

**ABUSED ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN ALBERTA  
THE STORY OF TWO TYPES  
OF VICTIMIZATION**

**a Research Report  
by Lorraine Courtrille**

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## ABSTRACT

Abused Aboriginal Women in Alberta, the Story of Two Types of Victimization, is a study about the obstacles encountered by Aboriginal women who are victims of domestic violence. The focus of the study was on Aboriginal women who make the decision to leave their rural home community and move into an urban centre in order to escape an abusive spouse.

In an attempt to incorporate regional differences the research was conducted in two southern, one central, and two northern urban centres in the province of Alberta. Eight aboriginal women and sixteen shelter workers were interviewed. Emphasis was placed on gathering information from Aboriginal women because of their direct knowledge of attitudes towards, and availability of support services for, abused Aboriginal women in Aboriginal communities. Shelter workers were interviewed because they, in contrast, were believed to be more knowledgeable about the problems Aboriginal women face in the transition to an urban environment. Three of the shelter workers were also Aboriginal women.

The service areas discussed include social services, legal and policing services, counselling services, childcare services, personal support services, Band Councils, and crisis women's shelters. Three other areas that were addressed were Aboriginal specific issues, children, and women's personal lives. The study emphasizes problems because of the belief, supported by the research, that few Aboriginal women who have relocated are able to successfully make the transition. It recognizes that the Aboriginal woman is first victimized by her spouse in the home community, then in a different way by the urban support services which do not recognize the cultural needs of her or her children. It concludes with a number of recommendations, primarily from the women who were interviewed.

## DEDICATION

We dedicate this work to the voices we have heard. Foremost are the voices of the strong, courageous women who have borne the beatings of men they have loved, and braved an often difficult and unyielding path, only to be faced with new hardships. Closely following are the voices of hopeful and dedicated shelter workers, who keep a light burning at a far away haven. Finally, through them, are heard the voices of the children, sometimes angry and demanding, sometimes timid and withdrawn; they are the voices of tomorrow. We can only hope that we do these voices justice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 1985 publication *Breaking the Pattern*, by Alberta Social Services and Community Health, reports only three methods of breaking the violent cycle in a relationship: 1) couples learn to live without violence (however, it is believed that this solution is rare); 2) one of the couple dies; and 3) the woman leaves the relationship and is forced to relocate.

Thus relocating is one of the few options open to women choosing to leave a violent relationship. Many obstacles exist for all women when relocating, but it is believed that Native women must deal with even greater adversities when relocation is necessary. For instance, Aboriginal women from a reserve or settlement community may have to deal with a completely different physical and cultural environment because they believe they must move to an urban centre to escape the effects of an abusive relationship. Workers in the field of family violence are aware of some of the differences between the needs of Aboriginal and other women in abusive relationships and they think that, most often, these differences are ignored by programs and services designed to assist Aboriginal women. Therefore, the purpose of this research project was to :

- 1) identify the reasons given by Aboriginal women for relocating (leaving their community) to escape an abusive relationship.
- 2) identify the problems abused Aboriginal women must face with institutions mandated to assist them.
- 3) identify the role traditional values of abused Aboriginal women play in:
  - Personal decision making, which may create obstacles for success in relocating
  - Counselling methods
  - Other areas that are problematic for Aboriginal women who relocate
- 4) make recommendations from the findings.

## 1.1 Background

The Ad Hoc Committee on Native Family Violence was formed to address a growing concern of the Aboriginal community, that the present system for helping Aboriginal women and children who are the victims of domestic violence does not work as it ought to. The idea that there are interlocking barriers to access and full participation in the available services is a constant theme. The 1987 study "Battered But Not Beaten" states:

Many of the men on reserves are particularly concerned about maintaining the status quo and keeping outsiders out. Social change and an increased population on many reserves have brought with them a culture of poverty, unemployment, alcohol abuse, and social dissolution which encourages violence and which has resulted in an escalation of violence in the family, sexual assaults, incest and attacks against the elderly (1987:24).

This perception of alcohol as an uncontrollable force behind the violence discourages a constructive solution and tends to absolve the offender from responsibility for his actions (1987:25).

To compound the vulnerability of many aboriginal victims of wife battering, a high value is attached to familial privacy, the cohesion of tightly knit extended families, and the authority of men within these families. The result is that violence becomes accepted as a private and inevitable part of life and the woman does not see "outside" services as realistic for dealing with being battered (1987:25).

The members of Aboriginal descent on the committee were aware that there were a multitude of issues working against Aboriginal women leaving their abusive relationships. It was believed that existing research had not clearly identified all of the factors that determine these women's ability to deal with abuse, within and outside of their communities. Therefore it was decided that only abused Aboriginal women and those most likely to encounter them during transition (shelter workers) would be approached for information.

The research presented here was guided by the belief that recommendations which will assist Aboriginal women relocate can only come from those who have been a part of this process. It is based upon a research proposal on the 'Relocation of Abused Aboriginal Women' which was developed in May 1989 and articulated in some detail the difficulties faced by abused Aboriginal women who must relocate in order to escape domestic violence.

We support the many cultural and political aspirations of Aboriginal people in Alberta and we seek not to replace or delay other necessary initiatives, but through our efforts we hope to bring some new awareness to the problems of relocation. We believe our report will not only be of benefit to the Aboriginal women who relocate, but to all those who want to be a part of the healing process.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research was completed in Alberta in the summer of 1989, with 16 shelter workers and eight Aboriginal women who had used shelters being interviewed. The overall approach to the research was to use in-depth interviewing which would enable Aboriginal women to talk freely about their experience of abuse and their efforts to break the cycle of abuse, and which would enable shelter workers to discuss the same issues as they related to Aboriginal women who they had met and worked with. Because the researcher and research committee believed it was important to document the experiences of women who had successfully relocated, the emphasis in both the questionnaires and the selection of respondents was on such women.

### 2.1 Target Area

Shelters were selected on the basis of being located in regions where high Aboriginal populations are located, as well as urban centres where high Aboriginal populations are known to migrate. A total of five shelters were selected from southern, central, and northern communities to ensure that regional differences, if any, would be addressed in the interviews.

In two of the selected areas interviews with women users of the shelter were not conducted. In one region due to the small size of the urban centre the Director saw the lack of services available and the lack of anonymity for shelter users contributing to abused women, in general, having difficulty using the centre and rebuilding their lives in the region. However, each urban centre did contain services that could benefit women wanting to relocate (for example, post-secondary education). The other centre was unprepared to arrange interviews due to a change of shelter directors over the summer holiday. In addition, of the five communities initially selected for the study it was necessary to change only one location when the director of the shelter reported that the Aboriginal women in the region did not fully utilize the facilities. According to this director Aboriginal women entering the shelter generally stayed only 2-3 days. Therefore, her workers had

limited experience in dealing with Aboriginal women, and the director did not think interviews would be useful.<sup>1</sup>

Directors of Shelters were asked to select staff members and clients to be interviewed. Shelter staff were to be selected based on their professional involvement with the Aboriginal women entering the shelter, and their years of experience in the area of family violence.

## 2.2 Workers

Of the 16 workers interviewed, 13 had worked in the Social Services field for 3 years or more. Three of the workers were of Aboriginal ancestry; consequently the directors involved felt their knowledge and experience outside the shelter would be relevant to the study. Two additional workers who were interviewed lacked any extensive knowledge of Aboriginal Family Violence so their interviews have not been included in the findings of this report.

From the original interviews it was decided not to include two of the shelter worker's, as it was strongly evident that their information was of no value to the research. However, both workers when being interviewed admitted they had not ever considered that Aboriginal women might have unique needs. Even using probing was of little value with these workers. In one situation probing did result in responses. This interview has been included in the data, because the worker made specific statements regarding Aboriginal women, unlike the other two respondents. Nevertheless it should be recognized that, in this instance, the respondent made some strong remarks that can be viewed as racist.

As noted above three shelter workers interviewed were of Aboriginal ancestry; all other shelter workers were Euro-Canadians. This distinction is necessary to describe differences in the interviews. Non-Aboriginal workers tended to be able to focus outside of their personal experiences, whereas,

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<sup>1</sup>This director is concerned that Aboriginal women in the region do not use their shelter and hopes through our research she will obtain insights into how to encourage abused Aboriginal women to use the shelter, as well as ways the shelter staff can best assist Aboriginal women in transition.

Aboriginal workers were dealing with personal issues. The Aboriginal workers discussed situations that were very close to them and on occasion I felt I was drawing issues to the surface that until now they had little opportunity or reason to reflect upon.

Their responses were also more specific to the community they were from. Most of the workers are employed in, and generally live in, centres close to their home communities. They requested that personal information not be used by our project and this request has been honoured. However, I feel it is important that Aboriginal workers in shelters realize they are not alone in their dilemma. The issues mentioned most often by them involved uncertainty of how to deal with racist views regarding Aboriginal peoples, and how to deal with the violence that, frequently indirectly, touched both professional and personal aspects of their lives.

### **2.3 Native Women**

Clients were selected on the basis of their having stayed in a shelter, as well as having relocated for at least a three month period. The lack of follow up programs in most shelters made it difficult to identify women who had relocated to an urban centre, therefore, only eight interviews were completed instead of the anticipated ten. The majority of these were identified by the local shelter director, but two were women known to the researcher.

### **2.4 Research Process**

The research process selected for the project involved one to one in-person interviews with Aboriginal women and shelter workers. The interviewees were given the options of speaking freely about family violence or responding to a prepared questionnaire read to them by the interviewer. This procedure was used because it was assumed that some individuals might prefer the less structured interview format. Furthermore, the open interviewing procedure gave the women an opportunity to define the issues which were important to them, rather than simply respond to issues which the researcher considered important.

