

Addressing Gendered Violence against Inuit Women: A review of police policies and practices in Inuit Nunangat



Report in Brief and Recommendations

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The Report in Brief

Gendered violence against Inuit women is a problem of massive proportions. Women in Nunavut are the victims of violent crime at a rate more than 13 times higher than the rate for women in Canada as a whole. The risk of a woman being sexually assaulted in Nunavut is 12 times greater than the provincial/territorial average. In 2016, Nunavut had the highest rate of female victims of police-reported family violence in Canada, the Northwest Territories had the second highest rate, and Yukon had the third highest.

As the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has emphasized, this gendered and racialized violence is a genocide that is rooted in systemic factors woven into the fabric of Canadian society.

Understanding gendered violence against Inuit women requires situating the issue within its colonial context, including how Inuit ways of living and being were dramatically disrupted as corporate colonialism took root and developed in the North.

In just a few decades (1950s to 1970s), Inuit underwent a profound transformation in their lives and livelihoods—a transformation that was orchestrated by colonial forces largely outside of their control. Their land-based economy and the cooperative ethos and informal mechanisms of social control on which it is based—along with the interdependent relations between Inuit men and women—were unsettled as Inuit were moved to permanent settlements, their children sent to residential schools where they could be taught *qallunaat* culture in preparation for their assimilation into the colonial social order, and their sled dogs slaughtered, effectively cutting Inuit ties to the land and access to their traditional source of livelihood.

Canada's national police force, the RCMP, played a key role in this transformation. The RCMP were involved in relocating Inuit to the permanent settlements, transporting Inuit children to residential schools, and slaughtering Inuit sled dogs. In short, the policing that the RCMP were engaged in was decidedly “racialized”; it was designed to enforce Inuit conformity to the emerging colonial regime.

In more recent times, social and economic issues—poor living conditions, food insecurity, and the shift in gender roles of Inuit men and women—are some of the more obvious manifestations of this colonial encounter with *qallunaat*. The intergenerational trauma that colonialism generates is also a key factor. This lived experience of trauma manifests in high rates of alcohol and drug abuse, a suicide crisis, and the pervasiveness of gendered violence against Inuit women.

Every Inuk woman deserves to live free from the threat and reality of violence. Police play a principal role in advancing and maintaining public safety. In Inuit Nunangat, policing is the responsibility of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), except for Nunavik, which has been policed by the Kativik Regional Police Force (KRPF) since 1996.

Official statements by the RCMP and KRPF as to their roles and responsibilities assert that policing is carried out in a manner that upholds justice and the safety and security of all citizens. Contributing to safer and healthier Indigenous communities is one of the five strategic priorities of the RCMP. The vision of the KRPF is “to provide the people of Nunavik with the best professional, respectful and efficient police services and to become a benchmark for police services in Inuit and Indigenous communities, both in operational and administrative matters.”

However, a number of challenges have been raised in the literature that call into question whether policing in Inuit Nunangat is being carried out in a manner that upholds justice and protects the safety and security of the communities being served, including: problems with policing in remote communities; the short duration of RCMP postings; the inexperience of officers; staffing shortages and turnover; language barriers; failure to recruit Inuit police officers; lack of cultural competency; lack of resources; underfunding; and lack of wrap-around services.

To explore what policing looks like on-the-ground and how these challenges manifest in relation to the police response to gendered violence against Inuit women, in-depth, qualitative interviews with 45 Inuit women and 40 service providers (including police officers) were conducted in the four regions in Inuit Nunangat.

Inuvialuit

Inuvialuit participants believed that gendered violence has become normalized for Inuit women, to the point where they have come “to expect it” in their lives. Participants attributed this violence to “the fallout of the residential school” and “people feeling really disempowered” due to the imposition of the colonial system.

While the RCMP’s G Division encourages a community policing approach, the continual rotation of officers, the perception that officers live separate and apart from the community, and the inexperience of new recruits have led to the belief that police officers are racist in their dealings with the Inuit community. Some participants, however, framed the issue as one of cultural misunderstanding rather than racism, as police are not aware of the colonial history and have little training on how to work cross-culturally, especially with victims of gendered violence.

Another source of the divide between the police and the community was police protocols when dealing with citizen reports, particularly the police dispatch system whereby calls are routed through the Yellowknife detachment, which is especially problematic for women in abusive relationships when they call on the police for help.

Several Inuvialuit women shared their stories of calling on the police for help to deal with domestic violence and their concerns about police not responding in a timely manner, having to be removed from their home instead of the abuser, court-imposed sanctions not being properly monitored and acted upon, and women not being taken seriously when they express fears for their safety.

A RCMP officer offered a different standpoint on the role of police in responding to domestic violence, and police frustrations with women who utilize the criminal justice system to play a vindictive game against their partners. Other service providers, however, pointed to the limited resources (such as shelters) available to Inuvialuit women who encounter gendered violence.

Inuvialuit participants offered a number of suggestions for improving policing in their region, including: reducing police response times; ensuring that police are knowledgeable about Inuit history and the challenges that Inuit have encountered as a result; learning the local Inuktitut dialect; training on trauma-informed approaches; and enhancing and better integrating the services being offered for women who are harmed by gendered violence. Primarily, participants saw the need for Inuvialuit communities to take ownership of their own affairs, a process that some believed was underway.

Finally, one Inuvialuit woman shared parts of her life story, providing an important teaching on how the trauma created by gendered violence can be so all-encompassing in Inuit women's lives—and their resilience and strength in combatting its harmful effects.

Nunavut

Nunavut participants were especially concerned with the pervasiveness of domestic violence in their community, brought into bold relief with the death of a young Inuk woman shortly before interviews were conducted. An elder pointed to the breakdown of traditional Inuit ways as an explanation for this violence.

While the RCMP have a visible presence in the community, some participants believed that this presence was limited to driving around in their vehicles. Participants were also concerned about slow police response times, which in part was attributed to calls being routed through Iqaluit and then relayed to the community detachment.

For some Nunavut participants, police treatment of Inuit is racialized. In their view, police officers' encounters with Inuit are based on racialized assumptions and a legacy of tension stemming from the colonial history of police-Inuit relations, generating fear and distrust of police.

Several women spoke about their reluctance to call on police because of negative experiences they have had in the past. Other women spoke about the troublesome ways that police treated them when they reported gendered violence. These experiences have left the women feeling wary and distrustful of police.

Participants, however, were also aware of the challenges that police encounter in Nunavut, including: working in high-risk situations where domestic violence is present; the lack of referral resources to support those on the receiving end of violence; the high turnover of officers; officers' lack of knowledge and experience about the North; and difficulties in retaining Inuit officers. Also concerning was the language disconnect, which sets up a barrier for Inuit women when reporting their experiences of gendered violence to police.

In addition to voicing their concerns about the police response to gendered violence, Nunavut participants also highlighted the lack of community resources, especially related to housing.

Participants also pointed to more fundamental problems with policing in the North that are rooted in the distinctive differences between Inuit society and southern Canada. They offered suggestions for how the police could begin to make the dramatic shift that is required in how they are positioned within the communities they are mandated to serve, including: becoming better educated about Inuit history, culture, and language; connecting more effectively with community leadership; becoming more aware of their accountability to the community; and getting to know residents in order to break down fear and mistrust of police.

At the same time, participants believed that community residents need to take the lead in inviting police into the community, and community organizations and services need to work at connecting with police in building partnerships. As well, efforts need to be made to ensure that supports (such as Victim Services) are in place to assist women who are being victimized by gendered violence. Police too require supports to deal with vicarious trauma, and the good work that they do needs to be noticed and appreciated.

Nunatsiavut

In Nunatsiavut, gendered violence is an ongoing concern. Participants were of the view that gendered violence has become normalized but hidden. However, women are reluctant to report the violence, and for a number of reasons: the isolation of their community; their reliance on their partner to maintain the household; threats from their partner; and the length of time it takes to process criminal charges.

Another significant reason cited for women not turning to police for help was the strained relationship with and lack of trust in police and the criminal justice system. Several women recounted their experiences in turning to the police for help. While some of those experiences were positive, several women found that the police response was unsupportive or jeopardized their safety. In some cases, the women found the police response to be unprofessional—and racialized.

Participants believed that the relationship between police and the community was a poor one, citing their residential separation in the community, their lack of interaction with community members, and the short period of time officers are stationed in the community. While police were seen to have a positive presence in the community (such as Canada Day events), most of that presence involved driving around in their vehicles. The automated call system was also mentioned as problematic, especially since calls are re-routed to St. John's Newfoundland after hours. The inaccessibility of police also extended to slow response times.

Participants, however, also spoke about the positive influence that individual officers can have in the community, especially in terms of their approachability and willingness to improve the police presence in the community.

Nevertheless, participants were also mindful of the challenges that police encounter in their work. These challenges included the weather and the lack of detachment resources (such as holding cells). But they also extended to a lack of understanding of life in the North and its colonial history and of Inuit culture.

To improve the relations between police and the Inuit community, as well as the police response to gendered violence, participants suggested: police officers need to be better educated about the communities they serve; new officers need to be better integrated into the community when they arrive; officers need to become more involved in the community; and the RCMP needs to work at building trust and rapport with community members. Hiring a cultural facilitator would facilitate this process. So too would ensuring that police officers have the necessary resources, including an increased staff complement and a call system that is accessible.

Participants also suggested that training in how to respond to disclosures of sexual violence and hiring more female officers to deal with cases of gendered violence would improve the police response to gendered violence. Employing community constables would also help to bridge the gap between police and the community and build trust.

Finally, participants emphasized the need for more social services and resources in the community, as well as a better coordination of the services currently being offered.

Nunavik

In Nunavik, safety has become more of a matter of concern than in previous years, especially in terms of gendered violence. Women talked about their negative experiences with the police when their safety was threatened or violence occurred. In one case, fear for her safety resulted in one woman encountering violence from a police officer, leading her to lack trust in police.

Other women expressed a similar lack of trust, which was being generated by a number of factors, one of which was the divide that exists between Inuit and outsiders in the community. This divide between locals and non-locals extends to the police. Participants believed that KRPF officers are poorly integrated into the community. Officers are only in the community for a short period of time, lack experience and training, and hold a limited understanding of the history of Inuit communities and the root causes of the problems encountered, especially with drug and alcohol use and domestic violence. This divide is exacerbated by language barriers, given that most officers are Francophone with little knowledge of Inuktitut. Several participants believed that the police-community divide breaks down along racial lines.

Participants were also aware that the KRPF has been under-resourced. The lack of 24-hours-a-day patrols and under-staffing affects their ability to respond when gendered violence occurs.

Participants also expressed concerns about how police go about their investigation when gendered violence occurs. One woman shared her story of how police handled a sexual assault against her daughter, forcing the child to be questioned alone. Other participants were concerned about the police investigation of the death of a young girl in the community. Others talked about the lack of services and supports when women and girls have been sexually assaulted.

Women who encountered domestic violence told of how they were the ones removed from their home, and not the perpetrator. Other participants commented on how No Contact Orders are not working in small communities given their limited services and proximity.

For many Nunavik participants, the police are an outside force that imposes a form of justice that runs counter to the Inuit way of resolving conflicts.

To resolve these issues, Nunavik participants suggested that police need to become more approachable and better integrated into the community. Increasing their complement would enable the police to provide better services, as would hiring interpreters to improve communication between police and the community. Involving Inuit in conflict resolution, such as through the use of cultural workers or natural helpers, would also go a long way toward repairing the police-community divide. Participants also suggested that Inuit need to be better informed of their rights.

Police officers indicated that several initiatives are underway that have the potential to improve the police response to gendered violence in Nunavik (improved cultural training, use of cultural facilitators, a call centre with Inuktitut speakers, etc.). But participants were aware that policing alone cannot solve the pressing social issues confronting Nunavik communities. Meeting basic social needs—including adequate housing—is paramount.

Moving Forward

Interviews with Inuit women and service providers have offered an important window into the police response to gendered violence. These interviews evidence the pervasiveness and severity of the violence that Inuit women experience—and the challenges they encounter in finding safety and security when violence occurs.

These interviews have also revealed that racialized policing persists in Inuit encounters with police officers. However, racialized policing is not simply a matter of some individual officers holding racist beliefs and stereotypes about Inuit. Rather, it is systemic in nature, embedded in institutional policies and practices.

Moving forward, therefore, will require a fundamental shift in how policing is carried out in Inuit Nunangat. In order for police to respond effectively to gendered violence, they need to move from being an outside force to become a part of community revitalization. Making this fundamental shift necessarily involves the police in a process of decolonization.

Essentially, decolonization means reversing the colonial strategy of assimilation. Rather than expecting Inuit to accept or comply with the colonial order, it is police and other social service agencies that need to assimilate into Inuit ways, including the “great guiding principles” of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*.

The way forward, therefore, is an approach to decolonizing policing that is grounded in Inuit knowledge and world views, holistic, and relationship-based. Rather than an outside force engaged in law enforcement and crime control, police are positioned as working in partnership with other social service agencies to foster community safety and well-being through problem solving and conflict resolution—all the while taking their lead from Inuit, especially Inuit women who have been harmed by gendered violence.

Adopting this decolonizing framework, a number of specific recommendations are offered that have the potential to assist the police in making this fundamental shift.

Gendered Violence against Inuit Women

Violence is a gendered phenomenon. Research has shown that females are much more likely than males to encounter sexual violence in their lives. Official statistics confirm that Canadian females are overwhelmingly the most common victims of sexual assault and other sexual violations (such as sexual interference, sexual exploitation, and incest), representing 87% and 80%, respectively, of those incidents reported to police.¹ Girls are more at risk of encountering sexual violence in their homes than boys are. Police-reported data on family violence against children and youth show that girls and boys have similar rates of physical assault perpetrated by a family member, yet the rates of sexual assault against female children and youth are four times higher than they are for males.²

Research on domestic violence also shows that while men and women are likely to report some form of physical or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner, the scope and severity of the violence they experienced differ. Women are more likely than men to report a physical injury (42% versus 18%) or fear for their lives as a result of the violence (33% versus 5%). Women are also more likely to report experiencing chronic violence, that is, eleven or more incidents of violence, than are men (20% versus 7%).³

But violence is not only gendered. It is also racialized. The inordinate levels of violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls have become a matter of public record. The statistics documenting this violence are startling:

- Indigenous women are more likely to report experiencing intimate partner violence than non-Indigenous women (15% versus 6%).⁴ And they are more likely to sustain an injury and to fear for their lives.⁵
- Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or missing than any other women in Canada, and 16 times more likely than white women.⁶
- Police-reported violent crime against young women and girls (aged 24 and under) in the North is nearly three times higher than it is in the South and nearly four times higher than for Canadians overall. Young women and girls in the North are also more likely to be victims of more severe violent crimes and to be physically injured by their assailant. Homicide rates from 2009 to 2017 for young females were more than three times higher in the North than in the South.⁷

Violence against Inuit women is especially troubling:

- Women in Nunavut are the victims of violent crime at a rate more than 13 times higher than the rate for women in Canada as a whole.⁸
- The risk of a woman being sexually assaulted in Nunavut is 12 times greater than the provincial/territorial average.⁹
- In Nunavik, 74% of Inuit women reported experiencing violence in the home, and 46% reported experiencing sexual assault.¹⁰
- In 2016, Nunavut had the highest rate of female victims of police-reported family violence in Canada (3,552). The Northwest Territories had the second highest rate (2,678), and Yukon had the third highest (1,007). The overall rate for Canada that year was 319 per 100,000 population.¹¹

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has named this gendered and racialized violence as genocide, declaring, “This violence is rooted in systemic factors, like economic, social and political marginalization, as well as racism, discrimination, and misogyny, woven into the fabric of Canadian society.”¹²

Every Inuk woman deserves to live free from the threat and reality of violence. Police play a principal role in advancing and maintaining public safety. In Inuit Nunangat, policing is the responsibility of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), except for Nunavik, which has been policed by the Kativik Regional Police Force (KRPF) since 1996.

The primary purpose of this report is to address the police response to gendered violence against Inuit women. Before proceeding, however, some basic socio-demographic information about Inuit residing in Inuit Nunangat is warranted.

