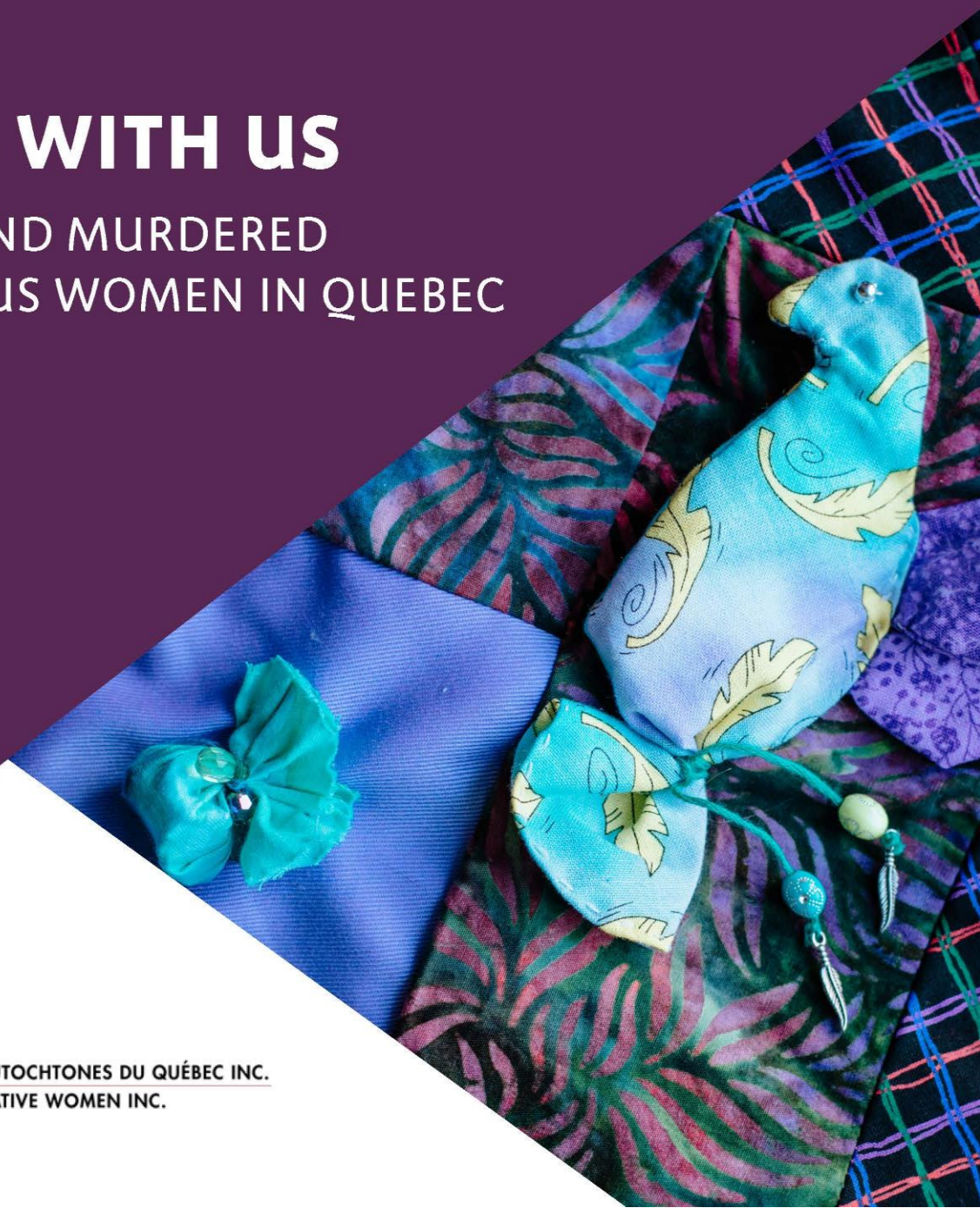
NĀNĪAWIG MĀMAWE NĪNAWIND

STAND WITH US

MISSING AND MURDERED
INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN QUEBEC



FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC INC.
QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN INC.

Cover

The picture on the cover of this report depicts part of a quilt created during an event organized by Quebec Native Women in April 2015 that brought together the families of missing or murdered Indigenous women from across the province. Each bundle attached to the quilt contains a message for a missing or murdered loved one. As a whole, the quilt is a way to honour the victims and represents solidarity and mutual support between families. The quilt should now travel across the province so that more families can add their contributions to it.

Original idea : Pascale Annoual, art ethnotherapist
Photo credit and cover page design : Maude Plante-Husaruk

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Quebec Native Women would like to thank the Mohawk Nation for each day allowing us to work on its unceded traditional territory.

Quebec Native Women (QNW) wishes to sincerely thank the families of missing & murdered Indigenous women who so generously agreed to share their stories. We wish to acknowledge the essential contributions of some 30 participants who took the time to answer our questions. We also thank the directors of Indigenous women's shelters and QNW's Nation representatives who helped us to shape this exploratory investigation.

Thank you to Carole Lévesque and Dominique Raby (INRS) for their support throughout the project and to the DIALOG team members who contributed to editing this report.

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We thank the members of the Fédération des femmes du Québec for their help with organizing the launching of this report.

We thank all QNW staff members who, each in her own way, contributed to this investigation.

Finally, we wish to thank Indigenous women and their allies who struggle relentlessly for the protection and safety of our nations' women.

Niá: wen!

FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC INC.
QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN INC.

Kuei

Nānīawig Māmawe Nīnawind… In November 2014, during Quebec Native Women's annual conference, Laurie Odjick, mother of Maisy Odjick who has been missing since 2008, asked Indigenous organisations who speak up for missing & murdered Indigenous women to stand beside families rather than in front of them. Her wish became our inspiration; we decided to name our report "Stand With Us" in Laurie's Anishinabe language.

Because family members are most directly affected by this issue, their participation was essential to the making of this investigation. Our hope was to provide them with a safe space, and to raise their voices. In the section dedicated to the family members' gathering, you will read that by sharing their needs, the families presented us with a clear road to follow. Now it is up to each of us to take that path.

With this report, QNW introduces you to the existing situation in Quebec. Despite current assumptions, we are undoubtedly implicated in the issue of missing & murdered Indigenous women. It is important to address this issue and to try and understand what Indigenous people experience in this province. This report focuses on issues of violence, racism and discrimination, because looking at the phenomena of missing & murdered Indigenous women through this lens relates directly to QNW's mission. Indigenous women continue to face colonial, sexist, patriarchal and intimate violence, to which we must put an end. To do this, we must all work together.

Recent events such as the Indigenous women in Val-d'Or courageously speaking out about the violence they experienced from police and the federal government's national inquiry on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls have instilled a sense of hope at QNW; indeed, collective awareness is growing. I am confident that we are finally going to make progress on the issues we have been speaking up about for so long. We hope that by reading this report, you will better understand what we as Indigenous women experience, and most of all, that you will feel the need to *act*, as we have been doing for the past forty years.

Ninashkumau Katipenitek ka minitak tshetshi umue minutaiat nitatusseunnan

Viviane Michel

President, Quebec Native Women

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INTRODUCTION

> Je trouve que c'est plus documenté dans l'Ouest que chez nous. Vraiment, au Québec là… Est-ce que c'est parce qu'on en a moins? Mais elles [les femmes] sont pas plus documentées, ce n'est pas parce qu'on en a moins que c'est moins important! Mais avec le peu de documentation qu'on a effectivement au Québec on fait pitié. Il n'y a [pas] grand-chose qui a été amené à ce niveau-là. On n'a même pas de noms, je trouve qu'on n'a pas grand-chose.[1]
>
> *Marie, responsable de dossiers, communauté autochtone*

> On est toujours noyés dans la masse d'Autochtones [au Canada]. Fait que c'est pour ça que je trouvais ça l'fun cette recherche-là, parce que j'me dis au moins ils vont avoir le portrait de la réalité du Québec.[2]
>
> *Karine, responsable de dossiers, communauté autochtone*

This document details the results of an exploratory investigation conducted by Quebec Native Women on the situation of missing & murdered Indigenous women (MMIW) in Quebec. This investigation benefited from the financial support of the Ministère de la justice du Québec and from DIALOG, the Réseau de recherche et de connaissances relatives aux peuples autochtones. Our aim was to highlight Indigenous people's diverse voices, particularly the voices of those most directly affected by the issue, namely MMIW family members. The goals of this investigation are as follows:

- To delineate the causes and meanings of violence against Indigenous women in Quebec
- To identify the specific features of the issue of MMIW in Quebec
- To bring to light the complexity of the issue of MMIW in Quebec
- To highlight the voices of those most directly affected
- To propose ways of moving forward that are truly adapted to the context of the Indigenous population in the province

The observations and results that arose from this investigation have allowed us to recommend courses of action for addressing the urgent issue of MMIW; these observations and results will likewise help in developing an action strategy suited to the Indigenous context of Quebec.

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1 Translation: I think it's better documented out West than here. Seriously, in Quebec…Is it because there's fewer cases? They [the women] aren't documented—the fact that there's fewer cases doesn't make it less important! There's so little documentation in Quebec, it's pathetic. There hasn't been much progress on that front. We don't even have names; we really don't have much.

2 Translation: We still get bunched together with Indigenous people from across Canada. That's what I liked about this research. At least it'll give an idea of what's going on here in Quebec.

Contextualization

The question of missing & murdered Indigenous women (MMIW) has been widely studied across Canada and there have been many reports recommending ways of addressing the situation (LSC, 2015).[3] Indeed, the ever-increasing number of MMIW is alarming. In 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada's (NWAC) initiative, Sisters in Spirit, documented 582 cases, dating mostly from the 1990s to the year 2000. More recently, in her doctoral thesis conducted at the University of Ottawa, Maryanne Pearce estimated that 824 was closer to the real number of missing & murdered Indigenous women in the country (Pearce, 2013). In April 2014, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) revealed it had identified no less than 1,181 cases of missing or murdered women since 1980 (RCMP, 2014).

As for Quebec more specifically, the question has not yet been adequately addressed. In 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada documented the cases of 22 Indigenous women who were murdered or reported missing in the province. More recently, the RCMP outlined 46 cases of homicide against Indigenous women perpetrated between 1980 and 2012. However, due to acknowledged methodological limitations (namely the under reporting of violence against women and the fact that Canadian studies did not account for the French-speaking population in Quebec), these numbers appear to be largely under-representative. Quebec Native Women wanted to address this shortcoming by launching the first investigation on the matter.

Last October, Radio-Canada aired a feature story on its investigative reporting show *Enquête*[4] that hit Quebec society and Indigenous communities like a bombshell. The show shared the story of Sindy Ruperhouse, a 44-year-old Anishinabe woman who was reported missing from Val-d'Or in April 2014. In the program, Sindy's parents, Johnny Wylde and Émily Ruperthouse, reveal how the police officers and detectives responsible for their daughter's case failed to share information with them, showed limited interest in the case and refused to cooperate with the family. The broadcast also showed something that had never been done in Quebec before: Indigenous women openly speaking out about the exploitation and physical and sexual abuse they suffered at the hands of Sureté du Québec officers in the Val-d'Or region (Dupuis, 2015). This broadcast revealed to the public just how crucial it is to pay attention to the issue of violence against Indigenous women in the province.

As we know, Indigenous groups and organizations and civil society groups have long been calling for a national commission of inquiry on the matter. For years, the Conservative government rejected their plea. On Tuesday December 8, 2015, the Liberal government led by Justin Trudeau, elected in October 2015, announced that the long-awaited commission of inquiry would finally be established.

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[3] A list of all the reports is available online: http://aptn.ca/news/2014/05/21/groups-upset-harper-government-using-murdered-missing-inquiry-calls/

[4] http://ici.radio-canada.ca/tele/enquete/2015-2016/episodes/360817/femmes-autochtones-surete-du-quebec-sq?isAutoPlay=1

Quebec Native Women's Involvement in the Issue of Violence

For over 30 years Quebec Native Women has made the issue of violence one of its main priorities. From the 1980s onward, the question of violence in Indigenous communities has mobilised activists from all nations. In 1987, QNW launched its first information and public awareness campaign, *Violence is Tearing Us Apart—Let's Get Together!* At the time, violence in Indigenous communities had already been acknowledged as a "great tragedy" (AFAQ, 1987). Over the next few years, QNW produced an information pamphlet, *Together Against Anishnabe-kwe Violence*. In 1992, QNW took the ground-breaking initiative of setting up a men's group to discuss violence, together with women, thereby showing that violence is not solely a "women's issue", but one that concerns the entire community.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, QNW organized three large gatherings on the issue of violence, *Skennenkò:wa, Here is the Dawn of Day*. Each of these events brought together hundreds of participants from Indigenous communities across Quebec, as well as from other provinces. In 2002, QNW leaders were invited by the Interministerial Coordination Comitee on Intimate, Family and Sexual Violence to partake in writing the second version of the government's intervention policy on domestic violence.

Over the years, QNW has produced dozens of reports and memoirs. These documents address issues relating directly to violence: safety, victimization, prevention, public services, relationships with police forces and protection (see, namely, QNWA, 1982 and 1990; QNW, 2008; Pelletier, 1993). Various provincial and federal administrations have come and gone, but QNW's approach has remained the same: in fact, it has grown to be more cohesive over time. In all circumstances, QNW focuses on the women themselves, on the (usually insufficient) available resources to ensure their safety and on the importance of considering the larger context in which violence occurs.

Violence Against Indigenous Women

A myriad of definitions of the types of violence affecting Indigenous women can be found in government, Indigenous and scientific literature (Flynn, 2010; Government of Canada, 2014; Montminy *et al.*, 2010). The purpose of this section is not to raise a theoretical debate on the matter. However, it can be useful to describe different types of violence generally experienced by Indigenous women. Based on our direct experience with concerned women and families, we have identified four distinct yet intersecting types of violence. We have defined them here in order to facilitate the reader's understanding of the investigation.

- **Structural Violence**: This type of violence encompasses the systemic effects of the policies of assimilation and erasure carried out by successive governments since the mid 19th century. The *Indian Act* is the quintessential example of a system that structures the lives of First Nations people on political, economic, social, judicial and cultural levels.

- **Institutional violence:** This second type of violence, a direct result of the first, refers to the impacts of specific institutions such as education, health or public safety. The example of residential schools is a meaningful one. The violence of this particular institution not only affected the lives of those who survived their experience in these schools; its consequences were passed on

from generation to generation and permanently affected the lives of thousands of children, and seeped in to all aspects of their lives.

- **Family Violence:** This term is often used in Indigenous contexts to underline the fact that violence concerns couples, but affects children and extended family members as well.

- **Intimate violence**: This last form of violence includes physical violence, psychological manipulation and financial control between individuals.

Methodology

In order to respect Indigenous knowledge and ethics, particular care was taken to develop a methodology based on the guidelines for research with Aboriginal Women that were created for QNW (Basile, 2012).

Qualitative Methodology: Prioritizing Voices

Adopting a qualitative approach allowed us to better highlight and contextualize what the people we met with had to say. We gave priority to the perspectives of those directly affected by the issue of MMIW and recorded their views on safety, violence, disappearance, existing initiatives and services as well as on what should be done. By conducting broader interviews on the issue of violence against Indigenous women, we were able to identify recurring themes that led to specific courses of action. As we will see in the conclusion, our proposals for courses of action take direct cues from the people involved and the families who have lost a loved one.

Table 1
Principles of Research Involving Aboriginal Women

1.	Include women in initial contacts before starting the research
2.	Hold extensive consultations with the community before beginning research
3.	Involve Aboriginal women in the task of defining the research subject
4.	Base the study on local needs and priorities
5.	Consider Aboriginal knowledge on the same footing as Western scientific knowledge
6.	Choose a research methodology that respects the conditions prescribed by the community
7.	Restore the voice of Aboriginal women
8.	Respect the holistic vision that is common to most of the world's Aboriginal peoples
9.	Establish reciprocity in all relationships with Aboriginal people (give something in return)
10.	Communicate the findings to the women concerned and the benefits for the community
11.	Uphold the basic values of respect, trust, knowledge, balance, fairness and decision-making power throughout the entire research process
12.	Adopt an inclusive attitude and approach and maintain an ongoing dialogue and an effective and sincere partnership

Source: Basile, 2012.

Conducting the Study

Data was collected over the course of three phases. During the first phase, we conducted fifteen guiding interviews with Indigenous women from all walks of life, including the directors of shelters from the Native Women's Shelter Network (NWSN) – managed by QNW – and representatives from Indigenous nations within QNW. The NWSN brings together frontline workers from shelters for Indigenous women across the province. As for the Nation representatives, they are responsible for representing the women of their respective nations and sit on the organization's board of directors. These first interviews, conducted by phone, allowed us to identify recurring concerns and questions. From there, we devised more complete interview guidelines in order to address the following overarching questions:

- What are the specific features of the issue of MMIW in Quebec?
- What factors influence Indigenous women's safety in Quebec and what is the state of the services offered to these women?
- What concrete actions should be taken to counter such a vast societal issue?

