consists of 11 Chapters (incorporated organizations providing frontline services) and 21 Councils (grassroots groups supporting community development models), representative of ONWA's four regional directions – East, South, West, North – throughout Ontario. ONWA's reach continues to expand as more Indigenous women's organizations join our collective. In 2020-2021, ONWA's overall community impact reached 128,000 community members and provided over 55,000 individual services to Indigenous women and their families.

Resource Extraction and Gender-Based Violence

ONWA has identified significant concerns with the relationship between violence against Indigenous women and resource extraction. Many of the communities in ONWA's northern regions are directly impacted by government-supported resource extraction activities such as mining and forestry. Frequently, these activities involve the establishment of temporary man camps near Indigenous communities. "Man camps" are defined as "temporary housing facilities constructed for predominantly male workers on resource development projects" (Secwepemcul'cew Assembly n.d.). Research that has been undertaken in this area demonstrates a correlation between the violent victimization of Indigenous women and the socio-economic changes created by the presence of extractive industries in proximity to Indigenous communities (First Peoples Worldwide 2019). Reports by First Peoples Worldwide (2019) and the U.S. Department of State (2017) show that in areas where extractive industries operate, Indigenous women and girls experience higher rates of gender-based violence, including sex trafficking and intimate partner violence.

Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) found that Indigenous women and girls across Canada have been targets of violence due to their communities being near natural resource industries (Vol. 1a, pages 584-586). The culture of gender-based violence that has been fostered within the man camps has been

described as one that exacerbates “isolation, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, misogyny, hyper-masculinity, and racism among the men living there” (Zoledziowski 2020), which all contribute to Indigenous women and girls being at a high risk for experiencing violence.

ONWA’s membership has identified that in addition to their concerns around violence related to extractive industries near their communities, there is a lack of information about the connection resource extraction has with human trafficking and noted their concerns about young Indigenous women being lured or forced into human trafficking related to man camps. Further considerations and research into violence mitigation strategies as they relate to man camps is a high need for all communities in proximity to natural resource extraction.

Resource Extraction and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

The racist and discriminatory legacy of colonization disrupts, undermines, and ignores Indigenous women’s place in society including diminishing their roles and responsibilities as Indigenous people. Colonization leaves Indigenous women and girls untethered from their identities, families, and communities, with patriarchal values informed by colonial standards that replace Indigenous values. From colonization, there is a long history of racialized gender-based violence that has been perpetrated on Indigenous women with the most notable being the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2-Spirit peoples. Indigenous women are three to four times more likely to experience interpersonal violence than non-Indigenous women (Brownridge 2008), and although they only account for 2 percent of Canada’s population, they represent 16 percent of the women who go missing or are murdered (Royal Canadian Mounted Police 2014). Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples experience violence at staggering rates in Canada. According to a 1996 Canadian government report, Indigenous women between the ages of 25 and 44 with status under the Indian Act, are five times more likely than other women of the same age to die as the result of violence (INAC 1996).

As noted by Boyer (2016) “simply being born Indigenous and female in a nation built off of oppression of Indigenous peoples, and the subjugation of women, engenders the very real likelihood of being subjected to the most severe forms of violence and becoming yet another homicide statistic, even without engaging in so-called high-risk activities”. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls uncovered that the staggering rates of violence are linked to multigenerational and intergenerational trauma, systemic discrimination and racism, marginalization in the form of poverty, insecure housing or homelessness, and barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and cultural support.

In ONWA’s 2019 report *Journey to Safe Spaces*, Indigenous women and service providers interviewed as part of the project reported that “communities located in the western part of the province have seen a major increase of trafficked young women due to mining and forestry camps” (ONWA 2019). The participants of the project identified that women “in low wage jobs (cleaners, cooks, etc.) in the camps are lured into sexual exploitation with promises of more money in one night than they would make in a month if only they stayed after their shifts and “partied” with the men” (ONWA 2019). The intersections of racism and sexism that Indigenous women experience in proximity to extractive resource industries contribute further to the crisis of MMIWG2S, as Indigenous women are dehumanized by the misogynist

and hyper-masculine culture surrounding these industries. In a 2013 article from *The Atlantic*, the actions of resource industry workers can be summarized in the words of a worker who was interviewed: “Basically [...] you can do anything short of killing somebody” (Crane-Murdoch 2013). In ONWA’s *Journey to Safe Spaces* report, it was identified that the workers and traffickers in these camps use “money, drugs, and alcohol as a form of luring or coercion” and that the women in these situations are “kidnapped, raped, and many are propositioned for sex” (ONWA 2019). The women and girls who experience this violence are dehumanized by getting thrown away by the men and “are found in snowbanks—barely clothed with no shoes—near mining camps. Some girls disappear” (ONWA 2019). In response to the sexual violence and exploitation of Indigenous women in or in proximity to the man camps, companies take security measures (wire fences, security cameras, etc.) to address the problem. It was noted in the report by participants that “men in the camps find ways around these measures” and that “some workers report that managers are involved in the trafficking or tolerate it” (ONWA 2019).

Additionally, Indigenous women residing at man camps have limited access to contraceptive measures, specifically emergency contraception. Due to lack of resources, education and the transient nature of the workers, Indigenous women who become pregnant or who give birth at man camps are often left to parent alone.