Basic Demographics

Inuit Nunangat (the land, water, and ice inhabited by Inuit) is comprised of four regions: Nunatsiavut (Northern Coastal Labrador), Nunavik (Northern Quebec), Inuvialuit (Northwest Territories), and the Territory of Nunavut (founded in 1999). In 2016 there were 65,025 Inuit in Canada, 73% of whom lived in Inuit Nunangat. Of those living in Inuit Nunangat, 64% lived in Nunavut, 25% in Nunavik, 7% in Inuvialuit, and 4% in Nunatsiavut. Inuit represent 5% of the Indigenous population of Canada.¹³

Age distribution: The average age of the Inuit population is 27.7 years, significantly younger than the non-Indigenous population (at 40.9 years).¹⁴ “Between 2006 and 2016, the Inuit population in Canada grew at a rate nearly three times that of the total Canadian population (29% versus 11%).”¹⁵

Language: 64% of Inuit of all ages in Canada reported being able to speak Inuktitut well enough to have a conversation; 45% reported Inuktitut as the most often used language at home.¹⁶

Education: In 2016, only 45% of Inuit in Canada reported having a high school diploma in comparison to 86% of the non-Indigenous population.¹⁷

Livelihoods: Like other Indigenous peoples, Inuit experience lower employment and participation rates in the waged labour market, and higher unemployment in comparison to the non-Indigenous population.¹⁸

According to the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, in 2017 52% of Inuit aged 15 or older living in Inuit Nunangat were working for wages; 79% of those employed had a permanent job while 24% worked part-time (less than 30 hours per week); 83% of unemployed Inuit cited a “shortage of jobs” as a barrier, while almost half (46%) of Inuit who worked part-time did so because full-time work was not available.¹⁹

Significantly, in 2017 the majority (85%) of Inuit aged 25 to 54 living in Inuit Nunangat participated in land-based activities (hunting, gathering wild plants, making clothing and footwear or artwork), and the majority participated frequently (for instance, 46% of those who hunted, fished or trapped did so at least a few times a week during the season).²⁰ Over one-quarter (27%) of Inuit participating in land-based activities do so in order to supplement their waged labour.²¹

In 2015, the median income for Inuit aged 15 years and over was \$23,485 compared to \$92,011 for non-Indigenous people in Inuit Nunangat.²²

Framing the Issue: Locating Gendered Violence in the Colonial Context

As the National Inquiry has emphasized, violence against Indigenous women is rooted in systemic factors that have been woven into the fabric of Canadian society.²³ Addressing the issue of gendered violence in Inuit Nunangat, therefore, requires situating the issue in its broader social context. Central to a full understanding of this social context is an appreciation of the history of Inuit people, their culture and ways of being, and how encounters with *qallunaat* (non-Inuit people)—including the police—became decisive factors in setting the stage for contemporary conditions in Inuit Nunangat and the prevalence of gendered violence against Inuit women. Key to unmapping that historical trajectory is acknowledging the role of colonialism.

Colonialism “is primarily about capitalist expansion, the opening up of frontier regions ... to generate industry and profit, ensuring that those occupying these territories are brought into the logic of the colonizing culture or removed so they are no longer an impediment to so-called ‘progress.’”²⁴ Colonialism, however, “has taken many different forms and has engendered diverse effects around the world.”²⁵

In Canada, the colonization of Indigenous peoples occurred in different ways in different regions, often changing in form over time. In the eighteenth century, for instance, French colonizers set up the colony of New France (in the area now known as Québec), establishing a permanent physical presence. While the French lost their colony after the British conquest in 1760, many of the French settlers and their descendants remained. The British interest during this period was more in extracting raw materials, particularly furs. British settlements took the form of trading posts. With the fur trade on the decline in the mid-nineteenth century, British authorities began to define the territory that came to be known as Canada as a suitable location for large-scale settlement.²⁶ Immigration of settlers to populate the southern regions ensued, heralding in a new colonial form, often referred to as “settler colonialism.”²⁷ With Confederation in 1867, the Canadian West was opened to full-fledged colonization and capitalist development.

While this colonization process has had distinct impacts on First Nations peoples—especially with the passage of the Indian Act of 1876²⁸ and the displacement of First Nations peoples onto reserves—the experience of Inuit in the North followed a different historical trajectory. Rather than seeing the North for its possibilities of settlement by newcomers,²⁹ the colonial encounter with Inuit was defined more in relation to the potential for resource extraction and establishing Canadian sovereignty over the territory. Rather than “settler colonialism,” therefore, “corporate colonialism” more aptly captures the economic motives tied to capitalist development and expansion in Canada’s North.³⁰ Nonetheless, the impact on Inuit ways of living and being were dramatically disrupted as corporate colonialism took root and developed.

Pre-Contact

Before the arrival of the *qallunaat*, Inuit lived a nomadic lifestyle, travelling in small family-based groups along traditional migratory routes using sled dogs (*qimmiit*) in winter and on foot or small boat in summer in search of food. The Inuit diet consisted mainly of caribou, fish, and sea mammals. Unique technologies and skills were developed to survive in the harsh climate, including “the igloo, kayak, ulu (women’s knife), quilliq (small stone stove that was their only source of heat and light during the long winter), fur clothing and toggle-head harpoons.”³¹ The Inuit family during this time period was self-sufficient, as the subsistence hunting economy produced food, clothing, heat, and light. Given the adverse climate conditions, however, “it was a continual struggle to keep family (and dogs) warm and fed, requiring constant travel to locations where the animal life was most abundant.”³²

As with most hunting societies, a distinct sexual division of labour prevailed in traditional Inuit society. “The husband had primary authority outside the home and had responsibility for being the primary provider of food, making tools and weapons, constructing shelters, tending to dogs, and looking after the general welfare and safety of the family. He made most of the decisions concerning when and where the family would move and when would be the best time to visit the trading post.”³³ Wives, on the other hand, “had primary authority within the home.”³⁴ As Nancy Wachowich notes:

The harsh Arctic environment coupled with the scarcity of game made women's roles an integral part of the traditional economy and essential for survival on the land. While men may have had the more venerable task of hunting and providing meat and skins for the group, women played a key role sewing skin clothing, keeping the sod-house warm with the seal-oil lamp, rationing the food, caring for the children etc. Inuit traditional culture was a highly sex segregated culture. Work was primarily divided into male and female duties and conventions stated that men and women who were not married or related rarely communicated with each other. Within the marriage unit, however, men and women were extremely interdependent and would often share in the labour, working together to get things done.³⁵

The mode of subsistence practiced by Inuit produced a “highly cooperative ethos” in which “the custom of sharing and caring for each other was firmly entrenched, as was discussing problems communally.” While conflict existed, “ultimately cooperation was mandated by survival, the common goal upon which life focused, day after day, winter after winter.”³⁶ In that respect, violence against women existed, for instance, in the form of men “disciplining” their wives, but the close interdependence of the gender roles between husband and wife mitigated against displays of violence within the domestic unit. “Marriage was not an option, but a matter of life and death, the union of a hunter and a seamstress. Neither could live without the contribution of the other.”³⁷

Inuit culture was primarily founded on a knowledge base of *Qaujimajatuqangit* (“that which Inuit have always known to be true”). It is “an ethical framework and detailed plan for having a good life. It is a way of thinking, connecting all aspects of life in a coherent way.”³⁸ This holistic approach revolves around four main cultural laws or *maligarjuat* (“big things that must be followed”): working for the common good and not being motivated by personal interest or gain; living in respectful relationships with every person and thing that one encounters; maintaining harmony and balance; and planning and preparing for the future.³⁹ As Joe Karetak and Frank Tester explain: “For Inuit, the ultimate goal of becoming a human being is to be as capable as possible in every area of life, but to also know the importance of respectful relationships and to value reliance on and support for others.”⁴⁰ Karetak and Tester also make the point that *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* is at odds with Western ways of knowing and being. The disconnect between the two knowledges became more and more evident with colonial contact, especially given the individualism tied to the pursuit of profit and the exploitation of nature that accompanied corporate colonialism.

Early Contact

Colonial contact with *qallunaat* varied according to the region. Labradormiut (Labrador Inuit), for instance, came into limited contact with Spanish whalers in southern Labrador in the late sixteenth century, and then French fishers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Protestant missionaries of the German-based Moravian Church, however, began establishing mission stations along the coast of Labrador in the late 1700s with the intention of converting Inuit to Christianity. Up to that point in time, Labradormiut had followed traditional patterns of hunting game, living in place-based groups of families “who were closely related and used a common hunting area.”⁴¹ With the arrival of the Moravians, the Inuit trade network gradually disappeared, “as Moravian stores supplied people with imported articles that they wanted” and “original place-groups were eventually absorbed into the congregations of Moravian stations which became the winter home for the majority of Inuit.”⁴² Britain acquired Labrador in 1763, and awarded extensive land grants to the Moravian Church to establish the communities of Nain, Okak, Hopedale, and Hebron.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Labradormiut became increasingly dependent on the wage economy, as “natural resource industries centered on seal netting, cod fishing, fox trapping, and char and salmon fishing” developed.⁴³ In 1926, the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) took charge of all trading operations in the region. The establishment of a military airbase in 1952 at Goose Bay and radar sites along the coast drew Labradormiut further into the wage labour economy. After Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949, services provided by the Moravian Church and the HBC were transferred to federal and provincial agencies.⁴⁴ During the 1950s, residents of Okak and Hebron were compelled to resettle to other communities “when church, health and government officials decided that their social and economic welfare would be improved by living in larger centres”—a decision that “seriously disrupted the historical and cultural organization of the northern coast and had long-lasting negative consequences for resettled families.”⁴⁵

In the Nunavut region, colonial contact began to have its first real effects on Inuit and their way of life in the mid-1800s with the arrival of whaling boats. Whalers harvesting the waters north of Pond Inlet, for instance, began employing Inuit families as seasonal ship-hands at their whaling stations. “Inuit helped haul supplies, performed menial tasks, and provided the whalers with meat, skin clothing, etc. in return for southern merchandise.”⁴⁶ As a result, items such as rifles, ammunition, knives, sewing needles, flour, tea, tobacco, and metal pots were introduced into Inuit culture. As well, wood from the ships began to change the style of sleds, tents, and sod houses.⁴⁷

By the early 1900s, the whaling industry was in decline as the Bowhead whale had almost disappeared from Arctic waters. Independent traders and Hudson’s Bay Company representatives replaced the whalers, trading manufactured goods with Inuit in return for Arctic fox furs, which were in high demand in Europe. As a result of this engagement with *qallunaat* traders, the Inuit economy shifted from subsistence hunting to one split between hunting and trapping, which meant that “traditional long-distance migratory routes were altered as families oriented themselves to the location of trap lines and trading posts.”⁴⁸ It also meant that Inuit were tied more directly to *qallunaat* traders in that “to be outfitted for a season’s trapping and family survival, a trapper had to go into debt to obtain the traps, firearms and ammunition, fabrics, metal goods and flour considered basic needs. This debt was readily forwarded by the trader, in that it bound the trapper to his trading post and ensured his full receipt of fur trapped.”⁴⁹

Over the next four decades, Inuit came to depend on the price paid for Arctic fox pelts to provide their families with basic necessities. Following WWII, however, the demand for fox pelts fell dramatically. “Fox fur trim was no longer in fashion, and synthetic material was rapidly replacing natural fibres in the garment industry.”⁵⁰ As a result, the price of fox pelts fell from about \$25 in 1945 to \$3.50 in 1949, recovering to about \$13 in 1952.⁵¹

At the same time, with the concentration of Inuit around trading posts, other game (such as caribou) became scarce. With Inuit experiencing dire times, the government began providing social assistance to stave off starvation. As R.G. Williamson points out, however, the provision of social assistance by the government had a specific meaning in Inuit culture, given that “the moral duty of the hunter is to try all resources for the sustenance of the family.”⁵² In these terms,

There is no shame in providing fish, or Arctic hare or even lemmings as they present themselves, and in the larger environment, in which people are included, the offerings of the white people such as long-term debt or government “welfare relief” outputs, are no less valid as resources which one has a duty to use. Especially as the “welfare rations” were not involved in the traditional taboos against over-exploitation which protected natural game, one could and even should call upon them to the fullest extent possible.⁵³

In the government’s view, however, the provision of “handouts” was only a temporary solution. As one response, the northern administration made the decision in 1953 to relocate Inuit from Inukjuak (Port Harrison) on the east coast of Hudson’s Bay to Craig Harbour on the southern tip of Ellesmere Island and to Resolute Bay in the High Arctic. As Frank Tester notes, this distance was the equivalent of moving from Toronto, Ontario to Miami, Florida.⁵⁴ The official rationale was that the area provided marine and land-based resources that Inuit could hunt and thus no longer be dependent on the government’s “handouts.” Inuit “were promised that if they didn’t like their new location they would be returned home—that never happened.”⁵⁵

Becoming more reliant on *qallunaat* goods, Inuit began relocating to coastal settlements where Anglican and Catholic missions and HBC posts were located. Also significant, however, was the Canadian government's "expansionist mood" in the 1950s.⁵⁶ The federal government established the Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources in 1953, which "set up a branch with direct responsibility for northern economic development in the broad realm of the extractive industries."⁵⁷ Mineral exploration activity began increasing across the Arctic, which was deemed to be a "treasure house" holding "vast, untapped riches."⁵⁸ As Williamson asserts, "the mineral wealth of the Arctic was then and remains a powerful motivating force in the Canadianising of the north."⁵⁹

WWII had brought thousands of Americans to build the Frobisher Bay airfield (at what is now Iqaluit). In 1954, driven by Cold War fears of a Russian invasion, the American military began construction of the Distance Early Warning (DEW) Line—a series of radar installations and airstrips stretching along the Arctic mainland coast. The construction of the DEW Line meant even more interaction with *qallunaat* as thousands of military personnel and civilian engineers were brought in to work on the project. "Many Inuit worked on the project as labourers. In construction camps they were introduced to Qallunaat food, flush toilets, wood-frame dormitories and central heating."⁶⁰ However, Inuit were "also exposed to alcohol, violence and the sexual abuse of Inuit women in places like Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit), where the American military had operated an airbase since 1942."⁶¹

With the shortage of game, the decline in demand for Arctic fox pelts, and the increasing reliance on *qallunaat* goods, more and more Inuit were encouraged to move to settlements. From the government's standpoint, relocation was seen as a way to incorporate Inuit into the project of modernizing the North. Since Inuit ostensibly could no longer sustain their traditional lifestyle, they needed to somehow be integrated into the capitalist wage economy.

