ARE WE FAILING INDIGENOUS WOMEN WHO FACE FAMILY ABUSE AND VIOLENCE? A PLEA TO RETURN TO THE TEACHINGS

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Abstract

Since Indigenous people have been in contact with the European population, the value system of Indigenous peoples has been viewed as “not as good as” (Sinclair, 2017, 30:00). The devastating outcomes are a forced integration and assimilation of a visitor nation’s ways of life and as such, the eradication of Indigenous ways of being, doing and knowing. When individuals are forced to engage in another’s value system, often their understanding of their own values gets lost. Indigenous women of Canada have been assimilated into European culture, and with that came the emergence of domestic violence, spousal abuse, and family violences which have invaded some family’s daily routines, or experiences. Many Indigenous women who suffer violence and abuse, experience loss of self-respect, family, friends, jobs, and their children (Government of Canada, 2012). The social structures such as the justice system, and family services, as examples, that are available today for Indigenous women to overcome the cycle of violence, are not always being delivered in culturally safe ways (Brennan, 2011). Culturally safe practices and procedures are critical in organizations that support Indigenous women who have been exposed to domestic violence (Klingspohn, 2018). Counteracting discriminatory, racial ideologies to protect Indigenous women is paramount. Our ancestral teachings and cultural teachings are something service providers can utilize daily in order to adequately address the needs of Indigenous women to heal and supercede the abuses they have suffered.

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Methodology

The Indigenous methodology of this paper is to review relevant literature that examines the violence that Indigenous women have been historically and currently exposed to and the response of the justice system and the attached support systems, which at times includes the traditional cultural approach of support by service providers. Literature in this review also includes teachings from my Elders, and the telling of experiences and stories.

Throughout this paper, I examine violence in Indigenous communities, the services available to curb this violence, and then make recommendations for further research and systemic changes. It started as a simple literature review, but as I examined more and began to immerse myself in the literature of journal articles, books, other Government published documents and pamphlets, I began to recall my own experiences and the teachings from my culture. The teachings of my culture are rarely found in articles and books. They are the words of the Elders with whom I have had the honour to sit with, drink a cup of tea with and to listen to. In this way, the paper takes on a life of its own. It has transformed into a telling of cultural teachings (of only what I can share, because some of our teachings remain private) and a literature review that is laden with my voice. My methodology is heavily influenced by my Indigenous teachings in that I cannot just tell what other people say without examining my lived experiences. So this paper, while I examine the relevant literature surrounding the services for Indigenous women experiencing violence, I share this through an Indigenous lens, which allows me to be a participant engaged not only in the telling but in the experiencing.

Overview

Statistics indicate that violence against women in Canada is high, and Indigenous women are significantly overrepresented when comparing this group to other Canadian women (Department of Justice, 2017b). The consistent implementation of culturally relevant services is also a concern, along with the ongoing structural, systemic racism by the very institutions that are meant to protect these women and their children. Therefore, these women also disporportinately struggle to find safety from perpetrators of violence (Rohner, 2020). What is apparent in this literature review is the need for improved services that rely on a local and culturally appropriate knowledges and a framework, which involves local Elders and which are prompt and ongoing, to combat the ongoing harms of colonization within the implemented programs and structures of society today.

Violence & Indigenous Women

Native Women's Association of Canada

54% of Aboriginal women reported severe forms of family violence, such as being beaten, being choked, having had a gun or knife used against them, or being sexually assaulted, versus 37% of non-Aboriginal women.

44% of Aboriginal women reported "fearing for their lives" when faced with severe forms of family violence, compared with 33% of non-Aboriginal women.

27% of Aboriginal women reported experiencing 10 or more assaults by the same offender, as opposed to 18% of non-Aboriginal women.

While the number of non-Aboriginal women reporting the most severe forms of violence from 43% in 1999 to 37% in 2004, the number of similar attacks against Aboriginal women remained unchanged at 54% during the same time period.

by the NWAC (2015) (p.2)

Figure 1 – Statistics of Overrepresentation of Indigenous Women and Violence

Introduction

Due to colonization in Canada, Indigenous people have experienced what is termed intergenerational trauma (Berube, 2015). This trauma has been initiated by historical oppression enacted by the settlers of this country. It has stripped the traditional rights and debilitated the cultural and ancestral practices of Indigenous people in Canada. Horrifically, this trend continues to occur today (Bombay et. al., 2014). One of the significant issues that resulted from these acts of oppression is that of violence towards Indigenous women.This has been characterized as a form of cultural genocide (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). These behaviors within Indigenous families were learned from the oppressors through, among other things, Canadian government-sanctioned residential schools and the Indian day school systems (Holmes and Hunt 2017). Reactions and responses to these acts of oppression, which are often called behaviors, are pervasive in Indigenous families today. The behaviors stemming from colonization sometimes leads to violent acts amongst men, women, men and women, adults, and children (FemNorthNet, 2016).

While all acts of violence are appalling, the ongoing inhumanity is prevalent and persistent in Indigenous communities today. Indigenous women continue to encounter the horrible effects and aftermath of each incident. They are then subjected to the ostensivily prescribed colonial cures that are the current social work practices grounded in the colonial misunderstandings of the needs of Indigenous families. It is the colonial cures for what I will argue is the problem that are at the heart of this paper. The Indigenous family unit, the ancestral teachings, and the healing practices of Indigenous people have been so disrupted by the introduction of family violence and mysogony that they have brought a need for these “cures”. Many of us Indigenous people working in the field as social workers recognize that in the same way that the violence is not ours, the processes for moving through and past the violence are not

ours either. If we are to effect change and stop this violence, we are going to have to recognize the shortcomings of current social work practices.

This paper, as you will come to know, originates from my personal responsibility.

Research Location

There is a significant need for healing. There is a need to end the violence experienced in Indigenous communities. Beyond personal responsibility, my hope is that through this paper, I can be a conduit for healing in my community. When Indigenous women are forced to use the Canadian justice system for protection, there is a need for recognizing and understanding Indigenous women's cultural needs. This is paramount while service provision is occurring and the focus should be on the improvement of Indigenous women's livelihood. The purpose of this paper is also to provide recommendations for services required for Indigenous women who are involved in intimate partner violence. When Indigenous women present in offices and ask for help, service providers often have no authentic and tangible way to provide these women with the services they desperately need. My hope is that by presenting the literature and then making research and practice recommendations, changes can be made that will allow for services to be culturally safe and address the problem of violence in our Indigenous communities.

First, I will speak to my social location. This includes who I am and where I am from, as it is essential in my culture to not only introduce yourself but to include an idea of why I am here and why this paper is important. I introduce one of my personal heroes, as well as a prominent teacher in my life. Without speaking to my own experiences and introducing those of my family, I would not be able to produce the reason for writing this paper entirely. We are all someone's daughter, mother, aunty, friend, or Elder. I also write about some critical Canadian campaigns or movements that speak specifically to anti-violence. The literature review then speaks to different

topics, including the Seven Sacred Teachings, and teachings from Elders. There is a focus in this review around the history of colonization and how it has filtered into the behaviors of Indigenous families because I believe that in order to combat the cycles of violence within our families, we must understand the trauma they endured through their colonization and oppression. I believe when I understand the trauma of an individual, I can begin working with the strengths within that individual. Improving policies and our personal practice is what needs to occur for all workers assisting women who experience violence. With improved policies, the services could improve, along with implemented cultural practices in local programming for all women, and men, their children, and their extended families. This will ensure that the services that our Nations are involved in are addressing the impact of violence that is prevalent from a recent incident and to understand the reasons for it entering into the family in the beginning. We must learn from our teachings and our histories in order to move forward.

My concluding remarks include recommendations for service delivery changes. It is evident that the current practices are substandard, and the recommendations, although simple, must be implemented to begin to address the violence within our families and communities. My hope as I go forward in this profession is that future research into the family violence in our communities will strengthen the policy reform and make meaningful changes that will end the violence for our beautiful women in our Indigenous communities.

Who I am / Why I Write About Violence Against Women

I am a member of the Lower Nicola Indian Band in Merritt, BC. This Reserve sits in an area today called the Nicola Valley. Our Nation, the Nłeʔkepmxc (People of the Canyon), are categorized into what is known for mainstream folk as the Interior Salish First Peoples in the Southern Interior of British Columbia.

