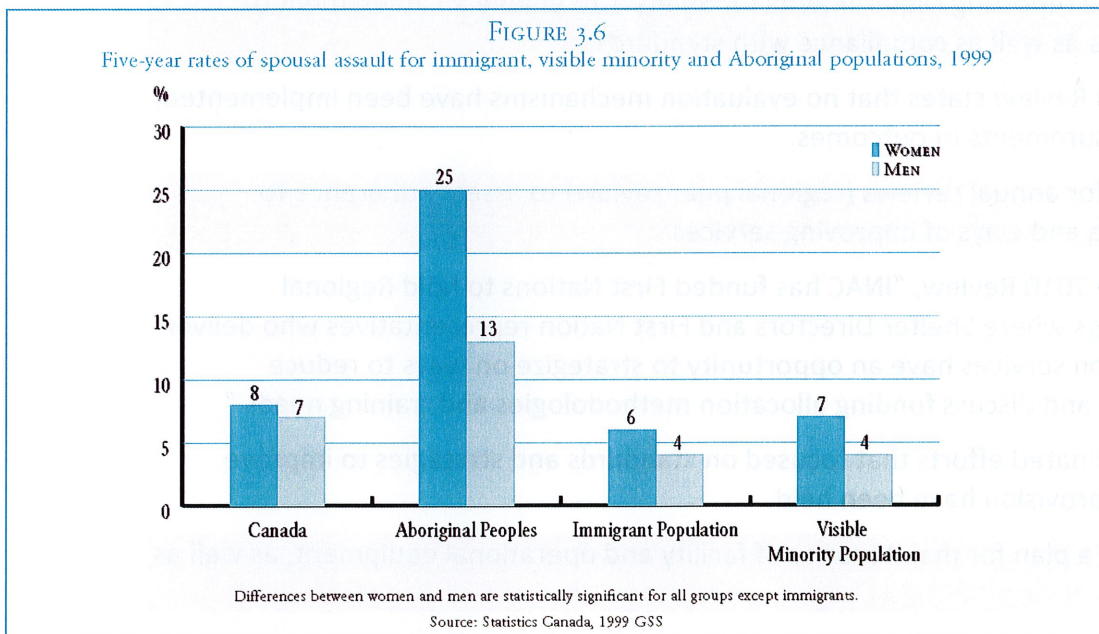


5. Examining Aboriginal Women’s Violence Data and Policy in Canada

“Aboriginal women and their children suffer tremendously as victims in contemporary Canadian society. They are the victims of racism, of sexism and of unconscionable levels of domestic violence. The justice system has done little to protect them from any of these assaults.”³²

Aboriginal women are three and a half times more likely to experience violent victimization (defined as physical and sexual assault and robbery) than non-Aboriginal women.³³ Aboriginal women report higher rates of stranger violence, more serious forms of family violence and are significantly over-represented as victims of homicide. Aboriginal women are also three times more likely to be victims of spousal violence than non-Aboriginal women, and spousal homicide rates are almost eight times higher for Aboriginal women than for non-Aboriginal women. According to the 1999 Statistics Canada study G35, Aboriginal women were twice as likely as men to experience spousal abuse and they were three times more likely than the average Canadian women to experience the same. Even compared to immigrant and visible minority women, Aboriginal women were as much as four times more likely to experience spousal abuse. Statistics Canada reports that Aboriginal women between the ages of 25 and 44 are five of violence.



factors contributing to the high level of violence in Aboriginal communities include the breakdown of healthy family life resulting from residential school upbringing, racism against Aboriginal peoples, the impact of colonialism on traditional values and culture and overcrowded, substandard housing.

Since the 1999 GSS was conducted only in English and French, the rates in Figure 3.6 may under-represent the actual rates of spousal assault among Aboriginal, immigrant and visible minority populations, some of whom may not have been able to respond to the survey.

There are also concerns

³² Manitoba Government. Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba. The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission. November 1999. <http://www.ajic.mb.ca/volume1/chapter13.html>

³³ Statistics Canada – Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Juristat. Victimization and offending among the Aboriginal population in Canada. Catalogue no. 85-002-XIE, Vol. 26, no. 3, 1999 data.

about the normalization of violence in many Aboriginal communities. Intergenerational cycles of abuse and violence, linked to historic trauma from colonization, residential schools and systemic discrimination, are community-wide in some instances. Studies, such as *Jumping Through the Hoops* (2009), relate that crime and victimization have become accepted everyday realities in some Aboriginal communities.³⁴ Victims are sometimes actively discouraged from speaking out, particularly in smaller remote communities, where women cannot easily leave (for example, in the North where there are no roads in many cases), there are no shelters or safe houses in the community, and law enforcement may be located at a distance.

Anti-violence against women initiatives have given rise to stand-alone organizations with formal mandates, programs delivered through existing national and regional programs, and funding programs that allow regional or local governments or groups to tailor to local needs. Funding for these initiatives is a complex mix of federal, provincial, foundation, corporate, and local resources with many initiatives requiring funding from several sources. The types of activities range from

- community campaigns addressing violence,
- tools to learn about and recognize the warning signs of woman abuse,
- engaging Aboriginal men who are abusive in a traditional approach,
- educating community members to take action,
- developing safety planning for women who are abused,
- developing programs focused on ending the isolation abused women feel,
- developing a variety of educational and awareness raising activities, and
- guidelines on how to implement campaigns related to the issue of violence in various communities.

Recognizing that each community is unique, it is important to have access to a wide variety of programs and services, across various governmental and organizational levels, throughout Canada. On-reserve violent crime rates are eight times the rate in the rest of the country. While non-Aboriginal women report a decline in the more severe forms of violence (43% in 1999 to 37% in 2004), the rate for Aboriginal women has remained steady at 54%. The net result of all of this focus are activities that work to reduce violence and improve the safety of Aboriginal women across Canada such as shelters for Aboriginal women and their children fleeing violence, 24-hour crisis lines, walk-in counseling support, healing programs, and treatment programs for Aboriginal men who have been violent, including physical, emotional, sexual and spiritual abuse.

³⁴ Bennett, Marlyn. *Jumping through Hoops: A Manitoba Study Examining Experiences and Reflections of Aboriginal Mothers Involved with Child Welfare in Manitoba*. 2009. Chapter 4 in: McKay, S., Fuchs, D. & Brown, I. (Eds.). *Passion for Action in Child and Family Services: Voices from the Prairies*. Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center: pp. 69-98. <http://www.cecw-cepb.ca/sites/default/files/publications/prairiebook2009/Chapter4.pdf>.