In the second phase, we conducted another series of individual interviews (three of which were conducted with two participants at once) based on two interview guideline grids specific to the type of participants we met with (see Appendix 1 and 2). We gathered the testimonies of 19 people by phone and met in person with 8 other people. We interviewed three categories of participants:

- **Frontline workers based in Indigenous communities or in urban areas:** people who work as counselors or who conduct workshops for organizations dedicated to helping Indigenous people
- **Members of an Aboriginal Nations Police Force:** people who work as administrators or as police officers for a police service in an Indigenous community
- **Caseworkers**: people who work as directors or coordinators or who hold a certain amount of responsibilities in the social services or justice fields in Indigenous communities or in urban areas

In order to be as representative as possible, we tried to interview people from diverse backgrounds and communities of origin. We used QNW's contacts and word-of-mouth to recruit participants. Recruiting relied upon the three following criteria:

- Being an Indigenous person or working with Indigenous people on a regular basis
- French or English-speaking
- Feeling concerned, alarmed or having something to say about violence against Indigenous women or about MMIW.

Lastly, the third phase of our study was dedicated to conducting group interviews with the family members of missing or murdered Indigenous persons. In accordance with recommendations gathered during the orientation phase, we met one family whose missing or murdered loved one was a man. The event during which the group interview was conducted occurred during

the family members' gathering organized by QNW in April 2015. Because we wanted to give as much weight as possible to families' needs and specific demands, section 5 of this report is entirely dedicated to the sharing that occurred during this gathering.

We also emphasize that we were particularly careful to respect the anonymity of the people we met with and to keep what they shared with us confidential. Pseudonyms have been used to designate participants, and the communities or cities they originate from are not mentioned.

Table 2
Characteristics of the sample

<table>
<tr><th>Category of participants</th><th>Nations represented</th><th>Place of origin</th><th>Language</th></tr>
<tr><td>Frontline worker
N = 12</td><td rowspan="3">9 Innus
4 Kanien'kehá: ka (Mohawks)
3 Eeyou (Crees)
3 Anishinabe (Algonquins)
2 Atikamekw
2 Waban-Aki (Abenaquis)
1 Huron-Wendat
1 Inuit
2 Non-Indigenous</td><td rowspan="3">20 Indigenous communities

7 urban environments</td><td rowspan="3">10 English

17 French</td></tr>
<tr><td>Member of an Aboriginal Nations Police Force
N = 8</td></tr>
<tr><td>Caseworker
N = 7</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">SUBTOTAL: 27</td></tr>
<tr><td>Family member of a missing or murdered Indigenous person
N = 19</td><td>Atikamekw
Kanien'kehá: ka (Mohawks)
Eeyou (Crees)
Anishinabe (Algonquins)
Mi'gmaq
Innu
Nation from outside Quebec</td><td>na</td><td>12 English
7 French</td></tr>
<tr><td>Pre-interview consultations
N = 15</td><td>na</td><td>na</td><td>na</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">TOTAL: 61</td></tr>
</table>

Scope and limitations of the study

Our approach has been to favour the voices of Indigenous people who live and work directly with Indigenous people in communities and urban environments, because they are the ones best suited to describe the impacts of the MMIW phenomena. Moreover, it goes without saying that it is of upmost importance to include the voices of MMIW family members in order to truly comprehend this issue's impacts. In the Quebec context, to date too little work has been done on this front. The fact that our organization is documenting the question also highlights the relevance of the knowledge possessed by people who work for Indigenous organizations and want to help our Peoples by staying active.

However, we did come across certain limitations. First and foremost, given our financial constraints, we were not able to conduct all of our interviews in person, which would have

allowed for a more intimate exchange with participants. For the sake of representativeness and equity, we would have liked to meet with participants from each of the province's First Nations, but were unable to.[5] Furthermore, despite wanting to focus our attention on Indigenous police officers working in native communities, whom we have seldom heard from on this issue, we would have liked to meet with police officers working in urban settings, who have received much criticism for their relationships with Indigenous people. Therefore, it would be relevant to continue and extend the investigation, via, for instance, the collecting of quantitative data, with resources that are in proportion with this issue's broad scope.

Structure of the Document

This document is composed of five distinct sections, each of which details a specific aspect of the study. Section 1 presents how the study's participants view and define the phenomenon of disappearance, the manifestations of violence that Indigenous women face throughout their lives, and Indigenous women's perpetual erasure. We will see how this chain of violence begins with the Canadian State's assimilation policies and extends into present day taking new forms. The 2nd section deals with the delicate issue of family violence in Native communities and urban areas, its impacts on women's daily lives. In section 3, we review the nature and scope of the services offered in response to the violence experienced by Indigenous people; we also describe the main barriers that keep people from accessing these services. The conclusions drawn from this section's content will help us to identify courses of action towards better-working services that can be thoroughly implemented.

The fourth section deals with the police forces most directly concerned with the issue of MMIW. Following a description of the existing tensions between police forces and Indigenous populations, we focus on the viewpoint of police officers who work in a very particular context: within their own Indigenous communities.

In entirely dedicating section 5 to MMIW's families and their specific needs, we have given them the final word. In conclusion, we present a brief synthesis of the main results of our exploratory investigation and propose courses of action that we think will benefit the ulterior elaboration of an action strategy.

[5] For example, our sample contains only one Inuit person. However, QNW is currently partnered with the Saturvitt Inuit Women's Association in planning a study on MMIW in Nunavik. Although it is still too early to share any of the results from that study, QNW will promote it once it is completed. We have also approached the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association, which intends to conduct a similar study regarding MMIW in Eeyou Ishtchee (Cree territory). As of now, this project has not yet been started.

SECTION 1
DISAPPEARANCE: AN IDEOLOGY OF ERASURE

We begin this section with an Indigenous woman's story, shared with us by a frontline worker from an urban area. This short excerpt is particularly telling of the ways in which the several types of violence that Indigenous women experience—structural violence, institutional violence and intimate violence—tend to accumulate, intersect, become magnified and repeat themselves.

> C'est une femme qui a été en consommation toute sa vie, elle a des problèmes. [Quand] elle a reçu son argent du pensionnat, elle a resombré encore plus dans la consommation, en plus de trop montrer qu'elle avait de l'argent, [et] elle a été battue. Elle a été à l'hôpital, [et comme pour] plusieurs personnes [elle s'est fait] revirer de bord parce qu'[elle était] en état de consommation. Pour ensuite mourir chez [elle]. Ça fait comme deux-trois personnes que j'entends parler qu'il arrive des situations de même.[6]
>
> *Elyse, frontline worker, urban area*

This woman's name should be added to the long list of Indigenous women who are missing or were murdered in Canada. One might claim that the person responsible for her death is the one who gave her the beating that led to her passing. In fact, this interpretation was favored by former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper when he insisted on the criminal, as opposed to sociological, nature of the murders of Indigenous women in the country (La Presse Canadienne, 2014). However, let us consider the entire story and the heartbreaking series of events that Elyse shared: this woman attended and survived residential school, an experience for which she received compensation from the government; she developed an addiction; she experienced physical violence as a result of a conflict related to her financial compensation; she was denied healthcare because she was intoxicated. Beyond the single act of violence perpetrated by one person against another, it is the accumulation of each of the above-mentioned acts of violence *combined* that led to this Indigenous woman's death.

In the following pages, we will reveal the ways in which, as Elyse's story exemplifies, the murders and disappearances of Indigenous women are in fact the end result of a long and troubling chain of disappearances, caused by the structural, institutional and intimate violence these women have experienced throughout history. We will posit that an ideology of erasure has been at work since the beginning of colonization, an ideology concretely manifested in the lives of Indigenous women. Indeed, starting with the progressive theft of their land, the women of our Nations have continued to suffer loss after loss throughout history. The *Indian Act*, residential schools and the high rates of Indigenous children taken from their families and placed into foster care are historical and contemporary forms of disappearance that have robbed Indigenous people of their childhood, their languages, their spirituality, their culture, and

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[6] Translation: She's been a user all her life, she has problems. When she received her money for residential school, she relapsed; also, she was too showy with her money and she got beat up. She went to the hospital, and as happens to many people, she got turned away because she was drunk. Then she died at home. I've heard about this kind of thing happening to two or three people.

have in turn severely affected their parenting abilities. Today, thanks to growing media coverage of the MMIW issue, Canadian society finally acknowledges that Indigenous people themselves are disappearing. However, this newfound sensitivity to the present situation is only the beginning. Understanding the links between the current day situation and the historic events and policies they stem from is crucial.

Identifying and defining the phenomenon of disappearance

> Les gens disent "bon elle est disparue, peut-être qu'elle veut tripper, elle ne veut pas revenir" [...] Souvent le commentaire que je me faisais dire c'est "Ah ben r'garde, elle est disparue, elle ne veut plus retourner dans sa communauté !" Ben c'est parce que… elle est vraiment disparue là ! C'est pas parce qu'elle ne veut plus rien savoir. Non, non, elle est vraiment disparue.[7]
>
> *Catherine, caseworker, urban area*

In order to understand how disappearance is experienced and understood by Indigenous people, we asked our participants to define what constitutes a missing person. Frontline workers and caseworkers pointed out two elements, estrangement and the unknown. Later, we will see how these components are in stark contrast with fundamental Indigenous values, namely solidarity and support.

> A missing person is someone we lose contact with that a family can't find.
>
> *Nicolas, caseworker, Indigenous community*

> Moi une femme disparue à mes yeux c'est une femme qui est loin de son monde, de sa communauté, de sa famille […] Une femme disparue aussi c'est de ne pas savoir ce qui s'est passé avec cette femme-là. [8]
>
> *Elyse, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

> Somebody who is no longer where she is supposed to be. If no one knows where they are, not their communities, not their partner, they're missing.
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

In the answers given by Nicolas and by Elyse, disappearance is equated with estrangement and the inexplicable. A woman is said to be missing if we cannot communicate with her because she is no longer with us. The participants also evoke the unknown. A woman is missing if her family cannot find her or if her loved ones do not know where she is. Anita expresses that a woman is missing when she is no longer where she *should be*. In this context, Anita meant that a woman should be able to be close to the people she loves. Given how sensitive Anita was throughout the interview, her use of the term "supposed to" was clearly not meant to relay that a woman who goes missing is abandoning her responsibilities. On the contrary, we believe the

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[7] Translation: People say "Okay, she's gone missing, maybe she's having a good time, maybe she doesn't want to come back" [...] Often what I hear is "Well look, she disappeared, that means she doesn't want to go back to her community!" It's like, hello! She disappeared for real. It's not because she didn't care and was fed up. No, she really disappeared.

[8] Translation: In my view, a missing woman is a woman who is far from her people, from her community, from her family […] A missing woman is also…when we don't know what happened to this woman.

frontline worker was saying that a woman *should be able to* be with the people she loves if she wants to.

In contrast, members of Aboriginal Nations Police Forces we spoke with presented a much narrower definition of disappearance. When we asked them if anyone had gone missing in the communities where they work, they often equated the concept with kidnappings:

> Il n'est jamais arrivé d'évènement ici. Jamais de disparition. On a eu des fugues de femmes autochtones, des fugues d'enfants en chicane avec leurs parents, mais on les a retrouvés. On n'a pas eu d'enlèvements.[9]
>
> *Alexandre, member of an aboriginal police force*

> I'm not saying that we haven't had scares, but it's hard for people to come to the community and abduct.
>
> *Brandon, member of an aboriginal police force*

Although Alexandre brings up the fact that running away could be considered a disappearance, he ends with an emphasis on kidnappings. Brandon emphasizes kidnappings as well. Mathieu on the other hand holds a view that has been heavily criticized in other reports published on the issue of MMIW, because it involves blaming the victims by presenting a narrative in which an innocent girl leaves the reservation and ultimately gets caught up with gangs and prostitution.

> [Étant donné] qu'on est plus loin un peu de tout ce qui est gang de rue et autres, [ça] fait qu'on a moins de sollicitation [...] [Quand elles] se font hameçonner sur le net, et qu'[elles] se ramassent à faire de la fuite, puis après ça, à faire de la prostitution et des gangs de rue, c'est un phénomène qu'on voit un peu moins ici.[10]
>
> *Mathieu, member of an aboriginal police force*

Mathieu's words are representative of a widely held perception, that Indigenous women go missing or are murdered more often in urban areas, while the frontline workers we spoke with defined disappearance in a way that transcends geography and lifestyle. Along with estrangement and the unknown, the idea of time passing reoccurred in the participants' definitions of disappearance.

> C'est une femme qui n'a pas donné de nouvelles depuis les dernières 24 heures […] qu'elle soit disparue, partie, je sais pas comment dire ça […] pis on en n'entend juste plus parler.[11]
>
> *Sylviane, frontline worker, urban area*

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9 Translation: Nothing ever happened here. No disappearance. We had some Indigenous women run away, kids who ran away after fighting with their parents, but we found them. No kidnappings.

10 Translation: Since we're further away from everything gang-related, we have less solicitation [...] When they get phished on the internet, they end up running away and getting involved with prostitution and street gangs. We sort of see less of that around here.

11 Translation: It's a woman no one has heard from in the last 24 hours […] she's either disappeared, gone, I don't know how to say this […] And then you just don't hear from her again.

> Une personne, disparue depuis 24 heures, dont on ne trouve pas le corps.[12]
>
> *Catherine, caseworker, urban area*

Though the specific amount of time varied between 24 and 48 hours, many people agreed that a certain time period should pass before a person could really be considered missing. However, both frontline workers and members of Aboriginal Nations Police Forces were critical of this technicality. It is now widely recognized that it is not necessary to wait a specific amount of time before considering that an Indigenous woman has truly gone missing. As such, although many participants did bring up the notion of a time period as essential to the definition of disappearance, we consider the notions of estrangement and the unknown that were previously presented to be much more fundamental.

The Role of Solidarity

Despite the discrepancies between the views of outreach workers and police officers, both groups equated women's safety and well-being with the notions of solidarity and community.

> In isolated communities, or when Native people live in big cities, they are outside of their everyday environment, their safe zone. Here [in a Native community] I can't commit a crime on the street because everyone knows who I am. It's even harder for someone not from the community to come in and take someone away.
>
> *Brandon, member of an aboriginal police force*

In trying to explain why kidnappings were less frequent in his community than in remote communities or in urban environments, the police officer noted how important close social relations were to Indigenous women's safety. Throughout our study, the notion of closeness and the solidarity it implies arose repeatedly as key elements of a woman's well-being and safety. The importance of closeness was made particularly clear when we asked participants to offer possible solutions to the issue of MMIW. Jeannine Raphaël[13] is a frontline worker in her community; in her view, solidarity between First Nations is in itself a solution to the problems that were broached during her interview.

> Moi je monterais quelque chose avec les onze nations pour montrer aux policiers que : "Regarde, vous [ne] voulez pas le faire ? Ben nous on va le faire" […] Parce que plus on est nombreux, plus on est fort.[14]
>
> *Jeannine, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

Jeannine hopes that by working together, by combining First Nations' strengths, it will be possible to enact the changes that, in her opinion, have yet to be enacted by others, such as the police. Sophie, an Indigenous participant from an urban environment, spoke of the importance of sticking together and of *collectively* refusing the trivialization of disappearance. Like Jeannine, Sophie is hopeful that by coming together, Indigenous people can cause change.

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12 Translation: A person who has been missing for 24 hours and whose body hasn't been found.

13 Ms. Raphaël has asked that we use her real name rather than a pseudonym.

14 Translation: I would put something together with the eleven nations to show the police that "Look, you don't want to do it? Well then we're going to do it." Because there is truly power in numbers.

> [E]n tant qu'Autochtones, on doit se serrer les coudes. [Il] faut qu'on en parle de plus en plus, [qu']on agi[sse] de plus en plus par rapport à ça pour qu'il n'y ait plus de femmes disparues, pour que ça ne soit pas une norme.[15]
>
> *Sophie, frontline worker, urban area*

One might think that the Indigenous urban drift is detrimental to this solidarity. But participants' claims show that on the contrary, Indigenous people living in cities have made consistent efforts to reinforce ties between community members.

> E: Je pense aux activités qui sont offertes au Centre, pour briser l'isolement, pour rassembler le monde, pour créer le sentiment d'appartenance… Une chance que le Centre est là.
>
> J: Oui. Y'a une grande sécurisation liée au Centre d'amitié.[16]
>
> *Elyse and Joëlle, frontline workers, urban area*

For Elyse and Joëlle, the activities taking place in Friendship Centres provide a sense of belonging and safety. Similarly, Beatrice, a frontline worker for Indigenous women in an urban area, says that women are safer when they are in groups.

