

Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Peoples

Puyallup TFW Program Links

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WHAT IS GENDER-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE (2020)

When people lose respect for the land, they lose respect for the people.

Settler colonialism - including the privatization and destruction of land - seeks to eliminate Indigenous peoples in order to gain access to the lands and waters. This system also supports environmental violence.

Environmental violence describes the ways that humans degrade the land, sky and waters. Environmental violence doesn't only affect Indigenous peoples, but a lot of it occurs on our lands and in and around our communities – our lives are viewed as disposable and our destruction viewed as a necessity for the profits of corporations and/or government.

Environmental violence can have a multitude of effects. These consequences make clear the connections between the health and safety of the lands and the health and safety of indigenous bodies - on all fronts, not just physically but also mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

- **Cancers and Other Illnesses** – along with reproductive health issues like birth defects and infertility.
- **Our Traditional Ways of Caring For One Another** – broken down, leading to increased rates of violence, poverty, drug and alcohol use, and crime.
- **Our Spirits and Minds Are Degraded** – resulting in trauma, loss of culture and self-determination, and – for many people – death by suicide.

VIOLENCE ON THE LAND, VIOLENCE ON OUR BODIES

Building an indigenous response to environmental violence.

- Connections between violence done to the land and violence done to indigenous peoples.
- Identify these land/body connections and name the environmental violence their communities face.

The dominant global economic system...requires an insatiable supply of natural resources, and the worlds' remaining and diminished resources are often located on indigenous territories. Oil – 5%; Gas – 10%; Low sulfur coal – 30%; Uranium deposits – 40%. Hopi/Navajo Black Mesa Plateau – largest strip-mining operation in US. Fort Berthold Res. – epicenter of oil extraction. No. Alberta – Tar Sands project largest industrial project in history.

Extraction Sites: Drastic transient population increase (mostly male); increase in drugs, crime, sexual assaults and more – ALARMING when compounded with the marginalization of women.

U.S./Native women already 2.5x more likely to experience a violent crime (July 2004).

Canada/Indigenous women 3x more likely to report surviving a violent crime.

U.S./Native youth experience more substance abuse, and trauma (2.3%) – and 2x more likely to die before 24 yo. Suicide - Alarming! Violent victimization - highest per capita rate. PTSD rates – rivals returning war veterans.

Indigenous Community Social Fabric – deeply impacted via higher cancer levels, birth defects, miscarriages, and mental illnesses wrought via living near industrial developments.

From a traditional perspective, the health of our peoples cannot be separated from the health of our environment, the practice of our spirituality, and the expression of our inherent right to self-determination, upon which the mental, physical and social health of our communities is based (IITC, 1996)

Indian communities express the connection between their peoples and their lands through creation stories, ceremonies, and traditional kinship and governance systems – while colonization, forced removal, and continued land dispossession attempt to stifle or sever this land/body connection.

Indigenous land/body defense - begs language describing the impacts of environmental degradation on both the social and physical impacts of human life. Being able to conceptualize and articulate these impacts enables communities to discuss, build strategies, and implement change.

Forms of Environmental Violence:

- Reproductive Health Issues (eg, birth defects, infertility).
- Cancer and other illnesses.
- Chronic Social Stressors, like:
 - Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women
 - Human Trafficking for both labor and sexual exploitation
 - Sexual, domestic, and family violence
 - HIV and other sexually transmitted infections
- Increased crime in communities
- Increased rates of incarceration
- Increased drug and alcohol use in communities
- Alcohol-related traffic fatalities
- Suicide (particularly among young people)
- Land trauma and dispossession
- Loss of culture and self-determination
- Divisions in families and communities
- Child removal
- Mental health concerns
- Poverty

If you're destroying and poisoning the things that give us life, the things that shape our identity, the places that we are from and the things that sustain us, then how can you not be poisoning us?

Environmental Violence = The disproportionate and often devastating impacts that the conscious and deliberate proliferation of environmental toxins and industrial development (including extraction, production, export, and release) have on indigenous women, children and future generations, without regard from States or corporations for their severe and ongoing harm.

The United Nations formally recorded the term environmental violence in recognition of the impacts of extractive industries in indigenous communities (July 2013). The statement they acted upon reflected the following concerns: “We have seen that the introduction of extractive industries (mining, drilling, logging, etc.) has resulted in increased sexual violence and sexual exploitation of Indigenous women and girls in many communities, as well as increased alcohol and drug abuse, sexually transmitted infections, divisions among our families and communities, and a range of other social and health problems.”

Environmental violence is becoming recognized globally.

“I love my community. I love the fact that I know people in my community. But why do we all have to live in such horrid conditions?”

“I think there’s a lot of mental health issues, where [being devalued this way] goes as far as believing that – and then valuing themselves as much as their community values them”

Living on the rez. knowing there’s a problem but feeling helpless because there are so many companies, so many projects going on, people can feel devalued and depressed.”

Toxic Tours = Local activists host tours of SW Ontario “Chemical Valley”, so that others can experience what frontline communities do on a daily basis.

Environmental Violence:

- Reproductive and Mental Health Systems
- Disappearances and murders of women and girls
- People suffering from cancers, addictions and other illnesses.

Sacrifice Zones

Exposures: Petroleum products and chemicals produced in petroleum manufacturing; chemicals in the sediments and waterways emanating from industrial activities.