The method of gathering data by in-person interviews was chosen because of the sensitivity of family violence, especially for Aboriginal women who are the victims of abuse. In this manner the interviewer could assess the emotional well-being of those women being interviewed . Once the interview was completed each woman was given an opportunity to work through her feelings and she was referred for further counselling or given other assistance if possible. Because of the necessity of the interviewer being able to deal with this reality it was essential that she have not only interviewing skills but some previous experience in dealing with victims/survivors of domestic violence. This procedure was based on a recommendation of the Native Women's Needs Assessment report, as follows:

A methodological recommendation then, which evolved out of the current investigation, would be that any future attempt to accurately assess the prevalence of battering in a reserve population use personal, one-to-one contact with the subject at her place of residence to request her cooperation (Doxator and Riddell, 1986:37).

The initial plan was to tape-record all interviews. Most were taped, and transcribed later for analysis. However, there were problems with equipment failure, background noise interference, individuals who were too soft spoken to be picked up by the recorder and, most importantly, some individuals who were uncomfortable being recorded so they tended to discuss issues more freely when the recorder was turned off. Consequently notes taken during the interview and recall notes made by the interviewee immediately after the interview supplemented the taped material.

## **2.5 The Instrument**

The questions were developed with the assumption that Aboriginal women who relocate do so because they are unable to obtain support in their communities. Furthermore, it was assumed that these women encountered obstacles in the relocation process. The purpose of the questions was to identify and articulate in greater detail the problems these women face in the Aboriginal community and the urban centre.

As the questionnaire was intended to invite discussion rather than be used as a rigorous instrument for statistical analysis, it was not pre-tested. Consequently, as it became obvious through the initial interviews that some questions were repetitive, they were deleted. Furthermore, although all but one interviewee chose the standard questionnaire, there was a tendency towards giving information that was covered by other questions not yet asked by the interviewer. Thus, in practise, the interviews based on the questionnaire were almost as open-ended as the unstructured interviews, and this seemed to be the most effective interviewing technique with both the shelter workers and the Aboriginal women who had used shelters.

## **2.6 Data analysis**

The data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Kirby and McKenna, 1989). Responses were analyzed for themes and these were organized together to identify underlying concepts and to determine relationships among the various elements. Shelter workers and Aboriginal women's responses were analyzed separately, but in the following their comments have been discussed together.

Because questionnaires had been developed prior to the interview, many of the themes actually arise as much from them as from the women's own thinking about the situation. However, both the interviewing procedure and the analysis tried to ensure that the women's major issues would come to the surface, whether or not they had been previously identified by the researcher.

Finally, we have chosen to incorporate comments from the literature throughout our analysis, to constantly show linkages between what women were saying and what has been reported elsewhere.

## **2.7 Limitations**

The number of women interviewed was relatively small, as is usually the case with grounded theory methodology, but it is possible there would have been some differences in results if the sample had been larger. This seems to be less the case with shelter workers, who presented fairly



consistent remarks on the issues at hand, so small numbers of interviewees quickly produced "saturated" categories in the analysis.

However, it would have been helpful to have been able to interview more Aboriginal women. Ideally in a grounded theory approach using interviewing, the respondent should be articulate and speak freely about their experiences to provide ample material for analysis. Most of the Aboriginal women were less verbal than the ideal, and the shelters did not have follow-up procedures which enabled them to identify a number of Aboriginal women who could be selected. It is possible a different procedure should be used for identifying Aboriginal respondents in further research, but the women interviewed in this study did speak openly and we think the results presented here accurately reflect their stories.

## **2.8 Looking forward to the rest of this report**

The purpose of this research was to examine the relocation of abused Aboriginal women in Alberta who chose to move out of their home communities and into an urban centre. There were five main areas of concern that will be discussed in this report, each under a specific section. The first section will examine violent behaviour in the Aboriginal communities. The second section will identify and describe the availability and adequacy of services in the rural/home communities and the urban centre. The third section discusses Aboriginal and cultural related issues and the section that follows describes children's reactions to the relocation. The final section examines the personal attributes that impacts Aboriginal women's ability to successfully relocate. The last chapter, successful relocation remarks and recommendations, will bring the report to a conclusion.

### **3. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **3.1 Family Violence in Native Communities**

Spousal violence is initially experienced by Aboriginal women in their home communities, and the responses of these communities and services available in them largely determine what the woman is able to do to change her situation. The comments of the women interviewed will be described here in terms of community member response, reaction of family and friends, and reasons given for leaving. In the following section rural services will be described.

##### **3.1.1 Community Members Response to Family Violence**

This first section addresses the respondents' concerns that relate to Aboriginal community member's attitudes and behaviours towards family violence. The bulk of the information is derived from the perceptions of the Aboriginal women, since most shelter workers had little or no direct experience with the Aboriginal Communities in their area. Exceptions were the Aboriginal shelter workers.

All Aboriginal women respondents saw the attitudes and behaviours of community members as reflecting an unwillingness to address the issue of family violence. The exceptions noted by three women were the beginning willingness of some Elders to express the view that family violence should no longer be tolerated by the women. Otherwise, the respondents thought that most community members did not seem to understand domestic violence. Because of this women felt blamed for the abuse or, even more often, community members simply did not interfere. For example, women stated that other community members were aware of her abuse, felt sorry for her, but chose not to intervene. Some interpreted the high incidence of violent behaviour they were exposed to, beyond their own situation, as an acceptance of violence by the community. It is likely these factors underlie the feelings of isolation and hopelessness the women experienced in their home communities.

Seven of the eight respondents were aware of family violence occurring beyond their own situation. Most believed that there was a high incidence of violence in their home community including elder abuse, sexual assault and alcohol related violence outside the family. Although some respondents believed that alcoholism contributed to the violence, violence often occurs whether alcohol is present or not.

One respondent stated that communities are becoming less tolerant of violent behaviour. Yet, it may be that much violence is unreported or unknown for as Linda MacLeod points out in Battered But Not Beaten, "...reporting is inhibited by close personal ties between either the battered woman and people who are possible sources of help, or the batterer and potential helpers" (1987: 23).

Aboriginal women also reported that potential sources of aid are not fully utilized by their communities. They noted that facilities existed and could be made available for use by battered women seeking help. So, although the capacity and the need has been established in at least some of the communities, at best minimum means for dealing with the problem of family violence have been established.

Shelter workers had less direct knowledge of the situation in the Aboriginal communities. Therefore, most of their comments are derived from their interaction with Aboriginal clientele. Thirteen shelter workers stated that the attitudes of community members, friends, family and band officials are to blame the victim or deny the problem. Twice workers noted that more problems exist for the women if her batterer is the "original" member of the community (that is, if she is from elsewhere and has married a man from the community she is living in). In these cases it would be more likely that interference or "sticking up for him" would occur. One worker believed that communal acceptance of violent behaviour and "traditional roles" contribute to the problem. Two of the shelter workers believed that cutting ties to the community, family and friends was the only possible answer.

One worker, knowledgeable regarding Aboriginal communities, remarked that

*Neo-colonialism is an internal value system that has been pushed at them for a long time. They are starting to acknowledge what is happening. There are programs all over that are helping towards that, for example counselling for one. These programs show the community is taking responsibility. I am hoping in 20 - 30 years it changes. There is lots to be done.*

Another thoughtful worker believed that the communities should ". . . address special needs for grieving because of shootings and violent deaths."

### **3.1.2 Family and Friends**

All Aboriginal women respondents who have relocated made comments concerning attitudes and behaviour of their family members with regard to the abuse they were experiencing in the Aboriginal community. As well, all remarked that their families were faced with adversity in attempts to provide support or help. Most often Aboriginal abused women are kept isolated from significant others by their spouse and family and friends are often threatened by the spouse if they try to help.

The women also stated that family members can not be very supportive because they are also often in abusive relationships. Perhaps because of that or for other reasons they want to remain out of the abused woman's situation. In addition, women who experienced inter-generational transfer of abuse sometimes do not consider asking for family support and intervention. So although families are usually aware of the abuse, the women believe their families are helpless to assist them and understand why they must leave the home community. However, situations vary and some family and friends are supportive. One respondent noted that a friend, and another that a family member, had transported them to the shelter.

Another issue for the respondents was dealing with their in-laws or spouse. Some respondents, concurring with the earlier shelter respondents'

statements about the importance of "marrying in", stated that since they married into the community their husbands have extensive family support. Congruently, there is pressure from spouse and in-laws to maintain contact with the children and remain in the abusive relationship. Once they have left the relationship, Aboriginal respondents were afraid to send their children "home" alone, but also feared an encounter with their batterer if they returned to the community with the children.

Many of the same issues that were discussed by respondents are present in the literature that pertains to isolated, rural or Aboriginal communities. Although Aboriginal communities are reported as having potential sources of help, a multitude of factors prevent Aboriginal women from accessing these supports. MacLeod found that

Close personal ties between the battered woman or the batterer and the people who are potential sources of help may inhibit the reporting of wife battering. In fact, research suggests that victims of crime generally are less likely to report crimes in rural locations, especially in small, homogeneous communities, because of the strong value the community places on maintaining relationships (1987:22, also see Jamieson, 1987).

In Marshall's view the problems with family support in domestic violence may be a result of not knowing how to approach the problem. She states that in order for family members to be a source of support family members "(must). . . know what spouse abuse is all about and learn what resources both within the family and outside of them will be most helpful" (1984:3, also see Graveline, 1986).

### **3.1.3 Reasons for Leaving**

Making the decision to end a relationship is extremely difficult for any person, however for a woman in an abusive relationship, her feelings of helplessness and powerlessness after years of abuse, makes the choice even more agonizing. In the case of the Aboriginal women,

. . . taking action may effectively result in self-banishment, loss of community and loss of rights. To

Speak out against intimate violence represents a threat to one's sense of collectivity as well as one's sense of individuality (Jamieson, 1987:131).