I was not always a member of my Mother's Band; it was not until 2011 that I was able to obtain my rights to my Band and lineage due to the hard work and struggles of many women who had been denied Band membership and Indian status in Canada. A Band member from the Lower Nicola Indian Band, Sharon McIvor, in a landmark case, challenged the Canadian Government in 2009 to implement the fairness of equity when considering eligibility to the Indian Act itself. It was and is, as McIvor (in Deer, 2019) describes in figure 2, a sexist document. Her powerful voice asserted that when Indigenous women were married to a non-Indigenous man, they lost their rights to Indian status, and therefore their children, and future generations also lost their rights to federally prescribed Band Memberships in 1951. In 2011, McIvor's won her case against the Canadian government , and as a result she won the ability for many Indigenous people, including myself, to obtain their Indian status through what is now known as the *Bill C-3 Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act*. McIvor's dedicated work continues as illustrated in figure two, and is a stark example of one woman creating change for the equity of women in Canada. Sharon McIvor has inspired me to be stronger than I ever thought I could be, and to be proud of who I am. I am fortunate that people have been placed on my path to teach me it has helped me to become who I am.

The most recent amendments to the Act came into force in December 2017, with the exception of a provision related to the removal of a practice of linking registration reform to the date of 1951 (commonly known as the '51 cut-off). The federal government is currently consulting First Nations on how to implement the removal of '51 cut-off and broader issues around Indian registration, band membership and citizenship.
McIvor criticized the consultations, saying their purpose has been "to scare status Indians that the addition of the women who are entitled will somehow destroy their rights as they know it," and that it is "asking if it's OK to continue to discriminate.
You can't give permission to discriminate, she said.

Figure 2 – McIvor discussions regarding eligibility and discrimination of Indian status in Canada (Deer, 2019)

I have worked as a social worker for seven years. I have worked as a family support worker, a youth support worker, and primarily as a child protection worker. These experiences have allowed me to be able to work on both sides of the battle that takes place in family service files. I have been the advocate for families against the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD), asserting and demanding their rights. Later I worked in that exact position which I had been railing against. The latter is a job I thought I would never do, however, life is strange and the paths we find ourselves on in this life, stranger still. I have lived in my community my whole life, and as I will share in this paper, I have been witness to violence the entire time. This lived experience has influenced me to do more, never to settle, and as you will see evidenced in my story to always stand up for what is right and good.

Making Sense of the Hard Lessons Learned

When you are a small child, watching the world seems difficult and at times, scary, you wonder why everyone else has such perfect lives. You believe that everyone has it better, as you are always bullied at your school, from elementary up to high school, for some reason, never fitting in. You are growing up realizing as a teenager, that you, in fact, have a wonderful life, and that those around you love you very much. Realizing how hard your Mother has worked to protect and ensure you have the best that she can provide and that this is much more meaningful than what the kids at school, who always get everything they want, have. Those kids, I imagine, lose the appreciation for those material things they accumulate. You realize that while you are becoming a role model to your best friend's children, and the children you end up working with and creating special bonds with is with many times more fulfilling than what you might have imagined those accumulations might bring. And then you realize that it is all thanks given to the teachings I received from my family. I would not be the person I am today without the hardships and painful experiences I received, that came along with an abundance of support and hope from

my family. When working within families that are overcoming their trauma, witnessing their resilience is an honor. I am here because my ancestors fought for me, and now I need to fight for my people to ensure that our future generations are successful and safe from harm.

Literature Review Findings

This section will examine the literature. I reviewed 26 different articles and books, as well as included Indigenous knowledges and lived experiences to complete this review. The search included the following key words and phrases: Indigenous/Aboriginal/First Nations violence/family violence; culturally safe services (in BC and Canada) for Indigenous women; as well as a review of local information pamphlets (that outline services); the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) report (and its references to family violences), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) report (and its references to family violences); as well as the teachings of Elders and familial teachings from my own community and family. This was a not linear process and often circles around each topic, picking up new pieces and shedding light where there was none before. The themes that emerged from the literature is as follows:

Violence is prevalent in Indigenous communities
Indigenous women experience violence at very high rates;
Abuses, violences and neglect are not Indigenous traditions;
Colonialism has taught and perpetuated many of the violences occurring in Indigenous communities;
Indigenous women are not being served by the social structures designed to help them in their situations; and
Cultural safe practices and returning to the teachings is possible.

Indigenous Women Face Violence: The Moose Hide Campaign

I became aware that it is well known that Indigenous families experience more violence than any other racial group (Brunette, 2016). I learned this, and then it became real to me after an interaction I had at work. I recall the day a supervisor of mine gave me some stacks of cards with a piece of moose hide attached to each card. She told me to hand them out to clients. After doing

some homework, I realized that this was an action put together by a group of Indigenous men and boys who had put a group together to take a stand against the violence towards Indigenous women. When I first learned this, I was impressed; this was unlike what the media and society portray about Indigenous males…this was Indigenous boys and men who are coming together and taking responsibility for the harms against Indigenous women. Their collective goal is to put a stop to it.

As the founder of the Moose Hide Campaign, Paul Lecerte and his daughter, Raven, were driving along the "highway of tears[1]," when they had what turned out to be a great idea (Moose Hide Campaign Development Society, n.d.). They wanted to process some of the moose hides they had tanned and processed, and cut them into small squares to start the campaign. The intiative soon turned into dedicated women who assisted with the processing and cutting of the

Moose Hide campaign materials to spread the word as they believe reads as follows:

> Indigenous women are three times more likely to experience domestic violence than non-Indigenous women, and three times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be killed by someone they know. Too many of our wives, daughters, sisters, aunties, mothers, grandmothers are not safe in their own home. Too many have been murdered or are missing. It is time for us to change this.
>
> This cycle of violence came from residential schools, racism against our Peoples, and colonization. It was never in our culture to do violence to the women and children in our families and communities. It was always our responsibility to protect them.
>
> Many efforts, projects, and strategies are now under-way throughout the country to change this reality, but we can and need to do more. Silence is not good enough, and simply being a non-abuser is not good enough. We must speak up and take action, and we need to support each other as Indigenous and non-Indigenous men.

Figure 3 – quote from the moosehidecampaign.ca website

[1] A stretch of highway in northern BC; highway 16 where between the years of 1986 and 2006, nine Indigenous women have gone missing or were found murdered along the 724 km stretch of highway.

hides, from local hunters and from road-kill on highways in order to produce the large number of squares produced today. Their original vision, as father and daughter, was one they could not have imagined, would explode and continue to promote a campaign denouncing the violence against Indigenous women. To date, over a million squares of authentic moose hide have been given out in the effort to stop the violence (Moosehide Campaign Development Society, n.d.). Lastly, I would like to mention that there are vegan folks or those who do not agree with hunting who also want to participate in this campaign that are now also able to participate. There are now, nine years later, naugahyde patches or synthetic patches available as well. The new goal for the Moose Hide Campaign is for reaching 10 million people wearing mini squares of Moose Hide (or vegan alternative) to signal across the country that violence against women must end.

It has been my experience that people change as they grow and have children of their own. This has caused me to pause and wonder, if Paul Lacerte did not have his daughter Raven, would he have felt so strongly about the campaign? Paul and Raven created an awareness that this insidious reality is happening. While I believe colonialism and loss of our culture are to blame, I imagine there will be disagreements from some about where and how the violence in Indigenous communities started. What is certain is that, if not before, then now, people in this country are very aware of the violence against Indigenous women. I am reminded in the work that I do: Indigenous families experience more violence than any other racial group in our country.

The Moose Hide Campaign and the equally well-known Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Movement[2] are examples of our Indigenous voices progressing to continue

[2] MMIW is a Canadian (and American) movement that works to publicly educate people about Indigenous (First Nation, Inuit and Metis) women and girls to raise awareness of this national crises and genocide through public marches, community meetings, band meetings, and training of professionals and para-professionals working in contact with Indigenous women and girls.

a forward effort of positive change. In order to create awareness and garner support in creating this change, it takes effort and diligence. The example of the Moose Hide Campaign, of creating awareness through the use of traditional pieces of moose hide assists Indigenous people to continue to practice within our ancestral teachings while remembering who we are, and where we come from. Practices like this one that has integrity and symbolism need to occur when assisting women who are exposed to violence. I cannot speak to whether or not the campaign was successful in curbing violence in Indigenous families. The purpose of my telling here is to speak to the success of creating awareness of the violence against Indigenous women happening in Indigenous communities.