> The only time I have ever heard anybody use the word "safe" when they are homeless is when talking about why they are in a group.
>
> *Beatrice, frontline worker, urban area*

According to Beatrice, homeless Indigenous women who are well connected or are part of a group can feel much safer than women who live alone, such as in an apartment. Contrary to popular belief, living "in the street" can actually be less dangerous for those women who, when they are not a part of a group, become more vulnerable. Anita also insists on the cultural benefits of being in a group, such as the sharing of traditional meat. She explains that these important moments in Indigenous communities bring people together.

> Elle a moins peur de rester dans la rue avec sa tante, sa grand-mère, sa sœur, sa cousine, que d'être toute seule [...] Mais la communauté c'est très fort, et s'il y a quelqu'un qui a de la viande traditionnelle, c'est vite! Il y a tout le monde qui sait en cinq minutes qu'il y a quelqu'un qui a du caribou, du poisson… Ça va vite alors c'est assez connecté on dirait.[17]
>
> *Anita, outreach worker, urban environment*

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15 Translation: As Indigenous people, we have to stick together. We have to talk about it more and more, we have to act more and more, so that Indigenous women stop going missing, so that it stops being the norm.

16 Translation: E: I'm thinking about the activities that happen at the Center, to break isolation, to get people together, to create a sense of belonging… Good thing the Centre is here. J: Yes, the Friendship Centre really does provide a sense of safety.

17 Translation: She is less afraid of staying in the street with her aunt, her grandmother, her sister, her cousin, than of being alone [...] Community is a really strong thing. If someone has traditional meat, the word gets around fast, in five minutes everybody knows that someone has caribou meat or fish…It's like there's a connection.

As shown in the above quotes, disappearance is defined by both the distance of a loved one and the mystery surrounding their situation, which constitute a breach of the fundamental Indigenous value of solidarity. Understood as such, disappearance emerges as a recurring theme, a permanent condition in the history of Indigenous women in Quebec and Canada. Thus, it becomes apparent that there is an abundance of stories in which this phenomenon has occurred, all of which should be understood.

Disappearance and the *Indian Act*

When we asked Sophie to describe what "missing and murdered Indigenous women" meant to her, she gave a detailed response that illustrated the complexity of the context in which disappearances occur:

> C'est une femme qui a été poussée en dehors de sa communauté parce qu'elle vivait de la violence conjugale et n'a rien pu faire. Elle est allée en ville et tout d'un coup on a perdu sa trace. Ça peut être une femme qui a été enlevée, ça peut être une femme qui s'est cachée parce qu'elle a un conjoint ou ne veut pas aller en prison parce qu'elle a fait un truc, t'sais? [...] C'est une femme qui disparait dans la traite des femmes autochtones. Ça englobe beaucoup de choses.[18]
>
> *Sophie, frontline worker, urban area*

Indeed, it appears as though, in this day and age, disappearance can mean many things. For Sophie, a disappearance can occur when people run away, are incarcerated or become victims of human trafficking. However, given our interest in considering disappearance from a historical angle, we paid particular attention to those who, in Sophie's words, "were driven out of their communities" or "went to live in the city and people lost track of". Sophie spoke of women who flee their communities to escape domestic violence, but there are other reasons why women are driven out of their living environments. Indeed, this imperative to leave evokes the history of the highly discriminatory *Indian Act.*[19]

Let us be reminded that until 1985, the legal authority under which an Indian woman lost her status when she married a non-Indian man robbed her of her entitlement to band membership and her right to live on the territory and access services. Conversely, when a status Indian man married a non-Native woman, he passed on his status to his wife and children. The consequences of the inherent sexism and gender discrimination contained in the *Indian Act* are multiple and complex. Let us focus on its negative impacts as they relate to the issue of MMIW: by losing their Indian status, Indigenous women were robbed of their right to reserve residency. These women and their children were exiled and could no longer be surrounded by their families and communities.

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[18] Translation: It's a woman who was driven out of her community because she was a victim of domestic violence and couldn't do anything about it. She went to live in the city and people lost track of her. It can be a woman who was kidnapped, it can be a woman who is hiding from a partner or because she doesn't want to go to prison because she did something, you know? [...] It's a woman who is trafficked. It can be a lot of things.

[19] Quebec Native Women has worked tirelessly over the years to document the negative effects of the *Indian Act* on the lives of Indigenous women (see, among others, QNW, 2000).

Although the *Indian Act* was amended twice to include major modifications over the last decades, transmission of status remains impossible for many women because of ongoing judicial constraints. Furthermore, the reintegration of women who were able to regain their status after 1985 proved arduous. In many cases, there was not enough land or housing to welcome the re-enrolled women, as ministerial promises to fund these things were only partially honoured. Conversely, bands that did have the necessary resources to reintegrate recently re-enrolled women have sometimes tried to prevent their return (FAQ, 2001).

Sophie adds to her definition of a missing or murdered Indigenous woman:

> Je pense que c'est un manque par rapport à un filet social qu'il devrait y avoir.[20]
>
> *Sophie, frontline worker, urban area*

The prolonged absence of women who were driven out of their communities and away from their extended families following marriage to a non-Native person represents an important barrier to the development of fundamental Indigenous values such as mutual support and closeness, described earlier. When they are far from their loved ones, women lose the solidarity of their community, and their capacity to transmit their identity and their values is severely endangered. The defining factors of disappearance mentioned by our participants, remoteness and the unknown, are impacts of a colonial policy imposed in Canada since the late 1800s. However, the *Indian Act* is not the only policy that leads to disappearances.

Disappearance and Residential Schools

Recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published a report on the history and legacy of residential schools in Canada (TRC, 2015). During this dark chapter of our history, Indigenous children between the ages of 5 and 17 were taken from their families and put into residential schools. These institutions were at the heart of Canada's assimilation strategy. Residential schools were managed by various religious communities or the government itself. The Indigenous children who attended them suffered innumerable physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuses. In some tragic cases, the students never returned to their homes and their families were left wondering about their child's fate. The youth who died in the schools were often buried anonymously, and unceremoniously. Charlotte and Karine, participants in our investigation, discuss how residential schools relate to the MMIW issue:

> Moi les seules disparitions que j'ai entendu dire, c'est plus dans le temps des pensionnats.[21]
>
> *Karine, caseworker, Indigenous community*

> To me it's mainly residential school, where they left for residential school and never came back […] I know that with residential school, there used to be quick sand behind the school and they would say, "So and so disappeared there." We used to go in and pull [each other] out for fun. I went to three different residential schools.
>
> *Charlotte, caseworker, Indigenous community*

[20] Translation: I think it has to do with a social safety net that should be there, but isn't.

[21] Translation: The only disappearances I've heard about happened during the residential school era.

In several respects, the residential school experience undoubtedly resonates with the way participants defined disappearance. When they were confined to residential schools, children were robbed of the possibility of living with their family or their community and of developing a sense of belonging. In fact, they were specifically and intentionally isolated. It is estimated that in Quebec, some 13,000 Indigenous children spent time in a residential school. Out of the 135 residential schools that existed in Canada, 11 were in this province (McDonough, 2013). Long after the last residential schools closed their doors though, the devastating effects of these institutions were felt in communities throughout the country, and the trauma that resulted was passed on from generation to generation (Menzies, 2009).

Disappearance and the Child Welfare System

Following the residential school era in Canada and Quebec, the State continued to displace and relocate Indigenous children across the country. Henceforth, in Quebec, Indigenous people were faced with institutions such as the Direction de la protection de la jeunesse (DPJ, or Youth Protection Services). As a result of their experiences of abuse and trauma in residential school, Indigenous people's parenting skills were severely affected (TRC, 2015). Simultaneously though, present-day social services hold Indigenous people to standards that are not adapted to their way of life. In a report co-written with the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec concerning the revision of the *Youth Protection Act,* QNW cited the example of Indigenous children from remote communities who are placed in foster homes far from their community of origin (FAQ and RCAAQ, 2005). The distance between parents and their children proved an important obstacle preventing the former from visiting the later. Parents, who often had limited financial resources, were then accused of having shown too little interest in their children, and in several instances, long-term foster care placement was recommended. This is just one example of the kinds of discrimination that QNW denounced in the report cited above.

Combined, discriminatory DPJ standards, and the negatively affected parenting skills of residential school survivors, have resulted in a disproportionately high rate of foster care placement of Indigenous children. Citing data from Statistics Canada and the Assembly of First Nations, *Le Devoir* recently reported that 10% of children placed into foster care by Youth Protection Services are Indigenous, though they represent just 2% of the Quebec population (Bélair-Cirino, 2015). As our study's participant Nicholas explained, the impacts of this phenomenon are huge. These children are uprooted, and there is reason to fear for their safety and well-being, he says:

> [C]hildren are adopted out of the community. When we lose our connection with them and don't know what happens to them [...] We're concerned that the kids who get adopted out are prone to this, prone to be one of the most vulnerable groups in society to disappear [...]
>
> *Nicolas, caseworker, Indigenous community*

When mentioning children who were adopted out of the community, Nicholas uses vocabulary reminiscent of the words other participants used to describe disappearance. He mentions adopted children and their biological family's disconnection and loss of roots. In this sense, children in foster care, or adopted children, could be characterized as having "disappeared" according to the definition provided in this report —but Nicholas takes us one step further. He expresses concern that children who have grown up in foster care might go missing once they are released. Nicholas' words serve to demonstrate that it is possible for Indigenous children, whether adopted or in foster care, to go missing *more than once,* from more than a single environment.

The high rate of Indigenous children in care and the risks that this may represent give Indigenous women legitimate reason to fear having their children taken away from them. Jeannine explains :

> Je sais qu'il y a eu des enlèvements d'enfants par exemple, je ne sais pas si ça compte… Avec le système de services sociaux […] Vraiment le système [...] je ne sais pas où est la faille. Même si tu n'as plus les droits parentaux, est-ce que ça donne le droit de mettre le parent à l'écart ? C'est quand même son enfant, c'est lui qui l'a mis au monde. Eux ils sont venus chercher l'enfant, la mère l'a mis au monde [...] C'est pas facile [...], t'es à la mauvaise place au mauvais moment, tu perds tout.[22]
>
> *Jeannine, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

Jeanine's words reflect the incomprehension of many Indigenous people in the face of Youth Protection's seemingly arbitrary criteria. The fear of losing one's children is so strong that it acts as an important deterrent to accessing social services. Oftentimes, Indigenous women experiencing a situation that would require that they reach out for support, such as family violence, refrain from doing so for fear of being reported to Youth Protection. This in turn accentuates both theirs and their children's vulnerability.

Placement of children in care by the DPJ constitutes estrangement of these children from their families and home communities. We have seen that once in foster care, kids may be at risk of disappearing *again*. When Indigenous children are adopted out of their community, family and community ties are severed. As parents may be unsure of what then happens to their children, this situation equally gives rise to the second part of the definition of disappearance provided by participants, the "unknown". Lastly, losing her children and the rupture that this causes may of course severely affect an Indigenous woman's life, and in turn, her safety.

Contemporary Forms of Disappearance

As we have shown, disappearance is in direct opposition with the collective project of solidarity and belonging. Indeed, the present situation makes it practically impossible for the fundamental Indigenous value of togetherness to flourish. In our view, this impossibility constitutes what the Right Honourable Beverly McLachlin, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, recently called the cultural genocide of Canada's First Nations (Fine, 2015). In considering each of the above-mentioned colonial policies, the systemic and institutional violence to which they gave rise are indeed components of genocide. Though they may appear to belong to the past, in fact, given their ongoing repercussions, these elements are directly tied to the current situation of missing or murdered Indigenous women across the country.

[22] Translation: I know some kids were taken away, but I don't know if that counts... With the social services system […] I mean, the system [...] I don't know where the flaw is. Even if you lose parental rights, does that mean you lose your right to be around? They're still your kids, you're the one who gave birth to them. They come and take the kids away, the mother gave birth to them [...] It's not easy [...], you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, you can lose everything.

Jeannine feels it is difficult to explain exactly how disappearances in the past are linked to today's. Nonetheless, she knows that events from every time period are related.

> Je n'arrive pas à l'expliquer parce que tout est relié […] Il y a quelque chose en arrière de ça qui pousse aujourd'hui le système de services sociaux à aller chercher les jeunes, les Autochtones à fuir la communauté, le service de police à ne pas écouter et aider les femmes… C'est désolant. C'est désolant de vivre avec ça et de dormir avec ça.[23]
>
> *Jeannine, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

What emerges from these pages is a historical chain of erasures. The women who lost their Indian status, the children who died or went missing from residential school, those who were adopted out of their communities, are its links. The trauma that has resulted, has progressively weakened the very fabric of Indigenous communities. Mutual support, solidarity, togetherness, and belonging, the fundamental values that Indigenous people have held on to throughout their struggle to resist each attack against their culture and integrity, are seriously endangered today.

The accumulation of communally experienced ruptures throughout history are felt on an individual level by Indigenous women today. It has become more difficult for them to rely on collective strengths as they once could. Due to the colonial and sexist policies enacted by the State, Indigenous lives are considered less valuable in a non-Indigenous society, and *Indigenous women*'s lives have been treated as though they have no value at all. Anita shares what one man did to express his hatred of Indigenous women:

> That's not only immediate violence that kills them, you know. A couple years back, there was a man who had AIDS. He was going around infecting any women because he didn't like Indigenous women. So he figured that before he died, he would infect as many Indigenous women as he could.
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

Ultimately, murder is the most serious and definitive form of disappearance. In the following excerpt, Sylvestre says that there have been at least six murders in his extended network.

> There was a woman murdered from my community a couple years ago. I don't know what the outcome of that was, if the person who murdered that woman was convicted. I think there was another Aboriginal woman thrown out of a balcony a couple years ago. There was another woman in a nearby city. What happened with that, I don't know, it was a long time ago. She was hit by a vehicle or beaten up, I'm not sure. The cops were there, they dragged her body onto a sidewalk. There were a lot of questions about whether they could have prevented her death, called an ambulance, but apparently they waited too long. I'm not sure how that story goes. There were also three girls from an Aboriginal community hitchhiking from a city to their community and they got raped, and were shot by three guys, all non-Native, and apparently one of the guys came out and couldn't take the guilt. He said "This is what we did." I'm not sure if they were still in jail.
>
> *Sylvestre, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

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[23] Translation: I can't explain it because everything is related […] There's something behind it all that pushes social services to take the kids away, Indigenous people to leave their communities, the police service to ignore women who need help…It's sad. It's sad to live with that. It's hard to sleep at night.

SECTION 2
FAMILY VIOLENCE

In the previous section, we saw that systemic and institutional violence are at the very root of the historical chain of Indigenous women's disappearances. In this section, we will address violence on an individual level. In an attempt to recognize the ties between family violence and the MMIW issue, we sought to understand how family violence is perceived in Indigenous settings and what those most directly affected see as possible solutions. These questions seem especially important considering the fact that during interviews conducted in our orientation phase, the majority of participants spontaneously associated family violence with the problem of MMIW. This section addresses the current state of family violence and how it is perceived.

The Importance of Talking about Family Violence

Linking family violence and the MMIW issue is risky, given the incredibly strong prejudices surrounding First Nations Peoples. Indeed, the tendency is to cast blame solely on Indigenous men for the violence that Indigenous women experience. This prevents decision-makers and the general population from acknowledging the other, at times more devastating, forms of violence mentioned in the previous section and thus from acting to end them. The Conservative government often tried to use this strategy to justify its criminalizing approach. Minister Kellie Leitch made a claim along these lines on the eve of a roundtable on MMIW held in Ottawa in February 2015:

> La ministre Leitch s'est retrouvée dans l'embarras en liant ces crimes d'abord et avant tout à la violence conjugale. En entrevue avec le *Globe and Mail* jeudi, la ministre a suggéré que les disparitions et les meurtres étaient probablement imputables aux hommes autochtones et découlaient vraisemblablement de cas de violence conjugale. [24] (Marquis, 2015)

As shown in this report, family violence is just *part* of the problem. We want to acknowledge that family violence exists and address the issue in a sensitive manner. There are too few studies on family violence in Indigenous settings in Quebec and it is difficult to gather precise data on the matter. One fact is well established nonetheless: Indigenous women are overrepresented as victims of violence in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013). Quebec Native Women has always believed that it is essential to acknowledge the existence of this type of violence and talk about it in order to end it. As Samantha put it:

[24] Translation: Minister Leitch embarrassed herself when she claimed the crimes were first and foremost the result of conjugal violence. In an interview with the *Globe and Mail* on Thursday, the Minister suggested the disappearances and murders could most likely be attributed to Indigenous men and probably resulted from cases of domestic violence.

> We have to address that. We have to admit that. If you don't admit it, you don't address it. Alright, it's a slap in the face, so what do we do about it?
>
> *Samantha, caseworker, Indigenous community*

Family violence exists and should be denounced, but it should also be seen as a social problem, which calls upon collective responsibility; as such, it can only be solved by working together.