Some women eventually do make the decision to leave the relationship. This next section discusses the reasons Aboriginal women who were abused made the decision to relocate to an urban centre. All of the women believed they had no viable option except to leave. Here are some typical remarks:

*The people just want to hide what is going on. Some want to hide the offenders.*

*You cannot change your situation in Native community; if you try you are attacked. People say you are trying to be better than they are.*

*Mind your own business, you are encouraged to stay in the relationship*

*The reserve is small and people know what is going on but no one tries to put out a helping hand to help the couple having problems. Everyone keeps to themselves.*

Community acceptance and a high incidence of violent behaviour creates a feeling of hopelessness for abused Aboriginal women. Most see the urban centre as providing greater assistance. Either there are no services available in the home community or the services provided do not adequately meet the needs of abused women. Minimal support is provided by family and friends under the threat of violence from the batterer. Aboriginal women felt that they were imposing when they stayed at the home of supportive friends.

Or, as indicated earlier, they may feel they have no supportive family or friends on the reserve. One woman said "If you marry into another reserve and you are in an abusive relationship your in-laws will stick by their son.". For another the racist remarks made by community members to her, because of her light skin colour, convinced her she could not hope to find support in the community.

The two most frequently mentioned reasons for leaving that shelter workers were aware of are the feeling of having no support in the community and the women's concerns about their own safety as well as the safety of other family members and children.

### **3.2. Services in the Rural Community**

In order to gain a better understanding of the situation in Aboriginal communities the women were asked about services that did exist in the home community. The following section will discuss and compare the views expressed by both the shelter workers and the Aboriginal women respondents. The respondents were asked to evaluate a range of services, such as counselling, financial, legal, social and Band services.

First, the most frequently mentioned comment was that there is a lack of services in the rural communities. In total twelve shelter workers and all the women stated that the lack of services in the rural communities was a major factor in their decision to leave. A lack of services includes not only the absence of services but also the inability of services in place to deal with family violence.

#### **3.2.1 Rural Counselling Services**

Where services exist in the rural communities there is a tendency for them to focus on alcohol abuse rather than other social problems, like abusive behaviour. Women who had sought help from counselling services on their reserves did not find the support they needed for a number of reasons. In one case, the individual was told by the counsellor that her own knowledge of family violence was far more extensive than was the counsellor's. Shelter workers were in agreement that comments they had heard from women indicate an inability of Band counselling services to deal with victims of family violence.

Two of the other problems they noted are that women fear being seen entering the service and that the information they share will not remain confidential. The oath of confidentiality that all Social Service workers are

committed to becomes even more important in a small rural community, like the reserves and settlements. Should a worker reveal any information regarding a client outside the agency it is highly likely that information will be shared amongst the community members. Not only does such a situation increase the degree of mistrust an Aboriginal woman has, it also leaves the woman and other community members questioning the integrity of the agency. In programs that are group oriented that deal with very personal information, like Life Skills, it cannot be stressed often enough the importance of both the staff and the clientele respecting one another's privacy. When an abused woman is subject to the weekly gossip, not only does it further isolate her but it also puts her life at risk. When they are aware of problems of breaches of confidentiality, many women are not willing to risk their spouse finding out about their involvement in support programs and choose instead to remain isolated in order to protect themselves.

### **3.2.2 Rural Policing and Legal Services**

Another service that was discussed by respondents was the use of the police as a means of protection. Police involvement in domestic disputes is inconsistent. The women who were interviewed came from communities where the RCMP were the police force that was in place for this type of service. Some women chose not to involve the police because they were aware of adverse consequences other women in abusive relationships had suffered after they had taken such action. Factors such as the legal status of the relationship also determined the willingness of the police to become involved. A comment by an Aboriginal women respondent illustrates this best.

*In a legal marriage the police won't interfere. If you are common-law and have been abused they will step in. If she wants to lay charges, the police will lay charges. If they see that the abuse is severe they will lay charges themselves.*

Another woman thinks that the problem is the police not wanting to get involved in "family business". Only one woman had been assisted by the police who simply referred her to the women's shelter.



Shelter workers have also found an inconsistency in the way police deal with family violence. Most of the worker's comments were, like the abused women's comments, in reference to the RCMP. They agreed that the police do not want to be involved in domestic violence situations. For the most part, the police who are willing to become involved are individual officers rather than it apparently being the practice of a department. On this individual basis, workers were aware of some RCMP officers who had been very supportive and had driven women and their children to the local shelters. Other police officers were ambivalent, especially in situations where they had been previously summoned. This comment by a worker illustrates the conflicting aspects of family violence that women and police encounter.

*Police are good about it but after awhile they don't take it seriously because they've gotten involved too many times. The person, (offender) is charged and by the time the court date is around (the woman) is helping the person. If the police laid the charges themselves and it goes to court the woman will lie. Because they (women) are scared and eventually they pay for what they did. They convince themselves the person is going to change even though they know it's not going to happen.*

At present, the police are probably one of the most utilized services by women in abusive relationships. In addition to RCMP services, tribal policing is available on some reserves and three of the workers were familiar with the Tribal police position in family disputes. If the comments by these workers are an indication of Tribal police practices, women living on reserves with this type of policing are not better off than women dealing with RCMP, but at a disadvantage.

These workers saw tribal police as unwilling to become involved in domestic violence. One worker commented that because Tribal police are, more likely, to know the circumstances of individual families they are more likely to ignore the call from a victim. Further problems arise for those women whose abusive spouse is connected to the Tribal police or Band Councils. In these instances the victim feels totally trapped. She believes her call to the Tribal police will only intensify the situation as it is likely the

spouse will be informed of her call for help. She cannot risk him being aware of the call so she does not consider this policing service an option open to her.

When Tribal police have involved themselves they generally suggest the woman consider leaving the relationship, but they do not provide transportation. The way shelter staff have resolved this problem is to contact the RCMP who they know are more willing to provide transportation to the local women's shelter.

Most of the comments made by workers indicate that the police are slow to react to domestic violence. Furthermore, they tend to want the women to let the situation settle down by itself, suggesting that ". . . *once the spouse has sobered up everything will be fine.*" In isolated areas the police may not come to the call for days and by then the situation has moved into a honeymoon phase and the women are hooked back into the abusive cycle.

The other issue that can arise for the Aboriginal woman when she involves the police is the reaction of others. One worker said that

*The RCMP will lay the charges against the man. If he goes to jail, then she is forced to leave because of the reaction of friends and family members. She is blamed for everything. The abuse is even her fault.*

In summary, the police services are an inconsistent means of support for Aboriginal women in abusive relationships according to the views expressed by the respondents and shelter workers. They are however an important service for the Aboriginal women in her home community because sometimes they are the only service available to her.

### 3.2.3 Rural Social Services

One of the few others services that women seek assistance from is Social Services. The practices of social workers are like that of the police in that many similar factors come into play and inconsistency of service delivery is a concern for respondents.

The three Aboriginal women who commented on the social service agency they had contacted differed. One woman had received support from the social worker and the other two had dealt with workers who had apathetic attitudes. These two saw social workers as unsympathetic or too involved in their own personal crisis to be of assistance to the abused women in the community.

Three shelter workers also discussed the social service agencies in rural communities. Again one of the workers believed that the social services are a support, whereas the other two did not agree. The shelter worker who considered the social workers as supportive came to this conclusion because they referred abused women to a women's shelter; however she was not aware of their willingness to transport the women to the shelter. The other two acknowledged Social Services as a service, however they did not see social workers as making an effort to become involved in situations of domestic violence. This was the case especially in circumstances of isolated communities where the abused women have never had in-person contact with their workers. All contacts have been telephone interviews.

When the only method of contact is telephone it is not possible for a worker to assess the condition of the client. Furthermore, discussing matters such as abuse for most abused women is something that is likely to occur only once the woman knows the individual she is confiding in. The woman herself may be unaware that what is happening to her is not acceptable and that she has the right to be protected from the abuse. If the woman has been isolated or has been witness to a lot of abusive behaviour, as a result of her own family history, she is even less likely to ask a stranger for help or to discuss the abuse she is suffering.

### 3.2.5. Band Services

The final services that will be discussed are Band services. These are all "rural" services in this case, but the aspects which are to be addressed here are those related to them as Indian bands rather than to being rural. Included in this section are those services provided by the Band Council. This section is relevant only to the reserve community as there were no Aboriginal respondents from the Metis Settlements. Further, most shelter workers lacked knowledge of what is considered a Metis community. The very few comments made regarding Metis communities were that no services were available for abused women on the local settlements.

Treaty women identified the Band Councils as a service that they expect support from but the comments they made indicate that the support is rarely available. First, the Community Health Centres now being established by some reserve communities did not provide the type of service an abused women would require, such as counselling, or a thorough investigation into the physical condition and proper documentation of complaints of violence made by the women who used the service. This type of documentation is especially important for the laying of charges should a woman choose that option.

Band Council have also become administrators of education on their reserves, and in this capacity they could address family violence through school programming. The comments made by women were that the Council they were aware of did not support the schools educating children on this issue. When attempts were made by school counsellors to implement programs that would address the problem of family abuse the Band Councils, especially all male Councils, opposed the practice. However there are Bands which do not oppose the implementation of services for victims of family violence.

On one reserve a shelter had been established and more recently other Bands have begun to implement services. On the reserve where a shelter had been established a number of problems occurred. These problems

included the lack of safety and lack of anonymity when a woman utilized the on-reserve shelter. The location of the shelter was public knowledge and the lack of police support for the shelter left the women vulnerable to interference from their abuser. Shelter workers reported these same concerns had been told to them by Aboriginal women who had stayed at the shelter.

The third issue that was identified by women regarding Band Councils is that favouritism occurs in their hiring practices. Three women respondents saw Band Councils as hiring family members for any employment opportunities administered the Band. Most of the employment opportunities on reserves occur through familial ties, therefore, the ability to improve one's situation are almost nonexistent in the view of these Aboriginal women. This is not directly related to services for abused women, but it does impact on women's opportunities to either gain some economic power in the relationship with their spouse or to make a living on the reserve if they leave the relationship.