Lack of Culturally Appropriate Services

Goals and recommendations for improved, accessible, and culturally safe interventions for women are implemented not only for Indigenous people but by Indigenous people, as I have shared. As services improve for our women, the idea that violence is diminished in all families and communities is critical not only as a goal, but a task that must be accomplished step-by-step. Our Indigenous communities need to remain strong, incorporate the traditional teachings from our stories we learned from our ancestors in order to teach the younger generations, who are our future, how to treat one another in order to continue to work together towards creating a life of non-violence for our women and girls. The Delegated Aboriginal Agency in my hometown of Merritt has multiple programs for Indigenous families, one including an *Indigenous Female Youth Navigator Program* for our young girls and teens, as well as a program called, *Feel the Beat*, where Indigenous children and youth are able to be exposed to positive Indigenous programs, community connections, and Elder visits twice per week.

The Government of Canada has sporadically provided limited and short-termed interventions for Indigenous people to access. Since becoming a social worker, I find that when a

program starts, it is only available for that fiscal year. For example, funding that comes from National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) lunchbag programs, youth programs, parenting groups are short term, often one-time funded programs. Afterward, the funding ends, along with the positive connections, learnings, experiences, and future teachings. This can be disappointing and difficult as an individual working in an organization to navigate. Moreover, it is a daunting reality for service users as they are unable to access services in any ongoing fashion and difficult for word of mouth referrals from previous clients because the program one client accessed no longer exists for another. It makes it difficult to continue a forward and positive movement if they are always short-changed and cut off. And the latter depends on whether one is even eligible to receive the benefits.

I recall being young, and my Mother[3] attempting, repeatedly, to access services through the government, and her Band office, only to be denied. My Mother continually being denied assistance for my sibling and I was challenging to witness. My father refused to pay for child support, and my Mother did not want to go through the court process to initiate receipt of child support, especially when my father told my Mother that he would just quit his job as a logger. My Mother was not able to receive any benefits from her Indian Band, because as we were young children, we did not yet have our status numbers; therefore, we did not count as potential clients of my Mother's band. Another issue was that my Mother was working and was not eligible to receive any benefits federally. All our dental costs were paid for by her. For example, she started us to see a dentist at approximately four years of age. With band membership and recognition by the Department of Indian and Northern Development[4] (DIAND as it was known

[3] Mother will be capitialized in theis paper when referring to my Mom, out of respet for who she is to me. Other instances of mother will not be capatilized.

[4] The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) has been known by a number of names. At the time of this writing (2020) the department is now known as Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

at that time), these costs would have been covered by the fiduciary responsibility of the department. Instead, my mother bore the full costs.

Additionally, both my and my sibling's eyecare was likewise not covered by our Mother's band nor her Indian status. My Mother worked at a non-profit agency, which did not provide any employment benefits for working with that agency either. Although my Mother struggled with finances as a single Mother, there were no Indigenous centered programs available for her at any time. Being ineligible for benefits from her band meant my mother relied on speaking with agencies that mischaracterized her, misunderstood her and pushed her further from her Indigenous birthrights.

There have been situations, like the lack of access to medical and financial supports, that were traumatizing for me, so today, I must acknowledge the accumulated experience, and this state of living had created a normalization of these behaviors that repeated themselves in my earlier adult life. However, what I can also say today, my Mother did the best she could with what she was given and always tried to make the best of her situations. My Mother would have benefitted from services that were financially, socially, and culturally appropriate had funding been available. Our situations and experiences would have been significantly improved if she had access to these services.

Colonialism and Systemic Racism

As a child and as a young adult, I did not realize that I would come to be viewed, by those in mainstream society, as a statistic at many cross-sections. I came from an Indigenous family, with a single parent, from a family that struggled with finances, addiction, abuses, shame, anger, health issues, and other discouraging realities that mainstream society judges harshly. I

INAC has two departments: 1. Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, and, 2. Indigenous Services Canada.

became aware that I was lumped into a myth and stereotype that began happening before I was born. I discovered early in life the perception that being Indian was not something to be proud of, and that it was a deficit rather than a strength. It is a perception that persisted. I learned that it was believed that our people needed more help and were considered helpless and worse yet, some considered us less-than people. I learned that I was not as good as the 'rest of the girls' in my class, or the women in my workplace and I came to believe that society was bigger and better than I, and my family were.

Story of George Jim

When I was younger, I might have been convinced that the racism and discrimination was all in my head. That was before coming across the story of George Jim. For sure a segment of society viewed me and my people as a lower form of life being. Europeans viewed Indigenous people, and some went so far as using Indigenous people (Indians as referred to colloquially) for show and to make money. In the book edited by Moses, Goldie and Ruffo (2005), one finds an account, told by Harry Robinson of George Jim in 1886. George Jim is an Indigenous man from the Ashnola Band who depicts himself and others from the Okanagan and Similkameen nations as being taken to prison, all over British Columbia, and later ending up in Europe as a 'showpiece', not very different from a caged zoo animal (Robinson, 2005).

The story of George Jim, as told in Figure 4, indicates the indifference and beliefs about Indigenous peoples held by many of the colonizers. As Moses, Goldie, and Ruffo (2005) re-tell and re-story, it is a reminder that since historians have been composing history it is apparent that the narratives as told by the settlers, did not portray the real stories. They did however damage the image of Indigenous peoples and give sway to the negative streotypes we, as Indigenous people continue to try to shirk off today.

Captive in an English Circus

"They took him everywhere for show.
Whenever they get somewhere
And there's a big forum
And table or something.
Then they tell him to get up there
And walk around there.
Then, the people in the big room,
Big house chock full of people,
And he watching them.
And these people, they pay.
Pay money to see that Indian.
There is no Indian in Europe at that time.
Only him."

Figure 4 - Quote of George Jim 1886 **(p.75)**

Infiltration of the Colonial Ways

Once the social justice of our people was taken away, piece by piece throughout the generations, colonization has taken its ugly face to the next level. While incorporating such different practices, beliefs, roles, and laws, family violence within the Indigenous family unit has created generations of damaged and future perpetrators and victims. As explained by Holmes and Hunt (2017),

> [family violence] is the result of, and reaction to, a system of domination, disrespect, and bureaucratic control. It stems from the consequences and devastation of forced white colonial policies of assimilation and cultural

> genocide over the past several centuries. Aboriginal peoples have internalized this oppression and thus its impact is felt in the family (p. 25).

As an Indigenous women working for a Delegated Aboriginal Agency, I see the impact of the forced colonial policies daily; as a child protection social worker oftentimes I find myself walking a fine line of implementing policies to our people in the name of the "law" and trying to assist a family to grow in a positive way. I have found that even though working in a respectful manner helps build some trust and rapport, at the end of the day, I am still imposing non traditional (colonial) practices and expectations upon the families I come into contact with.

Since the residential school system was implemented in Canada, an unfortunate factor that was well learned by the Indigenous people, were the colonial patterns of violence. This then worked its way into the homes, and in turn, produced a new generation of offending men towards women (Holmes & Hunt, 2017). As Holmes and Hunt (2017) note, conversations were initiated about this subject in the 1980's. The family systems have been shifting in this violent direction for generations now. This is evident in the start of various movements, such as the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA)[5], the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)[6], that are determined to stop the violence against Indigenous women, creating anti-violence awareness and undertaking research projects across the country.

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[5] ONWA is an organization that was established in 1971 to deliver culturally enriched programs and services to Indigenous women and families. Supporting women with research, advocacy, policy development and programs that focuses on regional and provincial activities in order to provide voice for equity, equality and justice through cultural restoration.

[6] NWAC is a National Indigenous organization that politically voices Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people in Canada, Metis, Inuit persons of Canada to promote social, economic, cultural political well-being of Indigenous women within their communities in Canada through advocacy, policy and legislative analysis, as well as cultural perseverance, labour, employment, health, violence safety, justice, human rights, environment, child issues as well as international affairs with a practice alike a family system of aunts, mothers, sisters, brothers and extended family though the use of spirituality, language and traditions.