Another factor encouraging relocation of Inuit families—and severely impacting Inuit way of life—was the government's move to provide for education of Inuit children via residential schools. While Anglican and Catholic churches had a presence in the Arctic as early as 1894, residential schools began to emerge in the 1920s with the opening of a Catholic school in Aklavik in 1925 and an Anglican school at Shingle Point in Yukon Territory in 1929.⁶² In 1949, the government established a policy to create federal day schools. "Although Inuit children attending day schools could technically go home to their parents for the evenings and weekends, in many cases, their parents remained on the land. As such, day schools still required most Inuit children to live in boarding homes, or hostels, and therefore involved the painful and traumatic separation of children from their parents"⁶³ In 1951, for example, the Catholic Church opened a government-funded school in Chesterfield Inlet that was technically a federal day school but had a residential facility attached to it. "The school became a source of psychological, physical and sexual abuse of Inuit children in the Eastern Arctic."⁶⁴ By 1969, the Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources had established a network of schools that included eight large residences and a series of some twelve smaller hostels spread throughout the North.⁶⁵

While the government was aware of the disconnect between traditional Inuit life and the emerging capitalist economy, and took moves to alter the school term so that the children could spend time with their parents during hunting and trapping season, the intention behind the schools was, as John Milloy observes, decidedly assimilationist.⁶⁶ Milloy quotes from a 1954 Department review of educational plans that noted since the region's Indigenous people were "almost always on the move" then the "residential school is perhaps the most effective way of giving children from primitive environments experience in education along the lines of civilization leading to vocational training to fit them for occupations in the white man's economy."⁶⁷ As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission notes:

The impact of the schools on the Inuit was complex. Some children were sent to schools thousands of kilometres from their homes, and went years without seeing their parents. In other cases, parents who had previously been supporting themselves by following a seasonal cycle of land- and marine-based resource harvesting began settling in communities with hostels so as not to be separated from their children.⁶⁸

As well, the federal government had implemented the national Family Allowance program in 1945 to assist families in supporting their children. Inuit were eligible for this support. They were given credit at HBC stores where they traded and could only spend it on an approved list of items.⁶⁹ However, "the use of Family Allowances to coerce families to send their children to residential schools became commonplace.... If children were not sent to school, a land-based family was threatened with cessation of the allowance."⁷⁰

Similar to the experience of other Indigenous peoples, the residential schools created inter-generational trauma for Inuit families and tore at the fabric of Inuit life.⁷¹ As Williamson explains:

Children were taken unwillingly from their families, often against the wishes of their parents, and usually they were deprived of their family clothing, given severe haircuts, given numbers and dormitory positions, and commonly forbidden to speak Inuktitut. Punishment of any breach was often severe (and terrifying to children whose culture never used shouting or physical beatings for discipline), and hostel workers and teachers often forthrightly condemned all native people as inferior specimens of creation. The school curriculum staunchly excluded any reference to the existence, let alone the value of their culture, and the Christian belief in their inborn guilt was heavily thrust upon them. This was done sometimes by people who at the same time were abusing them physically, psychologically and sexually.⁷²

Life in the Settlements

While Inuit were encouraged—and often coerced—into moving to the settlements, the conditions they confronted there were challenging. Accustomed to living in much smaller *ilagiit nunagivaktangit*⁷³ of some 40 to 50 people, Inuit were now finding themselves in much larger communities that ranged from 250 to a few thousand in number, with people they no longer knew intimately and who often spoke differing Inuktitut dialects.⁷⁴

The government provided small, “matchbox” houses for Inuit families. The houses “were built in single-unit tent style and made from scrap materials from the supply-pallets and packaging materials of the new arrivals. They were cold (and insufficiently insulated with paper or card-board, usually), seriously over-crowded and lacking in any organised water supply or waste disposal.”⁷⁵ As well, with the move to the settlements families became less able to hunt. Since the location of the settlements was determined by the *qallunaat* (Inuit, for instance, was chosen for its proximity to the Frobisher Bay air field), access to migratory routes of caribou and other game was at issue. Drawn into the casual labour cycle (and cash economy) of the settlements, Inuit dog teams were left to run loose to scavenge their own food—and were often shot by the local control officers. Families that had traditionally relied on a diet of “country food” (seal meat, muktuk, caribou meat, fish) came to depend on the healthier products from the Company store.⁷⁶

The overcrowded housing conditions and poor diet were “recipe for colds, influenza, diarrhea, dysentery and a long list of other infectious diseases.”⁷⁷ Prior to colonial contact, Inuit were “virtually free from the contagions which raked the rest of the world, so remote was their habitat.”⁷⁸ When the *qallunaat* arrived, however, bringing with them infections like influenza and measles, the results were often lethal. One of the worst influenza epidemics occurred in 1918 at Okak and Hebron when an outbreak led to the death of two-thirds of the total Labrador Inuit population.⁷⁹ As the National Inquiry notes, “Like other interventions, the delivery of government health care was an aspect of colonization.” The government’s response to tuberculosis epidemics is one notorious example of “an externally imposed system that caused extreme social suffering.”⁸⁰

When a tuberculosis epidemic broke out in the Eastern Arctic in the late 1940s-early 1950s, the government’s response was to send those affected to the South for treatment in sanitariums, which added to the disruption of Inuit life and generated further trauma. Before the epidemic was brought under control in the mid-1960s, an estimated one-third of the Inuit population had spent time in southern sanitariums.⁸¹ As Williamson explains: “Sometimes years went by without news. Some people never knew where or when their kinsperson had died. Sometimes, people presumed dead returned home to find their spouses remarried. Children taken outside in infancy came back North totally unable to relate with their stranger families and their alien culture.”⁸² The TB epidemic, like the residential school experience, “contributed to loss of language among young people sent south for treatment, disrupted family life and the cultural norms that kept communities functioning and left many unable to pursue the land-based activities upon which Inuit culture is based.”⁸³

As the settlements developed, the previous reliance on subsistence hunting and trapping was being overtaken by a concentration on wage labour. Traditional roles of men and women were disrupted as a result. Men's traditional role of provider for the family through hunting was affected (especially with the loss of their sled dogs), while women were "no longer responsible for clothing the family with skins or tending to the qullik, the seal-oil lamp."⁸⁴ Resettlement, therefore, "stripped away the relative balance between 'the home and the hunt.'"⁸⁵ In addition, "Southern values and lifestyles became increasingly popularized with the introduction of television, the southern curriculum taught in the schools, and the attitudes and behaviour of many non-natives in the settlement."⁸⁶

Relocation to the settlements therefore "brought massive changes to Inuit economic, political, and social life. It caused a drastic reduction in Inuit autonomy and self-determination, because government power was more firmly established in the settlements than in the camps."⁸⁷ Correspondingly, relocation "caused a decline in Inuit systems of leadership and authority, as traditional methods of social control lost their effectiveness."⁸⁸

The Role of the RCMP in the Colonial Encounter

Canada's national police force first came into being in 1873 with the creation of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP). The NWMP was initially tasked with securing Canada's sovereignty in the West in preparation for the arrival of settlers. The force expanded to the North with the Klondike Gold Rush in 1896. After the gold rush ended, its authority was extended further north with the establishment of the first Arctic police post in Fort McPherson in 1903. The force was conferred the title "Royal" in 1904, and in 1920 the Royal North West Mounted Police (RNWMP) amalgamated with the Dominion Police to form the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

Like other frontier police forces, the primary role of the NWMP was "to ensure the submission of Indigenous peoples to colonial rule."⁸⁹ However, as Amanda Nettelbeck and Russell Smandych point out, colonial societies such as Canada and Australia have developed particular "foundational narratives" about their histories of European settlement, including the role of frontier police forces in managing and containing the Indigenous populations.⁹⁰ One distinct feature of our collective imaginary—our sense of who we are as a nation—is that Canada is one of the few countries in the world to claim a police force as a national symbol. As journalist Peter C. Newman once proclaimed: "In Canada's case, the Mountie symbolizes not merely law and order but Canada itself."⁹¹ The officers of the RCMP are so identified with the national interest that criticism of the force is akin to an unpatriotic act.

As Sherene Razack notes, however, "The national mythologies of white settler societies are deeply racialized stories."⁹² For instance, one of the enduring components of Canada's foundational narrative is that explorers and settlers arrived from Europe to a *terra nullius*, an "empty land," that could be claimed and used for their own purposes. In this Eurocentric account, the original inhabitants of the land were depicted as "savages" in need of the civilizing influences of the European newcomers. Missing from this account is any recognition of the sophisticated trading and commercial exchanges, and customs and traditions practised by the Indigenous peoples who populated the space now known as Canada. As Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI) commissioners Alvin Hamilton and Murray Sinclair note with respect to First Nations, "Before the arrival of the Europeans, Aboriginal peoples had their own laws and customary practices for maintaining peace and stability within their communities—including the use of force and ostracism to enforce social norms and the role of elders in administering those norms."⁹³

The Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC) makes a similar point with regard to the arrival of the RCMP in Inuit Nunangat: “The RCMP did not bring policing and justice to the Arctic—it was already there.”⁹⁴ Based on knowledge passed down through the generations, Inuit had their own means of dispensing justice and ensuring conformity in keeping with *Qaujimaqatuqangit*. In contrast to Euro-Canadian law, with its individualized focus on the offence committed and the appropriate punishment of the offender, Inuit customary law was focused on ensuring that “the community returned to a state of harmony, peace and equilibrium.”⁹⁵ As such,

The history of the offender, details surrounding the particular incident, and the amount of harm inflicted upon the victim, all played important roles in the determination of an appropriate penalty. Individuals who were considered to be of particular importance to the well being of the community, such as a primary hunter, may have been treated with greater leniency. This was due to the belief that the imposition of a more serious penalty would not be in the best interest of the community.⁹⁶

Given the strong interdependence between Inuit and the harsh environment in which they lived, self-control was paramount, “since rash decisions or actions could endanger the entire community.”⁹⁷ Living in such close quarters also brought group members into frequent contact with each other. As such, informal mechanisms of social control such as gossip, shaming or embarrassing, ridicule, and social ostracism proved to be effective measures for dealing with problematic behaviour.⁹⁸

Humility was seen as a positive means of minimizing direct conflict. If problems persisted, leaders or shamans (called *angakkuit* in Inuktitut) could address them individually or during feasts or religious rites, and call upon those involved to reconcile with the community. In some places, conflict resolution could also take place through a singing duel (*iniutit*), or through physical challenges, where opponents took turns hitting each other (*tigutijut*). Banishment and execution were rare, almost always occurring in situations when a person was deemed to be too dangerous.⁹⁹

In the case of domestic violence, informal social controls operated against husbands who hurt their wives. “The husband would have to change or leave.”¹⁰⁰

Inuit methods of dispensing justice and ensuring conformity, however, were undermined once Inuit began interacting with and living among the *qallunaat*. In that regard, the RCMP “played an important role in establishing the Canadian state’s authority over Inuit society and its claims of Arctic [sic] sovereignty over Inuit Nunangat.”¹⁰¹

With increased pressures to establish Canadian sovereignty in the North, RCMP detachments were established in the 1920s. Officially, their role was law enforcement, but they were also involved in “collecting taxes and duties, delivering mail, and distributing first-aid supplies and other necessities to Inuit and traders.”¹⁰² While most of their time was spent at the detachment, officers also engaged in patrols by *qimmiit* (sled dogs). Given that recruits were sent North with virtually no training in northern survival, navigation, and travelling, they had to rely heavily on Inuit to keep them alive.

Initially the RCMP took on the role of benefactors and protectors of Inuit—assisting with medical emergencies, collecting people for medical checkups, inoculating *qimmiit*, and registering births and adoptions.¹⁰³ As more and more *qallunaat* populated the North, the RCMP took on the role of policing relations between *qallunaat* and Inuit. One concern, for instance, was the sexual exploitation of Inuit women by DEW Line employees and military personnel in the 1950s.¹⁰⁴

But the RCMP were also actively involved in ushering corporate colonialism into the North—and ensuring that Inuit abided by the new regime. During the 1950s, for instance, the RCMP played an integral role in relocating Inuit families to the settlements, including “choosing families who would move, choosing their destinations, gathering them for the move, accompanying them, acquiring goods for them, and even managing money on their behalf.”¹⁰⁵ The RCMP were also involved in ensuring that Inuit children attended school. “If parents did not voluntarily bring their children into the settlement at the end of the summer to attend school for the year, school officials and RCMP would make trips to the various camps by boat to pick up the children.”¹⁰⁶ As well, RCMP officers were charged with enforcing colonial laws, including those relating to game hunting and dogs. Life in the settlements also exposed Inuit to the availability of alcohol—and Liquor Ordinance infractions.

The Council of the North West Territory’s 1949 game laws imposed serious restrictions on Inuit hunting. Such laws, “especially as they applied to the Inuit, made almost no sense in the Arctic context.”¹⁰⁷ As Tester explains, the legislation “restricted the number of caribou that could be taken by someone holding a hunting license to five per year. No family living on the land could survive for a month—let alone a year—on five caribou.”¹⁰⁸ In Tester’s view, the law and its enforcement was “colonial, racist and punitive, and it was a recipe for starvation.”¹⁰⁹

Sled dogs were an essential part of Inuit life, especially as travel for hunting. With the move to the settlements, however, traditional Inuit ways of handling dogs came into conflict with the new colonial order.

Inuit were instructed to tie up their dogs by RCMP officers who didn’t speak Inuktitut. Doing so meant having money for a chain, often not in stock in HBC stores. It also meant having to find food for dogs used to scrounging when Inuit lived in land-based camps. Inuit were reluctant to chain them. At the same time loose dogs, firmly attached to adults and families in small hunting camps, were often a hazard to young children with whom they had no experience in communities where Inuit were now living.¹¹⁰

Under the *Dog Ordinance of the Northwest Territories*, RCMP officers had the authority to destroy any dogs that they considered to be “running at large or contrary to the provisions of this Ordinance.”¹¹¹ A 2005 RCMP investigation indicated that some 20,000 dogs were killed between 1950 and 1970.¹¹² Mass shootings of dogs—in some cases upwards of 250 animals—occurred on several occasions. As the QTC report on the RCMP dog slaughters notes, 200 dogs represented 14 to 25 teams, which could support hunting for 70 to 100 people.¹¹³ The QTC also notes that, “For many Inuit, the RCMP officers shooting dogs was representative of their broader disrespect for Inuit.”¹¹⁴

By the 1960s many of the tasks historically designated to the RCMP had been taken over by civil servants.¹¹⁵ Subsequently, the RCMP's role shifted from "benefactor and protector" to more conventional, southern-style policing. The QTC report notes that with this shift to law enforcement came confusion since there was no forum available for Inuit to have a voice or even learn their legal rights regarding "cases of arbitrary arrest, seizure of property, or perjury."¹¹⁶ Complicating matters was the language difference. Few RCMP officers spoke Inuktitut, and certain English words, such as "guilty," had no equivalent in Inuktitut.¹¹⁷ As the QTC report emphasizes, "During the whole era, Inuit never had an opportunity to adjust their own social and cultural beliefs and structures to the new system ... it was just 'grafted' onto them."¹¹⁸ As a result,

The emphasis on the enforcement of laws, without the benefits of a full justice system consisting of courts, lawyers, interpreters, and laws made by the people most affected by them, meant that many Inuit were even more likely to view the RCMP as threatening authority figures, a power dynamic that has permeated Inuit-RCMP relations ever since.¹¹⁹

Into the Present

Corporate colonialism continued to advance into the 1970s, with oil, gas, and mineral companies moving into Inuit Nunangat to develop mega projects aimed at extracting the natural resources. Concerned with the impact on the hunting economy and the exclusion of Inuit from any of the economic benefits, Inuit organized to assert their right to influence decision making and negotiations surrounding these projects. Several land claim agreements were settled as a result: the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (1975); the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (1984); the Nunavut Final Agreement (1993); and the Labrador Inuit Final Agreement (2005). In Peter Kulchyski and Warren Bernauer's view, however, "modern treaties can be characterized as tools of dispossession because they involve Indigenous societies forfeiting legal control over the vast majority of their territory."¹²⁰ In these terms, such treaties "are fundamental mechanisms through which capitalist imperialism operates in Canada's Indigenous North today."¹²¹

Other events in the 1970s and 1980s had a decisive impact on the ability of Inuit to provide for their families in traditional ways. In 1976 Greenpeace launched a campaign to oppose the harp seal hunt off the coast of Newfoundland. The campaign had a devastating effect on the Inuit seal hunt, despite the significant differences between the two hunts. "The Inuit paid for their small-take hunts out of the very limited sales of the few surplus seal skins they retained for trade rather than clothing. Most skins were used for clothing and the meat was an important and healthful part of the family diet."¹²² The campaign led to a drop in the price of pelts traded by Inuit from \$23 to \$4, "wiping out a subsistence activity that had provided income and that made it possible to hunt seals and provide Inuit families with seal meat, an important part of their diet."¹²³ Despite such setbacks, hunting for country food has remained an important component of Inuit life.

The relocation of Inuit families to the settlements was completed by the mid-1970s. In just a few decades, Inuit underwent a dramatic transformation of their lives and livelihoods—a transformation that was orchestrated by colonial forces largely outside of their control. Not surprisingly, social and economic issues have continued to plague Inuit families as they endeavour to manage the profound effects that colonialism has imposed on their ways of being and living.