The final issue from the women's view is that problems can arise relating to Band housing. Should a women choose to escape the abuse in her relationship, she is the one who is forced out of the family home. This is true not just in the sense that she feels she must leave the home, but in a political and legal sense on the reserve. When a couple applies for housing, if he is either a member of the same Band or the original band member, the property is placed under his name. When a woman approaches the Band Council to have him removed because of his abusive behaviour, she is informed that their hands are tied because the home belongs to the individual under whose name it appears on the band list. This situation is also reported by the Ontario Native Women's Association who found that

As a consequence of two Supreme Court of Canada decisions in 1986, Aboriginal women cannot seek an order for temporary occupancy of the matrimonial home under the usual provincial family legislation such as the Ontario Family Law Act(1989:57).

Clearly, these findings apply to Alberta Treaty Indian women as well. Most often the woman is too fearful to remain in the home anyway so she is

more likely to seek other alternatives. Overall the most important issue for treaty women respondents, is that Band Councils need to change the practices presently in place. That is, they must administer their services and programs to help the victims of family violence if they are to become a part of the solution and not remain part of the problem.

The shelter workers were equally concerned about the role of Band Councils, however they feel their efforts have been less resisted by some Bands. They find a few Bands are beginning to recognize that family violence is a problem and have begun some work in the area. Two workers had been on workshop panels in the Aboriginal community and three others were aware of Band administered programs that are in place to address the issue of violence. Some of the programs are for counselling victims of abuse and one is part of the on-reserve education system. The school program is also working with adults through running family violence awareness workshops and home visits when a problem has been identified by a school counsellor. Another worker commented that her own experiences with Band counsellors was that many are victims or offenders themselves. This was also a comment made by two of the women who had been the victim of men who had been counsellors.

Band support of women escaping the abuse varies. On a few reserves there is support and understanding from the Band Council that a woman in an abusive relationship has no choice but to leave in order to escape the abuse, but most are indifferent to the women leaving. On one reserve a man can use the band to punish a woman who chooses to leave. This is accomplished by withholding the Band monthly oil royalties payments of women and/or their children when they leave the reserve because of spousal abuse. This method yields incredible control of the women because, although she does not get the money, the social allowance agency these women must utilize calculate the women's monthly budget by including the funds as being received. This was, however, the practice of only one Band in the areas in which the research was conducted. Shelter workers are more optimistic about the likelihood that Band Councils will be motivated to accepting and becoming involved in dealing with the problem of family violence in Aboriginal communities than were the women respondents.

The final concern, which was mentioned by four women and ten workers is the problem women can encounter in accessing services. To some extent this is a function of the rural community, but it seemed to be marked on reserves also. Obstacles identified by respondents in accessing services were having no transportation, having no telephone and having small children. This inability to access services was not only a problem in obtaining services in the community, but also an issue for women choosing to relocate.

Some women choose to relocate regardless of the obstacles. One woman's story, as told by a worker, is an especially disheartening example of the Aboriginal women's situation.

*One big problem is transportation. We had one woman who hitch-hiked for two days to get to the shelter. She hid in ditches with her children. It is a very sad statement that someone has to go through that to get to a shelter or get the support of someone, . . ., to (get someone to) actually believe they need the service.*

For too many Aboriginal women the inability of Aboriginal community services to protect her and her children from the abuse means the only option is to relocate outside the community. What becomes equally discouraging for the Aboriginal women is that the hopes and expectations she has of the urban centre are not always realized; it turns out not to be as ideal as they had anticipated. Thus, seeking safety from the abusive spouse may result in another type of victimization. This time the abuser is less identifiable. They are no longer the victim of an abusive spouse, but the victim of a system that has not considered the uniqueness of their situation as Aboriginal women.

### **3.3 Urban Centre Services**

This section will discuss the problems Aboriginal women can encounter with services used when they relocate to an urban centre as a result of family violence. All the information pertains to Aboriginal women

who have entered a women's shelter in the initial stages of their transition to an urban centre. The questions that were asked specifically sought to determine the problems Aboriginal women encounter with services they utilize. The services that have been examined include women's shelters, social allowance programs, child welfare services, legal services, and counselling services.

### 3.3.1 Shelters

It was only the Aboriginal women who were directly questioned about the adequacy of the services provided by women's shelters. The majority of the comments indicate that the respondents were able to find support at the shelter in their transition. Only four of the comments made by three women identify problems experienced while the women were in the shelter. A total of 10 shelter workers were also aware that problems within the shelter exist for Aboriginal women.

The types of support the women identified as being beneficial was the support they received from staff, support from other women in the shelter, feeling safe and education about abuse. For one woman it was the first time she felt others believed what she was saying regarding her experiences as an abused women. Being believed and not feeling so isolated are important aspects for the abused woman regardless of ethnic background. Comments by one respondent are similar to what other women said:

*Just knowing the violence you experienced is not on your own, that other women go through the same thing. Until you start talking and showing it, you feel you are the only one. It is hard to believe they experienced the same thing... the way their husbands talked to them...a lot of it is the same thing.*

The opportunity to learn more about the dynamics of family violence in the shelter was a comment made by seven out of the eight women respondents. Because women's shelters in Alberta allow women to return time and time again those women who returned to their abusive spouse continued to use this service. For the abused woman this practice is vital. Only one of the respondents had not had to enter the shelter numerous



times before she was able to finally make the decision to not return to the abusive relationship.

Although it is important that women be permitted to return to shelters again and again, one concern of seven (7) shelter workers is the limited time women are permitted in the shelter with each stay. In their view, the present policy which allows women to stay for three weeks is inadequate. For some Aboriginal women the move to an urban centre means they must readjust their whole life.

They also expressed concern that the shelter can only provide a limited number of services due to funding and it therefore lacks the essential services required by the Aboriginal woman who is unfamiliar with an urban environment.

Some workers were concerned about whether or not Aboriginal women are using shelters. They believe the Aboriginal women who could benefit from the service do not use the shelter in the region. To support this, during the initial stages of the research it was found that one of the shelters that had been selected because of the high Aboriginal population in the surrounding area was only being utilized for a 2-3 day stay by Aboriginal women. Other areas reported that Aboriginal women generally stay less than 5 days. The lack of funding to do follow-up does not provide shelter staff with information as to why most Aboriginal women stay for such a short period of time or what happens to these women. Most workers believed they are likely to have returned to the home community.

For some women the shelters are one of the most important services they encounter when they relocate and they continue to use the supports available from the shelter even after they have established themselves in the urban centre. Those workers who commented on these women see them as contributing to the services provided by the shelter. Their willingness to share their personal experiences of relocation obstacles prepares or supports women who are still in transition.

Comments that were made by Aboriginal women and workers regarding the problems in shelters identified the following issues: harassment, racism and restrictive rules. The situation that involved feelings of being harassed involved a woman who was waiting for an opening in a second stage transition house. She felt her inactivity during this waiting period was appropriate but one worker felt differently, and constantly harassed her about her behavior. She found that staff did not make themselves easily accessible to the clientele in this shelter, and when a woman wanted to talk to a worker it was up to the woman to seek one out. For Aboriginal women this is important because of some personal characteristics and preferences which may make them more likely to seek help as they come to know and trust people. Had this been this woman's first experience in a shelter, she feels she is likely to have generalized this non-support to all shelters. Fortunately for her another shelter had a far more supportive environment and she was able to successfully relocate and now continues to advocate shelters as a valuable service for Aboriginal women.

The issue of racism occurring in the shelter is one discussed not only by an Aboriginal woman but also a number of workers. There is the occasional worker in the shelters who has not yet become aware of her own discriminatory views regarding Aboriginal people. To deny this problem exists between staff and clients, and clients and clients will only perpetuate the problem of racism and indirectly family violence. This will occur whenever a woman experiences racist behaviour in what is considered a safe house and generalizes this to all shelters, thus decreasing her chances of escaping the abusive relationship. Like the home community agencies, whose reputation becomes questionable because of the problems of confidentiality, the shelter will become known as a racist place for Aboriginal women instead of the safe house it is intended to be.

There are presently two methods used in shelters that may to some degree reduce the problem of racism. First, in one shelter where the problem was acknowledged the staff encourage women to prepare meals that are from their own ethnic background. It is hoped that through this method greater respect for each other's different ethnic backgrounds will begin. The second

and most frequently used method for Aboriginal women is the hiring of Aboriginal staff. Because, in most cases, shelter's Aboriginal clientele range from an estimated 25% to 70% the hiring of Aboriginal staff would certainly seem warranted.

When asked about the practice of Aboriginal staffing six of the seven women who had been in shelters that employed Aboriginal staff considered this an important aspect of their stay in the shelter. The individual who was indifferent to their presence states that

*Native staff that were employed had not been exposed to the Native community or the Native way so I cannot judge whether or not it was beneficial or not for them to be there.*

This has implications for the hiring of Aboriginal staff. The view was expressed by two workers of Aboriginal descent that not all Aboriginal persons on staff have the experience or knowledge that Aboriginal women may require when they are leaving an abusive relationship.

Restrictive rules in the shelters was partly seen as a problem, and partly perceived as helpful by the three Aboriginal women respondents who mentioned them. Two of the three women found the rules beneficial rather than offensive. For one the rule that children must be placed in bed by a certain time meant she had an opportunity to be alone or to interact with other women without constant interference from their children. The other woman said the expectation of program attendance acted as a motivator to force her into attending a program she might never have considered on her own. Only one respondent complained about the monitoring of the women's whereabouts, when they go out to attend to business while they are in the shelter

However, this woman is not alone in her views regarding the restrictive rules; shelter workers made a number of comments regarding this aspect of the shelter. Some comments by workers encompass the views expressed by most workers.