Defining Family Violence

We consciously chose the term *family violence* rather than *domestic* or *conjugal violence* or *violence against women*. This phrase allows us to contextualize the problem within other forms of violence experienced by Indigenous families and express the holistic nature of the violence that Indigenous women experience at home (QNW, 2010; Montminy *et al.,* 2010). Most of our participants also seem to prefer the term family violence. As Karine explains:

> Il est rare que l'on parle seulement de violence conjugale. Je crois que cette différence est importante, car elle change complètement la façon d'intervenir. Au lieu d'intervenir seulement sur l'homme ou sur la femme, on essaie de rétablir l'équilibre au sein de la famille.[25]
>
> *Karine, caseworker, Indigenous community*

According to this definition, violence can occur in intimate relationships, families or extended families, a group or even a community (Montminy *et al.,* 2010). Family violence encompasses many types of violence, such as physical, emotional, financial and sexual violence. The term also includes types of violence more specific to the experience of Indigenous women, such as spiritual, cultural and structural violence. Any member of a family can commit family violence, and a person can be both a victim and a perpetrator within a single family dynamic (Montminy *et al.,* 2010).

The term family violence also refers to the history of colonial policies aimed at destroying Indigenous families through the institutionalization of Indigenous children first in residential schools, then within the social services system. As we have seen, these events have had a tremendous impact on Indigenous families and parenting abilities. These profound and repeated attacks on family ties have contributed to creating the issues with violence we see in Indigenous communities today. Since cycles of trauma and violence are often perpetuated over time, family violence in Indigenous settings is generally recognized as an intergenerational problem (QNW, 2010; Montminy *et al.,* 2010).

[25] Translation: We rarely just talk about domestic violence. I think it's important to make that distinction, because it changes the way we intervene. We try to re-establish balance in the whole family instead of only targeting the man or the woman.

Manifestations of Family Violence

From the outset, many of our participants associated family violence with the issue of MMIW. For some, the two issues are inextricably linked, while for others, family violence is a step towards or a problem somehow related to the phenomenon. As Catherine expresses here, what is certain is that the two themes are connected. Indeed, she expresses, when ignored, family violence may lead to a woman's disappearance or murder:

> Je te disais tantôt que ça a un lien direct avec la violence familiale. Ben c'est de démontrer c'est quoi le lien direct [...] parce que ça a un lien. Mais on va toujours sensibiliser, parce que je me rends compte qu'encore aujourd'hui, dans nos familles et nos communautés, on dit [par rapport à] la violence : "ça va me donner quoi de porter plainte ?" Ça va te donner ça : tu ne te rendras pas [...] à être disparue ou assassinée, tu ne vas pas te retrouver le visage sur un pot de lait ou dans un réseau social. Je veux voir ta photo souriante et vivante. C'est deux choses parallèles que je vois en même temps comme ça.[26]
>
> *Catherine, caseworker, urban area*

In the majority of cases, participants asserted that family violence is just as present in Indigenous communities as it is in urban areas. While some participants seemed unable to identify such violence in their own community or environment, many recognized that this was a reality that needed to be tackled nonetheless. In fact, this is an important way in which remarks by participants from each category converged: family violence was present in their communities.

> Comme je te disais un des principaux problèmes ici c'est la violence […] Les jeunes vivent de la violence dans leur famille, ils grandissent là-dedans et ça se répète [...] C'est intergénérationnel. Le plus gros de nos dossiers c'est la violence.[27]
>
> *Étienne,* member of an Aboriginal Nations Police Force

> I think it's here [the violence]. But it's hidden. We're the picture perfect community. But it's there. We know it's there!
>
> *Sara and Jessica, frontline workers, Indigenous community*

According to our participants, family violence affects Indigenous community members regardless of age or gender. Many pointed out that violence against Indigenous men was likewise a serious issue, because men also suffer from the legacies of colonialism. Furthermore, participants shared that violence occurs in a variety of contexts: though violence between spouses is the most commonly reported, it also occurs between relatives, friends, acquaintances, strangers, between Indigenous people, or Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Furthermore, many participants stated they had witnessed or heard of cases of physical

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[26] Translation: I was telling you earlier that there's a direct link with family violence. So, it's about showing that link. [...] Because there is one. We have to keep educating people, because still today, in our families and communities, I hear people talking about violence, saying "What will reporting really accomplish?" I'll tell you what it'll accomplish: you won't end up missing or murdered. You won't end up with your face on a milk carton or on social networks. I want to see a picture of you smiling and alive. The two things are parallel, I see them as going together.

[27] Translation: Like I was telling you, one of the main problems here is violence […] The kids experience violence in their families, they grow up with it and it repeats itself [...] It's intergenerational. Most of our cases concern violence.

violence, some of which were so severe they led to hospitalization or, in some cases, to murder. Of course, the types of violence reported are varied and are not all of equal intensity. Physical violence may be the most visible and the most shocking for the general population, but frontline workers who regularly deal with struggling Indigenous women also worry about verbal, emotional, sexual and financial violence.

> [Il y a] beaucoup de violence, violence conjugale, verbale surtout là. Aujourd'hui, c'est beaucoup verbal. Beaucoup émotionnel […] Les madames arrivent complètement à terre. Ce n'est pas parce qu'elles ont mangé un coup… elles ont mangé un coup, mais émotionnel. À l'intérieur, c'est brisé.[28]
>
> *Jeannine, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

> Well, domestic violence, financial [...] My women are used for their welfare check, okay? They are used to pay the rent, used for beer, even if the woman... I had one woman, it was her home, her lease, and he kicked her out. I said to her: "That's your home." There is sexual abuse, financially, emotionally, you name it right across the board.
>
> *Béatrice, frontline worker, urban area*

In other words, physical violence is just one of many types of violence that profoundly harm and endager women. Every form of violence has major repercussions on women's well-being.

Indeed, "the impacts of violence on morale, financial autonomy, social participation and physical and psychological health are very serious for victims and their families" (QNW, 2008: 3). The profound and subtle effects of verbal, psychological or financial violence are deeply disturbing. Many participants identified shame and loss of self-esteem as results of these types of violence. Beatrice, a frontline worker from an urban area, says that shame can prevent a woman from communicating with her loved ones:

> The other thing about women not wanting to be found is the shame [...] They don't want to contact their families [...] They have fallen on hard times, and the hardest thing to do is to ask for help. So you know, to contact your family, as bad as it could be up there, it's like they have gone even down more... They don't want people to see them like that. They are ashamed, you know? They have told me that, they are ashamed and don't want anybody to see them like that.
>
> *Béatrice, frontline worker, urban area*

When the well-being of women is threatened and they are emotionally and psychologically overcome, they may find themselves in a vulnerable position that can affect their safety or isolate them. This greatly contributes to the MMIW issue.

[28] Translation: There's a lot of violence, conjugal violence, verbal violence mainly. Nowadays it's mostly verbal. Very emotional. The women come here and are at their lowest. It's not because they were beat up. They were beat up…emotionally. They're broken inside.

Family Violence: A Trivialized Phenomenon

Many of our participants said that violence in Indigenous settings is still a taboo subject and it is difficult to obtain exact information on its extent and forms. In addition, participants mentioned the trivialization and normalization of certain forms of violence. For example, because it is visible, extreme physical violence is usually recognized as a problem. However, acts of violence that do not leave physical marks, such as pulling hair, pushing, screaming or threatening, are more often tolerated and considered "normal", as are many other non-physical forms of violence.

> Je pense que c'est tabou, oui. C'est rendu tabou. C'est comme si… T'sais je me suis fait tirer les cheveux en arrière, ben c'est normal.[29]
>
> *Jeannine, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

> Donc, nous aussi je pense qu'on vit ça, tous les types de violences, ce n'est pas juste physique, les violences psychologiques, verbales, c'est des violences qui sont très peu dénoncées et même normalisées ou banalisées.[30]
>
> *Marie, caseworker, Indigenous community*

It appears as though family violence is seldom discussed in Indigenous communities. The taboo nature of violence, and the fact that it can be trivialized or normalized could be related to the close ties that community members share with one another. Given the utter importance of togetherness and unity in Indigenous settings, as discussed earlier, denouncing family violence may be perceived as a threat to family or community cohesion. It can be difficult to denounce an act of violence in a context where everyone in the community knows the perpetrator, and where inevitably, that perpetrator is somebody's family member, acquaintance, friend or neighbour.

Residents' proximity and the near impossibility of remaining anonymous in such small, close-knit settings[31] make it very hard for women living in Indigenous communities to complain about, never mind report, family violence. In addition to the threat of losing their children to Youth Protection, seeing their partner sent to jail, or experiencing retaliation by their aggressor, women who speak out about violence also risk being marginalized by their own peers. Charlotte addresses the pressure that weighs on women seeking to end a violent relationship:

> We also have a lot of marriage break downs, especially young couples. They involve violence. They stay together too long rather than resolve it. Partially, parents still say "You shouldn't leave your partner", that traditional: "You stay together".
>
> *Charlotte, caseworker, Indigenous community*

Since violence is seldom reported and sometimes even normalized, solutions and resources are hard to come by; in this context, women are more likely to run away or to isolate themselves.

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29 Translation: Yes, I think it's taboo. It's become taboo. It's as though…You know, I had my hair pulled, well that's just normal.

30 Translation: I think we experience that too, all types of violence, it's not just physical, there's psychological violence, verbal violence…Those types of violence don't get reported much and they even get trivialized or normalized.

31 Proximity creates many challenges. We will address them in the following sections devoted to services (section 3) and to relationships with police (section 4).

Housing Crisis and the Impossibility of Fleeing Family Violence

Indigenous women often leave communities because of shame and fear, but another important factor is the alarming housing crisis affecting communities, an issue many of our participants were very concerned about.

> In some villages, multiple families have to share small houses. In this context, situations of violence easily degenerate, as it is impossible for people to leave the household and establish themselves somewhere else or to protect their family members from acts of violence perpetrated in their home.

Anouk describes the situation in her community:

> Il y a aussi des jeunes filles qui n'ont pas de maison et qui ont deux-trois enfants. Il nous manque des maisons je veux dire [...] Comme des fois il y a des familles qui se retrouvent beaucoup dans leur maison [...] Des fois c'est là qu'il y a des problèmes de violence familiale je veux dire.[32]
>
> *Anouk, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

According to a report by the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU), in 2014, 34% of homes in Indigenous settings needed renovating and 23% of dwellings were too small, compared to less than 8% for the rest of Quebec society. In the current context, where resources for support are limited and it is extremely difficult to find a safe place to live away from violence, women may seek to leave their environment with the hopes of finding a better life. Joëlle explains:

> Ça va être la fuite parce qu'elles sont toujours confrontées à cette situation-là, donc au lieu de confronter ça à chaque jour, elles viennent vivre à [Ville], dans la rue [...] Dans les situations de violence aussi, elles vont aller dans les centres pour femmes.[33]
>
> *Joëlle, frontline worker, urban area*

Unfortunately, housing for Indigenous people is no less of an issue in urban areas. It can be extremely hard for Indigenous women to find housing in a city, due to limited access to affordable and sanitary housing, combined with racism from landlords who refuse to rent to Indigenous people. In some cases, women end up on the street despite having the money to pay for rent. Since housing is a fundamental need, this reality prevents women from finding support and a healthier environment.

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[32] Translation: Some young women don't have a home and they have two or three kids. We don't have enough houses [...] Sometimes a bunch of people end up in the same house [...] And I mean, sometimes that's when the family violence happens.

[33] Translation: They run away because they're always confronted with the same situation, so instead of facing that every day, they come live in [City], in the streets…Also when they face violence, they go to women's centres.

> The minute that they find out that our clients are Natives, they say "the apartment is rented". They ask directly: […] "Are you Native?"
>
> *Sara, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

> Et même pour aller prendre un appartement. Même si la femme a l'argent, même si elle a un bon crédit, il n'y a personne qui va la prendre parce qu'elle est autochtone. Alors elle est prise dehors et ça recommence le cycle.[34]
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

As Anita tells us, racism limits Indigenous women's access to housing in urban areas and renders them more vulnerable; the risks of becoming trapped in a new cycle of violence are therefore increased. Leaving one's community to flee a violent situation may seem empowering, but, as Anita reminds us, if women do not have access to living conditions that will ensure their safety, or if they are unprepared for the sometimes difficult realities of urban life, they risk finding themselves in a situation similar to the one they fled—only this time, they will be more isolated:

> This is the reality; this is not just all freedom. You can have freedom, when you come here, you might have freedom from your family, from abuse, but when you come down here, not only you have the abuse, you're now isolated.
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

Breaking the Silence

As noted earlier, the taboo around violence is still strong in Indigenous communities.

Silence is a symptom of the fear, identified previously, of seeing one's community torn apart by an accusation. From our perspective, collective spirit is so important to Indigenous communities that many people choose to remain silent to preserve a sense of community cohesion. However, their prolonged silence isolates victims of violence and their loved ones and renders serious problems invisible.

There is reason to believe that this silence has played a part in the cases of specific missing or murdered Indigenous women. Joëlle explains:

> [...] il y a des situations de violence et il y a des femmes qui ont été assassinées, [c'est] passé sous silence.[35]
>
> *Joëlle, frontline worker, urban area*

Until recently, this silence also prevailed in non-Indigenous society, which has been exemplified by authorities' and governmental complacency. As Donna explains, for a long time, society appeared uninterested in the fate of Indigenous women.

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[34] Translation: Even when they're looking for an apartment. Even if she has the money, even if she has good credit, nobody wants to rent to her because she's Indigenous. She's stuck in the street and the cycle starts all over.

[35] Translation: There are situations of violence and there are women who were murdered, and it was just swept under the rug.

> I hear about it on the news, the occasional issue comes about Native women, the violence with women and everything like that. It seems that we become a joke I guess? Because, “Oh they’re just Indian women” [...] To me, there’s more that can be done.
>
> *Donna, caseworker, Indigenous community*

Remaining silent and ignoring the issue of violence can severely limit prevention efforts and affect people’s well-being in both Indigenous communities and urban areas.

> Unless people are allowed to speak, there will never be change.
>
> *Samantha, caseworker, Indigenous community*

SECTION 3
THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL SERVICES: A DETERMINING FACTOR IN INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S SAFETY

> […] elle était en consommation. Elle était en consommation, mais tel que je connaissais ma sœur moi, ce soir-là je l'ai pas vue, mais je sais qu'à son habitude de boire, elle ne buvait pas beaucoup. Et si elle a été capable de se rendre au centre d'hébergement à pied, c'est parce qu'elle a dû être apte à se faire aider… Mais [...] ils l'ont refusée. Et comme par hasard, elle a rencontré quelqu'un qui vivait la même chose, c'était une non autochtone, et c'est ce soir-là qu'elle s'est fait poignardée.[36]
>
> *Jeannine, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

In this section, we will discuss the importance and challenges of prevention and awareness-raising about the living conditions of Indigenous people in Quebec. In so doing, we will address the current state of health and social services available to Indigenous people in communities and urban areas and identify which gaps remain to be filled.

During the interviews, we repeatedly heard that violence is seldom reported to authorities or social services. We gathered from the onset that this state of affairs might be explained by a lack of trust towards social service providers. This distrust and its underlying causes are related to the MMIW phenomenon because they are a severe impediment to women who so desperately need these services. Without access to support, women's safety is compromised and their vulnerability is increased accordingly.

The first contacts between Indigenous people and social services occurred when the Ministry of Indian Affairs tasked social workers with removing Indigenous children from their families to send them to residential schools. Later, most notably during what is known as the Sixties' Scoop, social workers were also responsible for identifying children to be placed in foster homes, usually with non-Indigenous families. Consequently, Indigenous people often equate interventions by social workers with governmental assimilation policies. As a result, outreach workers have often been labeled as kidnappers, family wreckers and oppressors (Sinclair, 2009).

[36] Translation: […] she was drinking. She was drinking, but I knew my sister, I didn't see her that night, but I know that she didn't drink much. And if she was able to walk to the shelter, she was in a state to get help… But they would not admit her. And as luck would have it, that night she met someone in the same situation, a non-Native, and that's the night she was stabbed.

Action before reaction: The Importance of Prevention and Awareness-Raising

What happens *before* Indigenous women go missing or are murdered? Rather than looking solely at the MMIW "phenomenon", we should consider the women themselves and try to understand what determines their living conditions. In the *Gazette des* femmes, Widia Larivière, youth coordinator for QNW and co-founder of the Quebec chapter of the *Idle No More* movement, wrote:

> Si nous voulons que le nombre de femmes autochtones disparues ou assassinées cesse d'augmenter, nous devons mettre en œuvre des mesures adéquates qui permettront d'assurer aux femmes et aux filles autochtones une vie décente, sans discrimination. Oui, rendons hommage et justice aux nombreuses victimes de ces tragédies, mais n'attendons pas que les femmes autochtones soient portées disparues ou assassinées pour s'intéresser à elles. Soyons à leur écoute et tenons compte de leurs préoccupations et de leurs recommandations alors qu'elles sont vivantes, afin de revaloriser leur pouvoir dans une perspective de décolonisation[37]. (Larivière, 2014)

According to our participants, there is a tendency to favour reactive measures over preventive actions. While it is essential to offer support to the families and improve responses to cases of disappearance and violent death, it is just as essential to combat the factors that lead to this escalation of violence and vulnerability. Here, Elyse and Joëlle express the need to act to put an end to violence and the causes of extreme situations such as disappearance or murder.