Poor living conditions is one of those issues. Just as housing was inadequate in the early years of the settlements, a housing crisis continues to affect Inuit families. According to the 2016 Census, 31.5% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat compared to only 6% of non-Indigenous Canadians live in dwellings that are in need of major repairs. Over half (52%) of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat live in overcrowded housing, a situation that occurs for only 3% for other Canadians.¹²⁴ Public housing units account for half of the housing units available in Nunavut; 1 in 10 Nunavummiut are on a waiting list for public housing.¹²⁵

Inuit families are also more likely to experience food insecurity. While 92% of all Canadian households are food secure, only 30% of households in Nunavut are food secure.¹²⁶ One factor is the high cost of goods in the North. “According to the Northern Food Basket, it costs \$260 to \$450 a week to provide healthy diet to a family of four living in northern regions, whereas the same basket of goods would cost \$200 to \$250 in southern Canada.”¹²⁷

Another profound effect of the colonial encounter has been the change in relations between Inuit men and women. The traditional hunting economy necessitated a tightly integrated sexual division of labour with distinct but integral gender roles: husbands as economic providers and wives as domestic mainstays. Values of cooperation, sharing, and reciprocity and an ethic of egalitarianism predominated as Inuit families worked together for the common good.¹²⁸ Those roles—and the balance between them—were undermined with relocation to the permanent settlements, as husbands faced increasing barriers to practicing traditional methods of food harvesting. While many men took up wage labour jobs in the settlements with the intention of alternating with periods of hunting, new technologies—gas-powered motorized canoes and snowmobiles—were prohibitively expensive to acquire and maintain. As well, many of the better paid jobs “tended to go to white ‘southern’ Canadian males, who had more formal education and training.”¹²⁸

Women’s role and position within the family were similarly affected. By the late 1990s, many Inuit women were working outside the home at paid employment. In some cases, they took on the role as primary economic provider for the family.¹³⁰ “Perceived by government officials as possibly more sedentary, possibly more ‘responsible’ than their male counterparts, women were often judged as being less likely to leave a job for hunting excursions on the land. As this prototype took shape, women became steady wage earners for their families and came to occupy many of the prominent positions around town.”¹³¹

Nevertheless, very few Inuit women are employed in the extractive industries of corporate colonialism: less than 2.5% of employed Inuit women are in trades and only .3% are in natural resource production.¹³² The majority of Inuit women work in the public sector, and are less likely than men to hold managerial positions. As such, Inuit women earn less than Inuit men, even though they tend to have higher levels of education.¹³³

While excluded from participation in resource extraction industries, Inuit women are still affected by their presence. The National Inquiry heard testimony and evidence that because of issues relating to transient workers and substance abuse and addictions, “resource extraction projects can lead to increased violence against Indigenous women at the hands of non-Indigenous men, as well as increased violence within Indigenous communities.”¹³⁴

Settlement has arguably been more disruptive to Inuit men than women, given that “men’s primary role as hunter and provider was severely curtailed ... whereas women’s roles in the household and in raising children continued.”¹³⁵ Those families who have not been able to access paid employment have had to rely on government assistance in order to get by. Some 42% of Nunavummiut, for instance, rely on social assistance to meet their basic needs.¹³⁶ In these terms, “dependency on government transfer payments replaced [the] economic self-sufficiency [of earlier times] ... which contributed to the erosion of the male role and an imbalanced gender regime.”¹³⁷

The shift in gender roles that accompanied the colonial encounter is one factor in the generation of trauma in the lives of Inuit—trauma that has manifested in the form of high rates of alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, and gendered violence against Inuit women.

The “Lived Experience” of Colonial Trauma

Trauma has been typically understood in individualized terms, especially with the increasing acceptance of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a way of framing trauma and its effects. Nonetheless, PTSD locates trauma as a psychological response to a deeply distressing or disturbing experience; in short, as a psychological disease or mental disorder. In this framing, the systemic processes that generate trauma and its social contexts get lost from view. This is especially the case for understanding how colonial trauma has worked its way into the lives of Indigenous peoples.

The ongoing impact of colonialism has led to what Judy Atkinson calls “trauma trails.”¹³⁸ Examining the case of the Indigenous population of Australia (and with direct relevance to the Canadian experience), Atkinson notes: “Large-scale epidemics, massacres, removals of whole populations to detainment camps called reserves, removals of children, splitting apart of family groups, physical and cultural genocide—these formed layers of traumatic impacts down the generations.”¹³⁹ The trauma trails laid down by colonialism have disrupted and restructured relationships between Indigenous men and women, and between parents and children, with an intergenerational impact. “When physical, structural or psychological violence is used to achieve the objective of domination,” Atkinson writes, “the outcomes may not only produce acute trauma, but may set in place chronic conditions of ongoing victimization and traumatisation at different levels, compounding the traumatisation across generations.”¹⁴⁰ In these terms, colonialism’s trauma and the trails laid down in the process alter the lives and conditions of not just individuals—but of families and entire communities.

Rather than a psychological disease or mental disorder, therefore, framing trauma as “lived experience” acknowledges the particular historical and social conditions in which individuals live their lives.¹⁴¹ This is especially the case when trauma becomes intergenerational, as it has for Inuit as a result of colonial practices such as the residential school system and the relocation to permanent settlements. Contemporary manifestations of the lived experience of trauma abound in Inuit communities.

One manifestation of trauma is the prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse. Janet Billson, for instance, notes that “rates of alcohol and drug abuse have skyrocketed in Baffin communities since resettlement.”¹⁴² According to the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 35% of Inuit women and 41% of Inuit men reported heavy drinking (having 5 or more drinks on a single occasion at least once a month).¹⁴³ More often than not, turning to alcohol and drugs is a coping strategy to deal with deep distress. As Gabor Maté, a doctor whose work in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside placed him into “close encounters with addiction,” notes: “All addictions always originate in pain, whether felt openly or hidden in the unconscious. They are emotional anaesthetics.”¹⁴⁴ Following Maté’s lead, the question to be posed is not “why the addiction?” but “why the pain?” Speaking to the high rates of alcohol and drug abuse in Indigenous communities in Manitoba, AJI commissioners Hamilton and Sinclair asserted: “Ultimately, it must be recognized that the presence and influence of alcohol and substance abuse in Aboriginal communities and among Aboriginal people are a direct reflection of the nature and level of despair which permeates that population.”¹⁴⁵ For Inuit, as with other Indigenous peoples, pain and despair have been promulgated by colonialism and its trauma trails.

Another manifestation of trauma is the suicide crisis. The four regions of Inuit Nunangat have rates of suicide between 5 to 25 times the rate of suicide for Canada as a whole.¹⁴⁶ The 2007-2008 Inuit Health Survey revealed that 48% of Inuit surveyed reported having had suicidal thoughts at some point in their lives; 14% in the previous 12 months.¹⁴⁷ Some 29% (31% women and 25% men) reported having attempted suicide at some point in their lives; 5% during the previous 12 months.¹⁴⁸ The rate of suicide amongst Inuit children is 30 times the rate for children in the rest of Canada.¹⁴⁹ Janet Billson and Kyra Mancini note that while alcohol and drug abuse may be a factor in the high rates of youth suicide, a stronger explanation is their marginalization and social exclusion.¹⁵⁰ Louis-Jacques Dorais puts it in these terms: “Caught between life on the land, about which they do not know enough, and the modern labour market, whose doors seem reluctant to open up to them, many young people have developed a feeling of being totally useless.”¹⁵¹

Yet another significant manifestation of the lived experience of trauma is the pervasiveness of violence against Inuit women. As indicated at the outset of this report, gendered violence against Inuit women is a problem of massive proportions. The 2007-2008 Inuit Health Survey found that over half (52%) of Inuit women in Nunavut reported experiencing severe sexual abuse during childhood.¹⁵² Over one-quarter (27%) of Inuit women reported experiencing sexual violence during adulthood.¹⁵³ The intergenerational impact of exposure to family violence is also evident in the research. A Justice Canada report on family violence and sexual assault conducted in the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut found that almost two-thirds (66%) of sexual assault offenders and over three-quarters (77%) of family violence offenders had a personal history of abuse.¹⁵⁴

Larry Chartrand and Celeste McKay note, “Explanations for such high rates of victimization are varied but the predominant view links high victimization to the overall impact of colonization and the resultant collective and individual ‘trauma’ and its impacts that flows from cultural disruption.”¹⁵⁵ Phil Lane and his colleagues also draw the connection between the lived experience of trauma and intimate partner violence:

Domestic violence and abuse are almost always linked to trauma in several ways. Certainly, abuse causes trauma in victims, as well as in children witnessing violence. But, domestic abuse is also and most often the result of intergenerational trauma. So, trauma is both one of the primary causes and principle outcomes of domestic violence and abuse.¹⁵⁶

Similarly, the National Inquiry asserts that the intergenerational trauma caused by government interventions from the 1940s to the 1960s “is the root cause of a great deal of the violence Inuit women are exposed to today.”¹⁵⁷

In sum, corporate colonialism has profoundly impacted Inuit ways of living and being, an impact that is continuing into the present. While the housing crisis, food insecurity, and disrupted relations between Inuit men and women are some of the more obvious manifestations of the colonial encounter with *qallunaat*, the trauma that colonialism generates is also a key factor. The lived experience of trauma manifests in high rates of alcohol and drug abuse, suicide—and gendered violence against Inuit women. Addressing the pressing issue of gendered violence against Inuit women, therefore, requires acknowledging—and attending to—the colonial context in which it occurs.

Contemporary Policing in Inuit Nunangat

As representatives of the Canadian state, the police have a key responsibility in responding to gendered violence and ensuring the safety and protection of Inuit women. Nevertheless, police are also implicated in the advance of corporate colonialism in the North. The RCMP, for instance, engaged in the colonial practices of relocating Inuit to the permanent settlements, transporting Inuit children to residential schools, and slaughtering Inuit sled dogs. To this extent, the policing that the RCMP were engaged in was decidedly “racialized”; it was designed to enforce Inuit conformity to the emerging colonial regime.¹⁵⁸ The question remains, however: to what extent does racialized policing continue to be practiced in Inuit Nunangat?

The following discussion maps out the official statements by the RCMP as to their roles and responsibilities, especially with regard to Indigenous peoples. It also includes a description of how the RCMP is deployed in three of the Inuit Nunangat regions: Inuvialuit, Nunatsiavut, and Nunavut. Policing in the Nunavik region, which is carried out by the Kativik Regional Police Force (KRPF), is then discussed along these same lines. Finally, challenges encountered by both police services are introduced.

RCMP Policies and Protocols

Official statements on the RCMP’s website assert that policing is carried out in a manner that upholds justice and the safety and security of all citizens. The statement on the “Core Values” of the RCMP, for instance, indicates that all employees are dedicated to providing an environment based on “individual safety, well-being and development.”¹⁵⁹ These core values include: Integrity; Honesty; Professionalism; Compassion; Respect; and Accountability.

In the section titled ‘Commitment to Our Communities,’ the RCMP states that it is committed to its communities through:

- Unbiased and respectful treatment of all people
- Accountability
- Mutual problem solving
- Cultural sensitivity
- Enhancement of public safety
- Partnerships and consultation
- Open and honest communication
- Effective and efficient use of resources
- Quality and timely service¹⁶⁰

Contributing to safer and healthier Indigenous communities is one of the five strategic priorities of the RCMP. As stated on its website: “Delivering culturally competent police services provides the foundation necessary to build relationships and partnerships with the more than 600 Indigenous communities we serve.”¹⁶¹ The website goes on to indicate that the RCMP contributes to safer and healthier Indigenous communities by:

- promoting and encouraging the recruitment of Indigenous people as potential employees and police officers
- working collaboratively with the communities to ensure enhanced and optimized service delivery by developing relevant and culturally competent police services
- contributing to the development of community capacity to prevent crime through on-going social development
- maintaining and strengthening partnerships with Indigenous communities, our policing and government partners, stakeholders and with Indigenous organizations
- promoting and using alternative/community justice initiatives for Indigenous people
- demonstrating value for service through the development, management and evaluation of the detachment performance plan created in collaboration with the local Indigenous communities
- contributing to public policy development and implementation and development to assist in building safer and healthier Indigenous communities.¹⁶²

The operationalization of this strategic priority is carried out by the RCMP-Indigenous Relations Services (RIRS), which is responsible for “planning, developing and managing the organization’s strategies and initiatives. RIRS works closely with Indigenous groups to develop innovative policing approaches that meet their distinctive needs.”¹⁶³ The RIRS oversees numerous Indigenous programs and initiatives, including: the Commissioner’s National Indigenous Advisory Committee (formed in 1990); Indigenous Perceptions Training; Inuit Perceptions Training; and Annual Performance Plans, which address an offence or negative social issue that concerns the community. The RIRS also provides additional support on the First Nations Policing Policy to its partners at Public Safety Canada.¹⁶⁴

The RCMP’s commitment to serving Indigenous communities is also outlined in the Mandate Letter from the federal government to the RCMP, which outlines government expectations of the force. RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki explained the Mandate Letter in her testimony before the National Inquiry, saying that it is “about enhancing our role and in reconciliation with Indigenous people, and bolstering the efficacy, the credibility, and the trust upon which the RCMP’s authority depends.”¹⁶⁵ The letter also “talks about renewed Nation-to-Nation relationships with Indigenous Peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership given the current and historical experiences of Indigenous Canadians with policing and the justice system.”¹⁶⁶

In her testimony before the National Inquiry, Commissioner Lucki also specified a number of other initiatives undertaken by the RCMP with regard to Indigenous peoples. One is the commitment to bias-free policing: “a fundamental principle that governs the delivery of our services and employment practices to ensure that we provide equitable policing services to all people while respecting diversity without abusing our authority regardless of race, colour, religion, gender/sexual orientation, age, mental/physical ability, citizenship.”¹⁶⁷

At the detachment level, relationship building and collaboration between the RCMP and Indigenous communities is implemented through the Annual Performance Plan. Based on consultations with “partner agencies, elected officials, schools, health services, social services, as well as Elders and internal consultation with members as well,” the detachment commander develops three to five priorities for the community.¹⁶⁸

As well, the Circle of Change committee emerged out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action to address violence against Indigenous women and girls. The committee "provides advice and guidance to the RCMP, but specifically on resources, policies, training, police tools, communication to better enable the RCMP to investigate, prevent, and address violence against Indigenous women and girls in those communities."¹⁶⁹

Finally, the Commissioner mentioned the RCMP's Major Case Management Policy, which governs the oversight of the procedures of the investigation of any major crime. "To ensure standard approaches at the national level, the National Investigative Standards Unit oversees the investigation of major cases."¹⁷⁰

RCMP Detachments

The RCMP services 700 detachments across the country, representing 65% of the RCMP's operational workforce.¹⁷¹ The force is comprised of 30,000 employees, including non-police members;¹⁷² 1,495 (7.7%) of regular RCMP members self-identify as Indigenous.¹⁷³ In 2017-2018, the RCMP admitted 1,152 new recruits to the Cadet Program; 3.1% of the cadets were Indigenous.¹⁷⁴

As part of its mandate, the RCMP is responsible for policing in three of the regions in Inuit Nunangat: Nunatsiavut (Northern Coastal Labrador), Inuvialuit (Northwest Territories), and the Territory of Nunavut. According to the RCMP website, the RCMP's B Division located in Newfoundland/Labrador is comprised of three districts. The Labrador district has 11 detachments, including four in the Nunatsiavut communities of Hopedale, Makkovik, Nain, and Rigolet. The RCMP's G Division in the Northwest Territories is divided into two districts, North and South, with 21 detachments (plus headquarters in Yellowknife, NT). The Inuvialuit communities of Aklavik, Inuvik, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Tuktoyaktuk, and Ulukhaktok each have an RCMP detachment. In Nunavut, the RCMP's V Division has 25 detachments that employ 185 people.¹⁷⁵

The First Nations Policing Policy

In 1991 the Canadian government created the First Nations Policing Policy (FNPP), which was the first national policing program for Indigenous peoples of its kind. The purpose of the FNPP is "to contribute to the improvement of social order, public security, and personal safety in First Nations and Inuit communities, including the safety of women, children, and other vulnerable groups."¹⁷⁶ The policy objectives of the program include:

- **Strengthening Public Security and Personal Safety** through responsive policing services that meet the particular needs of First Nations and Inuit communities, with respect to quality and level of service.
- **Increasing Responsibility and Accountability** by supporting First Nations and Inuit communities in acquiring the tools to become self-sufficient and self-governing through the establishment of structures for the management, administration and accountability of First Nations and Inuit police services. Police are to be independent from partisan and political influence.
- **Building a New Partnership** by implementing and administering the FNPP in a way that promotes partnerships with First Nations and Inuit communities based on trust, mutual respect, and participation in decision-making.¹⁷⁷

The FNPP is administered by Public Safety Canada through tripartite agreements negotiated between the federal government, the provincial or territorial governments where the Indigenous community is located, and the governing body of the Indigenous community. Cost sharing for the program is divided between the federal (52%) and provincial/territorial (48%) governments.