*They find it hard to stick to schedule in the shelter. They do not live by rules and regulations. This is the hardest thing for them to adjust to.*

*Some women are offended by these rules and regulations. They think it's alright for their children to stay up as late as they do.*

*Workers understand that it is not possible for the Native women to come off the reserve and obey their rules especially, if they had no set rules there.*

Although their way of expressing this problem sometimes reflect a stereotypical view of Aboriginal women, the comments were made so frequently that one must conclude the workers are apparently partly describing an actual problem. This conflict between the lifestyle of Aboriginal women who have originally lived in Aboriginal communities and the expectations of shelter workers was a concern noted by nine (9) workers.

The most frequently mentioned issue about shelter rules was related to childcare practices. Besides early bedtime restriction was the issue of who would be the care-giver while the children were in the shelter. Because relative-care is a common practice of Aboriginal people, in circumstances where another relative is also staying in the shelter problems arise. If a situation occurs where one woman becomes too dependent for child-care on a relative a worker will intervene. However, in such cases the workers have been uncertain of whether or not they are doing the right thing, or if this pattern of child-care simply reflects a cultural difference.

The views of the Aboriginal women interviewed indicate that the shelter is for the most part a supportive and safe environment for them. However, this may be a result of seeking respondents who had succeeded at relocation and focusing on their experience. For other Aboriginal women the experience may not be as wonderful as shelter worker's express serious concerns that too few Aboriginal women succeed at relocation. Women's shelters are the most frequently utilized referral agency by service workers in the home community. Therefore, this initial experience of abused Aboriginal women requires as much support as can be generated.

### 3.3.2 Social Allowance Services

The services provided by Alberta Family and Social Services (AFSS) and Indian Affairs are by far the most utilized by Aboriginal women. They are more likely to depend upon services provided by social allowance programs than women of other backgrounds because of the higher incidence of impoverishment in Aboriginal families and communities. One respondent resented the fact that she has to go on social allowance programs but could see no alternative.

Another aspect that contributes to the women's need to rely on social allowance programs are the laws that govern Treaty Indian peoples. Presently,

... the Indian Act prescribe no standards on family law in areas such as child custody, adoption, support payments, or the division of matrimonial property, so there is no other resource (than social assistance) for the abused woman. The same is true of a woman seeking a division of matrimonial assets. (Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989:57).

Most of the women interviewed were receiving benefits from Alberta Family and Social Services. Only two had been under Indian Affairs social allowance program, however this is not an indication of the number of treaty Indian women interviewed but rather a result of policies. Various factors such as Child Welfare involvement or the individual's ability to be employed determine her social assistance status.

There were comments made by four Aboriginal women regarding AFSS. Two of the issues that were discussed were about conflicting views between the social worker and themselves regarding future employment plans. The other three concerns were the lack of understanding their workers had regarding family violence. One respondent was accused of lying because her story differed from what a relative had reported. Another woman was told she should go back to the former home and retrieve her household and personal belongings. This practice of social welfare personnel

advising women that first they should try to get items from the former residence is also a concern expressed by shelter workers. Six shelter worker's thought this was more frequently encountered by Treaty status women who fall under an Indian Affairs mandate.

The only Aboriginal woman interviewed who discussed the Indian Affairs allowance program had not encountered the problems identified by workers. However she did say that the degree to which a woman is supported by Indian Affairs is determined by the number of times she has left the relationship and received funds for relocation. This was also mentioned by three shelter workers.

One of the greatest difficulties Treaty women encounter, mentioned by four workers is in the area of finances. They find themselves caught between Alberta Family and Social Services and Indian Affairs. The factors that determine a women's status for social allowance seem to be inconsistently applied. Further adversity occurs for the woman who waits 3-5 days to see a worker and is then told she is under the jurisdiction of the other agency. In previous years Indian Affairs made monthly visits to women's shelters, therefore the confusion could be avoided to a greater degree, but this is no longer done.

In comparing the services provided by AFSS and Indian Affairs there is agreement by respondents that AFSS is more accessible and more supportive of any extra expenses beyond the set budget. The extra benefits identified by workers besides the household living expenses that could be accessed included daycare, transportation costs, and recreational funds. Concerns regarding AFSS and Indian Affairs are multi-issue and will be discussed in other areas of this report, the obstacles to relocation sections.

### **3.2.3 Child Welfare**

Fear of involving AFSS in their personal lives is an issue for Aboriginal women. They are afraid that AFSS involvement leaves them vulnerable to Child Welfare intervention. One worker who was aware of the underlying factors remarked that

*Child Welfare had been involved in the Aboriginal communities a lot. They have a history. Different things have happened where children have been taken away. There are good reasons for women's fears.*

Three of the Aboriginal women had Child Welfare involvement. One woman had been involved with Child Welfare on two occasions. In the first situation her experiences were like those of another woman. Both did not understand the implications of Child Welfare involvement and eventually lost their children to permanent guardianship orders.

Attempts by one of these women to have her children returned to her care after years of separation were disastrous. By the time they were returned the children had so many problems that she was unable to cope with them. In her second, and more recent circumstances, the problem child was not removed but instead less intrusive methods were used and the problem eventually become manageable. The third woman expressed concerns about her children's foster care and was monitoring their condition when they came for home visits.

Six shelter workers mentioned that when they are aware of problems with children's behaviour they try to involve Child Welfare. However, most often such intervention is met with resistance by the Aboriginal women. One shelter respondent, in discussing agencies, observed that Aboriginal women's perception of agencies, especially child welfare, is that they are seen as an enemy and they are going to take her children away. One worker said

*Mention Child Welfare and immediately they think Child Welfare is going to take their children away. They don't know the services Child Welfare can offer to them. They don't realize Child Welfare is here to help them cope with their family. Some women are willing to allow Child Welfare intervention, whereas others refuse and may go so far as to leave the shelter.*

The fear of Child Welfare involvement is only one of the areas that abused Aboriginal women must contend with. Equally fear-inducing once the women have left the protective environment of a women's shelter is the likelihood that she will be located by her abusive spouse.

### 3.2.4 Safety

In one smaller urban centre where the research was conducted a concern of the shelter directors was the ease with which a woman can be located. There are a limited number of services such as doctors, grocery stores, or schools, and of course usually only one utility service, making it easy for an abusive spouse to locate the Aboriginal woman. Even in the larger urban centres, a Director stated that the Aboriginal community is so close-knit that the woman is likely to be located by her spouse unless she is willing to move out of the province. All he needs to know is where the Aboriginal services are located and it is just a matter of time before her whereabouts are known to him.

One shelter respondent described the results of the Aboriginal women's inability to keep her whereabouts unknown this way:

*Some women will live on their own for a month or so but then the husband moves in. Even if she calls the police they tell her he's got every right, that it is a family matter. So she's right back where she started.... I've have yet to meet a Native women whose husband has not found her.*

This situation may occur because of the value placed on extended family interaction in the Aboriginal community, but shelter workers believe the situation is compounded by another value conflict. Nine workers commented on what they believe is less emphasis placed by Aboriginal people on formal education. They believe this is what results in Aboriginal women who enter shelters tending to have lower levels of formal education and being less likely to place importance on schooling for their children. Although, children in abusive homes tend to fall at least one year behind in their academic year, shelter workers find Aboriginal children are more likely



to be two or more years behind. The educational levels achieved by an individual has implications on their ability to obtain knowledge and information they need to make decisions, and on their ability to obtain employment. Among the Aboriginal women respondents interviewed for this research, only two had completed their grade twelve and the remainder had grade nine or ten levels of education. Even these relatively low levels of educational attainment may not reflect the schooling of Aboriginal women who are abused, for the range of educational levels estimated by shelter workers is from seven to ten.

It is possible this is not actually a value conflict, but a reflection of the history of formal schooling in the Aboriginal community. Whatever the reasons, lack of schooling does make it more difficult for the Aboriginal woman to solve the problem of violent abuse in her relationships.

### **3.2.5 Police and Legal Services in the Urban Centre**

This section discusses the problems that Aboriginal women encounter with the policing and the legal system in the urban centre. Three Aboriginal women and three shelter workers commented on this urban service. Four of the respondents consider the problem of police indifference to be the same in the urban centre as was discussed in the section regarding police in the rural communities.

Two respondents had used the legal system to obtain restraining orders. In one instance, the woman did not realize that once she allowed her spouse into the home the order became invalid. So when a problem arose the police informed her that they could not lay a charge against him for violation of the order. She was forced to obtain another order to protect herself. This problem of comprehending and utilizing the legal system is well documented (Jamieson, 1987; MacLeod, 1987; Canadian Psychiatric Association, 1987).

Another respondent felt that by using the legal system her spouse would gain knowledge of her whereabouts if she initiated custody or divorce proceedings. She prefers to remain in a legal limbo than risk him knowing

where she is. A shelter worker believes the legal system can be intimidating to the Aboriginal women who are coming from isolated communities so they are less likely to use the system.

### 3.2.6 Counselling Services

Besides the shelter, one of the most important services Aboriginal women and shelter workers discussed was counselling services. The two types of counselling services mentioned by Aboriginal women and workers were one to one therapeutic sessions and group sessions. The agencies included those that cater specifically to Aboriginal people and those that serve all groups, which will be referred to here as non-Aboriginal agencies. This section does not include programs or services for children.

Of the five Aboriginal women who discussed counselling services, only three were specific to an Aboriginal agency. Furthermore, they were all regarding the same program. This particular program is a combination of life skills and parenting and acts as a support group to Aboriginal people. It was not only highly recommended by those Aboriginal women who had attended the program but is also considered an asset by shelter workers in the area where the program is offered. Amongst the topics the program addresses in addition to the above are abuse issues and sexuality and culture, all vital to the abused Aboriginal women.