> E: Il ne faut pas juste parler des femmes disparues aussi je pense. Celles qui sont vraiment disparues ou assassinées. Il faut aussi parler d'avant.
>
> J: Qu'il y aille de la sensibilisation de faite pour que la femme, elle aille les moyens pour se protéger ou protéger sa famille.[38]
>
> *Elyse et Joëlle, frontline workers, urban area*

Our participants identified prevention and awareness-raising of violence, intimidation and unhealthy relationships as important avenues for change. Many Indigenous communities in Quebec are working towards culturally relevant initiatives to prevent and counter problematic situations in their own environments.[39]

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37 Translation: If we want the rate of missing or murdered Indigenous women to stop growing, we have to introduce effective measures to insure that Indigenous women and girls lead decent lives, free from discrimination. Yes, we should honour and fight for justice for the many victims of these tragedies; but we should not be waiting until Indigenous women disappear or are murdered to take an interest in them. We should hear the concerns and recommendations of those who are alive in order to empower women with a view to decolonization.

38 Translation: E: We shouldn't talk only about missing women. Those who have really disappeared or were murdered. We have to talk about before. J: There should be more awareness raising so that women have the means to protect themselves and their families.

39 It could be very useful to have a compilation of the many projects and programs developed in Indigenous settings that proved to be relevant to the communities. It could serve as an inspiration for the future.

Later, we will see that in order to fight against service providers' possible prejudices effectively, awareness-raising must not happen only in Indigenous settings, but in non-Indigenous settings as well. Nevertheless, efforts in prevention and awareness-raising in communities and urban areas must unquestionably be paired with the provision services that are culturally safe and relevant.

Service access barriers in Indigenous Communities and Urban Areas

In the next few paragraphs, we will discuss the barriers that limit Indigenous women's access to support services, and offer recommendations for improvement. Despite the existence of some resources, it is agreed that too few are available to really respond to every one of the Indigenous population's needs, especially in regards to violence. This being said, some participants pointed out that cities with a strong Indigenous presence have begun to adapt their services to contemporary and urban Indigenous needs and realities:

> Moi je trouve que ça s'est amélioré en crime depuis dix ans. Quand je suis arrivée, c'était le néant. Là on a [plusieurs organismes et évènements]. Donc, pour moi, je vois une amélioration. Il y a encore de la perfection à faire, mais je vois une différence.[40]
>
> *Sophie, frontline worker, urban area*

Nevertheless, a number of social problems remain, and as we will explain below, for many reasons most people do not systematically choose to access available services. Although there is an increase in services offered in communities and in urban areas, certain barriers and difficulties continue to hinder their full utilization. We asked our participants to name barriers to accessing services. Frontline workers and caseworkers alike identified three main elements preventing them from *offering* quality services: a lack of specific funding, work overload and a lack of collaboration between service providers. Three other barriers prevent women from *accessing* existing services: shame, confidentiality concerns and the maladjustment of these services to their realities.

Funding

Funding is certainly one of the principal concerns of people who work in social services in Indigenous communities. There is usually only enough funding to effect short-term changes and services have seen frequent funding cuts. As Karine says here, the method of funding projects individually does not allow for the development of long-term programs that could have a sustainable impact.

[40] Translation: I think things are a heck of a lot better than they were 10 years ago. When I first got here, there was nothing. Now we have [several organizations and events]. So, for me, I see an improvement. It's still not perfect, but I see a difference.

> On aurait besoin de plus de sous. Parce que c'est tout le temps ça le problème [...] C'est tout le temps ça ! Tout est question d'argent. Ou bien on part des projets, ça marche, deux, trois, quatre ans, pis pouf ! Du jour au lendemain, non c'est fini, il n'y en a plus. Donc comme je te dis, c'est comme tout le temps à recommencer. [On] crée des besoins, pis aussitôt que ça marche, pouf ! On l'enlève. [41]
>
> *Karine, caseworker, Indigenous community*

Of course, project funding that does not allow for long-term development means that effected change is doomed to fail. For example, our participants told us that the lack of funding prevented service providers from hiring and retaining necessary staff. Many participants said that lack of staff was a frequent problem in organizations that work with Indigenous women.

> [Il n'y] a pas beaucoup d'intervenantes. Il nous manque des remplaçantes dans les nuits [...] [42]
>
> *Anouk, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

Also, violence prevention initiatives in communities, which were identified previously as important, are underfunded. As Marie points out, funding is more often allocated to reactive projects than to preventative ones.

> Les subventions qu'on a dans les communautés c'est très peu sur la prévention/promotion… C'est beaucoup sur l'après. Donc, il y a ça aussi à faire.[43]
>
> *Marie, caseworker, Indigenous community*

Finally, we also noted that funding is allocated after complex bureaucratic processes for which burdensome reporting is required that is rarely adapted to the context of small organizations with limited human resources, such as those operating in communities.

Accessible, adequate, continuous and recurrent funding of successful and promising initiatives and services would be a step toward positive and durable changes in Indigenous settings.

Challenge of the Frontline Worker Profession

First and foremost, Quebec Native Women acknowledges the tremendous work frontline workers accomplish daily. Theirs is a difficult profession with many responsibilities and demanding schedules. Particularly in communities, frontline workers are called upon to deal with complex and difficult cases, often involving their own peers or relatives, and do not have

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41 Translation: We need more money. That's always the problem…It's always that! It's always a question of money. We start a project, it works for two, three, four years, and then poof! All of a sudden it's done. No more money. So as I was saying, we always have to start over. We create needs and as soon as it's working, poof! They take it away.

42 Translation: There aren't enough frontline workers. We're missing substitutes for the night shifts.

43 Translation: The funding we get in communities is rarely for prevention or promotion. It's more for after. So that too remains to be done…

enough resources to adequately train new confident and qualified workers. Moreover, it is often difficult to recruit people willing to do this work.

> Intervention, there's not a lot of people who want to do it [...] It's the hours. It's all go 24-24, 7 days a week [...] I think there's people who have qualifications, but actually intervene with people in crisis… Not a lot of people want to do that. And I think you have to be in a very good place and you have to be very well to do that kind of work. You have to have dealt with your own issues.
>
> *Sara and Jessica, frontline workers, Indigenous community*

Given the extent of current shortages and challenges, many participants voiced the need for better support for frontline workers in communities and urban areas, who risk burning out, which in turn causes a high rate of employee turnover.

> Il y a beaucoup de roulement avec les intervenantes. [On commence] à nous connaitre, à avoir confiance en nous, alors un an plus tard, six mois plus tard, il y en a une autre qui arrive. Alors, il faut recommencer la relation.[44]
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

Despite frontline workers' efforts and good intentions, the high turnover which is very common can make Indigenous service users wary and increase mistrust among those seeking safety and stability.

Communication, Collaboration and Continuity

Our participants identified two ways of improving services in communities and urban areas: collaboration between service providers through concerted action related to violence, and active communication towards better problem-solving. Though some emphasized that formal collaboration networks were already beginning to take shape between frontline workers, social workers, healthcare providers and police forces, others shared that they still work alone without the benefit of consultation with potential partners. One frontline worker pointed out :

> On travaille sur des problèmes, mais il y a un petit manque à quelque part de transmission de renseignements. C'est de la communication. La communication elle est très importante quand tu [es travailleuse] pour une communauté […] Ça prend […] une communauté pour s'aider ensemble [...] S'il y a un service qui s'occupe de ça, normalement c'est de mettre l'autre au courant, c'est de dire "Ah! Est-ce qu'on peut vous épauler?"[45]
>
> *Jeannine, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

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[44] Translation: There's a lot of turnover with frontline workers. People start to get to know us, to trust us, and then a year later, six months later, there's a new one coming in. Then you have to start to build a relationship all over.

[45] Translation: We work on issues, but there's something missing when it comes to the transfer of information. That something is communication. Communication is very important when you're a frontline worker for a community. It takes a community to ensure mutual aid…If there's a service already working on an issue, we should have a way to let everyone else know, and for the others to say "Hey, how can we lend a hand with that?"

Furthermore, participants identified a lack of communication and continuity between services in communities and urban area services. It was reported that when they leave their community, women sometimes feel abandoned or neglected by their peers. Yet this critical and trying time of displacement represents the most crucial time to be receiving support.

Women's safety is greatly affected during periods of mobility (IACHR, 2014). Indeed, inherent to these moments of transition is the fact that women are in-between communities of belonging. As participants explained, women sometimes lose their community's support before they have integrated another in their new living environment. In these cases, women lack the solidarity and support of a group, from which they could benefit during such a trying period.

As they become increasingly isolated, Indigenous women can find themselves in dangerous situations or even be targeted as easy prey (Amnesty International, 2009). Besides developing special welcome services for Indigenous women new to urban areas, there should be tools for maintaining ties between women and their home communities. In the time it takes them to build up new networks, such tools may provide comfort and help counter isolation.

> Alors, pour moi, une partie du travail à faire, c'est vraiment d'avoir plus un lien entre la communauté autochtone et urbaine. D'avoir beaucoup plus de support entre les services, et de ne pas laisser tomber les membres de la communauté même s'ils décident d'aller vivre en milieu urbain.[46]
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

Lack of information or knowledge regarding available services is another factor that prevents Indigenous people in both communities and urban areas from fully using them. According to Karine, partnerships are a good way to make services more widely known and to spread information about their respective missions.

> Nos services sont de plus en plus connus justement à cause du lien de partenariat que nous sommes en train de développer. Nous en faisons un point important, car c'est par le travail effectué avec les différents collaborateurs (police, santé, éducation) que nous parviendrons à diminuer la violence au sein de nos communautés, mais pour ça, il est important de bien nous connaitre.[47]
>
> *Karine, caseworker, Indigenous community*

Thus, collaboration and partnerships are a promising way to offer better services in communities and in urban areas.

Shame, Discrimination and the Challenge of Asking for Help

As we described earlier, it can be difficult for Indigenous women to ask for help in overcoming a difficult situation. Their apprehensions can include the fear of being judged, the fear of

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46 Translation: So for me, part of the work that needs to be done is to have better ties between Indigenous and urban communities . To have a lot more support between services, and to be there for community members even if they decide to go live in urban areas.

47 Translation: Our services are more widely known now because of the partnerships we are developing. We believe that the work we do with different collaborators can reduce violence in our communities. In order to do that, people have to know who we are.

negative repercussions following an accusation and the shame of being in a situation that can be perceived negatively.

> C'est la honte, la peur aussi de briser sa famille, il y a plusieurs facteurs qui sont différents aussi pour chaque femme.[48]
>
> *Marlène, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

One major factor dissuading Indigenous women from denouncing violence is the fear that Youth Protection will take their children away from them.

As we have seen, Indigenous youth are overrepresented in the child welfare system (Blackstock *et al.,* 2004). Thus, this fear is completely legitimate and one cannot help but be concerned about the many parallels between this modern form of institutionalization and the history of residential schools. When Indigenous women lose custody of their children, this rupture constitutes yet another link in a long chain of difficulties that continues to harm them and may cause them to lose their bearings.

> Ces femmes-là ont des enfants, elles ont vécu des pertes et des ruptures très grandes, elles se retrouvent dans la rue parce qu'elles ont perdu leurs enfants, qui ont été placés dans les centres jeunesse… Fait qu'il y a toute cette réalité-là.[49]
>
> *Joëlle, frontline worker, urban area*

Participants also mentioned that some service providers blame or infantilize women, especially women who use drugs, who live in poverty, who are homeless or who work in the sex trade. Feeling judged or not taken seriously is painful enough for women to give up on the idea of seeking out formal help, even in desperate situations.

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48 Translation: It's the shame, the fear of breaking up your family. There are many factors; it's different for every woman.

49 Translation: These women have children, they've suffered great losses and ruptures. They end up on the street because they've lost their children when they were put in foster homes…So there's that whole reality.

> Parce que s'il y a une femme qui a été violée, pis elle était en consommation, et l'infirmière ou le docteur dit: "C'est juste une femme autochtone qui a consommé et elle ne sait pas de quoi elle parle"... [I]l y a des femmes qui m'ont dit ça. Elle est arrivée à l'hôpital, elle était en état de choc, et elle dit: "J'ai été violée". Et elle sent l'alcool. Et c'est comme… ils ne les prennent pas au sérieux [...] There is so much shaming that happens when people go for services, and it's a lot for them.[50]
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

The question of discrimination specifically linked to alcohol consumption arose often during our investigation. More than once, we were told that women were denied services for being intoxicated. The same thing might also happen to Indigenous people who have not been drinking at all; they experience discrimination because of their *assumed* intoxication.

Confidentiality and Anonymity in Indigenous Communities

> When we were doing addiction counsellor training and they said that you shouldn't work with your relatives, your family, I said: "In that case, I will not be doing anybody then because I live in a community where I'm related to everybody".
>
> *Donna, caseworker, Indigenous community*

Although issues surrounding confidentiality and anonymity are as much attributable to geographical isolation as they are to the specific realities of Indigenous communities, we mention them here because many participants brought them up. Communities are usually small and densely populated; therefore, residents usually personally know the people offering support services, and this can keep people from seeking help. As Samantha explains:

> So they have here, they have… social services that no one wants to go to [...] They feel there are issues of confidentiality, and they also feel issues of non-professionalism.
>
> *Samantha, caseworker, Indigenous community*

There have been cases of breaches of confidentiality, and though most service providers are aware of this issue and try to limit its negative repercussions, service users' trust remains difficult to gain and preserve. People hesitate to use their community's services for many reasons: confidentiality issues, the quality of services provided by people they know or fear of repercussions for one's self or loved one as a result of a consultation. Instead, many prefer to seek out informal support, resorting to formal services as a last recourse.

> I think, in our community as well, there's a strong family networking and friends, so I think they will go to their friends first, before they even access services.
>
> *Sara and Jessica, frontline workers, Indigenous community*

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[50] Translation: If a woman was raped, and she was under the influence of drugs or alcohol when it happened, and the nurse or the doctor says: "It's just an Indigenous woman under the influence, she doesn't know what she's talking about" … Some women have told me about things like that. They get to the hospital, they're in a state of shock, and they say "I've been raped." And her breath smells of alcohol. And it's like…they don't take them seriously [...] There is so much shaming that happens when people go for services, and it's a lot for them.

In a context where people hesitate to seek out formal help, the support roles of family and social circles are significant and reflect the importance of strong community links, as discussed earlier in this report.

Misconceptions of Indigenous Realities Held by Service Providers in Quebec

Our participants identified one last barrier to accessing services: non-Indigenous service providers' ignorance of Indigenous realities, especially in urban areas. As mentioned earlier, this ignorance perpetuates misunderstanding and even racism. According to our participants, non-Indigenous service providers would greatly benefit from learning about the history, languages, cultures and modern realities of Indigenous Peoples in Quebec.

We know very few services are offered in any of the eight Indigenous languages spoken in the province[51]. In addition, our participants mentioned that in French-speaking settings, there is little sensitivity to the fact that English is the language most commonly spoken by several Indigenous nations.

> We had [an Indigenous woman] who went missing, and another [non-Indigenous] woman in town went missing [...] Most of the businesses have her picture in the window, but not the missing [Indigenous woman]'s. And we are just next door to each other. And the comments they made were that the posters [of the Indigenous woman] weren't in French.
>
> *Sara et Jessica, intervenantes, communauté autochtone*

Indigenous people sometimes experience culture shock when they come to cities owing to the major obstacles created by a more individualistic approach, the complexity of the system, the bureaucratic red tape and the extensive range of resources. This clash can widen an already large gap between Indigenous women and potential non-Indigenous support workers and can be destabilizing for women who may feel vulnerable. Some women who stayed in non-Indigenous shelters found they did not feel as comfortable in Quebecois settings. As Sylvianne explains :

> C'est pas comme être avec des Autochtones [...] Ça les a aidées, mais elles disaient qu'il manquait encore quelque chose pour… Il manquait quelque chose [...] Je n'interviens pas de la même manière qu'une autre personne, eux autres non plus ils n'interviennent pas de la même manière que nous.[52]
>
> *Sylvianne, frontline worker, urban area*

Nonetheless, QNW has noticed an improvement in specialized Indigenous programming, especially in community organizations. Despite that these initiatives usually stem from a place

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[51] Indigenous languages most currently spoken in Quebec: Inuktitut, Cree, Naskapi, Anishinabe, Mohawk, Atikamekw, Innu, and Mi'gmaq.

[52] Translation: It's not like being with Indigenous people. It helped them, but they said there was something missing …I don't do outreach the way someone else would—and they don't do outreach the way we would.

of good intentions, we still found that many fail to include Indigenous women in the development of their programs and to adequately research best ways of adapting their services. Consequently, the results are often inconclusive.