In 2015-2016, the FNPP provided over \$120 million in funding for 185 policing agreements, policing a population of approximately 432,000 people with 1,299 police officers in over 450 First Nation and Inuit communities.¹⁷⁸ While the program is focused on enhancing public safety in First Nations and Inuit communities, “it is not intended to replace police services normally provided by the province or territory.”¹⁷⁹ In that regard, provincial police services, as well as the RCMP, continue to hold responsibility for the policing of Indigenous communities.

Policing in Nunavik: The Kativik Regional Police Force

While the RCMP assumes primary responsibility for policing in three of the Inuit Nunangat regions—Nunatsiavut, Inuvialuit, and Nunavut—policing in Nunavik takes a different form.

The RCMP policed the Nunavik region until 1961. In that year, the Québec provincial police force, the Sûreté du Québec (SQ), took over responsibility for policing in the province. Following the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975, an agreement was made between the SQ and Indigenous communities to implement an Aboriginal police program. Indigenous applicants who successfully completed the program became special constables with the SQ. In 1996, following on the implementation of the First Nations Policing Policy, the Kativik Regional Police Force (KRPF) was created.

The KRPF delivers regular policing services to 14 remote northern villages of Nunavik, which encompasses Québec’s far north (the territory of the 55th parallel). Similar to other Indigenous police services formed under the FNPP, the KRPF is funded through a tripartite agreement, with 52% of the funding provided by the federal government and 48% by the Québec government. Additional funding is provided under a separate agreement for police services during itinerant court sessions and for a Cadet Program and officer training.

The mission statement of the KRPF is spelled out on its website:

It is the duty of the KRPF and each member thereof to maintain peace, order, and public safety in the territory, to prevent crime and infringements of the by-laws of the municipal corporations, the ordinances of the KRG [Kativik Regional Government], and the laws of Québec and Canada, and to seek out offenders.¹⁸⁰

The vision of the KRPF is “to provide the people of Nunavik with the best professional, respectful and efficient police services and to become a benchmark for police services in Inuit and indigenous communities, both in operational and administrative matters.”¹⁸¹ The values the KRPF uphold include:

- The highest moral and ethical standards. Striving to uphold the public trust and maintain accountability to the public through all employees and volunteers.
- Our employees are the most important asset and only through teamwork, mutual respect, and cooperation can communities be best served.
- The role of the police is determined by the community it serves and it is through a partnership with the citizens that the police improves the quality of life through control and reduction of crime.
- The police and the community share in the responsibility for crime control and public safety.
- The capability to accomplish our mission is determined by the dedication to public service, diversity and quality of the work force and we seek to recruit and retain individuals who possess those qualities.
- We seek to collaborate with the communities to better understand the nature of local problems and to develop meaningful and cooperative strategies to solve these problems.
- Enhance the skills of all personnel to ensure motivation, creativity, dedication and professionalism, while creating an atmosphere of job satisfaction, enthusiasm, security and personal career development.
- Expand with maximum efficiency available resources, both personnel and financial, in order to provide optimum service to the citizens.
- State-of-the-art technologies and continuous up-to-date training in order to maintain and enhance police service delivery to the citizens.¹⁸²

The headquarters of the KRPF are located in Kuujjuaq, and detachments operate in each of the 14 communities (serving a total population of 13,000 residents). Community detachments are generally composed of 3 officers. However, in Kuujjuarapik, Inukjuak, Salluit, Puvirnituk and Kuujjuaq, there are 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 officers, respectively. According to the tripartite agreement, the KRPF must consist of a minimum of 58 full-time positions, including the police chief, and assisted by support staff.¹⁸³ KRPF Chief Jean-Pierre Larose described the breakdown of the force's staff to the National Inquiry:

We have 48 constables, seven patrol sergeants, two prevention officers, two liaison officers, one criminal intelligence officer, two sergeant-detective investigators and we have six employees, police officers who accompany me on the management team; the police chief who is myself, two deputy directors: one for operations and one for administration and civil security. And we have three master captains who are in charge of the three districts I mentioned to you: a captain in Kuujjuaq, who represents Ungava Bay; a captain in Salluit, who represents Hudson Strait and the North; and a captain in Puvirnituk, who represents the west coast of Hudson Bay.¹⁸⁴

Policing Challenges

The official statements of both the RCMP and the KRPF claim that policing in Inuit Nunangat is being carried out in a manner that upholds justice and protects the safety and security of the communities they serve. Nonetheless, a number of challenges have been raised that call that claim into question.

Policing of Remote Communities

The communities of Inuit Nunangat are spread over a wide geographical area. Of the 21 detachments in the RCMP's G Division in the Northwest Territories, for instance, 11 are fly-in communities. The 25 detachments in the RCMP's D Division in Nunavut cover 787,000 square miles of land and water, representing 20% of Canada's land mass. All of the 25 RCMP detachments in Nunavut are accessible by air only. Yvonne Niego who, among other accomplishments, had a twenty-year career in the RCMP told the National Inquiry: "It takes two days to get to one certain region in our territory. Everything is done by remote supervision, which is another factor."¹⁸⁵ In Postville, a hamlet in Nunatsiavut, policing is only available 21 days each month. It is a 45 to 50 minute plane ride for the police to arrive from the nearest community.¹⁸⁶

KRPF Chief Larose spoke to the National Inquiry of the challenge of undertaking crime investigations in remote communities. In Nunavik, specialized SQ investigators need to be brought from Montreal and often encounter delays relating to weather and transportation.

There is no less than an average of 15 to 18 hours of waiting. What you have to understand is that we are police officers: when we are in a community of three police officers, that I have to protect the crime scene at -40, with blizzard conditions, it's not easy. We must protect the scene, we must wait for the arrival of the Sûreté du Québec, and of course, they also have constraints to mobilize their staff, charter a plane and hoping that the weather is favourable.¹⁸⁷

While the remoteness of many Inuit Nunangat communities poses a challenge emanating from geography and climate, other challenges emanate more directly from policing policies and practices.

Duration of RCMP Postings

Most RCMP postings are for a period of only two to four years.¹⁸⁸ Commissioner Lucki sees this policy as positive:

I think from a community perspective, I think sometimes it's viewed as negative because they get used to a certain policing service by certain members, and then when those members leave it's tough on the communities. But I think, too, the positives are that with each member there is new policing practices brought to the community, a renewed energy, new ideas that they bring with them. So positive and negative are both, but I honestly think having renewed energy in the community is always good, especially [because] people learn different things from previous posting down south and then they can bring that to that community to solve community issues.¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the RCMP policy of limiting the duration of postings impedes "working collaboratively with the communities to ensure enhanced and optimized service delivery." More specifically, the continual rotation of officers reinforces the view of the police as an outside force that is not well-integrated into the community.¹⁹⁰

Inexperienced Officers

Most officers posted to northern communities are new recruits with little policing experience. In combination, the limited duration of postings and inexperience of officers impede the development of a trusting relationship between police and community members. In these terms, Inuit women will be reluctant to report experiences of gendered violence to police if a lack of trust prevails.¹⁹¹

Staffing Shortages and Turnover

KRPF Chief Larose told the National Inquiry in 2018: “I have a major problem: the turnover of my staff. There is an incredible staff movement. More than 50% of my staff have less than one year of experience in Nunavik.”¹⁹² In July 2019 the *Nunatsiaq News* reported that the KRPF was continuing to face a severe staffing shortage following the resignation of almost one-quarter of its officers: “Over the last month, the Nunavik force saw 16 officers quit their jobs, leaving roughly 48 officers to police the region’s 14 communities. The force is considered fully staffed with 65 officers.”¹⁹³ According to Chief Larose, it is common for officers to leave at the beginning of summer, and that an average of 70 officers leave the force each year—more than the force even employs at one time.¹⁹⁴

Staffing shortages not only limit the ability of the police to carry out their mandate, they create untold stress for police officers. As Chief Larose testified before the National Inquiry, KRPF officers are often working 70 hours per week in sometimes dangerous conditions with no back up.¹⁹⁵

Language Barriers

Two-thirds of Inuit are fluent in Inuktitut. Nunavik has the strongest population of Inuktitut speakers, with 99.2% of Inuit there saying they are fluent. In Nunavut, 89% are fluent, in Inuvialuit 25% are fluent, and in Nunatsiavut 20% are fluent. For elders, aged 65 and older, 61% speak Inuktitut as their first language. Very few Inuit speak French, the language of service providers in Quebec. Yet, fewer than 5 of the 150 RCMP officers in Nunavut are fluent in Inuktitut.¹⁹⁶ As of May 27, 2019, there were reportedly no Inuktitut-speaking staff in the Nunavut telecommunications department; no operators who dispatch calls for the RCMP through the Operational Communications Centre are capable of taking a call in Inuktitut. The only detachment highlighted as ‘bilingual’ on the RCMP website is the Nunavut Headquarters located in Iqaluit—where French and English (but not Inuktitut) are spoken.¹⁹⁷

Recruiting Inuit Police Officers

While “promoting and encouraging the recruitment of Indigenous people as potential employees and police officers” is one of the commitments made by the RCMP,¹⁹⁸ very few Inuit can be counted among the RCMP ranks. In Nunavut, for instance, of 150 officers only 3% (5) are Inuit.¹⁹⁹ Yvonne Niego indicated during her testimony before the National Inquiry in 2018 that it had been 14 years since an Inuk had been hired by the RCMP in Nunavut.²⁰⁰

Cultural Competency

One of the key planks of the RCMP’s strategic priority is the commitment to providing culturally competent services to Indigenous communities. In that regard, the RCMP has undertaken several initiatives, one of which is Inuit Perceptions, a one-day cultural awareness seminar designed to orient officers to Inuit culture, customs, and beliefs.

The key intended outcome of the Inuit Perception seminars is to ensure employees in RCMP 'V' Division who are not originally from the territory are able to identify and understand historical issues revolving around police-community relations in the North; understand some of the unique perspectives of the Inuit culture; and be better equipped to communicate with residents. RCMP members will be better prepared to work, live, integrate and understand the social context of remote and isolated communities.²⁰¹

The National Inquiry, however, noted that the matter of cultural competency is not simply “the completion of a course that one takes and then forgets, but, rather, the requirement for the development of a deeper understanding and knowledge of Indigenous history and contemporary challenges that is always evolving.”²⁰² As Retired Police Chief Clive Weighill told the Inquiry:

Every police officer should be very, very fluent in what’s happened with residential schools, what’s happened with colonization, the White Paper back in the ’70s, the Sixties Scoop, and contemporary issues and downfalls that are happening right now in our Indigenous community. Every police officer in Canada should be able to just tell you that right off the top of their head.²⁰³

Lack of Resources

Despite the stated KRPF value of ensuring “state-of-the-art technologies and continuous up-to-date training in order to maintain and enhance police service delivery to the citizens,”²⁰⁴ the force has encountered significant challenges in ensuring effective delivery of services in Nunavik communities. As Chief Larose told the National Inquiry:

Currently, our calls go directly to the police’s portable radios and I do not have a 24-hour patrol in the communities. It therefore requires standby, as we call it. And sometimes the police, when they are out of service during the night, are called directly on their radio, they get dressed and answer calls.²⁰⁵

Underfunding

Tripartite agreements under the FNPP are time-limited and program-based. KRPF Chief Larose spoke to the challenges of working under the contribution agreement framework. The KRPF contract expired in April 2019. The force was asking for an increase in personnel and equipment as well as a call centre based in Kuujuaq with Inuktitut-speaking operators (calls at present are sent directly to police officer radios). Moreover, underfunding under such agreements means officers rarely work with a partner and therefore lack the standard back-up available to officers in other police services.

Lack of wrap-around services

Police representatives who appeared before the National Inquiry also spoke to the need for adequate supports that individuals who contact the police may need, including “mental health support, health care, housing, or other forms of social services and culturally relevant support.”²⁰⁶

In combination, these challenges pose significant systemic barriers that affect the ability of police to effectively respond to gendered violence against Inuit women. But what does policing look like on-the-ground? How do these challenges manifest in relation to the police response to gendered violence against Inuit women? To explore this issue further we conducted interviews with Inuit women and service providers (including police officers) in each of the four regions of Inuit Nunangat.

Methodology

The primary research question that informed our study was: *How can police services be made more responsive and sensitive to the needs of Inuit women who experience gendered violence?* To address this question, a qualitative research methodology was employed to bring forward the standpoints of Inuit women who had experienced gendered violence as well those of elders and service providers (including police officers) across Inuit Nunangat.

Project Advisory Committee:

To support the research, a Project Advisory Committee was formed, consisting of representatives from each of the four Inuit Nunangat regions. The Committee was tasked with providing guidance in relation to the selection of the communities to be included in the study, vetting the interview schedules, and identifying service providers to be interviewed for the study. The Committee was also provided with a draft of the research report for its feedback.

Ethics Certificate and Research Licenses:

Ethics approval for the project was granted from the Aurora College Research Ethics Committee and the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba.

To conduct research with Inuit or in Inuit Nunangat, research projects are also required to undergo a research vetting process. The process differs in each region. In the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, a research license for the study was granted by the Aurora Research Institute. In Nunatsiavut, the Nunatsiavut Government Research Advisory Committee reviewed and approved the research proposal. In Nunavut, a research license was granted by the Nunavut Research Institute. Nunavik is the exception as there is no formal approval process for conducting research in the region.

Data Collection:

Data collection involved qualitative interviews with two main groups: Inuit women who have experienced gendered violence; and service providers (including police officers) who have experience working with women that have encountered gendered violence. Interviews were also conducted with several elders to draw on their knowledge of the issue of gendered violence in their region. Semi-structured interview guides were developed to provide participants with enough opportunity to share their standpoints and experiences. This approach aligns well with Indigenous methodologies, enabling participants the space to tell their stories as they understand them.²⁰⁷

Inuit women were asked about themselves (their age, whether or not they are in a relationship, and whether or not they have children). They were asked about their sense of safety in the community and the role that police play in their community. They were asked about any experiences of physical and/or sexual violence they have had, whether or not that was reported to the police, and what the nature of the police response involved. They were also asked questions about any other times that they called on the police for help, and what that involved. Finally, they were asked about what they think could be done to improve women's safety in their community, and things that police could be doing to make their community safer.

Service providers were asked about the nature of the work they do, their awareness of and experience in relation to the issue of gendered violence against Inuit women, the role that police play in the community, the services they provide, and the successes and challenges they encounter in carrying out that role. They were also asked about what they thought could be done to strengthen relationships between the police and the community and to make Inuit women safer. Elders were asked similar questions during the interview.

Recruitment Strategies:

With the input of the Project Advisory Committee, one community in each of the four regions was chosen as the primary research site for the study. The researchers then arranged for an appropriate location in each community at which to conduct the interviews. A Community Research Liaison was also hired in each of the four communities on a short-term basis to provide support, advice, and direction on several matters, including: helping the researchers facilitate community engagement in a culturally-safe and respectful manner; facilitating the researchers' connection with community members and services within the region; and providing guidance on culturally appropriate strategies for conducting the interviews.

In order to recruit Inuit women as participants, information about the study and an invitation to participate (in both English and Inuktitut) were shared through several channels (posters, radio advertisements, and social media) during the week prior to the researcher visiting each community.