The dangerous reality of being an Indigenous woman is clear: we are 16 times more likely to be murdered than non-Indigenous women, we face substantial rates of violence on both systemic and individual levels, and we are solicited, harassed, sexually assaulted, trafficked or propositioned simply by existing in public spaces. In a statistical profile from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 40% Indigenous peoples self-reported being physically or sexually maltreated before the age of 15, compared to non-Indigenous peoples reporting at 29%. Of this, 14% of self-reported are Indigenous girls under the age of 15 experiencing both physical and sexual maltreatment, compared to 5% of self-reported Indigenous boys (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics 2016).

Climate Change as Gender-Based Violence

The climate crisis is impacting the health, safety, security, and ways of life of Indigenous communities across Canada, while also deepening existing conditions of inequality for Indigenous women, their families, and communities. ONWA recognizes the traditional and inherent roles of Indigenous women as caretakers of their traditional lands and waterways. The voices of Indigenous women must inform and lead the conversations around climate change and environmental justice. As stewards of their lands and waterways, Indigenous women are at the forefront of action defending their territories from irreversible harm. The traditional knowledge and cultural values Indigenous women hold are key to the protection and sustainability of the natural environment for all future generations in all communities.

Indigenous women are disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of climate change. Environmental issues are inherently connected to the systemic marginalization of Indigenous women and girls, which is why these issues must be addressed. With 90% of disasters now classed as climate or weather related, Indigenous communities and their territories face heightened risks related to the safety and sustainability of their lands and water systems (Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters 2015). Resource extraction plays a significant role in global climate change, particularly in the

risks it poses to Indigenous communities. Oil and gas pipeline infrastructure leads to environmental degradation related to the construction of new pipeline projects, including spills and leaks related to existing pipelines. There is an overwhelming body of evidence directly correlating oil and gas infrastructure with harm to Indigenous communities, particularly in the ways in which extractive resources impact access to clean drinking water and harm traditional subsistence practices (Datta 2020, Ruddell et al. 2014).

Recommendations

1. Core Sustainable Funding for Indigenous Women’s Organizations

- a. Investing in policy, research, and evaluation to support community development and community services in meeting the safety and healing needs of Indigenous women and girls.
- b. Indigenous women’s organizations need core sustainable funding to support capacity building, engagements at multiple levels (in community, with our chapters and councils, at government tables, with other partner organizations, etc.), performance measurement and the achievement of long-term performance goals.
- c. This should be understood as central to reconciliation with Indigenous women as Indigenous women will be supported to take up their leadership roles in their communities and Nations.

2. An Indigenous Gender Based Analysis must be applied to the issues facing Indigenous women, specifically as it pertains to MMIWG

- a. Systemic change across all systems must take place to ensure Indigenous women’s safety is central to all work surrounding Indigenous women and girls.
- b. MMIWG is an intersectional human rights issue in Canada and thus must be viewed from this lens. Employing tools such as ONWA’s Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis should be central to this work.
- c. All levels of government must work with Indigenous women’s organizations to ensure that an Indigenous gender-based analysis is used to account for the needs of Indigenous women and girls. The work must ensure that a human rights framework and intersectional lens is applied to all aspects of work done relating to resource development, and must build on the recommendations of previous reports including, but not limited to: the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007), Report of the Ipperwash Inquiry (2007), Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (2015), and Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Calls to Justice (2019).

3. Investing in the safety and healing for Indigenous women and girls

- a. Immediate investments are needed to address Indigenous women’s safety and violence prevention. This means investing in Indigenous women’s organizations for the long term as they provide safe spaces and apply an Indigenous gender-based lens to programs, services, and advocacy. Infrastructure funding is also required to continue to provide safe spaces.
- b. Indigenous women’s safety must be understood to be central to efforts to address MMIWG
- c. Indigenous women and girls have a right to identify the programs and services they wish to access to meet their needs – this includes the right to Indigenous women’s specific programming and supports.
- d. The safety of Indigenous women and girls must be considered in any policy or legislation that impacts their lives, with any relevant policies and programs being culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and strengths-based. All programs for Indigenous women and girls must be supportive of the wholistic well-being of the entire community.

- 4. Indigenous Women’s voices must be central to the implementation of the National Action Plan**
 - a. Indigenous women are the experts in their own lives. ONWA maintains that Indigenous women’s perspectives and issues must be at the forefront of discussions and policy changes that impact them. It is critical that an Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis is applied to the issues and proposed solutions.
- 5. A commitment to ongoing and meaningful engagement with Indigenous women through a Nation-to-Nation-PLUS approach that is inclusive of Indigenous women who are not represented by distinctions-based organizations**
 - a. Systemic change is needed across all systems to advance work on the provincial implementation of the TRC’s Calls to Action and MMIWG Calls for Justice (healthcare, child welfare, and housing are top priorities for ONWA). Indigenous women and our organizations must be included at the forefront of this work.
- 6. A nationally standardized and formalized reporting process for violence in proximity to all resource extraction initiatives must be created.**
- 7. A national database on MMIWG must be established that addresses jurisdictional issues and that captures information beyond what is currently collected.**
- 8. Impact-Benefit Agreements need to use an Indigenous gender-based analysis to ensure impacts on Indigenous women are considered.**

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