> Les ressources [non autochtones], dans leur bon vouloir, veulent implanter des programmes ou des ressources de réhabilitation [pour Autochtones, mais] tant et aussi longtemps que ça ne vient pas de la base, et qu'il n'y a pas de femmes autochtones d'impliquées, ça ne fonctionnera pas.[53]
>
> *Catherine, caseworker, urban area*

Right now, the most successful programs appear to be services specifically dedicated to Indigenous people and led by Indigenous people or by people with a firm grasp of Indigenous realities (such as the Native Friendship Centres, established in Quebec since 1969) (Bordeleau and Mouterde, 2011). What also seems to be especially useful is for Indigenous women to be accompanied by an Indigenous support worker or by a trusted individual when accessing services in the Quebec network.

Services Available to Men

Something our participants mentioned repeatedly is the alarming need for improved services dedicated to Indigenous men.

In the spirit of respecting Indigenous ways, we acknowledge that men and women each have important roles to play within a community and that all genders suffer from the effects of colonization. According to participants, the lack of resources available to men negatively affects the women in their lives, their families and their communities.

> Ce que vivent les hommes, ça affecte directement les femmes. Si on ne prend pas soin des hommes, ça va tomber sur la tête des femmes. Je trouve qu'il n'y a pas assez de services pour les hommes […] Les hommes, pour être capable de prendre soin de nous–en fait, d'eux-mêmes–je trouve qu'il n'y a pas assez de support.[54]
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

Anita explains that in order for the community to heal, both women and men need healing. While a number of services provide women with ways to leave their environment or to receive help, there are very few services dedicated to men, victims or perpetrators. Men who were convicted of violent offences and serve time in jail undergo short-term therapy, but it is seldom possible for them to continue the therapeutic process after their release. Sylvestre points out:

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53 Translation: Non-Indigenous resources want to develop rehabilitation programs or resources for Indigenous people, and that stems from good intentions. But as long as it's not coming from the grassroots and that there are no Indigenous women involved, it won't work.

54 Translation: The things men go through directly affect women. If we don't take care of men, women end up picking up the pieces. I think there's not enough services for men. There's not enough support for them to take care of us—of themselves, actually.

> I know there are a lot of programs for women, but there aren't any for men [...] There aren't enough programs for men. A lot of men that do go for treatment programs or go to jail, nothing is done for them when they come out. The behaviours are still there; they were just arrested with no rehabilitation. This needs to be addressed…
>
> *Sylvestre, frontline worker, Indigenous community*

In Indigenous settings, whenever possible, family and community healing must be the priority.

> The thing about healing is, let's heal the family. There is a plan for the woman, the kids... But if we want women to go out and experience a good life, they are going to have to re-establish relationships with the fathers. Not all of them... are... in jail, or have abandoned the family. There are fathers out there taking care of kids. They need to re-establish relationships with fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins... You know, you have to have balance. We teach the medicine wheel, balance in your life. That includes everyone in their life.
>
> *Béatrice, frontline worker, urban area*

SECTION 4
RELATIONSHIPS WITH POLICE FORCES

> Il y a une femme qui a été assassinée, qui a été tuée… Mais les policiers, ils disaient que c'était un suicide […] C'était affreux. Elle était mère. Elle était mère… Et le policier disait qu'elle s'était suicidée, et on savait tout le monde qui était l'homme qui l'a battue, qui était l'homme qui l'a tuée. [55]
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

Relationships with police forces are at the heart of the MMIW issue. In fact, over the past few years, law enforcement officials have been heavily criticized regarding their work with MMIW and their families (Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women, 2014; Walter, 2014). The more than forty reports on MMIW that already exist have addressed such issues as police racism, reports not being taken seriously, long wait times before setting investigations in motion, and lack of communication between police officers assigned to the same case and with victims' families during investigations (Amnesty International, 2009; AFAC, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2013; IACHR, 2014). Accordingly, we set out to better understand the nature of the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and police officers in communities and urban settings in the specific context of Quebec.

In Indigenous Communities

In the context of this study, we have chosen to examine the relationship between Indigenous people and the police from a perspective that, until now, has received little attention, i.e. the rather common position of members of an Aboriginal Nations' Police Force who work within their own communities.

Police Officers' Perception of MMIW

Let us begin by reviewing what was discussed in the first section of this report, when defining disappearance. Police officers were practically unanimous on the issue of MMIW: aside from the few communities where a specific case was more widely known, such as Shannon Alexander and Maisy Odjick from Kitigan Zibi and Tiffany Morrison in Kahnawake, the issue has been discussed very little. Members of Aboriginal Nations' police forces seem to imply that the issue of MMIW is important but does not directly concern them; rather, it is associated with urban areas or Western Canada.

[55] Translation: There is a woman who was murdered, who was killed… But the police, they called it a suicide […] It was horrible. She was a mother. She was a mother… And the police officer said she had committed suicide, but we all knew the man who beat her, the man who killed her.

> Il y en a qu'on voit que ça peut tracasser, mais pas de là à faire des campagnes sur ça.[56]
>
> *Fanny, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

> Oui, on a vu le dossier de la Colombie-Britannique, avec celui qui prenait les prostituées autochtones. [C'est un phénomène que j'associe] au rapprochement urbain.[57]
>
> *Mathieu, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

Furthermore, according to the statements of certain police officers, the term "missing or murdered Indigenous women" only applies to cases that have not been resolved.

> Seulement un cas d'assassinat ici à [communauté], et la personne a été arrêtée. C'est pas un cas où on ne connait pas le meurtrier.[58]
>
> *Marcel, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

> For the time I have been here, I mean there have been women who have been murdered, but the crimes have been solved. It wasn't like at the hands of some… It would be like a love triangle, that type of thing. They haven't been murdered and missing, they were just victims of a violent crime.
>
> *Brandon, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

Brandon does not seem to consider that murder in the context of a love triangle can be part of the MMIW phenomenon. His attitude underscores the power of narratives according to which the phrase "missing and murdered Indigenous women" applies only to a certain type of story. However, we contend that any murder, regardless of the context in which it is committed, remains a murder and is indeed a part of the issue currently under analysis.

Relationships with the Community

The police officers we spoke with described their day-to-day work as community oriented. For the officers, proximity, active participation in the life of the community and the possibility of addressing locals in their own language have allowed them to develop a personal connection that has made their work easier.

> La différence en communauté: vraiment l'aspect communautaire. On se connait tous ici. C'est un service beaucoup plus personnalisé. On peut faire le suivi, on en entend parler des gens.[59]
>
> *Marcel, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

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56 Translation: Some people are worried by this, but not enough to start a campaign.

57 Translation: Yes, we saw the file on British Columbia, with the one who took Indigenous prostitutes. [It is a phenomenon I associate with] proximity to urban areas.

58 Translation: Only one case of murder here in [the community], and the person was arrested. It's not a case where we don't know the murderer.

59 Translation: The difference in being part of a community: really the community aspect. We all know each other here. It is a more personalized service. We can follow up; we hear about it from people.

> On va dans les fêtes familiales et les activités de la communauté, on va aussi par exemple jouer avec les jeunes au basketball ou au hockey. On essaie d'être très présents, que les gens nous connaissent.[60]
>
> *André, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

> Ça facilite les relations, si j'ai aidé quelqu'un avec son épicerie en après-midi, et que je dois intervenir dans une bataille le soir, la personne va me connaitre […] On a toujours une personne qui parle [la langue autochtone de la communauté] quand on fait une intervention.[61]
>
> *Etienne, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

Community police practices point to a collaborative process that anticipates the eventual need for an intervention. The participants cited above also indicated that prevention is favoured over repression.

> Nos interventions sont plus diplomatiques que répressives, on essaie d'employer cette voie le plus possible.[62]
>
> *Alexandre, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

> C'est un rôle plus communautaire, en fait c'est d'être proche du citoyen et d'éviter en premier lieu des situations qui pourraient se produire, c'est une relation d'aide en fait.[63]
>
> *Pierre, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

> On va faire beaucoup de plans de préventions dans les cégeps, auprès des conseils de bande, dans la population avec les ainés, sur la fraude, des activités sur différents thèmes à la population. [64]
>
> *André, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

That said, police work focused around a community philosophy alone appears to be insufficient to transform the negative perception certain people have of law enforcement. In these respects, the state of affairs described by police officers was less than ideal. Despite what they claimed was a more personalized approach, they stressed that their work remains largely unpopular.

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60 Translation: We go to family gatherings and activities in the community; for example, we also play basketball or hockey with youth. We try to be present, so that people know us.

61 Translation: It makes relationships easier; if I help someone with their groceries in the afternoon, and I need to intervene in a fight at night, the person will know me […] We always have someone who speaks [the community's Indigenous language] when we intervene.

62 Translation: Our interventions are more diplomatic than repressive; we try to use this approach as often as possible.

63 Translation: Our role in the community is to be closer to the citizens and pre-emptively keep situations from happening; it is in fact a helping relationship.

64 Translation: We work on prevention plans in CEGEPs, with band councils, with elders, on fraud, different themed activities with the community.

> Y'en a toujours des mécontents, mais on ne peut pas faire plus. C'est un métier impopulaire. Vraiment impopulaire. C'est vraiment pas facile.[65]
>
> *Marcel, membre d'un corps de police autochtone*

> Bien perçus, non pas vraiment. C'est sûr qu'on a un rôle à jouer qui ne plait pas à tous. Le gars à qui je donne un ticket ne va pas m'aimer. Ça dépend.[66]
>
> *Mathieu, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

For one police officer, the problem exceeds the matters of popularity or appreciation. Alexandre expressed concern that women from these communities appear to have a distinct lack of trust of law enforcement.

> Au niveau des femmes autochtones, c'est quand même inquiétant. On ne sait pas comment faire pour les amener à avoir confiance au système […] Il y a une grosse éducation à faire au niveau de la communauté autochtone pour les éduquer à avoir confiance au système de police.[67]
>
> *Alexandre, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

Given the nature of the interventions that police frequently have to perform, there are significant risks when women do not trust police. Indeed, though some participants indicated that they rarely deal with violence, the vast majority stated that they had to intervene in cases of family violence on a regular basis.

> We have very violent communities proportionately. Because we're dealing with aggravated assaults, sexual assaults, etc. All these things we deal with every day, all the time, we have a lot of violence.
>
> *Brandon, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

> Des cas de violence conjugale, oui, [on en a] beaucoup.[68]
>
> *Mathieu, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

It should also be noted that our participants often saw a connection between violence and other social issues, including the consumption of drugs or alcohol.

In a context where violence is omnipresent, the evident distrust of women towards members of police forces takes on particular significance. Indeed, in such situations, women should be *particularly* able to rely on law enforcement, though this does not seem to be the case. As we saw in the previous section, the lack of trust in service providers can be explained by proximity—in this case, between police officers and the community they work with. As someone also working within a community, Marie explains having one's own police force can be highly beneficial, but there are also drawbacks, particularly in cases of violence.

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65 Translation: There will always be dissatisfied people, but we can't do more. It is an unpopular profession. Really unpopular. It's really not easy.

66 Translation: Well regarded? No, not really. We have a role to play that does not appeal to all. The guy that I'm giving a ticket to is not going to like me. It depends.

67 Translation: In terms of Indigenous women, it's pretty worrying. We don't know how to get them to trust the system […] there's a lot of education that needs to happen at the Indigenous community level to teach them to trust the police system.

68 Translation: Cases of conjugal violence, yes, [we have] a lot.

> Je pense que c'est important d'avoir son propre corps policier […] parce que les policiers qui connaissent la population, qui connaissent notre réalité, ça peut être des avantages. [M]ais ça peut être des inconvénients, parce que les gens, souvent, ils vont hésiter avant d'appeler les policiers. Parce qu'ils se connaissent, parce qu'ils ne veulent pas conter leur histoire à une personne [en particulier], ils ont peur, ils ont des doutes sur la confidentialité, sur l'anonymat également.[69]
>
> *Marie, case worker, Indigenous community*

> Everybody knows each other, is related to each other […] I'm guessing that people just might not report depending on who's on call.
>
> *Sara and Jessica, frontline workers, indigenous community*

Within communities, the closeness between law enforcement and the population it serves can act as an important barrier to reporting family violence, despite the fact that ordinarily this type of familiarity is both advisable and wanted. Generally, this proximity allows for pertinent and personalized police practices. Nevertheless, in the specific context in which one must report or intervene in matters of violence with someone to whom they are related, such closeness can constitute an obstacle. The same applies to proximity between a service user and frontline worker. Women's fear of being unable to count on impartial and confidential services from police officers in their communities increases their vulnerability.

In the event where neutrality and the respect of privacy within police interventions cannot be assured, women are naturally likely to remain silent and endure suffering, or to flee with little support. In both cases, this puts women at risk of going missing or being murdered.

Alexandre recognized this problem and agreed with other participants. As a way forward, he recommended sharing resources.

> Souvent le frère ou oncle travaille et c'est le beau-frère qui a fait l'agression. On n'utilise pas les autres communautés et on devrait […] Idéalement, chaque corps de police pourrait faire des prêts de service pour des enquêtes pour éviter que ce soit des gens qui se connaissent qui interagissent. Ça donnerait une confiance dans le système. La petite madame qui ne se plaint pas parce que c'est son frère qui est dans la police, [ça pourrait l'aider].[70]
>
> *Alexandre, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

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69 Translation: I think it's important to have one's own police force […] because police officers who know the population, who know our reality, that can be an advantage. [B]ut it can also be a disadvantage, because people often hesitate before calling the police. Because they know each other, because they don't want to tell a [specific] person their story. They are scared, they have doubts about confidentiality as well as anonymity.

70 Translation: Often the brother or uncle are working and the brother-in-law has committed the assault. We don't use other communities and we should […] Ideally, police forces could lend their services for investigations to avoid having people who know each other interact. It would generate trust in the system. The little lady who doesn't complain because her brother is a police officer, [this could help her].

Alexandre's suggestion of resorting to the services of Indigenous police officers from other communities allows for the possibility of continuing to rely on practices that are adapted to each community's context. MMIW families who took part in this study, from whom we will hear in the following section, made similar recommendations.

Beyond the issue of trust, one participant brought up additional challenges. During our interview, she was critical of her community's police officers, claiming that they themselves were part of the violence problem in the area. Samantha expressed anger about the dynamics of favouritism she perceived in her environment.

> They are part of the violence. Their behaviour, some of it is really… I can't even begin to understand how they are behaving as policemen […] Because of that attitude, that "This is my cousin so I won't take him in, but this guy here I don't like him, so I'll take him in." Then there is a violence incident, they play favourites or whatever. They are part of the problem.
>
> *Samantha, caseworker, Indigenous community*

Samantha's legitimate concerns relate to issues that reach far beyond police officers' day-to-day work, since they call both their training and practices into question. Whether this is a generalized phenomenon or not, our data does not say. Nevertheless, without a doubt it will be necessary to look into police officers' behavior as well as the ethical rules of practice that accompany (or should accompany) their training.

In Urban Settings: Persistent Prejudice

Given our decision to focus on interviewing police officers in Indigenous communities, we did not speak with any police officers working in cities. All the same, in discussions with frontline workers in urban areas, the matter of police relations arose. According to Anita, although relationships have been fraught with difficulties on a number of levels, the nature of these bonds now seems to be improving; slowly but surely they are strengthening.

> Même si ce n'est pas évident avec tout le monde, de plus en plus les policiers que j'ai rencontrés, ils ont plus un esprit ouvert […] Ils commencent à respecter le fait qu'ils ont besoin d'intervenantes autochtones pour les accompagner aux services de police ou à l'hôpital. Ils commencent à dire merci au travail des intervenantes qui ont été les voir, ils commencent à avoir une relation avec les services, une vision du travail d'être coéquipier entre les policiers et les intervenantes.[71]
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

[71] Translation: Even though it's not obvious to everyone, I've met more and more open minded police officers […] They are starting to respect the fact that they need Indigenous frontline workers to accompany them to police stations or to the hospital. They are starting to thank frontline workers after having met them, they are starting to know the services and acquire a vision of the work of cooperation between police officers and frontline workers.

Anita's remarks demonstrate how positive collaboration between police officers and service providers is greatly appreciated and can greatly enhance the well-being of, and the respect for the women they work with.

However, it must be emphasized that statements as positive as this one were rare throughout our investigation. Police officers' desire to work in collaboration with frontline workers appears to be contingent on individual goodwill rather than institutional practices. In fact, more often than not, participants denounced police officers' prejudice towards Indigenous Peoples and mentioned the discrimination the women they work with face regularly.