One of the advantages of Aboriginal services is that it gives aboriginal women an ". . . opportunity to meet other Native people in similar situations and to learn new skills.". However, three Aboriginal women respondents had used non-Aboriginal group sessions and found they were also supportive. What needs to be considered in referring Aboriginal women to services is the length of time they have been in an urban centre. One Aboriginal woman who had stayed in the program designed for victims of family violence found the support and information were valuable to her. Another woman who had tried a number of programs said:

*. . . if it doesn't help you with your self-esteem the first time then take it again. (Or realize the program) ...might*

*not be the one for you. You might have to shop around until you find the right one for you.*

Becoming involved in services or programs that are designed to meet the problem at hand is one of the most important considerations. For some women periodic visits to the shelters they have stayed at may be important. For three Aboriginal women one-to-one counselling was beneficial to their circumstances. However, each of the women was also involved in some support program. Service referrals by workers involved need to consider a multitude of factors such as the individual woman's personality, the length of time in the urban centre, availability of daycare or transportation, or location of the agency that provides the service.

Respondents noted that it was important that contact with other Aboriginal services be stressed. Even those women using non-Aboriginal services had access to some Aboriginal services or program. Supporting this belief in the importance of Aboriginal services was the fact that, in one region of the study where no specific programs for Aboriginal peoples existed and no Aboriginal staff were employed by the shelter, successfully relocated Aboriginal women could not be identified by workers in the shelter.

In this case the director attributes this fact to the ease with which an Aboriginal woman can be located by her abusive spouse rather than the lack of Aboriginal services. But other regions had the same problem and they were aware of women who had been successful in the transition regardless of spousal and extended family interference. This director also thought that the lack of success with Aboriginal clients could be because the clientele they deal with come from isolated communities. Nevertheless, another shelter that dealt with Aboriginal women from isolated communities and had Aboriginal services and staff reported a higher incidence of successful outcomes and more satisfactory relations with Aboriginal women.

In total, nine shelter workers expressed the view that services provided to Aboriginal women in abusive relationships are inadequate to meet their needs in the relocation transition. Shelter workers are not alone in their views that services presently in place do not meet the needs of Aboriginal

women, as we find such statements frequently in other research. Bill Hanson, for example, says:

Because their remoteness is often social, cultural, psychological, economic and geographical, it can not be assumed that their needs can be adequately met by programs and services created to serve...the dominant society (1985:31).

Although part of the inadequacy issue may be related to the lack of understanding or sensitivity of workers involved in assisting Aboriginal women in transition there are a number of other areas of concern.

### **3.3 Aboriginal Specific Concerns**

The next section, which discusses personal issues of Aboriginal women should assist workers to consider how they can help these women. Those issues that have been identified as occurring more frequently for Aboriginal women cannot be categorized as simply cultural differences. Differences in obstacles encountered more frequently by abused Aboriginal women who relocate have been categorized in the following as societal and cultural issues.

#### **3.3.1 Societal Issues**

Within the category of societal issues aspects that will be discussed focus mainly on the racism Aboriginal women encounter in obtaining housing, general societal views about Aboriginal peoples, employment opportunities and effects on their children. There are also other issues related to problems obtaining housing that have been included in this section.

A total eight workers and two women made comments regarding the issue of housing and racism. Obtaining housing for Aboriginal women is an issue both Aboriginal women and shelter workers identified as critical for a woman's successful transition. In all five locations where the research was conducted the shelter staff have, at various times, done their own investigation of racist landlords. For example, they have called a landlord

after an Aboriginal woman has returned from a rental accommodation and been told it was rented. Most often, the worker has been informed the accommodation is still available even though the Aboriginal woman was told otherwise. This is extremely frustrating for the Aboriginal woman who is continually rejected. Although she may suspect it is because of her Aboriginal heritage, she is too burdened with the effects of the abuse to make an issue of the event.

When asked about the obstacles Aboriginal women encounter, one worker said:

*Racism. A lot of women who come to the shelter end up returning to their home community, because they are forced to. They can't find a place to live. This is a very racist centre. Women ask landlords about a place for rent but as soon as he sees she is Native, the place is mysteriously rented.*

Two Aboriginal women said they had chosen to inform the landlord of their ancestry on the initial phone call, rather than waste time going for a viewing only to be rejected. Another two women had been asked by the manager if they intended to have family come and stay with them and if they consumed alcohol or drugs.

Within the wider society, certain stigmas are attached to people of Aboriginal ancestry. The assumptions held by others which were most frequently mentioned by respondents were that all Aboriginal people are alcoholic, or that abusive behaviour is the norm within their culture. This is likely a result of a historical conception that North American Indian peoples were seen as 'savages'. The abused Aboriginal woman must not only deal with the effects of an abusive spouse but once she leaves her community, she is vulnerable to abuse inflicted upon her and her children because of racist attitudes.

Besides stereotyping Aboriginal women also encounter other problems finding adequate housing, that need to be considered here. Five workers thought that one of the factors that makes it more difficult to obtain housing

is the number of children a woman has. Women entering shelters who have more than two children are more often of Aboriginal descent. The higher number of children, coupled with high rents in some regions of the province, means they are forced into renting from slum landlords. Furthermore, Aboriginal women whether from a reserve or elsewhere are less likely to have the essential references requested by a landlord. Non-Aboriginal women are more likely to have a friend or services previously used to act as a reference in obtaining housing.

The second issue is of the limited amount of money social allowance programs allow for people on assistance for housing. For instance, one worker was aware of women placing a child with extended family to offset the high costs. This in turn creates greater stress and feelings of isolation for the Aboriginal women. Related to this is the feeling of Aboriginal women respondents that they are forced into small apartments due to rental costs. This is problematic for them because their children are accustomed to a far greater deal of freedom in their home communities.

According to one Aboriginal respondent's experience, once an Aboriginal woman has been subjected to racist attitudes in seeking a residence she feels less confident about her ability to find employment. She may also find herself discriminated against when she seeks employment, and other areas including medical services, social services and banking services. One shelter worker disagreed with this general observation made by others, believing that because a woman is of Aboriginal descent less is expected of her from Social Services than is expected of other women. In this same region, another worker was aware that even when Aboriginal women have the proper identification they still encounter problems cashing cheques at the bank. Whether women find themselves discriminated against, or "less expected of them", all of these behaviors suggest a racist environment for the Aboriginal woman.

The final issue that pertains to dealing with racism, especially a concern for Aboriginal women, is when their children must deal with racist comments by other children in school. Children subjected to such discrimination become more problematic for their mother. They want to

miss school or they get into fights at school. The lack of relevant programs geared to create positive views in schools does not help these women or their children. Those who previously attended reserve schools are at a greater disadvantage. Until they enter a non-Aboriginal school they had been, for the most part, protected from the racist attitudes of school mates.

Racism may also occur with children in foster care. When the child is in foster care it is likely the foster parents will not be of Aboriginal ancestry. One Aboriginal woman respondent remarked about her daughter in foster care:

*I want her to know her family and her culture. The foster parents have tried to change her but it is not possible. She is the only Native person in the community where she lives. She's dark like a lot of Native people.*

The problem of racist attitudes Aboriginal women deal with in trying to establish themselves in an urban centre can be overwhelming. Those abused Aboriginal women who relocate need to be aware of the discrimination they and their children are likely to encounter. If relocation is the only option to escape the abuse Aboriginal women will need to draw upon as many supports as can be identified. Aboriginal women who relocate will not only find themselves having to deal with problems created by racist stereotyping views held by non-Aboriginal peoples, but are likely to find their cultural background conflicts with the expectations of a non-Aboriginal environment.

### **3.3.2 Cultural Issues**

This section will discuss the cultural issues identified by respondents. They are not always expressed by Aboriginal women but they can create obstacles. Amongst the factors identified have been language, lifestyle and cultural beliefs, although there are others that could be considered.

Six shelter workers who discussed the issue of language saw this as a problem in assisting Aboriginal women. A minority of women entering

shelters have limited ability with the English language. This occurs more frequently in northern communities. However, one Aboriginal shelter worker in the south has been told by women fluent in their Aboriginal language that it is much easier to express themselves when they use their mother language. One Aboriginal respondent said that even though she does not speak her own language just hearing it being spoken in the shelter was comforting for her.

Differences in lifestyle is one of the most frequently mentioned cultural issues. These differences can be expressed as changes in the environment, way of life and values. Assessing this aspect of relocation was done by shelter workers rather than the women, however, in their own discussion some of these same issues were mentioned.

Changes in environment refers to the aspects of transportation and size of the community. For the Aboriginal woman who comes from a small isolated community using a public transit system can be a frightening and confusing experience. This is especially so for a woman who is quiet, shy or withdrawn. Shelter workers try to help in the area of transportation as much as possible, however, they recognize that their own efforts are minimal. For these women even a smaller urban centre may be considered a large and overwhelming experience when they have come from a small community where it is likely everyone will know one another. They are not accustomed to worrying about the safety of their children. Children must be taught to use traffic signals and to be aware of the danger of strangers. They are further frustrated by having to live in a tiny apartment. These aspects of an urban centre are best expressed by a worker who remarked:

*She is stuck in a tiny apartment with her children. Both she and her children are used to wide open spaces. This is place full of strangers. If she has to catch a bus to go somewhere it can be frightening for her, especially if she has never taken a bus before. When the weather gets cold and she has her children with her she may feel it's impossible so she might as well go back to her apartment.*



Beyond the changes in the physical environment, there are distinctions in the way of life. As previously mentioned in the section on shelters, the rules and structure aspects of the dominant society conflict with a far less structured home community. Greater emphasis is placed on material needs in an urban centre than they have been accustomed to. The shelter provides more comforts than they can provide and their children may pressure them to meet the same standards when they leave the shelter. When she is on her own, she may have the added burden of extended family coming to stay or visit. As a result she must feed more people than her budget permits. She may already lack budgeting skills because she may not have required them in the home community. In her home community when she was low on food or money she could turn to a relative to help.