Along with these movements, inquiries began into governments from groups such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples[7] (RCAP), as the concepts about family violence topics that were not being discussed often within the families and communities of Aboriginal people became evident (RCAP, 1996). Strong Indigenous women were demanding change. Due to colonization and its harsh stigma of Indigenous persons, the violence had become a normalized characteristic within Indigenous families (Holmes & Hunt, 2017). Women did not speak about these concerning realities going on in their relationships for fear of backlash and rejection by their husbands, family members, and communities. Holmes and Hunt (2017) note that there are "narratives that promote colonial and racist constructions of Indigenous people (and whole communities) as inherently abnormal and defective" (p. 16). This statement reveals how the settlers felt the need to change the ways of Indigenous nations, entirely. What the settlers failed to recognize, in too many instances, were the well-structured, respectful familial laws Indigenous families practiced before contact with the European race that were taken away and replaced with what we see today; the aftermath of learned violence. Within the constructs of modern-day society, continued stigma has taken away the valuable teachings our ancestors that had been in place generations ago and that we have collectively struggled to keep in place today.

Indigenous Values: It's Where We Come From

A Story of Resilience

It took a long time for me to recognize that these were the effects of colonization. As we have witnessed our family members struggle, I must mention here the word 'resilience'. Within

[7] RCAP (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples) is a comprehensive report of a full scale federal commission that was created by the Federal Government that has five chapters that draw attention to the interconnected issues and lived realities for Indigenous peoples. This document admits the ignorance of the governments and their policies and admits to the forced assimilation of Aboriginal populations of Canada, with the hopes of bringing positive change to the Nations. It attempts to take account of all of the horrific acts that were done to our people. The report acknowledges that the damage will take a long time to repair and will only be possible through new relationships between Indigenous people and the Canadian government.

the Indigenous culture is the strength of our ancestors, which has continued for generations that carry us as a nation. Without our resilient ways, our culture would have been extinguished. Many of our activists and strong-voiced women are at the front-line attempting to make the positive changes that are needed to continue to regain our cultural ways back, and to take the violence out of our homes. As Graveline (1998) states, “we also need to critically analyze the notion of resistance as “essential” to our survival. We also need to critically interrogate the concept of ‘agency’ as it applies to our quest for decolonization” (p. 43). The fact that we have been damaged, twisted and changed so much by the agency of governments and societal groups is not going to stop the strong Indigenous woman. Myself, as a person who has been engrained in the cycle of abuse, I am one person that will always try to encourage and lift the others who need assistance to get out of the terrible situations they are in. I can do this in my personal life and in my work. I have been able to face racism, sexism, and pure hatred with the knowledge that my ancestors were strong and faced their difficult battles. Colonialism also built the ideology that families like mine were not good enough; however, we can have control, and we can work towards a safer future. Being brave, getting educated, advocating, and informing others are all ways to continue battling the colonial ways that have forced their way into the family unit.

We may not even realize that a behavior, or ideology has entered into our families until generations later. I have come to believe that the issues of my Mother were not that of her beliefs, but thoughts, behaviors, and other beliefs that others portrayed onto her, from my Grandmother. I have learned since being more mature, and I am able to understand what my Mother learned from my Grandmother. My Grandmother was also a single Mother, raising four children, one who passed at only thirty-three. My Mother lost my brother when he was just

twenty-six years of age. I have heard that no Mother should live longer than their child. Both my Mother and Grandmother had to bury their children.

As a child I witnessed an internal conflict between my Mother and Grandmother. The battle was intense, and unfortunately often unfolded with the use of alcohol. Sadly, I had to experience the same lessons over again when I became an adult. However, when speaking about it with family, it is amazing to hear about how we truly are who we have become, one step at a time. Even with the use of alcohol within our family, I now understand how it was a way of these amazing and strong women to try to keep sane and relax in their own ways. I now understand that the alcoholism was a way for these amazing and otherwise strong women to protect their sanity and escape if only for a little while. As a teenager I had some experience with alcohol, and I have been able to ensure that it does not take control of my life, as I have witnessed the burdens it has caused in not only my own family, but the many families I have worked with and have been in contact with through friendship.

I will continue to remain a strong Indigenous woman like my Mother and Grandmother, and I have promised myself that when I become a mother, that things will be much different than my own growing up experience. I believe the words of my Mother, that every generation tries to improve the next, and that I will be capable of actualizing such ideas. I will try my best to ensure that my children are safe from violence, as well as any drug and or alcohol misuse within my family. Having to live within a society that has forced me to learn about injustice and inequality through generations of trauma, suffering, and overall genocide has led me to recognize the need to protect ourselves from the behaviors.

Responsibility

I have now learned to embrace my cultural heritage and bloodlines. For that reason, I write this paper, and undertake the professional practice I do to ensure that there is an

improvement between the ways of Indigenous life after the settlers made their claims to the land and eroded the way of life and the one I will ultimately hand my grand-daughter. It is what my ancestors would have wanted. Since finding out about my ancestry and my Two-Eyed Seeing[8], foot in two worlds, I recognize that even though I am part Aboriginal, I was not spared the experiences of abuse and pain as experienced by many of the full-blooded Indians. I was informed by a respected Elder, Mary Louie[9] (2008) of Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT), that, I can be mistaken to be of non-Indigenous descent with long brown hair, and beautiful brown eyes, etc. As Elder Mary Louie has said to me, "due to your white privilege, you have to understand you have a responsibility now as a communicator between both the non-Indian world and the Indian world. Your role is to ensure that proper communication and understanding occurs between both worlds" (2008). I will endeavour in all of my steps on Mother Earth to honour the words of Elder Mary Louie.

As Graveline (1998), explains, "white privilege is hidden through the complex, multifaceted denial processes, which produces individuals who do not recognize their own racial or cultural makeup as White European" (p.107). This sounds quite negative, but it is the truth. As my father was non-Indigenous, I was born with lighter skin, as the Elder pointed to, which has allowed me to receive less racism than that of a person of full-blooded Indigenous heritage who presents as "dark" and very Indigenous looking. Once I truly learned this privilege that I had always had with me, at first, I felt guilty of who I was because of my fair skin. Graveline (1998) also tells us that "[b]eing unaware or unconscious of one's cultural location within White-privileged culture can allow individuals to remain distanced from accepting responsibility for the

[8] Two-eyed seeing – a lens of working with the knowledge not only from Western teachings, but that of Traditional Indigenous teachings, can be found at: http://www.integrativescience.ca/Principles/TwoEyedSeeing/

[9] Mary Louis – an Elder at NVIT from the lower Similkameen Area, often gave advice and presentations along with guidance and supports with the NVIT Elders council.

historical abuses of their Ancestors as well as their own and those of their peers in daily life" (p.108). I realized this 'privilege' I acquired was now a new responsibility for me to strip myself of prior actions which included acting naive about the fact that due to my lighter skin, I either did not receive the amount of racism of another Indigenous woman with dark skin, or I am taken more seriously due to the colour of my skin, especially in the world of child protection. When Elder Mary Louie directed me to be the conduit to both worlds, my work as a social worker was impacted by my need to be the voice for Indigenous women who would not otherwise have a voice. I began to recognize my responsibility to make things right with my ancestors both those who came before and those about to arrive here. I had been able to bring healing within my own life. In my healing, I determined that not one more person, child, mother, or sister should feel the way I had to feel. I knew I could be a strong voice for change in the community for family violence against Indigenous women.

The stories I have heard over the years from colleagues and, or the way that Caucasian workers speak to me at times can be defeating. I have noticed that when having to deal with agencies such as the MCFD, the Caucasian women who are employed there treated me better than those of my darker-skinned colleagues. I understand, that may have made my life somewhat easier, but it was a noticeable theme even with my colleagues, who were open about it with me. I have now taken this advantage to become the voice of other Indigenous women who need me, or who have been spoken of in an ill manner. I will not accept the prejudice that is spoken to me, and I take it seriously. I was taught by Elder Mary Louie that I needed to be that voice, and I put it into practice and speak up when I see wrongs now. I know that I have the responsibility to conquer the racism that hurts our people, no one will ever be able to accuse me of only using my membership just to gain the small benefits provided from having an Indian status card.

Relationships

Indigenous families and kinship connections before settlers came to our lands were in many instances, matriarchal. And, if not matriarchal, these connections included and were committed to respect and honor for Indigenous women. The cohesive nature that the women would bring to pre- and early contact in Indigenous communities was through the teachings of respect and responsibility.