> Elles ont peur, elles ont vécu des situations, elles ne veulent pas aller faire des plaintes parce qu'elles ont peur des représailles des policiers ou d'autres gens. Et souvent elles ne sont pas prises au sérieux, parce que "Ah ben là t'es en consommation". [72]
>
> *Joëlle, frontline worker, urban area*

As discussed in an earlier section of the report, Joëlle describes an instance of discriminatory behaviour from police officers when a woman was barred from accessing services due to alcohol consumption. According to Béatrice, another frontline worker, Indigenous people are regularly profiled and receive fines for reasons she deems unreasonable:

> Oh because he is sitting on the doorstep. And maybe he sits on the doorstep every day. Is he hurting anyone? […] No […] Uh, standing in the wrong place [and p]robably the other one is throwing cigarette butts on the ground.
>
> *Béatrice, frontline worker, urban area*

Sophie expressed how trust in police officers can be seriously affected by negative interactions.

> Veux-tu prendre une chance que ce soit un bon policier ou un mauvais policier? J'ai vu du bon travail se faire, mais j'ai aussi vu le mauvais travail […] Maintenant c'est rendu que j'ai peur des policiers alors que je n'avais jamais eu peur d'eux autres avant […] La manière expéditive qu'ils ont de régler les problèmes alors que… Prends le temps! […] Et on voit aussi comment ils peuvent se donner des plus grandes largesses […] Donc non, la confiance elle se perd. Elle n'a jamais été aussi basse je pense à [Ville] par rapport aux policiers. Pourtant, avant j'avais confiance énormément.[73]
>
> *Sophie, frontline worker, urban area*

Further aspects of the relationship between police officers and Indigenous people in cities were raised by MMIW family members; these will be addressed in Section 5.

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[72] Translation: They are scared, they have been through tough situations, they don't want to report because they are afraid of retaliation from police officers or others. And often they're not taken seriously because, "Oh, well, you've been drinking."

[73] Translation: Do you want to take a chance that it's a good cop or a bad cop? I have seen good work, but I have also seen the bad work […] It's gotten to the point that I'm scared of police officers even though I was never afraid of them before […] The dismissive way in which they solve problems even though…Take more time! […] So no, the trust is lost. I don't think it's ever been so low in [City] for police officers. But I used to have a great deal of confidence.

Police Officer Training

We have established the great importance of transforming existing services and practices dedicated to Indigenous people in both rural and urban areas. Indigenous women in vulnerable circumstances are far more likely to seek help and support from service providers they can trust and feel good about. Yet, police officers' inconsistent experience of sensitivity training on Indigenous realities demonstrates how varied this training can be from one police officer to the next.

> Moi comme je viens de la communauté, j'ai pas eu de formation spécifique.[74]
>
> *André, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

> J'ai eu ma formation à [l'École nationale de police], mais rien sur les Autochtones en particulier. Sinon j'ai eu quelques formations sur les suicides, les problèmes de santé mentale…[75]
>
> *Étienne, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

> J'ai suivi une formation sur l'histoire, les traités, la culture, la chasse, la pêche, etc.[76]
>
> *Mathieu, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

When we asked André about his training, the officer alluded to a period of integration that novice police officers must undergo in his community.

> Tout policier qui vient de l'extérieur va être jumelé avec un partenaire de la communauté, qui va lui présenter les aînés, les personnes des Conseils de bande... C'est un processus d'intégration qui dure deux à trois semaines.[77]
>
> *André, member of an Aboriginal Nations' police force*

The training offered to police officers operating within Indigenous communities does not appear to be consistent. Yet, as we explained, such training should take account of Indigenous realities both substantially and consistently. Furthermore, given the great number of Indigenous people living in large cities (Lévesque and Cloutier, 2013), it is important to ensure consistent yet locally adapted training for all police service personnel operating in cities as well.

Since the Indigenous women and even certain police officers who took part in our investigation brought up the lack of trust between Indigenous women and law enforcement, we asked our respondents how feelings of trust could be developed or improved upon. Their answers lay the groundwork for the development of training that truly takes into account the needs of the population that law enforcement officers are supposed to serve. Some frontline workers explained:

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74 Translation: Since I come from the community I never got any specific training.

75 Translation: I got my training from [the École nationale de police] but nothing on Indigenous people in particular. Otherwise, I received training on suicide and mental health issues.

76 Translation: I received training on history, treaties, culture, hunting, fishing, etc.

77 Translation: Any police officer from the outside is paired with a partner from the community that introduces them to elders, members of the Band Council… It is an integration process that lasts two to three weeks.

> De se montrer comme une personne avec un esprit ouvert, je sais que ce n'est pas beaucoup, mais s'ils pouvaient demander une question, une phrase [...] en langue autochtone ou même le fait de connaitre les communautés. De donner l'impression qu'ils connaissent la communauté autochtone.[78]
>
> *Anita, frontline worker, urban area*

> Le fait de parler à une femme policière peut sûrement aider la femme à être en confiance. Et je pense que quelqu'un qui a de l'empathie, qui a un peu les qualités d'intervenant, qui a une ouverture.[79]
>
> *Marlène, frontline worker, indigenous community*

> Mais si moi j'ai besoin d'un policier [...] je vais demander un membre de la communauté parce qu'eux connaissent la problématique dans la communauté même [..] Moi c'est sûr que j'aurais plus confiance de parler avec un autochtone qu'avec un non-autochtone en tant qu'intervenante.[80]
>
> *Jeannine, frontline worker, indigenous community*

Such responses suggest that Indigenous women might further seek support from police officers' whose approach is in line with that of frontline workers. Indeed, Indigenous women want to be heard, and treated with compassion and an open heart and mind. Furthermore, they should also be able to interact with someone who understands both theirs and their community's lived experience. Frontline workers equally highlight that women appreciate the possibility of interacting with female police officers who, preferably, are Indigenous. Lastly, they seek interactions that are devoid of the power dynamics that typically characterize exchanges with law enforcement.

Like the needs related to Indigenous services listed in Section 3, it appears as though close collaboration between police officers and frontline workers may be an interesting and helpful way forward in view of fostering Indigenous women's trust in law enforcement, regardless of whether these police officers are Indigenous or not.

78 Translation: To show you're open minded, I know it's not a lot, but if they could ask one question, one sentence […] in an Indigenous language or even knowing the community. To give the impression they know the Indigenous community.

79 Translation: Talking to a female police officer can surely help a woman to build trust. And I think someone who has empathy, the qualities of a frontline worker, who is open.

80 Translation: But if I need a police officer […] I will ask a member of the community because they know the issue from the community's perspective […] For me, as a frontline worker, I would certainly trust an Indigenous person more than a non-Indigenous person.

SECTION 5
FAMILIES SPEAK UP

This investigation would have been incomplete without the essential contributions of the families of missing or murdered Indigenous women. Of course families should be consulted first in any attempt to identify needs and determine eventual courses of action, though, too often, they have been cast aside. With this in mind, QNW organized an event in April 2015 that brought together eleven MMIW families. This section offers an analysis of the discussion that occurred during this important gathering.

Description of the Family members' gathering

Quebec Native Women firmly believed that our organization's attempt to collect families' testimonies for this investigation should extend beyond a single group discussion, and that such an experience should be hosted in a safe environment. Our hope was that families would feel comfortable to reflect, share and mutually support one another. Accordingly, the group discussion that was part of this study took place over the course of a larger gathering of MMIW families.

From April 23 to 27, 2015, QNW brought together 19 individuals—from 11 families, and 7 different nations—who had lost a loved one. Our primary objective in organizing such a gathering was to create a time and space for families to share, grieve, and heal. We also asked participants to voice their needs for the purposes of our investigation. Mainly, this event provided participants with an opportunity to share their stories and to meet families who have had experiences like theirs. In order to create a culturally safe environment, a great variety of workshops and performances were offered—drumming, hoop dancing, sewing, a sharing circle, a sweat lodge, birch bark basket-making, discussions with Indigenous leaders, and singing. Elders and qualified Indigenous frontline workers insured that the event was appropriately facilitated.

The group discussion that we will describe below was therefore programed within the context of this larger event, and participants were under no obligation to take part. Although not everyone spoke up, the circumstances were favorable for families to share their stories, and in the language of their choice.[81] The discussion took place outdoors, around a campfire, in the presence of elders and traditional medicine such as cedar, sage and tobacco. This was of particular significance for participants.

Needs Identified by the Families

We asked the families to express their needs, the messages they wanted to share and the suggestions they had for how to help their families or take action on the issue of MMIW (see Appendix 3). Here we present the main highlights of the conversations we had with the courageous families we had the honour to meet.

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81 In French and English. Whisper translation was also available in some Indigenous languages.

Relationships with Police Services

Numerous families brought up the interactions they had had with police forces who intervened in their loved one's case. Many expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of their relationship—or lack thereof—with law enforcement. As was the case with Sindy Ruperthouse's parents, mentioned earlier, police services' responses to reports of an Indigenous woman's disappearance was often found to be far too slow.

> The response from the police was next to nothing in our case. Reserve police came to do a statement and that was it.
>
> *Thomas*

In certain instances, participants implied that the disappearance of their loved one had not been taken seriously. For example, Thomas explains how the hasty conclusions drawn by the police influenced the public. By insinuating to the media that their loved one was in fact a "runaway" rather than a missing person, a police officer contributed to slowing interest in searching for the victim.

> Chief of police went on TV and declared [the person who disappeared] a runaway, which cut off chances of searching for her, blaming [the victim] ... That cut off chances of people looking for her…
>
> *Thomas*

Eleanor's story unfolded in a similar way. Police were quick to accept the runaway theory, with little to no consideration for the victim's family or their point of view.

> Quand les recherches étaient en cours dans [ma communauté] et que la police a appelé pour dire qu['on avait aperçu quelqu'un] et que la description de [cette personne] correspondait à la description de [la personne disparue], c'est ça qui a fait arrêter les battues. Je me suis toujours dit que ça n'a même pas été vérifié cette information-là [...] C'est quelque chose qu'il faut changer dans les façons de faire de la police. On a notre mot à dire.[82]
>
> *Eleanor*

The frustration and helplessness families can experience as a result of the seemingly limited interest of police can cause much suffering and incomprehension. Many family members said they found it difficult to maintain a relationship with the investigators in charge of their loved one's case. As the investigation process went on, families realized that they had not had the chance to establish trust with authorities, due to their lack of communication. It was also revealed that missing persons' files had been transferred several times from one police department to another.

[82] Translation: When the search was underway in my community and the police called to say they had seen someone and that the description of this person fit the description of the missing person, the search stopped. I've always told myself that this information was never even verified. That's something that should be changed in the way the police do things. We should have our say.

> Where I have hate is when [my investigator] told me that investigators of Montreal are going to see me [to help with my case], but it's been one year now since he told me that. Not even a phone call, I wait and I wait.
>
> *Alan*

> On fait juste changer d'enquêteur, je ne sais plus où on est rendu [...] Les enquêteurs, qu'est-ce qu'on fait avec ça? Je ne sais plus quoi faire avec eux. Il faut faire quelque chose, mais j'ai peur de déranger l'enquête. Si on bouge, si on dit quelque chose qui n'est pas vrai, on fait quelque chose de travers, j'ai peur de déranger. Ça fait que je me ferme et j'écoute. "J'ai rien, j'ai rien"; c'est ce qu'ils n'arrêtent pas de dire. Ça fait qu'on devient frustrés. J'aurais le goût de dire "Qu'est-ce que vous faites!?" mais je ne le dis pas parce que je ne veux pas briser la relation, parce que peut-être qu'il ne me parlera plus après.[83]
>
> *Gerard*

As Gerard so aptly describes, the relationship between a victim's family members and an investigator involves an obvious power imbalance. Families shared their reluctance to voice any opposition to the handling of their loved one's case for fear of harming the investigation. Essentially, families need the police to show greater concern for their well-being and appreciation for their potential role during the investigation. Should it be impossible to involve or adequately inform families, the reasons for this impossibility should be clearly presented to them so that they can fully understand the process.

Furthermore, as one participant pointed out, some cases that have been considered resolved by police continue to raise doubts among the victim's loved ones. For some families, many questions remain unanswered and elements of the investigation seem suspicious, but nothing is done in these cases to expand the investigation.

> Il y en a tellement qui ont vécu des pertes, des disparitions… Ils [n'] ont jamais de réponses à leurs questions. Il y a des dossiers […] ça fait longtemps qu'ils ont été fermés. Les gens sont passés à la Cour, ont été acquittés. Mais les familles sont restées avec ça, il y avait tellement d'anomalies [...] Elles restent avec plein de questions. C'est une réalité dans nos communautés, il se passe tellement de choses.[84]
>
> *Eleanor*

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83 Translation: All they ever do is switch investigators, I don't know where we're at…What do you do with investigators? I don't know what to do with them anymore. We have to do something, but I'm scared I'll disrupt the investigation. If we move, if we say something that isn't true, if we do anything wrong, I'm afraid that I will bother them. So I shut up and I listen. "I have nothing, I have nothing", that's what they keep telling us. So we get frustrated. I feel like saying "Well what *are* you doing?!" but I don't say it because I don't want to harm the relationship, because maybe then they won't talk to me after that.

84 Translation: So many of those who suffered losses, disappearances…They have never gotten answers to their questions. Some cases have been closed for a long time. People went to court and were acquitted. But the families still live with that, there were so many anomalies [...] They still have all these questions. It's a reality in our communities, so much happens…

Echoing the words of frontline workers and members of Aboriginal Nations' Police Forces, families said the proximity between residents in small communities and their police forces can be the cause of many challenges. In the case of a criminal investigation, it can be very problematic for a police officer to be in charge of the case of someone they know. To avoid any delay or conflict of interest in the case of a disappearance, Jennifer suggested an exchange of services between communities. This solution was proposed previously in the pages of this report.

> The other problem with police in our reserves is that when they are investigating, they might get into something that it is their own family or friends involved and they might cover it up [...] One thing to get around that is that if we train our reserve police in all our communities, at least in Quebec, we could take care of that. Also when someone goes missing or is murdered, they could make an exchange [between communities] to ensure that they don't have a conflict of interest. Because that happens a lot in our communities where police are involved with their family. It's a problem.
>
> *Jennifer*

Evidently, proximity between residents may challenge policy impartiality, but it can also cause police to experience intense emotions for which they do not necessarily receive appropriate support. Patrick said there should be more cultural and psychological assistance for police officers:

> There should be an elder in police forces on reserve to help with trauma, because they live trauma too. They need spiritual help. This is what is missing. An elder at the police force to smudge, medicines, circle.
>
> *Patrick*

Families seem to agree that there should be further training for Quebec and Indigenous police forces around the question of missing or murdered Indigenous women.

> Our police don't have enough tools, they don't know, don't understand what we feel.
>
> *Alan*

> Definitely, there's a need for training for these cases. And they need compassion also. Compassion is what they need.
>
> *Susan*

Finally, relationships built around trust between investigators and the Indigenous population are sought. Families ask that they be heard, believed and taken seriously, and for police to work quickly and efficiently while being empathetic. These types of relationships, which should be the norm, do exist in some cases:

> Some families had good experiences. For us it took us four years for an investigator who would listen [...] They call, and that's all we ever wanted. He calls when in [town], just to say hi, to let you know "I'm thinking about you." [The person who disappeared] is not forgotten. That's all I ever wanted. It took me four years of fighting for that [...] He sits there and talks to us. I think we all deserve that. That's what I want families to have. This relationship.
>
> *Susan*

Even when it is impossible for police to give clear answers about investigations, the families want a human relationship with police members. Families need to know that whoever is in charge of their loved one's case will do everything they can to find out what happened.

> Moi je cherche encore des réponses. On va en chercher encore.[85]
>
> *Gerard*

Support and Healing

It is clearly urgent for families to be heard and supported. Nevertheless, families have experienced isolation in their communities because their peers do not know how to approach them. Ironically, this fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, even when it comes from a caring place, contributes to the isolation families experience in a time when their greatest need is to be surrounded by people they love and care about.

> Il y a la communauté aussi [...] On dirait que, avant tout le monde nous parlait, on nous invitait, tout ça. Mais maintenant, on dirait qu'ils ont peur de nous autres [...] Ils ont peur de comment aborder ces sujets-là. Il devrait y avoir des manières de parler dans une communauté [...] C'est sûr qu'on a besoin d'aide, les communautés ont besoin d'aide pour comment aborder ces personnes-là. On a besoin de parler. [86]
>
> *Gérard*

Victims who are already vulnerable and suffering often end up having to ask for help and take it upon themselves to share their story and their needs. It is well known that the quest for support is burdensome and can take a lot of time in such difficult circumstances.

Case workers and frontline workers also expressed they felt unequipped to face such profound distress. They are not prepared for these situations such that when they arise, they do not know how to react.

> Ce qui manque c'est que les intervenants, les personnes qualifiées vont même pas les voir. C'est [les victimes] qui doivent faire le geste d'aller les voir en plus de ce qu'ils viennent de vivre [...] Quand tu vis quelque chose, tu refoules, tu refoules, t'attends qu'il se passe quelque chose pour être capable de parler. C'est trop tard. Il y a trop de retard, c'est dur de démarrer quelque chose après. Il faut faire quelque chose maintenant.[87]
>
> *Jeannine*

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85 Translation: I'm still looking for answers. We're going to keep looking.

