

- Some 54 per cent of Aboriginal women report the most severe and potentially life threatening forms of violence, compared with 37 per cent for non-Aboriginal women;
- Where the rates of spousal violence are much higher in the territories than in the rest of Canada, the severity and impacts of spousal violence are also greater;
- 28 per cent of women in Nunavut are victims of spousal violence compared to seven per cent in the provinces;
- Police report higher rates of violent crimes in the territories, including sexual assaults and spousal homicides;
- Per capita rates of shelter use are much higher in the territories than in the provinces, with Nunavut having the highest shelter usage per capita: shelter use in Nunavut on a single day was a staggering 10 times higher than any of the provinces.

Qanuippitaa?, the 2004 Nunavik Inuit Health Survey, reveals a significant sexual violence problem in that region. Thirty-two per cent of adults stated they were forced or had faced attempts to force them to perform a sexual act during childhood or adolescence, and 20 per cent stated they encountered the same problem as an adult. Among women, half indicated they had been victims of sexual assault or the victim of attempted sexual assault when they were a minor and one-quarter had encountered the same problem as an adult. The report adds that “Violence against men must not be ignored: 16% had encountered this problem when they were minors and 13% as adults.”¹

The resources available for Inuit women in the North who are victims of domestic violence and for their children fall far short of meeting their needs and safe shelters are not able to keep up with the demand for their services. The actual number of shelters in operation at any given time in Inuit regions in the Arctic can vary depending on their ability to operate for a number of reasons, but there are currently five shelters in Nunavut, two in the Western Arctic region of the Northwest Territories, four in Nunavik and three in Nunatsiavut. Less than 30 per cent of the 53 Inuit communities in the Arctic have a safe shelter for women and their children. There is no second-stage housing. Shelters across the North face particular challenges such as very high operating costs including utilities and shipping costs, human resource capacity issues and lack of access to training and professional supports. The lack of stable funding is a major barrier to

¹ Institut national de santé publique du Québec and the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services *Qanuippitaa? How Are We? Summary Report of the Nunavik Inuit Health Survey* (2004) pg. 5

ensuring the safety of women and their children through the provision of safe shelter in times of crisis.

Overcrowded housing and the lack of housing options, poverty, lack of employment and/or skills, substance abuse and the lasting effects of colonization, residential schools and intergenerational trauma are all key issues that further contribute to Inuit women being vulnerable to ongoing abuse. The extreme housing crisis across the Arctic often means that for women living with violence in the home there may be no other safe housing options, and the cost of air travel to seek safety in another community can be prohibitively expensive.

Approximately 20 per cent of Inuit now live in the south. Too often Inuit women have to leave their homes and families in the Arctic to seek safety in another location where they often find themselves marginalized and isolated in big cities and continue to experience violence and abuse.

Pauktuutit has undertaken numerous initiatives to address violence and abuse in Inuit communities through projects such as *No More Secrets* in the 1990s, which openly addressed child abuse in an Inuit context and revealed that 85 per cent of health care and support workers knew of a child that was being sexually abused. In 2002, a survey was conducted of services for child sexual abuse survivors and numerous projects to address spousal abuse and violence have been undertaken. In 2003, through the financial support of Heritage Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Department of Justice and the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, Pauktuutit undertook a three-year initiative called the *Nuluaq* Project, which was created to improve the coordination of abuse prevention services and resources in Inuit communities. This initiative resulted in the creation of the National Inuit Women's Shelter Association and the *National Strategy for Abuse Prevention in Inuit Communities*.

The strategy sets forth clear objectives for future action:

1. Develop sustained relationships among partner organizations that are committed to a steady reduction of violence and abuse in Inuit communities;
2. Coordinate efforts so that resources can be used to the best advantage; and
3. Implement effective, culturally appropriate services and programs to prevent abuse and promote healing.

The strategy also outlined clear strategic priorities for future work in abuse and violence prevention:

1. Make abuse in Inuit communities a priority issue;
2. Raise awareness and reduce tolerance of abuse;
3. Invest in training and capacity development;
4. Sustain front-line workers and community services;
5. Deliver services that heal Inuit; and
6. Expand programs.

Since the release of the strategy, Pauktuutit has and continues to design and deliver projects that are reflective of these objectives and strategic priorities. The *Nuluaq* Project led to five communities adopting a zero tolerance to abuse and violence against women and children. Additional projects have resulted in the introduction of various counseling models.

The *Somebody's Daughter* program, developed by the Kivalliq Inuit Association, is an on-the-land program for Inuit women, single mothers, survivors of residential schools and those impacted by the residential school legacy. Participants learn how to sew traditional clothing and animal skin tanning techniques. Creative writing is included as part of the healing process, as well as developing life and coping skills.

Pauktuutit has adapted the *Somebody's Daughter* project model by developing several on-the-land projects, including a current two-year *Women Taking the Lead in Family Violence Prevention* project, in partnership with Status of Women Canada, which includes a component on elder abuse awareness. Work is also being done to bring elders and youth together to discuss violence prevention in their communities and develop community responses.

The *Making Our Shelters Strong* project developed a training workshop for front line workers in Inuit communities, which helps address the need for ongoing training and support for those working with women and children fleeing abuse in isolated communities. Plans are underway in 2010/11 to deliver this workshop in the Western Arctic, and Pauktuutit is currently working with the Government of Nunavut to create a web portal to respond to the professional support and development needs identified by shelter workers.

In the recognition of the impacts of the residential schools experience, Pauktuutit continues to implement the objectives and priorities of the *National Inuit Residential Schools Healing Strategy* as part of its overall commitment to ending violence and abuse in Inuit communities.

Pauktuutit continues to move forward in its commitment to keeping abuse and violence prevention as a priority. Collaboration with the Canadian Red Cross is currently being undertaken to bring a comprehensive violence prevention program to the North and to the urban centres with large Inuit populations. In collaboration with Health Canada in 2010/11, Pauktuutit hopes to conduct an environmental scan related to the nature, scope and prevalence of elder abuse in Inuit communities as the foundation for continued work on this issue.

Pauktuutit continues to work towards the vision of an Inuit society of healthy individuals who respect the past and embrace the future as Inuit, and who live in supportive families and caring communities. In this vision, violence and abuse are rare occurrences that are dealt with swiftly and justly according to Inuit ways. Abusers are held accountable for their actions, and both victims and abusers are supported in their healing process.