To attain a sample of service providers, a purposive sampling strategy was used. Under the guidance of the Project Advisory Committee and a local Community Research Liaison, a list of potential participants was compiled, and they were then contacted by email to explain the project and invite their participation.

The Interview Process:

Prior to the interview process, each participant was provided with a detailed Consent Form that spelled out the nature of the project, the kinds of questions to be asked, how confidentiality would be maintained, the potential risks and benefits in participating, and how the findings of the research will be disseminated. Participants were also asked if they wanted to receive a copy of the final report. The Consent Form was made available in both English and the appropriate Inuktitut dialect. The participants' informed consent was confirmed with their signatures. Each participant was provided a copy of the Consent Form, while the researcher maintained possession of the original.

With the permission of participants, interviews were audio-recorded so that they could later be transcribed for analysis purposes. To accommodate participants' language needs, an interpreter was available during the interviews with the women to undertake a simultaneous translation of what was being said. In two cases, women spoke mainly in Inuktitut and their recorded interviews were later translated into English.

Due to the sensitive and private nature of what was often being discussed, precautions were put in place to conduct the research in a confidential and respectful manner. For instance, the researchers, the Community Research Liaison, the interpreter (if present), and the transcriptionist all signed a confidentiality agreement confirming that they would respect confidentiality. Consent forms containing participants' signatures were kept in a secure location. Interview recordings and transcripts were shared by the researchers and the transcriptionist on a password-protected and encrypted website (Sync.com).

At the end of each interview, the women were asked how they were feeling and whether they needed support. A mental health worker was available either on-site or easily accessible during the period when the interviews were conducted to provide support to women if they needed or wanted to follow-up during or after the interview. Community participants were paid an honorarium of \$50 in the form of a gift card in recognition of their time and expertise.

Most of the service providers were interviewed during the time when the researcher was in the community. In several cases, however, interviews were conducted over the telephone (and recorded). On two occasions, a focus group was held with service providers using the Interview Schedule as a guide for the discussion. Adopting these strategies enabled a broader range of perspectives and participants. The length of these interviews averaged one hour in duration.

The Study Sample:

The initial intention was to secure a sample of 8 women and 5 service providers in each of the regions (for a total of 52 interviews). However, given participants' interest in the study and willingness to share their experiences and standpoints, a total of 85 individuals ended up participating. The regional breakdown is as follows:

Region	Inuit Women	Service Providers and Elders	Service Provider Focus Group
Inuvialuit	12	10	6 participants
Nunavut	11	5	4 participants
Nunatsiavut	11	9	
Nunavik	11	6	
Total	45	30	10

While participants shared their knowledge and experiences about living and working in communities outside of the specific ones selected for the study, it should be noted that the findings do not necessarily represent the entire region or all communities within the region in which they were generated.

Data Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The transcripts were grouped according to region and then analyzed to determine the themes that emerged from participants' responses. The findings—presented in the next four sections of this report—emphasize the narratives of participants. In reporting on what participants had to say, however, identifying information has been removed to maintain confidentiality.

Policing in Inuvialuit

In the Northwest Territories, six of the RCMP's 21 detachments are located in the Inuvialuit region, with the headquarters of G Division located in Yellowknife. While Yellowknife has a population of 20,607 residents, the Inuvialuit communities are much smaller, with populations ranging from 3,536 in Inuvik to 982 in Tuktoyaktuk, 623 in Aklavik, 444 in Ulukhaktok, 302 in Paulatuk, and 111 in Sachs Harbour.²⁰⁸ While Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk are connected to southern Canada by road, the other communities are only accessible by air. To assess women's sense of safety and security in these communities—as well as the police response when gendered violence occurs—a focus group of six participants was held in Yellowknife and individual interviews were conducted with 12 Inuit women in an Inuvialuit community, many of whom had also lived in other Inuvialuit communities. In addition, 10 service providers (including two RCMP officers) were interviewed either in-person or by telephone.

Safety Concerns and Gendered Violence

When asked whether or not safety was an issue in their community, Yellowknife participants responded in the affirmative. The women indicated that they “wouldn’t walk alone” when out in the community, and several shared incidents of being followed and harassed by men on the street. According to the participants, violence can occur “anywhere, any time.” The women shared experiences of witnessing women being beaten by their partners “in broad daylight,” and of being attacked by a man while walking home at night.

One woman told of a harrowing experience of being sexually assaulted by a man in a hotel room. He had her on the bed, covering her mouth with his hand so she couldn’t scream. She said that all she could think of at the time was “Breathe slow. I want to see my grandkids tomorrow. Breathe slow.” The man almost had her pants off, but somehow she managed to get away and began crawling across the floor towards the door, with him on her back. She used all her might while thinking to herself, “Just breathe slow. That way you have strength.” When the phone rang, she told the man, “That’s security.” So he let her go and she managed to escape downstairs. The RCMP were called and the man was later picked up. But no charges were laid. As the woman indicated: “‘cause some ladies are afraid to talk about it.”

According to the Yellowknife participants, experiencing sexual violence has become normalized for Inuit women. As one woman said, “If sexual assault didn’t happen to you, something was wrong. You came to expect it.” She had disclosed an experience of sexual assault to family members when she was younger. Her father and uncles “beat the living shit out of him,” which left her feeling guilty about what happened to the young man. So she learned very quickly not to speak about her experiences. As she commented: “I want to give back the shame that I’ve carried for so many years because that shame is not mine. I used to think it was my fault all the time.” Another woman commented on the struggle between helping yourself and helping your community when violence occurs. One possible outcome is that women “can be shunned” and “people talking bad about you.” Historically, “that’s what punishment was [but] the victim is being punished instead of the perpetrator.”

When asked about safety in their community, Inuvialuit participants raised the issue of intoxicated people in the downtown area. As one woman commented: “It’s such a big thing, there’s just so many of us now on the streets, just drinking and drinking.... And right now, this is the highest I’ve ever seen with how bad the alcoholism is on the streets.” Participants, however, were also concerned about the gendered violence that occurs in the community. Several participants commented that violence against women is more “hidden” than it used to be. As one service provider said, “I think it’s more behind closed doors now. I remember long ago I used to see women getting beaten up on the road or on the street or, you know, anywhere. Yeah. But now you don’t see that, hey. It’s all in behind doors.” A second service provider commented that she “really didn’t think it was an issue” compared to previous years when “you’d see women walking around with black eyes and puffed up faces.” But she has come to realize that, “it’s still there but it’s hidden.”

When asked whether gendered violence was an issue in Inuvialuit, a service provider replied: “Absolutely... we definitely see it. We see, oh, there’s just way too much violence up here. So we see the violence against women, we see some violence against men, we see same-sex partner violence, we definitely see violence towards children.” This same service provider went on to locate the issue in its broader context: “I think in general in the North with all the issues we’re dealing with, and particularly the fallout of residential school and people feeling really disempowered with, you know, the modern system being imposed on them and old ways of resolving conflict, I think we see a lot of conflict, which really translates into violence.” Another service provider also located gendered violence in its colonial context:

If you know the history of the residential school in our communities, we had two residential schools, a Roman Catholic one and an Anglican one. And in those schools a lot of abuse happened, whether physical, sexual, verbal, discrimination, put down, all those kind of abuse happened to the small little students, like 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, right till they finished high school probably be about 14, 15 years old. And so a lot of abuse happened. And then when we did the history of the residential school in our region, in our northern region 60 pedophiles were hired into the schools. So you can imagine the abuse and the trauma that these young kids have and then to grow up with that without having it being dealt with. So that is a result of the trauma that happened in the schools is the violence against women. Some men grew to hate women, you know, inwardly because they were violated by a woman. And when they were very young and nowhere to deal with it, know how to deal with it, so there was a lot of violence. Lots of violence against women, yeah, both sexual and physical.

Police Presence

As might be expected, participants' responses to questions about the police presence in their community differed depending on the size of the community in which they lived. When asked about the police presence in Yellowknife, focus group participants believed the RCMP were present "only for incidents, not community involvement or activities in a positive way." One woman commented: "It would be really good if they interacted more with the community, to be part of the community instead of just working in Yellowknife." Another said that it would be better, "if they were invested in the community as much as the community is invested in the community, instead of just working here as a job. I do see that they are making efforts. Indigenous Day and Canada Day they have a set up at the park. But it would be nice to see an RCMP force—not so much force but presence—join events when there are positive things happening rather than only interacting during incidences."

Focus group participants believed that the RCMP were more involved in Inuvialuit communities than in Yellowknife. As one participant remarked: "They would participate in events. The whole community was engaged." Another participant commented: "The public likes to see that interaction because it shows investment." Several Inuvialuit participants agreed with this assessment. One woman talked about how involved the police were in her home community:

In my community it's positive because they do a lot of things with the community, lots of activities they do, baseball and any kind of sport or they're just fishing or just sitting with elders. Even in the indoor programs they go in and do a lot of just playing, so a lot of the kids know the RCMP, you know, they're going to come in and play or they go there to the station, "If you're not working can you come play with us" and they just go. ... Lots of positive things the RCMP do.

Other participants talked about how the police were actively involved in local community events, "taking part in all of the, like, the family violence day and suicide prevention. And going into the school and talking with the kids, yeah. They play hockey with the kids, they play hockey with the locals, so it's good, yeah." A service provider emphasized the importance of police involvement with the community: "We get a lot of members here they get really involved in the community. And in the North, of course, if people know you, they're much more trusting of you. There's been too many strangers in and out to really invest in people."

Community Policing: Set up to fail?

Participants' assessments of the police's involvement in the local community are in accord with the community policing approach encouraged by the RCMP's G Division in the Northwest Territories. As one service provider indicated, "I would not say that it is a formal program that is centrally directed. It's more about encouraging the members to be really involved in the community, each person to get involved in the community." Another service provider concurred, saying: "All of our RCMP officers are encouraged to get involved in the community and be a part of the community. They have to live there. They bring their families. They bring, their kids are attending school. So they're a part of the communities when they're there." For one service provider, having a community policing model has special relevance for victims of gendered violence because it "encourages members to be a real part of the community, and that's where those personal relationships can develop and that trusting relationship can encourage victims to come forward and disclose and find ways to be safe." An officer explained that a community-based role was especially relevant in smaller communities, where police become a "one-stop shop":

The police obviously are the primary law enforcement agency and have the mandate and the contract to provide frontline policing to the community. But in smaller communities we're generally much more than that because there's not a lot of other services in those areas, so we're kind of the one-stop shop for people whenever they have problems, regardless of what those problems might be. So they might not directly fall under the RCMP mandate but because communities are so small and our members are fairly committed, we end up doing a wide range of things, hosting community events and helping with a hockey rink. Sometimes in the real small communities we're often the only person that some people can talk to because there's no counsellors in town or anything of that nature. So we end up taking a much more community-based role than just primarily law enforcement.

Nevertheless, while many participants commented favourably on the police's involvement in the community others were more cautious in their appraisal. As one woman remarked: "I would say yes and I would say no, because it depends on, some of them have been here, if they've been here for more than about three years some of them build good relationships and others don't because you hear of some RCMP officers who are violent themselves. I mean, the way they interact with people."

Given the concerns around intoxicated people in the downtown area of the Inuvialuit community, some participants believed the police were doing a good job. "Like, if there's drunks on the road and being a nuisance and that they take them into drunk tank. So that's good. Like, they take them off the street and put them in the drunk tank to sober up." Other participants, however, were concerned about how police interacted with residents who were intoxicated. One woman commented: "They won't, if they're intoxicated, they won't really listen to them or what, they just won't respond. They should respond. And have a little care towards the other person, whether they're white, black, Inuit, Indian, shouldn't matter at all." A service provider made a similar comment about the police treatment of intoxicated people: "And it's just because they're intoxicated, you know. I mean, they're all human, we're all humans, we have the same colour blood, you know, and feelings and whatnot." This service provider was especially concerned about how aggressive officers were when taking people to the drunk tank, and "clients coming back with bruises and sprains, you know, and uncalled for, you know." She added: "The RCMP may think they're drunk or whatnot, they belittle them. And they turn around and say, 'Oh well, they were resisting arrest.' So they have that under their belt, to cover up their ignorance."

Another participant believed that police treated some people who are intoxicated better than others. "Well, you know, they come right away and then whoever's getting picked up if they know them they have no problem with, but if they don't really know the other people they just, like, try to act rough with them, like, rough them up a little bit, like, when they try to pick them up when they refuse a little bit." This woman believed that newer RCMP officers were especially inclined to be more aggressive: "when they recruit new ones it's kind of a hassle.... just the way they act towards us sometimes or towards them when they pick up people.... More aggressive."

These comments by participants point to some fundamental problems with implementing the community policing approach that is encouraged by the RCMP—one of which is the policy relating to the duration of officer postings. One officer commented on the almost complete turnover of officers in his detachment within a short period of time: “within the last, I’d say half a year” five officers left the community, “and then I got a whole new fresh crew, five new fresh faces.” Another service provider noted that in the seven years he has lived in his community, “we’ve had at least maybe four different detachment commanders here.” As a result, officers are only in the community “two to three years, maybe four at the most” and many are new recruits “right out of depot [who] will come and do their first, anywhere from six months to two years here.” As one woman said, “there’s always different cops coming in. Like, they stay for a while and then they leave and then they have different cops.” Another woman added: “Some of them are a little distant for quite a length of time when they’re just new. Some of them it takes them a while to get used to living in a community because they come from, like, mostly cities.”

Their constant rotation poses a significant challenge for officers. As one officer noted, “You have to prove yourself ... every time you come to a new community. Doesn’t matter where you came from or how many years you got, you have to prove yourself to these people.” From the community’s standpoint, however, it means that “You get young members who don’t know about our community or about the types of problems we deal with or the unique history of this area.” To this extent, the constant rotation of officers means that efforts to engage in community policing are essentially set up to fail. Given the time it takes to establish relationships with the community—to become “a real part of the community”—officers would only have just begun to forge those relationships as their posting was coming to an end. As one service provider explained: “So after two years, they’re well-established, everyone, you know, the community members have accepted them, and then it’s time for them to go. And then they got new RCMP coming in, and so they have to build that relationship again.”

One service provider pointed to the “intentionality that goes into the way they staff these small communities.” While officers are encouraged to engage in a community policing approach, developing relationships with community members begins to run counter to the police’s law enforcement role: “It gets tougher and tougher for them to do their job impartially and act and sort of respond as per the textbook because their entanglements of person interaction get more and more complicated. And so in a way that [constant rotation] helps them keep it clean, but it also limits their ability to really integrate.”

Adding to this temporal limit to the police-community relation is a spatial division relating to where police officers and their families live. As a service provider noted, “They’re in that section of the town. Nobody goes there. Just them, you know what I mean. So, well, divided.” Another service provider explained that historically, the community was a “segregation town.”

The white people lived up here and the Native people lived down here. So the west end was the Native people and the east end was the white people. They got all the nice furniture, all the food that they wanted, they didn’t have to pay rent, nothing. They lived with running water. People doted to them. But in our west end we had to live in a one-bedroom shack for about 12 or us. With honey buckets that we had to go and spill out and water to get, we had to get water by hand. And so that was always our, that’s the history of our town.

Another participant commented on the implications of this spatial division, saying that, “At one point it was just like they had their own little groups, RCMP, nursing, they all stayed within their group, they didn’t associate with the community members. So right there you’ve got the community members already mistrusting them because they’re not associating, not getting to know us because, you know, we have a different culture.

Complicating the matter further, concerns were expressed that new recruits are not adequately prepared to take on their role. One officer noted that: “I’m telling staffing, ‘Listen, you can’t keep sending us guys that are not trained.’ If you’re coming North, that’s like, it should be like a specialized section within itself. You should come highly trained, highly ready to go when you hit the ground because here it’s steady.”

The police-community divide that is prompted by the continual rotation of officers, the perception that officers live separate and apart from the community, and the inexperience of new recruits leads to charges that police officers are racist in their dealings with the Inuit community.

Racism or Cultural Misunderstanding?