Six shelter workers discussed the implications of extended family support in the Aboriginal community and the problems it may create. Extended family moving in with her is an issue that can cause a number of difficulties for the abused Aboriginal woman. The importance of extended family contact is far more significant in the Aboriginal cultural than in the more dominant value system. To deny her family a place to stay goes against the values she has been ingrained with since childhood. Both she and her children may have relied extensively on the extended family in the home community and their presence in the urban centre is support for her. However, the impact on her can be more than financial.

Some landlords may threaten her with eviction if she does not force other family members to leave. This is especially likely to occur if the family member has a problem with aggressive behaviour after alcohol consumption. As well, she may choose to participate in the drinking, thinking it will relieve all the stress she is trying to cope with. Regardless of whether the money is used to feed the extra mouths or on alcohol, she can only use services like the Food Bank a limited number of times per year.

In some situations the Social Worker may cut her off assistance if she has her extended family living with her. Furthermore, family members may view the relationship with her spouse as important and think she should be working towards a reconciliation. They might even invite him to move in.

The support from extended family may not be in her best interest, but the isolation she faces in the urban centre makes her vulnerable to their interference regardless of the implications.

In the situations of the Aboriginal women interviewed, their actual response to the family varied. Two had chosen to keep their family members at a distance. Five respondents received some support and understanding they needed from family members. Two were selective in the family members they chose to let know of their whereabouts. They felt at this time in their lives it was best to associate only with those family members who had some understanding of the importance of her and her children's safety.

The final issue that affects some Aboriginal women in their ability to deal with the abuse, is a belief few non-Aboriginal people would share or understand, much less be able to provide assistance to the effected Aboriginal women. It was described by four shelter workers and two women respondents. This belief, most often referred to as 'bad medicine', is highly effective on the women who believe someone has used it on them or who fear someone will use it on them. Those shelters that have encountered women who have this fear have contacted and utilized an Elder.

However, agencies that deal with Aboriginal women may not be made aware of the problem for two reasons. These reasons are best stated in the words of shelter workers:

*Native people have a spiritual part and can't talk to other (non-Aboriginal) people about this. They don't talk about the different beliefs and traditions they have. (The woman) finds it very hard in the shelter if she practice her Native culture. They don't practice Native ways in the shelter.*

Again this emphasizes the need to ensure that Aboriginal staff be familiar with the traditional beliefs and practices of the Aboriginal peoples.

### 3.3.3 Children

Thus far, the problems that relate to children have been discussed in the issues of formal education, housing and Child Welfare. There were comments made by respondents regarding other issues that relate to children. This section discusses the concerns Aboriginal women have regarding their children once relocation has occurred.

Extended family is important to an Aboriginal woman, who has lived most of her life with them close at hand. They are important not only for her own emotional needs, but also because they provide support to her children. Three women and five shelter worker respondents identified problem behaviors displayed by children when they leave the violent spouse. Girls generally take on the role of caregiver but the boys are more aggressive than they have been. These women respondents related the problem of their male children's aggressive behaviour to their exposure to violence in the home.

The children also generally blame their mothers for breaking up the family and having to move to the urban environment. The abused woman may not be able to cope with the behaviour because she may feel guilty for having exposed them to the violent home. On the other hand, the child who is passive or extremely independent is not seen as being a problem; however research indicates they are also in need of help to deal with the effects of the domestic violence (Kendall, 1985; Macleod, 1987).

Shelter workers were more concerned about the women neglecting, rather than abusing, her children. However, there have been reports of abuse and incest in the Aboriginal families who have entered the shelters.

Another situation that is more likely to occur in the Aboriginal families is children remaining or moving back to the care of a relative or the spouse, especially when it is an older child. Regardless of whether or not all the children are in the women's care the importance of children maintaining contact with the spouse or the extended family results in

pressure from all three parties for the women to return to the Aboriginal community and the relationship. In total eight workers saw the pressure placed on women by their children to return to the Aboriginal community as the most likely factor to result in her returning 'home'.

Shelter workers considered the adjustment speed of children who remain in the urban community as much quicker than do the women who have to deal with the behavioral problems of their children. Aboriginal women are furthermore concerned that the abusive home is likely to have future implications for their children. Therefore, many of the recommendations made by Aboriginal women related to the need for education in all aspects of interpersonal relationships.

### **3.4 Personal Issues**

The final section examines the aspect of personal issues that Aboriginal women identified and those shelter workers have observed in the women they have been involved with. These qualities, both attitudinal and behavioral, affect the women's ability to successfully relocate.

One notion, that Aboriginal women adhere to traditional roles, was defined in two ways. One refers to male/female roles in relationships and the other is related to child-rearing practices. Comments made by six shelter workers referred to male/female roles and related to the women viewing themselves as being expected to remain in the relationship regardless of the circumstances. Only one of the women interviewed had not also been trapped by this idea.

The other, and more frequently, mentioned issue is extended family care for their children. When this is the case a woman can never fully leave her community. In order to maintain contact between the child and family members in the community, visits back are essential. It is only a matter of time before the spouse will hear about the return and she is likely to find herself back in the relationship.

Besides this notion of traditional roles, three comments by workers indicated Aboriginal women were likely to return more frequently because of the long period of time and severity of the abuse they have suffered. Because of this, the women have become very passive and the multitude of factors that have been discussed regarding Aboriginal communities have taught her to remain helpless.

This learned helplessness behaviour may contribute to other concerns expressed by workers. They see Aboriginal women as less likely to ask for help and because many believe they lack skills or the ability to cope with the demands of the urban centre some support is essential. Not all women are lacking in skills, although shelter workers saw this frequently as the circumstances of young Aboriginal women, but the notion that she has no skills attributes to her inability to successfully relocate.

The importance of Aboriginal women becoming involved in programs that will help them overcome the many obstacles they encounter cannot be underestimated. However, workers were concerned that she is less likely to ask for help or that her quiet, shy or withdrawn nature does not initially promote a cooperative working relationship with the workers involved with her. Furthermore, prior to utilizing services Aboriginal women want to have some familiarity with the service and its staff. Initially they are slower to join programs but once they are committed they show incredible dedication.

This dedication observed in many Aboriginal women is an asset, but it can create problems for them. One of the workers commented that often Aboriginal women have been through more than one abusive relationship. Other workers are concerned that too frequently they can find themselves in another abusive relationship shortly after leaving the shelter. Also, the workers commented that often they find that the man named as the abusive spouse has been named by other women using the shelter at a previous time.

Nine shelter workers suggest programs Aboriginal women are involved with need to address the issue of self esteem. The workers saw low self-esteem as a major personal issue for Aboriginal women.

Frequently, the Aboriginal women express feeling of fear, guilt, loneliness and a sense of not belonging when they are in the urban centre. Support groups rather than individual counselling are more likely to help her to overcome some of the feelings of isolation these Aboriginal women experience. Although many Aboriginal women are not known as talkers, her involvement with groups will give her an opportunity to learn more about the effects of the abuse on herself. One woman remarked that the group experience had been helpful because ". . . I needed to learn to be with people who were sober."

The problem with the present services is that many do not consider the uniqueness of the situation of Aboriginal women. Ryan in his evaluation of services states

Their values and their culture, . . . particularly personality styles, and class related emotional problems . . . make them ineligible for, and incapable of profiting from the kind of help we have available.. . help which incidentally was created for and is indeed specifically reserved for, our middle class peers (1986:56).

### 3.5 Additional Salient Issues

There were two other salient issues identified in the data analysis process. These were the need to look at a higher occurrence of addictions in Aboriginal women and the occurrence of sexual abuse in battering relationships. Although discussion of them was not extensive, they were given sufficient importance that they need to be mentioned briefly in this report.

#### 3.5.1 Addictions

First, the problem of addiction to alcohol or drugs was a concern expressed by three woman and ten shelter workers. The workers saw Aboriginal women as more likely to have or to develop an addictions problems. On the one hand, they are more likely to encounter pressure from friends to consume alcohol. On the other hand, doctors appear to be more willing to prescribe drugs, especially to Treaty Indian women, to help

overcome the overwhelming emotional effects of the abuse and the relocation.

### **3.5.2 Sexual Abuse**

The final issue to be discussed is the occurrence of sexual abuse in spousal abuse relationships. Of the six shelter workers who discussed the problem of sexual abuse only two viewed it as more likely to occur in Aboriginal families. They attributed their assessment to the virtual nonexistence of sex education in Aboriginal communities. The need for education on sexual issues was also a major concern of Aboriginal women.

The remaining four workers view sexual abuse as a phenomena that has been under-reported. The figures reported by women using shelters to the Office of the Prevention of Family Violence (AFSS) in 1988 indicated that 31.7% of the women reported the occurrence of sexual abuse in their abusive relationship. Workers believe a 70 to 80% occurrence is more accurate. They attribute the low number to present reporting methods. Presently women are interviewed within the first two days of entering the shelter. They find once women are more comfortable in the shelter or they gain a better understanding of what is considered sexual abuse a far greater number of women will discuss this aspect of abuse in their relationships. However these numbers are not recorded and the programs continue to lack this aspect of counselling. This is a result of the lack of funding and training for staff in the shelter.

## **4. Successful Relocation and Concluding Remarks**

What aspects were identified which, thus far, seem to determine an Aboriginal women's ability to successfully relocate? There are just four which are obvious from this study. First, there is a higher incidence of relocation in women who have a higher level of formal education. Second, women who are successful work very hard at establishing themselves in the urban centre and third they have the ability to use resources effectively. Finally, the successful women were willing to cut or reduce ties with the home community.

Each of these aspects can be seen to some degree in the women interviewed. Half of the women had formal education beyond grade ten, above the average for Aboriginal women of their age. All the women were extremely self motivated and ambitious although only one of those who had not completed her education was presently enrolled or had future plans for further schooling. All can be seen as hard workers and half of them had been employed prior to entering their home community.