Kindness and generosity were not only between family members but between nations. Women were not beaten to obey their husbands. Women were not kept from family and friends because they were being accused of being promiscuous. Women's attire and the way they carried themselves was not misunderstood as they are 'asking' to be raped. However, these humiliating and dishonorable thoughts about Indigenous women, that were brought by the Europeans, eventually infiltrated into the opinions of Indigenous men (Klingspohn, 2018). The horrendous idea that a woman deserves to be raped due to the clothing she wears is not the idea that Indigenous men ever had before contact (Manitoba Government). Women did not live in fear of the men in their communities as there was little family breakdown (Manitoba Government). Somehow, the colonizers believed that there was a definite need to change the Indians, due to their 'savage' ways of life. The irony is not lost on me.

At the same time that the European settlers viewed the Aboriginal people as less-than, they could not deny the Indigenous people's impressive methods of invention and strength. As described by Wardhaugh and MacEachern (2017), "[t]he early explorers commented on the physical prowess of the First Nations. Even when it came to technology, at times, Aboriginal goods were superior" (p. 37). The Europeans found themselves in awe of the abilities of Indigenous knowledge keepers, Elders and matriarchs to prevent death and disease by simply knowing which tree bark to boil to survive or that the Indigenous men in the community had the

knowledge, skill and strength to easily maneuver such large canoes. Unfortunately, these accounts did not last long in the history books and narrative accounts were replaced with negative stereotypes by the settlers (Wardhaugh & MacEachern, 2017). It is the loss of this knowledge and efficacy to Indigenous men and women that I believe contributes to the wheedling in of the negative and destructive behaviors.

As stated by Holmes and Hunt (2017), “Indigenous systems of law and governance rely on the maintenance of these relational systems” (p.7). It is my understanding family roots are the primary source of Indigenous identity and knowledge. When living within a system of people, it can give you a sense of belonging, worth, and responsibility; your world has a reason for living. Daily living has a purpose, and we focus on connection through Indigenous knowledge. Hart (2010) insists that expertise is not just from a law being implemented via commitment of respectful individuals, but it is, “[p]ersonal, oral, experiential, and holistic” (p.3). As it is implemented as second nature within our families, those internal morals and values are also the laws of our people. It are these relationships, connections that have been threatened to very nearly total loss.

As an example of this interconnectedness, in the family system in Indigenous families similar to mine, the roles of the family for providing guidance and discipline are not granted by only a mother and father figure. I recall aunts, uncles, older cousins, grandparents, and other family members who provided many styles of leadership, guidance, and teachings to me and my sibling. This form of instruction was not one that was directed by one family member to another, and it was taken up out of moral obligation and responsible knowledge sharing. This interconnected way of raising a family is community dependent and is constantly building relationships.

Two-Eyed Seeing or Tunnel Vision: Services Delivery

Cultural Fit

One current issue when immediate contact of service delivery for Indigenous women, stemming from family violence, is required, the only service available in our community is through the RCMP and Victim Services. That service delivery model does not always culturally fit for Indigenous women who have been a victim to intimate partner violence. Due to the colonization of Indigenous peoples, the Westernized way of working with intimate partner violence has not aligned with the values of Indigenous people (Harfield et. al., 2018). Because of the differing values, practices, models and beliefs of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, the imposed law that is currently relied upon today can be viewed as unfair to continue to use with Indigenous peoples in Canada (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, n.d.). The current justice system available to Indigenous women, who are currently overrepresented within the statistics in our victim services system today, is a significant issue (Department of Justice, 2017a).

To ground this discussion, I suggest examining surrounding modes of education about Canadian history of the assimilation of Indigenous people at contact because it will provide a better understanding of from where Indigenous people have come and likewise provide an understanding of the importance of cultural safety to be amalgamated into existing service delivery of Indigenous women today. Cultural safety is a framework to improve services in professions such as health care, education, and social work. The cultural safety framework moves us beyond cultural awareness and the acknowledgement of difference to address misunderstandings of culture and the inequities inherent in these misunderstandings (Rego, 2014). Cultural safety creates “an environment that is safe for people…it is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with

dignity and truly listening" (Rego, 2014, n.p.). In acquiring cultural safety it is imperative that professionals in their current practice make connections between the historical past and the experiences of Indigeous peoples today (Rego, 2014). There is a need to ensure that all domains of the criminal justice system and the supports required by Indigenous women are culturally safe because it includes a sense of fairness and equality for vulnerable clients both legally and internally. Habitually, in the services currently provided the culture of Indigenous women are often ignored and forgotten by the service provider.

When referring to appropriate and approaching cultural safety processes for Indigenous women, the use of a talking circle is of value and necessity when addressing any form of disagreement or decision making (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014). Graveline (1998) describes the circle as a traditional concept that brings people together in a way that Indigenous people utilized prior to European contact. Historically, when communities needed to make crucial decisions, address conflicts, or to heal members of that community, the power that came from the practice of using circle has survived all forms of colonialism and is used today (Graveline, 1998). If Indigenous women receive assistance in the culturally safe format that is inherent in the talking circle, the results from the circle will be more helpful than what is offered by mainstream society (Graveline, 1998). The talking circle, if it were to be introduced and utilized by the RCMP and Victim Services, and if it were to be more widely used by Social Workers would contribute to Indigenous women being able to access culturally safe services following incidences of family violence.

Indigenous Knowledge: Erosion and Disruption

When this generational system of governance and structure was disrupted by the heteropatriarchy, it imposed a system of socio-political dominance way of family functioning by the European settlers, the entire well-being of Indigenous people was compromised. As stated by

Klingspohn (2018), “[o]ur traditional men and women lost their responsibilities in using their strengths, either physically or mentally” (p. 2). I feel, as a contemporary Indigenous woman, that when you are within a trusted network of people, we will follow the collective direction in a holistic and natural-like way. Through what I term as the defining moments, moments where we watch our Elders, we learn their every move, and it becomes our way of being. We learn how to solve problems, how to discipline ourselves and the younger ones. We learn how to think. We are imbued with belief in the teachings that are passed from generation to generation.

Our Elders are great teachers using story, which our culture has sustained since the beginning of time. This is called and is described as ancestral knowledge. When we listen to this knowledge provided to us, it is a platform for us, as Carolyn Kenny (2012) reminds us that, to learn our practices, “our values, and, fundamentally, our sustainability as peoples” (p. 4). Learning through oral traditions is a beautiful way to connect the morals taught within a story to real-life lessons. I found that listening to my Elders is like a second nature; it is easy, and enjoyable.

I will never forget the teachings of my late Grandmother, spoken in tones that only I knew were serious tones, that did not need to go any further for explanations, or discipline. This is supported in Holmes and Hunt (2017) who were talking about life after forced relocation for the Inuit when they iterate, “before forced relocation from the island, there were fewer social problems in the community, and they were dealt with through communal and familial processes and familial processes of the resolution, including the support of our elders” (p. 26). In providing services to these women, we have to use every avenue possible to to reinforce the ancestral teachings that they have carried with them from generations. This kind of respect and adherence

to ancestral teachings creates cultural safety and more than that it reinforces the ancestral teachings as having a place in modern society.

Indigenous women had roles that were important because our families and extended families and communal way of living were often matriarchal. To this day, the practice of the female making essential decisions has survived, even considering the patriarchal belief systems that have been forced onto Indigenous people through many generations. Meranto (2001) explains, "[e]arly on, this reciprocity, as well as extended families, matrilineal clans and age-grade helped secure a level of equality of genders" (p. 340). This knowledge-keeping and overall worldview is surrounded by relational thinking. Having people come together to make decisions, to help one another, to survive together interdependently, and to keep the peace was focusing on all pieces that collectively create and constitute life. This is described in the article written by Hart (2010), that life is sustained by seven principles (see Figure 5).

Spirituality is considered tangible as the seven indigenous metaphysical beliefs explained in Figure 5, are included in the breath of the spirit. This needs to be recognized and included as part of the commitment to correcting history. These sacred teachings have been practiced since

Seven Sacred Teachings

> Knowledge is holistic, cystic, and dependent upon relationships and connections to living and non-living beings and entities. Second, there are many truths, and these truths are dependent upon individual experiences. Third, everything is alive. Fourth, all things are equal. Fifth, the land is sacred. Sixth, the relationship between the people and the spiritual world is important. Seventh, human beings are least important in the world.