Several participants believed that some police officers were racist in their treatment of Inuit. As one woman commented: “You get some that are really against Aboriginal people. And they’ve been overheard, like, putting down our people and stuff. So it gets to the point where you can’t trust them, you know, if you run into people with that kind of attitude.” A service provider also believed that racism is at work in the police response. “I’ve called many times for intoxicated patrons, aggressive behaviour, just about anything. I as a, I hate to put it this way, I as a dark-skinned person with black hair ... they can take more than an hour to come to help with the public.” Yet, “when my manager calls the RCMP they’re here within five minutes.... He’s white too.”

Another woman commented on the issue of racism by police: “I’m not saying all but some are racist and they’ll look at you only one way and not, like, they’ll look at you other than being a human being, a person like anybody else.” This woman believed that the root of the racism was the police’s lack of understanding of Inuit: “They do not know us or our culture or how we were brought up.... It’s kind of hard to try explain because with them they only see it one way and they don’t see how we are, how we deal with our own issues as families, as Aboriginal people. We understand each other because we’ve been doing that for all our life. But for them, they don’t really understand.”

A service provider also spoke to this issue. In her view, the divide between the police and the community was not due to racism but to cultural misunderstandings:

I’m sure there’s some true racism. Going to get racists everywhere, right. But I think more of it would be about cultural misunderstandings. I don’t think it would be deliberate racism... They just might not understand how something is done. I think that would be more it, right. And we often think if somebody doesn’t understand us, they don’t like us, right. Well, that’s not the case at all, they just truly don’t understand you and you don’t understand them.... So I think we get all these cultural misunderstandings—and on both sides. ‘Cause I often see the RCMP, I hear them saying, “Everybody’s so racist against us because we’re white.” I think, “No, it’s ‘cause they don’t understand you.”

Another service provider agreed that misunderstanding between the police and the community was a significant source of the divide that existed:

They don't understand where we come from. You have to understand, like, you probably know about residential school and the trauma, you know, just saying. That's what they need to understand is where are these people coming from? Like, you know, what happened to them? Why are they so angry? Why are they, you know, lashing out to authority? They have to understand that. That's what's needed.

A service provider offered an example of the police's lack of understanding or knowledge about Inuit history:

I had a [RCMP] member a few years ago say to me, "Why don't they get over it? The schools closed a hundred years ago." I said, "No they didn't, they closed in '95 here." And he was shocked, he thought we were talking about ancient history that happened to great-grandparents. I said, "You won't find anybody here over 50 who didn't go to residential school." And I started naming some of the people. He was shocked. He just, he didn't know it.

This same service provider also believed that the police are not informed about the impact of residential schools:

That's something the police aren't taught or if they are it's like a 10 minute lesson. And it really needs to be a whole day with some of the elders and maybe some of the service providers explaining it to them and explaining the emotional and psychological impacts and the disconnection children then have from parents and families and culture. And even their own self. You take any child in the world and rip them away from everything they know and you're going to have problems.

Connected to this lack of understanding about the colonial trauma that Inuit people have encountered, a service provider was concerned that RCMP officers have little training on how to work cross-culturally, especially with victims of gendered violence.

I know the vast majority of RCMP have very little interviewing experience. They're taught to interrogate, which of course is totally different. So when they fall into that method with an abuse victim, you're just abusing somebody again. But to actually draw out information is a whole skillset and to do that across cultural ways another skillset. And what we see is that lack of understanding and that lack of skill. And, of course, if they do develop it, we're going to lose them in a few years anyhow.

Another service provider indicated that a workshop on trauma-informed investigative practices had recently been held for RCMP officers. "We were all sort of surprised they didn't have that.... I was just speaking informally to a couple officers and they realized that perhaps they were questioning or maybe the way they were speaking with victims was not the most appropriate."

This lack of understanding shows up in other ways, one of which is “the way people tell you something.” As one example, a service provider talked about how the word “bothering” is used. She recalled a time when a young Inuk woman told her that a man had been “bothering” her. As she noted, “in my way of viewing the world at that time it meant you’re just kind of bugging me, like, maybe you’re teasing somebody and I don’t like it.” But when the service provider asked for clarification, the young woman revealed that “he was actually raping her.” This issue emerged during the one of the interviews in this study. In recounting what had happened to her when she was younger, one woman said that, “a couple of my brothers were bothering us, a couple of us girls.” When the interviewer asked what she meant by “bothering,” the woman replied: “having sex with us when we were like 10 and 11 years old.” As the service provider noted, “bothering here means sexual assault. But if you’re a social worker, RCMP, or whoever and you’ve just arrived here, that means nothing, right. You’d never pick up on it.” She put the issue in its historical context: “If you look back at, you know, even residential school you never ever told, right. And you never told on the offender and if you did there was horrible consequences. So it’s always this hinting around the edges.”

The gap between the police and the community readily engenders a lack of trust of police on the part of community members. As one service provider put it: “Where are we going to go for help? Who else can we turn to, you know, if the RCMP is not to be trusted, if their members are not to be trusted. Where else?”

Calling on the Police for Help

Another source of the divide between the police and the community involves police protocols when dealing with citizen reports. According to participants, the contact with the RCMP in previous years was more straightforward. As one participant indicated, “A long time ago we used to be able to phone the RCMP” and they would be there right away, “without asking questions.” But “today there are certain rules.” She went on to elaborate:

Like, if I call the RCMP and I witnessed somebody being beat up, a man beating up his wife, whatever, or beating up his child, whatever, right on the spot they’re going to ask me all kinds of questions, your name, your – [Personal questions?]. Yeah, personal, they’re going to ask you personal questions before you get to the issue. By the time you get to the issue that person is already, whoever beat up is already gone and running and we don’t know where they’re gone, you know. So it’s that period of time between the time you saw it and the time you, you know, that’s ... the most critical.

It would appear that a key source of the community’s frustration is the police dispatch system. As a service provider explained:

Basically, after working hours here because we only have one or two members on and they can’t be taking all the calls and being out. They actually, when you dial the RCMP here you do get Yellowknife dispatch, but you might not know that, that’s part of the problem.... So most people when they get somebody, you know, “This is Fred, this is Fred, come right away.” “Well, Fred where are you?” “At my house.” “Where’s your house Fred?” “By the greenhouse, right.” “No, no Fred, like what’s your name? What’s your first and last name? What’s your date of birth? What town are you in?” That’s where people get frustrated locally.

One participant believed that the dispatch system was especially troubling for women in abusive relationships. The women need to relay information to the dispatcher in Yellowknife, who then passes it along to the RCMP in the community detachment. “So they call back and then you have to tell them the whole story again. And it becomes frustrating, you know. It’s frustrating for the woman who’s trying to flee, because they’ve already told their story, their facts once. Why should they tell it again? So it’s the response time a lot of times, yeah.”

Several participants shared their experiences with calling the police for assistance in dealing with an abusive partner.

Responding when Domestic Violence Occurs

One Inuvialuit woman told about the abuse she had encountered from her partner. “I got beat up a lot... It happened every time he drank. I was never, I don’t think I was ever safe when he was drinking ‘cause I always knew something was going to happen. As soon as he come home drunk, I knew there was something bound to happen, yeah.” When her partner would get violent, she “used to run away a lot without shoes, sometime without a jacket. And I’d make it all the way down to the other end [of town], middle of winter” to where her family lived.

The violence was reported to the police “many times.” The first few times she called on the police, they removed her and the children from the home. “Oh my goodness. We, like, I used to have to go out with my own children. Like, they wouldn’t let me stay home with my children. They’d let me go out and let my spouse stay home. And it was terrible. I said, ‘Why can’t you take him and leave us home?’ But they’d take us instead of the abuser.” The police would take her to the women’s shelter. “And that was so uncomfortable, like totally uncomfortable. It’s, like, it wasn’t our home. Like, we had to like walk around on eggshells, like, who else was there. And I didn’t really want nobody to know we were there. But I had no choice, my kids were small, so yeah.” After “so many times of them doing that,” the police eventually removed her partner from the home. However, her partner would soon return, “bothering, kicking at the door, banging, yelling. And then we phone and phone. They said, ‘Oh you guys are,’ they try to say, ‘You’re just phoning to scare him off.’ I said, ‘Goodness sakes,’ I said, ‘I got like, I had four children at home.’ I said, ‘How the heck am I supposed to be joking about stuff like that?’”

Her partner, however, did end up being charged “numerous times.” “The last time he beat me up it was so bad. I was cut up in the head and black and blue all over, yeah. He always made sure he’d go for the face when he used to beat me up so I’d, he’d never stop me from going out, though, yeah.” On that occasion, her partner ended up serving a 16 month jail sentence.

The couple have since reconciled, largely because her partner has changed “big time.” “It used to be when we used to drink, I used to get all the beatings when we were drunk. But now he doesn’t even, now when he gets angry with me, I just walk away or he walks away. That’s a big change there.” Looking back, the woman believed the police could have responded differently; they “could have took them out of the house or charged them sooner and, you know, came sooner or before anything happened, anything worse happened.”

Another Inuvialuit woman had experienced violence from an intimate partner as recently as two years ago. “It was emotional, physical, it got physical towards the end.” The man was apprehended by police. “After they took my statement, they said they’d keep in touch with me after they acted on it.” The police returned later and informed her about the conditions that had been imposed on her partner, “which was to stay away from me and not to try to get in touch with me and not try to talk to me at all.” However, the man did not abide by those conditions, to the point where “he even showed up here [the women’s shelter] at the door.” She called the RCMP “each and every time” but “nothing was done about it.”

And it really upset me because I had dealt with it with different RCMP each time. ... The one RCMP told me that they want to catch him on an actual breach where he does something. I said, “That is breach.” And they said they want to catch him on something more. I said, “Well, what is it going to take? For him to kill me?” And they just said, “No.” I just got to be more cautious. ... And no, it wasn’t acted on, not to my knowledge, the way it should have been.

In addition to the No Contact Order and a condition to abstain from alcohol, her partner received a sentence of 90 days in jail, to be served on weekends. The woman said that she “had a really good worker through Victim Services. She really helped me. She really got the RCMP on their toes about how serious the situation was.” When her partner failed to show up for his weekend sentence, the Victim Services worker “actually had to phone Yellowknife, the head sergeant or head whatever in Yellowknife, for something to get done. ... And that was the only reason he was picked up at the time because of my worker through Victim Services had gone overhead from here to Yellowknife. And that’s the only time stuff did get done.”

Her partner was sent to Yellowknife to serve the rest of his sentence. On his release, he started a new relationship. “So as long as he’s with her he doesn’t even acknowledge me, which is what I want. But there are times I’ll see him on the road and if he’s intoxicated, he would, he does try talk to me and I just ignore him.” While the woman has managed to make a break from the relationship, she was not happy with the police response: “They could have acted on it. They could have confronted him. And they could have done something to make sure that his, what they had given him, make sure he acted on it or took more initiative to go in and talk to him and make sure he, like, remind him again and again if they have to about his conditions. But no, they didn’t.”

The woman experienced another incident of intimate partner violence a year ago. The police were again called, but given her previous experience the woman did not want to proceed with charges: “And I just said, ‘No.’ I’d rather just bury it than have to go through it in court and dealing with the RCMP because of the incidents I wasn’t getting any help or anything. So why should I go through all that?”

A third Inuvialuit woman experienced physical violence from her partner. The woman explained that:

He’s not, like, we’re not from the same culture yeah. He’s like a white person. And when we started going out, we didn’t really know each other. But we ended up together and he, I guess he, his background was like rough. Like, his parents, I think his parents were, you know, they were always arguing and they weren’t getting along so it affected my common-in-law at that time. And ‘cause I heard he was in the military, so that might have affected how he, his wellbeing.

The couple would “get into fights. Like, he’s beaten me up in our, early in our relationship before we had kids.” On one occasion, the two were having an argument. She ran into the bathroom and closed the door. “But at that time he was like stronger than me, so he pushed his way into the bathroom. And he had a knife and I was trying to run, like get, run out of the bathroom but he got a hold of me in the bathroom. And he had my arms tied with his one arm and he had the other, his other hand he had a knife in it and he held it to my throat.” The woman managed to avoid serious injury and waited until her partner fell asleep before contacting police. “Cause he said if I went out or told anyone the next time for sure he would kill me.... I was that scared.... When he fell asleep, I took off out of the house and went straight to the cops and I told them.” The police investigated and, finding the knife, charged the man. “When he was at the station he confessed or he admitted, yeah.” He ended up spending three months in jail for the assault.

The violence in the relationship continued. But when the police were called, “he would talk his way out of it. Like, he made it look like I was the crazy person or exaggerated.” The police “would just like ask what happened and then, you know, tell us, you know, what we could do. And then they would go.” The police would tell her that, “it was not a domestic violence, like, there’s not enough evidence or, you know, anything to take one person out of the house or lay charges.” On one of those occasions, however, the woman was the one to get arrested. The two had gotten into an argument over how he was disciplining her daughter. “He knows how to push my buttons... And it got me more angry. And he would open the door and close it until I got so angry that I punched the door and it made a hole.” The woman was the one to call the police. “They came over and I started telling my side and somehow I got arrested (chuckle), yeah.... They brought me to the cop station and fingerprinted me. And they held me at the station that night and the next day I had to find a place to stay. And I was not allowed at my home.”

The woman believed that police should have responded differently. “They can, instead of just advice, you know, take him. Like, we made so many calls, they should have known, they should have known like now that, it felt like they didn’t take it serious, like, take me seriously ‘cause I’m Inuk. Either that or they were just tired of the many phone calls from my house.”

These three stories showcase some of the concerns expressed by Inuvialuit women when they have called on the police to respond when domestic violence occurs: concerns about police not responding in a timely manner; concerns about having to be removed from the home instead of the abuser; concerns about ensuring that court-imposed conditions are being properly monitored and acted upon; and concerns that Inuit women are not being taken seriously when they express fears for their safety. An RCMP officer, however, offered a different standpoint on the role of police in responding to domestic violence.

The “Game within the Game”

The officer was well-aware of the severity of the gendered violence that occurs in the region, saying that when the men “go violent, they go violent. They’re heavy handed. It’s not just a shove and pull a little bit of hair, man. It’s like a beat down.” He also expressed his dedication to carrying out his role as a police officer: “There’s nothing that we wouldn’t do for them ... like, there’s nothing. We don’t turn nobody away here. No call is too small. That’s my motto.” But his frustration was also palpable during the interview. That frustration was directed at the women who were being victimized by violence.

According to the officer, too many women will push to have charges laid as a way to get back at their partners, but then fail to follow through with the court process—and then resume the relationship with their abuser. As he commented: “The women all pull out at the last second in court, 90 percent of them.” This frustration is also felt by the members of his detachment.

They put a lot of hard work into the investigations, they put a lot of hard work. Crown wants everything, they want this disclosure, and this disclosure process is so, there’s a lot of rules of engagement. So and we have to follow those rules and a lot of paperwork, a lot of checkboxes, check listing all this stuff. And then you watch, it’s like growing a plant, hey, in the first stages of its life. That’s your court case, you’re nurturing it, you’re trying to get all the information all, you know, to lay the right charge, to help the victim, to speed everything up through the court process so it doesn’t get bogged down, all this stuff. And then Boom! They [the women] come by and they just clip it. Done.

The officer framed the matter in the context of a game. The criminal justice system’s response to gendered violence is the larger game, whereby police intervene and lay charges, which are then processed by the courts. This is a game that police “don’t like losing.” They’re “passionate” about what they do. “So every investigation we take that’s, we don’t want to lose because if somebody’s coming to us for help we’re going to do our best to help people.”

According to the officer, however, there is also a “game within the game” that women who experience gendered violence are playing—a “vindictive” game in which the police are one of the pawns. He clarified: “I say the word ‘vindictive’ because it’s like, it’s about ‘How do I get back at you for hurting me?’” He explained further:

So this is how it breaks down. It’s not in all cases but it’s here, though. It’s in this community, it’s almost in every community that I’ve worked in in the North here.... So you have a domestic violence call, man or woman, whoever the instigator is, most the times it’s, 99 percent of the time it’s the man being the instigator and the woman’s the victim. So we’ll attend that call, we’ll go through that process of, and usually most time the guys are gone, 50 percent of the time they’re still there. We’ll make the arrest, we’ll issue the court dates, the no contact clauses, all this stuff, Victim Services, put this all in place. Then the vindictiveness starts. Now it’s her turn to get back at him. Like, twisting the screws on the conditions, all this stuff, till the moment that he settles his matters in court or if he’s going to be released, then it’s like, “Okay, now you can send him home now.” But he just half-killed you, but now you can send him home now?