Two of the women had no contact with their families, but in both these situations problems with the family had occurred in childhood and were not a result of the relocation. Five of the respondents had minimal family contact and only one of these was still encountering relatives who are less than supportive. The other four dealt only with family who were supportive. Only one had not broken ties to the community. She is also the only one whose former spouse has begun to take responsibility for his own abusive behaviour.

The subtitle of this report, 'The Story of Two Types of Victimization', was selected because it seemed appropriate to the stories we heard from the respondents about the conditions abused Aboriginal women find themselves in when they relocate. Because of the first type of victimization, the abuse of their spouse they move to an urban centre where a different type of victimization occurs. Leaving the battering relationship is viewed as one of the few alternatives to escape abuse, and this often involves relocation to an urban centre. Although we do not claim our respondents were a representative sample of Aboriginal women in Alberta, we believe that our findings generally apply to abused Aboriginal women who relocate to a larger metropolitan centre.

Relocation for these women is not a decision made out of rational contemplation, but rather a desperate action to be protected from what is often years of severe physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse. Our own findings support what other authors say. The present situation in most Aboriginal communities, which ignore or deny the existence of family violence, does not promote the development of services that can provide the support and protection abused women require (Doxtator & Riddell, 1986;



MacLeod, 1987; Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989). Therefore, in the home community the lack of support for the abused Aboriginal women, their children and their extended families leaves them all vulnerable to be victimized by the abusive spouses.

But the abusers themselves are most likely victims of inter-generational family violence and the support services they require are non-existent. This fact does not excuse the violence they perpetuates on their spouses and family, but it helps explain why Obomsawin(1988) refers to the present conditions of family violence in Canada's Native communities as a modern tragedy. Our own findings indicate that the tragedy is real and if it is to be overcome Aboriginal community Councils and members need to be a part of the process of family healing.

The fear that intervention in violent homes will break-up the families and destroy the fabric of community life serves only to perpetuate the cycle of violence. Furthermore, the break-up of the family is likely to occur at some point and like Jamieson (1987) we fear that far too often the cycle is broken not by healing but by the death of one of the spouses. We appeal to those in authority, both men and women, to become a part of the healing process.

Relocation to the urban centre may be one alternative but the costs to Aboriginal women, their children and their communities are incalculable. Not only does the community lose a family in this process, but it gradually risks losing its culture. The present system in urban centres does not, for the most part, provide an environment that enhances Aboriginal culture. Instead the realities abused Aboriginal women are exposed to serve to degenerate cultural values through conflicting expectations, and they cannot return regularly to their home communities for cultural support. In the urban environment, in place of a recognizable offender these women become the victim of laws, policies, practices and attitudes that work against their identity as Aboriginal women.

Nevertheless, it must be recognized that regardless of Aboriginal community efforts, Aboriginal women may not have any option but to relocate or remain in an urban centre. Therefore, urban centre services

cannot negate their responsibilities to the abused Aboriginal women and their children. The Alberta Child Welfare Act, 1985, sought to protect the rights of any child to their familial, cultural, social and religious heritage. Without the opportunity for abused Aboriginal women to continue to practice their cultural ways, not only are the Aboriginal women victimized, but so are their children.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made by respondents spoke to both the Aboriginal and the urban community. They emphasized the need to develop or enhance services in the Aboriginal community. However, some questioned whether or not any changes could occur in Aboriginal communities because of the frequency of all male Band Councils, who control the types of services developed in the Aboriginal communities.

Education is a key issue for Aboriginal respondents. They identify three areas in which educational programs should be developed: family violence, parenting, and life-skills for all community members but especially for the youth. Training staff who work in agencies that provide social services about victims of family violence is also essential.

Service development suggestions were the creation of safe houses, support groups for abused women and recreational programs for youth.

Recommendations regarding urban centres are related to shelters, services and schools. It is recommended, that presently operating safe houses need to increase the ratio of Aboriginal staff employed. Furthermore, non-Aboriginal staff need to evaluate their knowledge and skills in regards to assisting Aboriginal entering their facilities. For instance, it is essential that non-Aboriginal staff become aware of any racist views they might unconsciously possess.

Another suggestion is that shelters that service only Aboriginal women in urban centre be developed. There is a definite need for a second stage transition housing for Aboriginal women in urban centres.

It is recognized that in some situations an Aboriginal woman may not have the option of returning to her community, therefore, the well-being of her children is an issue. School administrators need to evaluate what educational services they provide to their Aboriginal population. The teaching of Aboriginal languages and culture to their children is important to these women and one respondent appealed to the educational system to implement these services in their programming.

Another set of recommendations was oriented to the need for support services in the urban centre to become more culturally aware. This would require that cultural differences of Aboriginal clients need to be considered in the present policies and practices of the agencies. As well, there is a need to develop programs specifically designed for Aboriginal women in crisis. There were also recommendations made regarding the ways agencies could possibly increase the adequacy of their services, given the need for that service.

These different types of recommendations are detailed in the following section. They are as close as possible to recommendations made directly by respondents rather than recommendations developed by the researcher from her work. We have treated the recommendations section of the report as the final opportunity for the women who were interviewed to "have their say" and to speak to policy makers and service agencies, in or outside of the Aboriginal community.

## 5.1 Recommendations to/for the Aboriginal community

- \* Counselling and community education specific to battering relationships are needed in Aboriginal communities. These should be primarily in the form of workshops for women, for men, and for community leaders.
- \* There need to be programs to create awareness of the nature of family violence among workers (caregivers, R.C.M.P., Public Health Nurses) on reserve. This could be done through training in family violence dynamics and ideally should be organized by community leaders.
- \* Aboriginal communities need to take responsibility for creating appropriate services by gaining the support of elders and community leaders. Funding bodies and provincial and federal agencies should allow this to happen, and encourage it with their policies.
- \* Attitude changes in males who dominate the reserve power structure can be accomplished by including programs for men.
- \* Anonymity and confidentiality should be strictly adhered to among reserve services.
- \* There is a need for Crisis centres, safe houses or shelters and second stage housing in the Aboriginal community.
- \* The response time of tribal police and R.C.M.P. needs to be decreased to provide adequate protection for women on the reserve.
- \* Remove the abuser from the reserve home, rather than the abused woman
- \* A liaison worker in the Aboriginal community should work with urban shelters.
- \* Rather than creating separate services do away with the reserve system.
- \* Development of on-reserve support groups for women (education component to include information on sexuality and sexual behaviour e.g. birth control).
- \* Development of marriage counselling for those who want to maintain their relationship without violence.
- \*Development of programs for children of violent relationships because of the likelihood of them perpetuating the violent behaviour in future relationships.

- \* Develop recreational programs and facilities in Native communities.

## **5.2 Recommendations to/for shelters**

- \* The usual three week stay is too short to meet the needs of Aboriginal women, therefore it is recommended that the length of stay be increased in situations where the need is evident
- \* The shelters require funding that would allow them to do follow-up so they can provide adequate support for Aboriginal women
- \* Staff require training and a modified approach to meet the special needs of Aboriginal women.
- \* The shelters should have more Aboriginal staff and resources which pertain to Aboriginal culture.
- \* Aboriginal women's shelters should be developed in urban centres.
- \* Temporary educational services should be provided to children while they are in shelters.
- \* A transportation program to the shelter should be provided.
- \* There should be more second stage housing and on-going support services for battered women.

## **5.3 Recommendations to/for Support Services**

- \* Existing services should be co-ordinated more effectively.
- \* There needs to be an increase in services to handle higher numbers of women who need them, and to diminish waiting lists.
- \* Social Services and Indian Affairs need to improve their services to Aboriginal women. These services are often intimidating and impersonal, which means employees are not likely to learn of the real needs of women.
- \* Social Services and Indian Affairs should inform Aboriginal women of all the available financial support programs and how to access them.
- \* Although women are generally referred to Aboriginal services, there should be an increase in Aboriginal staffing in the provincial Social Services. (Southern and central Alberta provide more Aboriginal services).

- \* Child Welfare services should be more supportive and consistent.
- \* Family services and services to children should be increased.
- \* There is a need for staff members in the public and community services to be educated in cultural awareness and family violence.
- \* Changes in the policing system should include education of the police force and tribal police, decreased response time and better protection from threat when a women has laid charges.
- \* In the legal system, restraining orders should not be attached to another order, should be easier to obtain, and should be fully enforced by police.
- \* Low cost housing specifically for large Aboriginal families with more appropriate rules concerning references are required.

#### **5.4 Recommendations concerning ways of dealing with cultural differences in the urban community(city).**

Most of these recommendations imply the employment and effective use of Aboriginal staff.

- \* Programs need to be more attuned to the special needs of Aboriginal women and provide daycare.
- \* Address special needs for grieving in Aboriginal community because of shootings, violent deaths.
- \*Need to develop Aboriginal programs which address issues such as parenting, life skills, family violence, sexual relationships, sexual abuse, addiction, Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal spirituality (e.g. Family Life Improvement Program).
- \* Hiring Aboriginal staff can improve the comfort level for Aboriginal clientele, however, culturally aware individuals are preferred.
- \*Aboriginal staff may require intensive training to deal with their own exposure to violence.
- \* Aboriginal staff must also be prepared to deal with other Aboriginal community members pressure to breach confidentiality or to provide additional services outside the job.

\*Aboriginal staff should be consulted in the identification of problems in service delivery or development that relate to Aboriginal peoples.

\* Use of elders for spiritual guidance.

\* A need to find more effective ways of dealing with conflicting values. (For example, a structural setting based in one set of values causes problems of understanding in women whose life has been based in another set of values).

\* Aboriginal urban women should be helped to create an Aboriginal support group.

\* More extensive follow up from Aboriginal programs.

\* Need to increase language and awareness of Native culture in urban centre schools for children who must relocate.

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