Figure 5 – Seven Sacred Teachings (Hart, 2010, p.3)

the beginning of time. It is an ideology of all things being connected that is given to us by our

Ancestors. Through our cultural practices, Kenny (2012) insists that "[t]his principle (connectedness) is vital in most Indigenous societies and contained in Indigenous religious-spiritual belief systems" (p.6).

Stereotypes of the Indigenous Woman

> Sexual stereotypes that polarize women either by romanticizing them as "princesses" or by denigrating them as sexually immoral and beasts of burden mark the cultural as well as political colonial legacy that continues to constrain their contemporary life choices through their treatment by such sites of power as the law and government (Fiske, 2000, p.12).

This quote from Fiske is in stark contrast to what I mentioned earlier, Indigenous women before contact, were treated as valuable, contributing members of our society before the erosions of colonialism. Today's stereotypes affect Indigenous women in a much more negative manner.

Constraining stereotypes (that we are sexually immoral, beasts of burden, and or princesses) set the stage for the current struggles for Indigenous women today. When being compared to a completely different culture, in this case, the cultures of the European settlers, it has set expectations upon our Indigenous women that have enforced opinions that Indigenous women in society are less than, and the sexuality that they have been built to appear like has now created as Fiske (2000) points out, "Aboriginal women as criminal subjects and discredit them as credible victims of sexual violence" (p.12). This can only further hamper Indigenous women seeking services and protections from violence. Further, attitudes like these have perpetuated silence. When initiating any form of formal procedure to address an abuser of violence, the fear and harm that women have experienced from their own families while their cases are brought before the court systems has created still another level of trauma. Women have expressed they

are afraid of losing family members and their children if they admit to the violence they have experienced (Government of Canada, 2012).

Justice is "Served": Review of Service Delivery

Women who become victims of domestic violence are sometimes involved in the justice system (Scrim, 2017). It is a system that was not necessarily designed to deliver services in a culturally sensitive or safe manner. Typically, when Indigenous women access support services within the legal system, the only real expectation of 'justice' is the prosecution of the perpetrator, which almost immediately requires the family unit to be severed. The contemporary belief to separate husband and wife from each other when things in a marriage go astray is an ideology not often practiced by Indigenous families. Other options after an incident may be for the woman to access restorative justice services, which is recognized as an alternative to the general court processes, if available. This alternative process is believed to be a more culturally imbued option for the perpetrator to be prosecuted. This process, which has been often attributed as Indigneous requires the victim to be present in the room with the perpetrator. However, this is a process that is not safe for all Indigenous women.

Palmater (2016) examined the prevalence of "societal and institutional racism against Indigenous peoples" (p. 253). Palmater's research looked at national inquiries, commissions, and investigations with a view to justice reform. Early into the investigation, it was revealed that the judicial systems and the conflict between the Indigenous families were a result of poor socio-economic conditions. Palmater's investigation claimed that racism was a major obstacle to overcoming the experiences that Indigenous people receive while involved in any part of the systems "including, but not limited to: policing, courts, prosecutions, alternative measures, access to legal counsel, corrections including community corrections, youth justice, community justice processes, and victims services" (p. 265). In her article, Palmater (2016) discusses the

lack of action from the government, public bodies such as the media, and from society due to the fear that is instilled in individuals if they are found to be reporting on the socio-economic issue of racism. This reinforces that there continues to be unhealthy relationships between Indigenous communities and the justice system in Canada. Despite the suggestions Palmater has made stemming from her findings, these relationships (between Indigenous peoples and the justice system) have yet to be reconciled (Palmater, 2016).

When reflecting on Indigenous culture and safety from my own traditional and feminist[10] perspective, I recognize that when Indigenous women are forced to interact with oppressive systems, it increases potential abuses stemming from misunderstandings of culture and the inequities inherent in these misunderstandings. This comes from multiple directions toward women who need assistance due to their inherent vulnerability. Feelings of shame, the fear of losing their children, having their problems exposed, and losing community status creates a barrier for women to come forward and seek help. The traditional need for family and community and for keeping marriages together is not a practice that Western society tends to place significant value on, as individuality is seen as most important (Tam et al., 2016).

As supported by Klingspohn (2018), there are different ideologies about what to do in the event of intimate partner violence. The victim, who typically identifies as a woman as discussed by Cameron, (2006) is expected to leave their partner. This mindset does not coincide within Indigenous ways of living as the Indigenous people's cultural ideologies believe the opposite. It is practiced within Indigenous families that when there is a problematic situation, the family unit stays together, envisioning a life without their partner is not something learned and practiced by the Indigenous family of many communities (Klingspohn, 2018). Adapting to Western

[10] I am not a feminist scholar nor a feminist activist, but I do subscribe to some of the befliefs of a feminist such as equality and rights.

worldviews of separation and individualistic thinking is not aligned with the mindset of many Indigenous families. Often Indigenous communities are matriarchal, and those women facing family turbulence are or will become the leaders of the community. The actions that they take in the face of this turbulence will have lasting effects, not only on themselves but on their children and extended families.

One way of coping, or swerving the issue of family violence, has been secrecy. When the secrecy of abuse results in less police reporting, it speaks to the reluctance of women and their attempts not to jeopardize the family unit. Tam et al. (2016) outlines three mandatory prosecution policies implemented when making reports of violence, that once control over the situation is forfeited, and the criminal justice system is obligated to respond through improved policies and procedures, the result becomes fewer reports made by women. Even with improved systems accessible to women, there are inconsistencies. Currently, there are more straightforward procedures for obtaining restraining orders, peace bonds, and mandated counseling for offenders, but the outcomes still suffer from the lack of trained officials (Tam et al., 2016). Cameron (2006) also implicates silencing (secrecy) as a reoccurring theme. It both decriminalizes and privatizes intimate violence, setting back feminist activism and prevents women from having a meaningful role in directing how crimes should be dealt with in their communities.

Further, with fear of retaliation and increased violence, the risk of more violence increases. This creates an increasing correlation between violence and the drastic decline of safety for women and children. My personal fear is that children, who eventually learn the behaviors of their those they live with, carry on that unhealthy conduct within families of their own, normalizing abuse through the generations. We need to address the fears of women so they do not have to live in a shroud of secrecy and silence, with regard to family violence and

secondly, we need to develop culturally safe services so these women are able to remain whole while accessing services to address the violence.

When considering the revictimization of the Indigenous women, some women Whom I have worked with, have told me that the restorative justice programs have not assisted with safety nor provided appropriate intervention. For example, often, when using the restorative justice measures the offenders are released on lesser terms than if they were processed through the mainstream court and social systems. Indigenous women in the community I live in have told me that this to continues the spread of domestic violence within their own family systems. This form of forced social control for Indigenous males involved in this system is not adequately assisted, as the system itself is unable to respond to intergenerational trauma and its detrimental effects on Indigenous families. On the other hand, as Holmes and Hunt (2017) state, "[r]esponses have been ineffective and make the problem worse by isolating offenders from their family and community without providing the kind of interventions needed to change violent behaviors" (p. 36).

So, on the one hand, the isolation of offenders within the jail system, for example, is not assisting the combat of intergenerational trauma. On the other hand, the implemented efforts that are considered culturally appropriate such as the restorative justice alternative court sentencing are not considered a safe way to process violent offenders. As an Indigenous woman that has been fortunate enough to understand the implications of either systematic form of addressing male offenders of violence within Indigenous communities, I have come to learn there is much more to implement for our offenders and the survivors of domestic violence in our families.

Palmater (2016) states Indigenous women continue to be mistreated by the Canadian justice system because the racism and abusive behaviors from the staff within these systems are

normalized. Cases from Helen Betty Osborne, J.J. Harper, Neil Stonechild, Minnie Southerland and Donald Marshall Jr. are only a small example of the truths uncovered and shared by brave writers (Steckley, 2013). Practices such as 'starlight tours' allegedly practiced by RCMP members are described as officers bringing Indigenous men and women, against their will, to outskirts of towns, force them to undress and they are then left to freeze to death in cold weather (Campbell, 2016) This also includes the account of Darrell Night, who in fact survived a starlight tour[11], never to receive an apology from the RCMP (Campbell, 2016). Other Indigenous people, including in British Columbia, have died such horrid deaths (Campbell, 2016). The harmful and unacceptable method of punishment by use of "starlight tours" is a direct result of racism and a lack of cultural respect, sensitivity, and knowledge of th cause and effects of colonization on the part of the RCMP officers. After working in child protection for six and a half years and having survived various forms of domestic violence personally, as an Indigenous woman, this topic is of importance to me to see the improvement in the ongoing needs for Indigenous women to feel safe and able to ask for help.