Local Air/Water: Neurotoxins, carcinogens, hormone disruptors, respiratory irritants

Impossible to navigate where a certain toxin has come from, or which company has done it, or how often that’s happening.

The land and water is considered to have only one use – profit.

There's got to be some value in the land. It's not just there to make money off of. It's a living thing that's been alive for a long, long time. Our ancestors and their ancestors have had this land, and have cared for it up until industry came in.

The impacts have been so extreme that for more than 25 years, local residents, environmental organizations and other leaders have fought the degradation caused by the dumping and widespread toxic contamination of the waterways.

Exposure to pesticides that traditional basket weavers face when carrying out cultural activities – pesticides sprayed onto grasses and reeds, putting traditional weavers at risk of breathing in, absorbing and ingesting toxins as they gather, weave and split reeds with their teeth.

I kept thinking about the Earth, and how she feels when we go in there and we drain her, or we're putting things in her...and just thinking how strong our Mother is.

“I can remember a long time ago when it was all about fishing. The loss of connection to tradition has been devastating. I feels like we’re really lost. .specifically the men in my family feel lost, like they have no place and they’re trying to find meaning again. You can see our men struggling. .”

Drug abuse is a form of environmental violence. Drugs & Crime: Crime rates, drug offenses, injuries related to alcohol, Hepatitis C rates, traffic fatality rates, heroin or methamphetamine use.

Some community members turn to drug use in part as a result of the legacies of colonization. “When you’re disconnected from your land, you’re disconnected from yourself. And so you make these decisions that you wouldn’t always make...because you’re just so desperate to feel something.”

Culturally-Safe Harm Reduction: Intervene in ways that support sovereignty over peoples’ bodies and their lands. Reduce the everyday risks and harms they face while trying to create safety in unsafe situations.

Culturally-Safe Harm Reduction: Applies to individual encounters – as well as the systems, structures, and realities Indigenous people face like racism and colonialism. There is a great need to reduce the harms of colonialism, imperialism, and environmental violence in a way that focuses on the self-determination of Indigenous bodies and Indigenous territories.

The connection between environmental degradation and the loss of culture, health and nationhood, is very much intertwined

**“Speak up when you feel like it’s necessary, when you feel like someone should say something and no one is saying anything
And don’t be afraid”**

It is crucial to examine the role patriarchy and capitalism play in the struggle to rid Indigenous land and bodies of destructive and predatory industries.

Colonization is not a thing of the past; rather it remains visible through the introduction, proliferation, and support of systems of government that blatantly disregard the traditional leadership roles of Indigenous nations.

Why do Indigenous communities, which are home to both the most resource-rich territories in North America and the greatest extractive industrial development, remain some of the most impoverished?

It can be argued that the consent given by these communities for industry to operate was, at best, given under duress, and at worst, never given at all because of the lack of transparency and truth behind the deals.

Environmental violence has deep and lasting impacts on families and communities – e.g., community members pitted against each other. These familial and community divisions cause trauma within nations – a trauma that only begins to heal through education and community support. Divisiveness holds families and communities back from healing – and diminishes their collective power. There is also resistance within impacted communities to acknowledging the damage and trauma caused by environmental violence.

Sister’s Collective: Learn and practice traditional ways, and do important work around her community.

The process of learning, educating, speaking, standing up and resisting the abuse – is the spark behind the grassroots movements protecting Indigenous lands, bodies, and communities.

I think that a lot of young people don’t get to experience those things our ancestors or our grandmothers and parents did as young people, because we have such tainted land now. And this inability to practice one’s culture, this inability to pass it on to the next living generation to ensure that culture survives, is yet another form of environmental violence.

Reclamation of Power

- Learning about cultural identities, and how to respect and exercise sovereignty over their bodies and lands.
- It's a difficult process, as all are anti-trauma, anti-oppression, and anti-colonial struggles – and environmental violence causes and resurfaces all of those traumas.
- We carry these burdens, we carry these stories – everything – with us as young people. And I think when we allow young people to actually face those situations and sit with that hurt, I think that's when the breakthrough moments happen.
- The media and mainstream narrative around environmental justice rarely emphasizes the need for healing of lands, bodies, and spirits.

Healing means being grounded in the knowledge that we are not disconnected from the land. The animals, the birds, all of them—they are our teachers. Everything on the Land is a teacher.”

“We’re really trying to invoke in our young people that we do have this connection to the land, and these are the ways that we do, and these are the prayers that were laid down, and the prayers...it strengthens.”

Focus on uplifting community-based leadership and successful advocacy strategies that offer immediate, accessible, holistic approaches to environmental violence.

Industries are often allowed to extract resources from indigenous lands with very little regard for people’s safety and wellbeing.

Environmental Violence

- Indigenous women have largely led the movement to recognize this term.
- The injustices that happen to Indigenous women often happen because they are women *and* Indigenous.

The trauma Indigenous women's bodies experience because of environmental destruction happens because they are women, because they are indigenous, because of the colonial legacies within which their communities live, and because the environment is considered an inexhaustible resource to be sold, purchased, and exploited. The intersections are endless, and so, if our work is to be effective, our responsibility is to meet this trauma at these intersections. This is what resisting environmental violence looks like.

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Duty = Implement US v. WA-Based 1987 Washington State TFW Agreement