86 Translation : There is the community too [...] It seems as though before, everyone would talk to us, would have us over, all that. But now, it's like they are afraid of us [...] They are afraid of broaching the topic with us. There should be ways to talk about things in a community [...] Of course we need help, communities need help figuring out how to approach these people. We need to talk.

87 Translation : What's missing is frontline workers; those who are qualified don't go to [families]. On top of what they are going through, [victims] are required to take the first step [...] When you are going through something, you turn inward, and inward, and something has to happen before you are able to talk about it. Then it's too late. It takes too much time, and it is so hard to start something up at that point. Something has to be done now.

According to our participants, families often feel abandoned and do not get the chance to share their stories and their thoughts about what they are going through. Meeting with other families who have had experiences like their own and who can truly understand what they have gone through appears very helpful.

> What helped me was this event, the fact that I was invited to it. I'm from a family suffering, but here there are people who understand my pain, I would hear those suffering, and that helps me immensely to express the pain, to realize that we are suffering in silence for so long.
>
> *Margaret*

As Margaret pointed out, in order for families to feel supported, and so they can support each other, further gathering opportunities must be developed where families can come together and speak out in a safe environment that provides both strength and relief. The families unanimously supported the idea that annual gatherings must immediately be planned.

> This retreat is a really good thing. It can't just be once. It's just the beginning. It has to be on a regular basis. At least once a year.
>
> *Jennifer*

Beyond the healing power of being understood and supported by families like one's own, such gatherings cause families to draw parallels between their stories. Here, Susan explains that one of the stories she heard during the event triggered intense feelings for her, because it was so similar to her own.

> You know, when I heard your story yesterday, it triggered so much because it was similar, so similar. And it's sad that we have to fight for our loved ones like that.
>
> *Susan*

Hearing other peoples' stories allowed the families to understand the scope of the phenomenon; for many people, this was a strong incentive for action. Coming together around a common cause brought strength and courage to those who have endured much suffering and who now want to speak out about these injustices. Such feelings of empowerment can help to overcome the helplessness that many families have felt over the years.

> Other people are hurting. If Harper's[88] not going to do anything, we need to rally forces. If we get together we grow stronger. Harper will have no choice but to listen if we are all together. We can grow rapidly.
>
> *Margaret*

As we mentioned earlier, community solidarity is a strong and cohesive force within Indigenous cultures. These family members' testimonies confirm that gathering and providing one another with support are seen as ways of overcoming the suffering that many Indigenous people have experienced. One participant suggested putting the families who have lost a loved one in contact with each other so that they may help one another. Families further expressed that given how long some of them had waited before they were able to access formal support, it

[88] At the time of the interview, Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister of Canada.

could be very beneficial if they could be contacted directly, and help instead, was offered directly to them.

> I would like to see—when a family reaches out to you, before they do, we should reach out to them, ask them what they need.
>
> *Susan*

As Gerard, Susan and Jeannine suggested, creating connections between families could be an appropriate way to offer immediate and ongoing support to the families of MMIW; in so doing, frontline workers would be better equipped to meet their needs. This type of support network could also reduce the feeling of helplessness experienced by the families' peers. According to Patrick, the support should also take on cultural forms, which, in his opinion, are practically absent in the healing options currently offered to Indigenous people.

> But I find the culture is missing…All leaders should be oriented towards the cultural… they should want to say "let's have a prayer and a sweat." This is missing a lot. Everywhere. I believe in these prayers and what they can do. Everything should be done with a prayer [...] This needs to be brought back. This is the bottom line of all our problems. We want people who understand our ceremonies and medicines. We can't do it alone. We get help from our ancestors and medicines.
>
> *Patrick*

Information and Knowledge

Despite the great number of reports that document the MMIW issue, some families stressed that further research and knowledge about the subject are needed. Indeed, we at QNW equally realized that the extent of the phenomenon remains extremely hard to measure. Eleanor elaborated on this matter :

> Je pense qu'il serait bon de répertorier les cas. Y'a tellement de… Il y en a tellement eu de disparitions. Il s'est passé beaucoup de choses [...] Il faut avoir une bonne idée de l'ampleur pour pouvoir faire quelque chose.[89]
>
> *Eleanor*

Additionally, it would be important to understand the intergenerational impacts of the phenomenon, in order to draw a clearer portrait of the problem and grasp its historical and contemporary ramifications. This information could also be useful in the development of different intervention initiatives.

For instance, Jennifer had come to accompany her mother in grieving the death of a woman Jennifer had actually never known herself. During the event though, the participant was shocked to realize just how much the disappearance that had so profoundly impacted her mother's life had transcended generations and significantly influenced her own life:

[89] Translation: I think it would be good to document the cases. There are so many… There have been so many disappearances. A lot of things happened. We need to know the scale in order to do something.

> I found my grieving yesterday, [and realized] how multigenerational trauma has an effect for the missing and murdered women, how it's playing itself out now. It's almost like the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission], the way that it has been working and playing out, the same thing needs to happen with this. We need a commission; people need to listen at that level.
>
> *Jennifer*

This testimony helps us to understand that the repercussions of the MMIW phenomenon on Indigenous communities are greater than we can currently imagine. As Jennifer indicated, testimonies should be gathered across the country and an event similar to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission should be organized in order to measure the true impacts of this situation across generations.

Awareness in the general population and institutions

Earlier, we addressed the necessity of educating families' peers so that they may be better equipped to comfort their grieving loved ones.

MMIW families also brought up the importance of sharing their realities with the general public in Quebec. In other words, families want to raise Quebecois' and Canadians' awareness beyond the individual stories of MMIW; they also want people to understand the historic realities that have led to socioeconomic issues that Indigenous people currently face.

According to Thomas, First Nations' history is missing from Quebec's education curriculum, and is seldom discussed in society. This in turn inhibits dialogue and understanding between Nations, and this should be seen as one of the reasons that there is still so much misunderstanding and even racism towards Indigenous people.

> Our history, it does not get taught, that's why we are viewed the way we are. We're left out of the history books.
>
> *Thomas*

Families highlighted that in order to support Indigenous Peoples and to effect lasting social change, people in Québec must know and understand Indigenous Peoples' realities. Support of the general population could considerably influence the ways in which existing problems in Indigenous communities are acted upon. This call for deepened knowledge and understanding of history and its consequences goes out to schools, the media, health and social service agencies and the general public.

Furthermore, families insisted on the importance of educating both Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments and their leaders about the current situation. Families want to be heard and for their experiences and demands to be understood. In order to truly support MMIW families and their communities, the impacts of the MMIW phenomenon must first be *felt*, only then will the seriousness and importance of the situation really be grasped.

> You are leaders, but you are also people who need to hear their stories and listen. Take that hat off and listen to people who put you in that seat. Because you haven't been there. You didn't listen. We have been used for political agendas. I still think we're being used for political agendas [...] Actions are better

than words spoken. That's what I need to see and I think this is what families need, action from leaders. Many talk and haven't spoken to us.

Susan

With this report, we have shown that the MMIW issue is rooted in a long and painful history of assimilation and erasure. Families demonstrated that, more than anyone, they understand this history's impacts and the ways in which it has affected their lives as family members of a missing or murdered Indigenous person.

It goes without saying that all of the challenges that have arisen as a result of the little known history presented here cannot be solved by MMIW families alone, nor even can they be solved by Indigenous communities or Nations. As Susan, Eleanor, Gerard, Thomas and others explained, as many people as possible need to know and understand what their families have undergone and learn about the origins of this suffering.

We strongly hope this will happen, as, evidently, do the families. Such an awareness should persuade the public and its leaders to support the families in achieving resolution, or healing. Despite the magnitude of their suffering, the families never stopped expressing hope. In their unity, they saw a source of strength, which will continue to guide them in their struggle.

CONCLUSION

Summary

Between April 2014 and December 2015, Quebec Native Women worked tirelessly to gather the testimonies of people who, each day, strive towards bettering Indigenous women's sense of safety and well-being. Thanks to the generous contributions of the participants in this investigation, we were able to provide an overview that confirms that the question of missing or murdered Indigenous women does concern us in Quebec and that the phenomenon is both complex and rooted in the past.

The history of Indigenous Peoples in Quebec consists of a chain of disappearances linked directly to both the Canadian and Quebecois governments' policies of assimilation and erasure. Today, these disappearances, defined by participants as the vanishing of a loved one under unknown circumstances, take on different forms, of which murder is the most serious and definitive. In order to better understand the nature of this phenomenon, our investigation has addressed the structural, institutional and personal violence that are manifest in Indigenous settings. We have tried to document the ways in which these types of violence reflect the quasi systematic discrimination that Indigenous people face from figures of authority. Our interviews have also allowed us to underscore the importance of fighting against the silence and lack of engagement by those who are aware of the existence of family violence in their surroundings.

We have also explored the barriers preventing women from accessing services they should be able to rely on for support. Fear and shame often make it difficult for women to ask for help, and few services outside their communities are adapted to their specific needs. It is clear that in Indigenous settings, family interventions should be prioritized over one-on-one work. Moreover, lack of funding, excessive workloads and lack of collaboration between service providers isolate frontline workers, rendering their work all the more difficult. As for police officers, discrimination and profiling of Indigenous people persist despite growing collaboration with frontline workers. In communities, according to the Aboriginal Nations' police force members we spoke with, police practices rooted in community values alone are not enough for women to feel safe to reach out for help when they have experienced violence. In any case, the proximity that exists in Indigenous settings remains an important barrier that prevents women experiencing family violence from accessing support, both because of the threat to confidentiality and the ethical challenges that this closeness poses.

Lastly, this investigation has given us the unique opportunity of meeting with the families of missing or murdered Indigenous women. Their generous testimonies have allowed us to identify their need for better relationships with police, enhanced emotional support, further documenting of the MMIW issue and, greater awareness raising of the public and of political leaders.

Ultimately, participants' concerns echoed preoccupations addressed by Quebec Native Women over the years. Indeed, our countless projects and initiatives are a testament to our ongoing focus on missing or murdered Indigenous women and on the violence that Indigenous women experience in general. Indeed, each of the initiatives that QNW has put forth over the past four decades lies within the scope of the courses of action suggested in the following paragraphs.

Courses of Action

Supporting Families at the Heart of the Tragedy of Missing or Murdered Indigenous Women

Events similar to the one organized in April 2015 should be hosted each year to offer support to the victims' loved ones, offering them an intimate and safe space to discuss their experiences and an opportunity for mutual aid. In addition, obtaining knowledge more specific to the Quebec situation (as was accomplished in these pages) regarding violence against Indigenous men and women will help to shape actions to stop and even prevent murders and disappearances. Additional work on missing or murdered Indigenous women should rely on a methodology that is respectful of Indigenous knowledges and involves the participation of families.

Favouring Collaboration (Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Actors and Between Communities and Urban Areas)

During the summer of 2015, QNW actively participated in the elaboration of a collaboration agreement between the Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal (the Montreal Police Service) and Montreal's urban Indigenous population. Following the example of other Canadian urban centers, the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy NETWORK asked the police service to sign this agreement in order to officialise their relationship, to raise the awareness of its personnel and to define a common mode of operation in cases of reported disappearances. QNW is coordinating the working committee responsible for the implementation of this last objective. Particular focus will be on relationships with the victims' families. Though it is still too early to speak of the impacts of this agreement, such collaborations are encouraging and could no doubt be adapted and reproduced elsewhere in the province. QNW is also a signatory of a solidarity agreement with the Fédération des femmes du Québec (Québec Women's Federation) aiming to promote solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women; a contribution to the redefining of perceptions and practices.

Raising Awareness and Educating Indigenous and Non-Indigenous People on the Place of Indigenous Women in History and in the Contemporary World

Holding workshops on issues relevant to Indigenous women is at the heart of QNW's actions and is intended to reach various audiences (students, employees of the State, community organizers). Since 2004, we have been collaborating with the École nationale de police (National Police School) in organizing training sessions for students from Indigenous cohorts. During the workshops, we address the sexist and discriminatory provisions of the *Indian Act*, sexual health, family violence and the best ways to intervene in crisis situations in Indigenous settings. This training could reach out to other categories of professionals, namely in the fields of education, health, and, of course, social services.

Focus on Solidarity and Mutual Aid

Community forces are of capital importance in Indigenous settings. Consequently, courses of action must serve to regenerate them and to favour communal living, allowing Indigenous women and their families to flourish. QNW brings together close to 100 Indigenous women each year for them to meet and address the issues that affect them; such meetings contribute to reinforcing a sense of belonging that reaches beyond local or regional communities. Furthermore, as coordinator of the Network of Shelters for Indigenous Women in Quebec QNW brings together Indigenous frontline workers from shelters across the province twice a year for

them to share information on a given theme. These meetings are important times for frontline workers to develop relationships and to break the isolation they may feel.

Develop Participative, Prevention, Accompaniment, and Intervention Strategies Against Violence

We propose to consolidate Quebec Native Women's well-established leadership in Quebec by coming up with an action strategy that will allow us to act *now* in Indigenous settings *and* in non-Indigenous society. We propose to combine in this strategy elements of prevention, accompaniment and intervention. Like the other courses of action identified earlier, this strategy would focus on the importance of strengthening links in Indigenous communities and in cities.

Needless to say an eventual action strategy will necessitate significant training and financial support. As was established in this report, short-term project financing does not succeed in bringing permanent changes in Indigenous settings. It would be better to prioritize a long-term approach aiming at profound change in Indigeous settings. This responsibility lies on Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. Indigenous women are daughters, sisters, mothers, cousins, friends, workers, frontline workers, and more. Empowered by their incredible resilience, together we will succeed in creating better conditions for the blossoming of our families.

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Appendix 1

Guide for one-on-one interviews with frontline workers or case workers in Indigenous settings.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">These questions can be used to guide the discussion, but do not have to be asked in their entirety or in any particular order. Let the discussion with the participant unfold freely.</td></tr>
<tr><th>Description of the Community</th><th>Services</th></tr>
<tr><td>Can you give me a general description of your community (or urban area)?
Do you think your community/nation has particularities (that others don't)?
What are the interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in your community or urban area (frequency, nature, etc.)?
Do you experience racism in your community or urban area? From whom?</td><td>What kind of support is there for women in your community? What services are under-used or little known? Why, do you think?
What problems lead women to reach out to your organization?
Are there barriers to accessing services? Why?
What are the challenges faced by frontline workers?
How could services in the community or urban area be improved?</td></tr>
<tr><th>Relationships with Police Services</th><th>General Perceptions of the Problem</th></tr>
<tr><td>What is the role of police services in your community or urban area? How are they perceived?
What would be the ideal interaction to have with police services in the case of a disappearance or of a suspicious death?
What could make a victim's loved ones feel confident to report, to tell their story, to open up to police services?</td><td>Tell us about the question of missing or murdered Indigenous women in your nation, community or urban area.
It is a problem people talk about? How is it perceived? Is it a preoccupation?
Is it a problem you associate to Quebec?
What is a missing person to you? When can we say that a person has disappeared?</td></tr>
<tr><th>Prevention and Awareness</th><th>Ending the Interview</th></tr>
<tr><td>What is being done in terms of awareness of prevention around violence (or other problems that were discussed)?
Could we be doing more? How?
Would you say the situation of missing or murdered Indigenous women is well-covered in the media?</td><td>Is there any other information or preoccupation about missing or murdered Indigenous women you would like to share with us?</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix 2

Guide for one-on-one interviews with members of an aboriginal nation police force

Role and Relationship with the Community	Murders and Disappearances
• Can you describe the community you work in? • How did you come to work in this Indigenous community? • How did the population greet you? • What is the role of the police service in the community? • How do you adapt your interventions to the Indigenous context? • How do you think the population perceives police services? • Why do you think relationships are sometimes tense between Indigenous people and police services? • What could facilitate your role in the community?	• Let's talk about the situation of missing or murdered Indigenous women more specifically. In your opinion, is the population worried about this problem? Why? • Is this problem present in your community? • What is your procedure in the case of a disappearance? • In the case of a suspicious death?
Collaboration	**Media**
• What are your relationships with other services in the community (shelters, treatment centres, DPJ, etc.)? • What could make you feel more comfortable in your work with frontline workers and other community actors? • What would improve the collaboration? • How could the population and police officers feel safer?	• What is your relationship to the media? • What do you think of their work regarding Indigenous issues?
Ending the Interview	
• Do you have any other comments on the question of missing or murdered Indigenous women in Quebec?	

Appendix 3

Interview Guide for Meeting with Families

What could help the families and peers of missing or murdered Indigenous persons?
• On the political level • On the social level • On the community level • On the cultural level
What would you like to say, what message would you like to transmit…
• To the government? • To police services? • To social and health services? • To society? • To organizations? • To the media?
What would you like to share that hasn't been said yet?