Turning the Page

Attempts to challenge this subjugation of Indigenous women has been common practice. In the footsteps of Sharon McIvor and her triumph, which I wrote about earlier, Indigeous women are getting stronger. For example, within the feminist movement, women are now speaking out about their experiences while coming into contact with the justice system, and specifically how it is considered a service but continues to oppress Indigenous women. This has created interest within some movements which as Fiske (2000) writes,

[11] Campbell, M (2016) Describes a "starlight tour" in the article from Mclean's.ca: https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/new-light-on-saskatoons-starlight-tours/

> finally, feminist historians and literary critics are increasingly turning to Aboriginal women's story telling as rich and authentic sources of knowledge - empirical and theoretical – that are essential to the outsiders' comprehension of difference, the politics of identity, and to the development of feminist praxis that embraces work 'by, for, and about' Aboriginal women (p. 20).

It is finally being understood story by story, study by study, that the residential schools, enforced laws, stereotypes, racism and overall assimilation of Indigenous peoples have created unnecessary suffering and hardship over generations culminating in an attempt to take away the knowledge of Indigenous people. Our Indigenous cultural ways of living and caring for one another could very well have been thought to be very nearly lost and irretrievable.

Spirituality in Practice

> [P]rior to colonization, Aboriginal systems of thought were incorporated into our daily lives. It was the dominant mode of consciousness. Patterned into our unconscious through stories, rituals and humor and enacted in everyday experiences (Graveline, 1998, p. 52).

Colonialism squelched many of our teachings like the ones that Graveline points out. A large piece that is missing today, from our own ways of working with Indigenous people, is the realm of spirit. Part of what is considered wellness includes the fundamental belief around spirituality as demonstrated in the teachings, in the quote above, from Fryre Graveline.

When speaking to spirituality, the common sense of the world within Indigenous communities was through the train of thoughts from philosophical conversations with one another as all are interconnected with each other, the universe and Mother Earth. When this worldview is taken away from an entire race, there is a huge missing element of healing for our Indigenous women when they are infiltrated into the realm of violence. Healing is connected to

all things. How is one able to get the assistance they need if the spirituality is not implemented into practice?

My job, working in our currently practiced methods of helping which is considered to be what holistic (mind, spirit, body, and emotion), that in my experience, in the social work sector, has not in fact been holistic to Indigenous women who are victims of violence. I feel that as social worker myself, the actual work of help declines at the point of contact with our Indigenous women. If we do not carry the real holistic practice with our clients, it is true that we, too, have lost our ethics within the profession. This is supported by Gregory and Holloway (2005) who state that due to, “marketization, bureaucratization, and managerialism combined with the loss of the public-sector ethic, have served to downgrade the status of holistic models and ethical caring in social work practic’ (p.49). This, which can only be characterized as a hap-hazard practice, will only continue as our current governing system is not addressing the lack of an essential piece of health, which includes spirituality. While attempting to state they are part of the solution, the government continues to tell the stories of our people, leaving out many important truths.

As a child protection worker, whose work is funded by the government, I am not directed to work with a spiritual lens with my clients. I am given specific assessment tools to inform my practice with families but there is no mention of spirit nor spirituality. Included in my work is the violence within families. In my practice and my experiences with the RCMP in British Columbia they also do not address the victims holistic needs are. Neither are there any other integrated cultural practices when I am interviewing a mother who has been beaten for the third time this year. Based on my experiences, we do not include any spirituality in our practice, and yet our clients' spirits are clearly broken.

Habits are Hard to Break

As society continues to pathologize Indigenous persons, families, and communities, I only feel anger. It is an anger I imagine would be within each person experiencing this. Or perhaps it stems from those formative memories. As a young girl, I do recall conversations about being a “dirty Indian” by my late Grandmother, and I just didn’t understand her. I knew my Grandmother was bathing regularly, I note my Mother was always clean, and they all made sure I was cleaned every day. I just did not know why she called herself dirty. Later, when I had immersed myself into the public-school system, the dynamics of my understanding were much clearer. This view of ‘the dirty Indian’ was a societal view that all persons like our family who had beautiful shades of darker skin were considered dirty.

I was being left out in groups at school and was called an Indian; yet I had no idea what that meant. Vicki Smye (2008) characterizes this experience in this way, “[m]any people noted how their lives had been profoundly affected by the trauma enacted on Aboriginal peoples” (p.10). Conversations that also provide evidence of the intergenerational trauma within my own family, for example, I remember my Grandmother called my Father ‘ugly’ often as a little girl. It was not because of how he looked, it was from what she knew about him, as a non-Indigenous man, and his treatment of Indigenous women. That truth was never for me to hear and know about until a few years ago, well after I became an adult. Maybe, my Grandmother, in her way, was fighting back from what I might never know completely.

Holmes and Hunt (2017) discuss, “[a] regimen of domination that is established and enforced by one person over one or more others, through violence, fear and a variety of abuse strategies is usually not an isolated incidence” (p.16). I feel that my Grandmother was tired of the dominance that my father carried out and found herself fighting back from the patriarchal dominance that was ingrained in my father, whether he knew it or not. As Smye (2008)

discusses, many like myself and my Grandmother, "[w]ere affected by the trauma experienced by their parents and grandparents (intergenerational trauma)" (p. 10). Today, I understand I now too, suffer the intergenerational injury of my ancestors and am holding myself responsible today to counteract the colonial impacts my family has endured because I agree with what Corntassel, et al. (2009) state, that the government "[n]eglects to fully appreciate the ongoing impacts of residential schools on communities, families, and individuals and lived experiences of resilience and resurgence that need to be shared with intergenerational survivors and other Indigenous peoples" (p.140). Clearly this telling should be seen as a call for cultural safety in the practice of social work and victms.

Policies Need Improvement

How Do We See Ourselves? Do They See Us?

When a person is stripped of their essential role in society, it does not surprise me that the outcome is a a diminished self image. This can result in a wave of anger toward the self. This inward anger can result in suicide attempts and lashing out against others (Sibbald, 2008). This can then result in the individual feleing tremendous guilt and shame (ibid). Community development educator Andy Sibbald (2008) laments,

> this role of loss manifests itself in some of the westernized terms of domestic violence, alcoholism, depression, and a host of other problems that are determined by the medical model that has been introduced to Indigenous Nations (p.13).

We weren't plagued by this shame and guilt before colonization. I often hear the term 'Old Indian tricks' used by Elders, the aunties and uncles, and even some of the young people. They are referring to how we used to be able to fix things ourselves, as Indian people. I wonder why we do not use these 'old Indian tricks' when trying to overcome

social problems particularly violence against women. This could be due to the everchanging views of our own people. I genuinely believe that colonization has brought on many deficit-based terms that we now believe about ourselves.

Working Better

As I reflect on the seven principles[12], a Cree metaphysical belief, mentioned on page 28 of this document, there are teachings such as being responsible for our actions because the responsiblty comes from our actions. Kenny (2012) remind us that to maintain this sense of connection, Aboriginal people hold beliefs which suggests an aesthetic engagement with the land – an intimate spiritual commitment to relationships with all living things. I find that the lessons within the seven sacred teachings being left behind are taking away the identity of our Indigenous families, leaving their responsibilities behind. Stories of our ancestors described by Kenny (2012), "integrate past, present, and future" (p.7) and need to be re-introduced into our family systems. As mentioned earlier, I have found that Western feminist theory has not been helpful for me. It is not helpful here either. Indigenous women do not fit into this Western lens, nor is the terminology useful, as our families have and continue to rely on matrilineal teachings. So when we are often applying a theoretical framework to our Indigenous clients, we must remember that certain ideologies do not fit the worldview of Indigenous women, even though many of the clients are living in colonial constructs. In my experience, many of these women are holding onto ancestoral teachings and embracing popular Indignnous teachings like the seven porinciples from the Cree people.

[12] The Seven principles – are known as a relational worldview with the Cree people that suggests living things are connected within the spirit world. Individually a person can enjoy freedom of self expression to the non-living world, and in a community sense, the families connect with each other. Equalling all in this world can come together and support one another. Hart (2010)

When you look at the practices that colonialism implemented into the Indigenous families, they have entirely overturned the social dynamics of Indigenous societies (Corntassel et. al., 2009). When a culture fully and wholeheartedly needs the land for subsistence, and for spiritual needs and that is taken away, it has an impact that is torrential, and almost unrecoverable. As previously discussed, the land and the spiritual practices have been taken away and I would assert families are being forced to reside on reserves. Furthemore, many Indignous families discontinued speaking their original languages and practicing the traditional ceremonies (Corntassel et. al., 2009). The unfortunate outcomes created a painful and continual loss. However, there is an "opportunity for change" (Holmes & Hunt, 2018, p. 28).

Women Are Now Reaching Out

Speaking out and having a voice for Indigenous women has not been an easy path to walk for Indigenous women of Canada. After the onset of colonization infiltrated into our families, it changed the respectful ways of our people, women were the primary sufferers in this chaos. Colonial views implemented have until recently choked the voices of our people, and finding a way to overcome the fear and unknown responses have been a long journey. Too often, we see Indigenous women in shelters and in other forms of safe-housing, sent there to learn relationship skills by implemented programs due to violence that has infiltrated Indigenous homes (Ontario Native Women's Association, 2018).

Cultural Safety (Not Cultural Blindness) in Services

I believe that for our work as social workers to be complete we must come from the perspective of our clients. If we do not understand their beliefs, histories, their ancestor's past traumas, and what has led us to the current circumstances, then how are we supposed to actually help others? As a child protection worker, I can say that the practice methods that are taught by seasoned workers, policy manuals and training cannot ensure that any worker is apt to assist any

human being appropriately. We rarely speak to the person about their personal beliefs, or spiritual practices. When working within a crisis situation, personal beliefs and spiritual practices should be a priority. We need to make it a priority because many people obtain their strength, resilience, and willingness to change through another way of understanding. Coming to a common ground with a survivor of abuse, may very well be the exact maneuver of the worker also letting that power go, and allow for the beliefs of the Indigenous teachings and supporting practices to assist a person in finding their inner strength to proceed. When we continuously disrespect the values of the most vulnerable populations, it is no surprise that these women and children are falling through the cracks. Having very differing worldviews, will eventually hinder the relationship with the client and worker, as each individual is looking at a situation from very different lenses, making it difficult to come to a resolution of help. If holistic worldviews were implemented in practice in the public systems such as healthcare, the justice system, and the child protection realm, I believe that the outcomes with the families would not only be improved, but would have a higher likelihood of becoming a permanent solution.

Understanding Culture and Its Role in Culturally Safe Services

A lack of understanding regarding traumatized women is an issue ongoing within Canadian service providers today. As Holmes and Hunt (2017) state, there is “[a] lack of gender and diversity analysis in planning and implementation, which often results in women survivors of violence being revictimized through RJ [restorative justice] processes” (p. 35). When considering the sentencing circles that are deemed appropriate for all Indigenous offenders, the issue is that the non-Indigenous judges are implementing this form of sentencing and judging whether or not the outcome of such approaches have been successful for the offender. Holmes and Hunt (2017) claim “offenders are released back into the community “without formal sanctioning” (p. 36). The issue then becomes that the offenders are not formally sanctioned

through our court system. These concerns for ongoing repeat offenses by the perpetrator, are then not documented, the risk for Indigenous women and children are put at a vulnerable place, and the offenders can continually manipulate the system. Considering that restorative justice is more community-centered, offenders will attempt to use this service to receive lesser terms of incarceration, hoping that the opinion that the circle will promote more accountability of the defendant in hopes of overall prevention of future partner abuse, however as stated earlier, it is not the fix-all to the ongoing issue that began at first contact with the Europeans.

A Cautionary Tale: Culture or Hood-winked?

It is possible that not everything should be attribute to culture or differences of worldviews. I recall when I began in the field of social work in 2010 serving the Chilcotin (Northern BC) area, I served seven different Indigenous Bands as a Family Support Worker for two years. I had a female client who was 15 and had a pregnancy with a male, who was 31 years of age. The young mother at the time did not speak often. She presented as very frail, shy, and timid. I also remember the couple was very isolated, living many miles away from the central city for services. I recall the boyfriend (father of the pregnancy), as a large, strong, quiet man, who did not want me or the social services involved in his (and his girlfriend's) matters. However, due to him attempting to access Social Assistance for his girlfriend as a dependent, the result of age difference immediately came to the attention of the social workers. Planning services were working to prevent the separation of the child and the family, however at birth that child was apprehended. I remember no family was able to support a baby and many had stated they were at a busy time in their own lives. While the apprehension trial was beginning, I remember the judge asking the couple to provide letters of support from the extended family and Indigenous community identifying this union as a cultural norm or an acceptable practice. The judge wanted proof that such a young age mother and age of the father was culturally sound. As

a young, inexperienced social worker I was confused about this issue but wanted to respect the community if they were to consider such a relationship socially acceptable. After approximately ten letters submitted to the courts, the father of the child was not formally charged for sexual abuse of a minor. Despite the verdict I had unresolved questions: if the family and community members supported such a relationship, why were none of them stepping up to the plate to help care for the child in temporary custody while awaiting the verdict? I was asking myself, did the community truly support this? And I wondered was someone writing letters and getting people to sign them without being informed? Were the signatures on the letters real? I had so many questions. Either way, as her social worker I was tasked to help the young mother with her wishes. It was not long however until there was a brutal domestic assault on the young mother by the father. With the baby still in care this assault would prevent the baby from returning home anytime soon. This case left me with more questions than answers. The mother never did charge the father and she did not once admit to his assault on her. If not for a witness who came forward indicating that this violence had occurred we might never have known about that time. I know now with my experiences professional and personal that the mother would have had her own reasons to have kept quiet in her circumstances. Perhaps to protect herself from future harm. Protect her child. Or to ensure that her child would have some form of access to the father. I will never know most of the answers. The answer that I am sure of now is that this was not a cultural way of life, nor a union grounded in Indigenous traditional teachings.

Conclusions

Through reviewing literature in this area, it is easily identifiable that there is a trend of Indigenous women are facing violence. There is also a trend they are receiving poor treatment from many levels of the Canadian justice system and in social work programs (Reitmanova &

Henderson, 2016). Cultural differences are misunderstood or ignored. Cultural teachings, particularly ones pertaining to spirituality likewise are missing.

Recognition of cultural differences by the justice system would significantly enhance and encourage the provision of services in an environment that is approachable – ensuring that the overall future generations of Indigenous people in Canada are more likely to seek help for experiences of domestic violence, but also to ensure that when it is required, ongoing healing is occurring. The need for staff members at these levels of service, leadership, governance, and society, in general, will need to be open-minded to the ideologies of the Indigenous cultures in Canada to undertake what is generally known as reconciliation.

Recommendations for Research

More research regarding the risk of domestic violence that Indigenous women face is needed, but more importantly, awareness is required in making it known that certain risks are linked to the history of colonization. This important link and understanding will greatly improve the ability to truly combat the onset of domestic violence in Indigenous communities. The fact that Indigenous families have continued their resilience through the generations of abuse by mainstream society is duly noted, and for families to overcome the generations of abuse and fear, I truly believe that there is need to understand the originating source and research the current situation. Based on my experience and the stories and wisdoms found in the literatures, I have come up with recommendations for practice and policy such as:

- Ensuring that social workers are informed, educated, and held accountable to practice in a culturally safe manner with Indigenous women. Through renewed policies and legislation looking at first contact women should be asked how they wish to proceed with their worker.
- More research about the benefits of traditional practices for frontline service workers is key. Recognizing the benefits of using spirituality when assisting clients and providing supports will

benefit clients and I believe the social worker as well, as it will help in our own practices in the work we do.

- Integration of traditional practices are necessary for organizations that serve Indigenous women. This will require Elders and knowledge keepers to assist in creating a new way of working with our people, using the local and surrounding practices.
- The RCMP need training to assist Indigenous survivors of domestic violence in culturally safety.

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