While this “game within the game” is not being played in “all the cases,” the officer remarked that “those are the ones that make me upset because I know that life’s not going to get better in that house. And then one day we’re going to find her dead or badly injured.”

According to the officer, a “true victim” would be a woman who ends the relationship:

A true victim would be at the door here, “No I want him out. That’s it. I’ve had enough. I can’t do this anymore.” You know, when there’s a real scenario of true violence, of true victimization, of a woman being abused that just wants out and doesn’t ever want to put up with that anymore. But those cases are getting, for every five or six that come in, maybe one of them is like that. But the rest is just a vindictive game.

His desire is for “every woman to come to court to testify to show that you’re not going to tolerate that. I have zero tolerance for domestic violence. I have more zero tolerance for that game.” He takes the matter personally: “I’m serious, man, every time a domestic violence charge, violence against women, walks out of the court, stay of proceedings, are withdrawn, it hurts. It hurts bad. I don’t like losing those.”

The officer, however, was not optimistic that the men who engage in gendered violence will change. His solution was a dramatic one: “If I could take 30 of these guys in the community and take them out for a boat ride with cement boots, that’s what I would do. Because in their lifetime they’re not going to get the help to change. So if they go from relationship to the next relationship ... It’s not a trail of broken tears, it’s a trail of broken women, because they’re not fixing the problem so they’re taking that abuse from one relationship to the next.” He was also not optimistic that the sources of change lie within the community. Rather, the only way that women can truly be safe from the violence is to leave their community and start a new life. “Because if a true victim would just say, ‘No I want out. I want to start a new life because I can’t put up with the hurt, the pain, the abuse and the suffering,’ to me that’s like a true victim that wants to get out and make a fresh start and get on with life.” But at the same time, the officer recognized that the prospects for doing so are slim.

If you’re a victim you just want out, you want a safe place, you know, some place where you’re not going to be abused or you’re not going to be mentally abused or spoken at like that, you want to get your kids away from that, absolutely. But this, because there’s no, where are they going to go? Where are they going to go? Who’s going to offer them a way out? Who’s going to offer them a better life outside of here?

In these terms, perhaps Inuit women who are caught in the trap of a violent relationship also know that their options are limited, which might help to explain why some women might engage in the “game within the game.”

Other participants were aware of the limited resources available to Inuit women who encounter gendered violence. One service provider noted that only two of the six Inuvialuit communities have family violence shelters. In the four communities with no shelter, “there may be times when a woman stays overnight, say at the health centre or things like that, but there are no designated safe houses.” Given the small population in these communities, “establishing a family violence shelter is just, is a really significant thing, not just in terms of the infrastructure in a community where there’s already not enough housing, but in terms of the staffing levels that are required.” A police officer commented:

We respond initially and we try to support survivors and victims, but oftentimes those survivors and victims have no way out of their current predicament because it's a small community, they have nowhere else they can stay, there's no shelters available, people often know everybody's business so they'll get shamed into even calling the police in the first place or proceeding with prosecution. So it's very difficult to insulate or protect survivors and victims from that type of thing in small communities. So, you know, I think the, because the victims and survivors face so many challenges themselves, that that's a police challenge too, to try to help these people.

What Needs to be Done?

As one service provider remarked, police are very much “at the back end” in the effort to respond to gendered violence. “They really are. It's them and then court and then whatever happens with the offender. They're not at the front.... They're really dealing with the end product of violence. The violence has already happened.” Nevertheless, participants offered suggestions about what could be done to improve policing in the Inuvialuit region.

Several participants drew attention to what they saw as slow response times by police. “I think they're a little bit slow to get to the spot where somebody's hurt or something. Like, for this tiny community I would think it would be faster, you know, their response to calls and whatever.” Another participant said that the police needed to “come quicker instead of waiting for the last minute” when domestic violence breaks out. She didn't like that the police “had to wait till we're just about beat up to death or barely moving before they come.”

Participants also emphasized the need to close the divide that exists between the police and the community. Key to closing that divide is that police officers need to be better informed about the communities they serve. As one focus group participant said, “RCMP need to know the community and the people they're protecting. That's the only way people will feel safe.” An Inuvialuit participant noted that police need to be more knowledgeable about the colonial history and the challenges that Inuit have encountered as a result:

What I'm saying is they should be more involved with, like, send them to a place first where they get to know different Aboriginal people and get to know them first for our side, where what we used to do like a hundred years ago. And get to know a little bit about our culture and just how we do things. And not just throw them in like, “Here, you deal with them” sort of thing. And we're not like a litter of whatever. But for them to kind of get to know us first before trying to come to work with us or help us. And they should be more sensitive about what we go through. For us, it's hard because this is a change, a big, big change from what we're used to and how we were brought up and what we see and do.

In addition to learning about Inuit history, police officers could make more of an effort to learn the local dialect. As one participant suggested: “If they could take time to go and join in the language classes, just to learn the basic words like ‘hello’ and ‘how are you’ and ‘thank you,’ you know, just the basics for the time being until they’re comfortable in saying them. It would be really nice for them, that way they can understand some of the people they’re talking to.” This same participant also suggested that the RCMP could do more to offer interpreters and to post signs in Inuvialuktun. “The majority of people in my home town don’t always understand the writing, like, the length of words and what they mean. And they always need someone there to interpret for them or help them understand.”

As well, police training needs to include trauma-informed approaches. As one officer acknowledged: “If we start to really train ourselves on trauma-informed approaches, I think that will also help improve relationships with society’s vulnerable people when police have a better understanding of how trauma has affected some of these types of people.”

Closing the divide also involves educating the community as to the kind of information police require when they are called, especially through the dispatch system. As one service provider described it: “I think part of that is the education around how do you call the police and what do they need, what do they need to come and help you and keep you safe. And also, people don’t understand that even while the person’s talking to you on the phone, they really are dispatching somebody, but because you don’t hear them saying it, you know, they’re typing it, whatever, they just assume nothing’s happening.”

Given that police are located “at the back end” of the effort to respond to gendered violence, participants were of the view that more work needs to be done to integrate the services being offered. An officer was of the view that:

We need much more than just a police response. We are one part of it, we generally can provide immediate safety to people, we can try to hold suspects accountable, but ultimately, I think there needs to be a, sort of a multi-facet, multidisciplinary approach to gender-based violence. And oftentimes the law enforcement’s not sometimes the best way to deal with this type of thing long-term. So we are one small part of the cog, but we need, you know, there’s much more things that can be done and that could assist survivors and victims.

To support and assist survivors of gendered violence, one participant suggested that police need to work more closely with Victim Services:

When there’s complaints of violence they should automatically contact Victim Services and say, “We have a victim here, a victim of violence, can you help that person,” instead of telling that person, “Phone Victim Services.” Because that person, they’re already stressed out enough from all this violence that happened to them, they’re not going to be strong enough to phone Victim Services.... They’re not going to call ‘cause they’re going to be scared. Even though the services are there the RCMP and them have to work together with that client instead of sending that person home with a piece of paper and say, “Gee, I got to phone.” And they’re not going to understand, by then their adrenaline is going to be so high, they’re not going to, you know, they’re going to say, “Well I’m too scared because my so-and-so is going to find out and going to get more violent and whatever.” So there’s got to be a collaboration or better resources put together to avoid situations like that. Because it is real, it does happen.

A service provider reinforced this viewpoint by suggesting that the various social service agencies and police need to work more closely together. In part, that would involve service providers connecting with the RCMP “and let them know what they’re doing and, you know, here’s what we do here and what you do there.” It could also involve social workers and police working in tandem when gendered violence occurs. “They’re not opposing positions, social worker and RCMP, that you work together. You might have different paths to the same goal of keeping everybody safe.” From the police perspective, forming partnerships involves “making sure you reach out to know what services are available in your community. Oftentimes they’re not right there, but if you make some phone calls, there’s support services in other neighbouring communities or from Yellowknife that might be able to assist you. So forming those partnerships early is something definitely we must do. And that truly depends on the type of police officer you have in the community.”

In addition, further steps could be taken to ensure women’s safety. As a service provider suggested: “bring the services directly to them instead of them having to go out of the community or out of their place of safety ... that would be a big, big help. I think they would be able to work with the women better, yeah. They’d feel more safe.”

Participants also noted that more resources are required in the community for women who are fleeing violence. As one woman noted:

So right now our transition house, we only have eight beds to serve the whole region. There needs to be more resources out there for women who are fleeing violence. You know, like, it’s bad enough they have to come here, do we want to send them further away from home? No. Do we want them to go through more policies and procedures? No. They’ve already, they’re already fleeing. The problem is here. If we don’t have enough room in transition house then they put them at transient, like, they try to work with the hospital, and if there’s no room there they put them in hotel. Now is that good? You know, there’s no protection at the hotel there other than the hotel clerk.... So there needs to be more resources. Like, they need to work on getting more beds available for women fleeing violence.

In addition to providing more shelter space, participants saw the need for a drop-in centre in the community, “a place for women to come in and be comfortable to share or know what’s going on in the community. If we don’t have that common place for them to come where are we going to meet them?” Such a venue would offer “a place where women can gather” and enable them to connect with the services available in the community, including the police.

Primarily, participants saw the need for Inuvialuit communities to take ownership of their own affairs. As one participant noted: “Once a community comes together to work together, you know, they’ll be able to, the community members, work alongside with the agencies to make our community safer ... because our community members will let them know what our problems are in the community.” A service provider believed that this process was underway: “We’re taking our power back as Aboriginal people. And if we take that power back then we’re more able to freely assist the service providers that come into our town. Yeah, I believe that.”

Healing and Resilience

One woman in her sixties shared parts of her life story with us, providing an important teaching on how the trauma created by gendered violence can be so all-encompassing in Inuit women's lives—and their resilience and strength in combatting its harmful effects.

The woman told of growing up in a two bedroom house with her parents and 12 siblings. "And there was a lot of drinking with my parents and a lot of fighting and we saw a lot of my dad beating up my mom. And lots of my mom running away and my dad being there alone with us." In addition to witnessing a lot of physical violence, the girls in the family were subjected to sexual violence from their brothers. When the girls told their mother what was happening, "she got mad at us instead of believing us that it happened. And so she caught my brother playing with my younger sister at one time and she got mad at my sister, and my sister said, 'Well, he told me that I was his girlfriend.' So that was his excuse. But my mom didn't do anything with it."

In addition to experiencing sexual assaults in her home, the woman had also encountered gendered violence out in the community. When she was 11 or 12 years old she was "walking down by the valley" when a man "brought me to this empty house and he raped me in there." The woman said that she never reported the sexual assaults to police "because I didn't think that anybody would believe me at the time." As well, she said, "I always heard my dad or mom say, 'Shut up. Don't talk. Keep quiet.' So I was trained that way to be quiet, like, you know, not to voice my opinion."

When she turned 13, "after a few beatings from my dad," she ran away from home and stayed with her auntie and uncle; they "were drinking so I drank with them." At the age of 14 she met her partner. The two moved "down in the Happy Valley, they used to call it, down there by the tents." There they "saw lots of violence ... people beating up people and, like, it was always scary."

The woman and her partner had 10 children together. "With the five older ones, I can't remember raising them, because I was always in fear. I was always in fear from my husband and from people outside of my house." Her main concern was "to keep my children safe, my five older children. So always had them first before anything else." But despite her efforts, two of her children were sexually assaulted, one by a young relative and the other by a church minister. The police were involved in both cases, and the perpetrators were convicted and incarcerated.

The woman also encountered violence from her partner, especially when alcohol was involved. "There's a lot of times when we were drinking that I would be abused. My whole face would be like, you can see on my face, I would be like, don't remember going to hospital and, you know, because of things that he was doing." While she received medical attention for her injuries, she said that, "I didn't really say things to the police because I was too scared." Even after the couple managed to quit drinking, the abuse continued. On one occasion, her husband "said he's going to beat me up when we go home." That time, she made the decision to call the RCMP. Her husband was charged and the court ordered anger management counselling. While her husband resisted going for counselling, he was assigned to a counsellor that he liked and trusted. She said that her husband later disclosed "that his anger was toward residential school where he got raped there."

The couple continued to get counselling to help with their relationship. "So we kind of like figured out life because we had no life skills when we were younger. We only knew violence." She explained further:

I remember going into the hospital and for stitches or something and the social worker came to get my children and she said, "You know that what's happening to you is wrong." And I couldn't understand her because I didn't know that spousal assault or sexual abuse or incest or whatever, I didn't know it was wrong at the time.

But the trauma from the abuse she had encountered continued to have an impact on the woman's life. Once her youngest child started school and she had more time on her own, she began experiencing flashbacks. "I started getting jittery and I started seeing things and I started seeing my dad touching me in places and my brother on top of me.... Then I started having these feelings and I could see myself, like, being hung by my neck. Because I used to try to kill myself when I used to drink. And I don't remember but I used to end up in hospital, trying to commit suicide.... All that started coming back to me."

The woman sought help and ended up in an intensive therapy program in Ontario, where "they teach you to live in the present. So all the things that happened before, they taught me, like, to look at something else. And I did all these good things that keep me busy in a good way." During her time spent in therapy, the woman experienced more flashbacks: "I saw myself under the bunkbed, in the bottom with boxes in front of me. But somebody would always grab my hair and pull me out. And that was what's happening with me and my sisters." She spoke about experiencing her fears during the program:

I was afraid to go to the bathroom because there was somebody under the bed. It would be my dad or my brothers or the other person that raped me when I was younger. They would be under there... And then I went downstairs and I told them that there's somebody under my bed. And they went to check. There was nobody. But because I was always hiding under the bed when I was younger, to hide from people, that was one of my fears under there.

One of the key memories that kept her positive was the she had time spent "on the land with our elders," especially her grandmother:

And I remember her even through the dark times in the middle, I remember going to her house and sitting there in a log house and she would make me tea in her little container like this. Even though we had nothing to eat, she would make me a little pot of oats, just enough for me to eat. And she would bring me to church, the Anglican church where there was just only our mother tongue, our Inuvialuktun language, so we would sing in our Inuvialuktun language. And then she would take me when she'd go to places, she would bring me with her. And that was my safe place. And when I started healing, I kept going back to my grandmother and how she treated me and feeling safe with her. And that was my safe place to go in the beginning. So I'm so thankful to our elders now and the way she treated me.

When she returned home after completing the therapy program things were much improved. “Because I was strong enough to now take care of myself.” She was also in a better position to support her children: “If they had concerns they would let me know, and that’s why the two children came up and had these two traumas that they went through that we worked together. I went with them to their, wherever they wanted help I went with them.” Her partner was also in a better position to support the children. “He used to be quite mean to the boys and, like, he used to get beat up as a young boy from his father. So he beat up his boys. And now he takes them for rides and they, like, talk together. He asked for forgiveness and now, like, it’s a healthy relationship now.”

The woman has also become a cultural support worker in the community, assisting other people in dealing with their lived experiences of trauma. “I listen to people if they have any concerns or if they just need someone to talk to. I go to their houses or I listen to them on the phone. That’s what I do.” She also participates in workshops on sexual abuse and family violence. “They call me to be an elder support for them ... because sometimes, you know, like, not to be mean but they have like counsellors from Vancouver and Ontario that don’t know the culture and they don’t know how our culture is with sharing information. So I would be there if they didn’t want to share with them, then they would share with me, yeah.” She believes that “healing on the land is different than the programs that are provided with out-of-town counsellors.”

With our participants we do a lot of, sometimes hunting and trapping and making dry meat and doing dry fish and that kind of stuff that take your mind away. And then after we play games with them, like crib, and different things to make them comfortable in their space. And we talk about how our tradition was before we went to residential school, where it was safe, safety all the time. And then going into residential school where it was lots of trauma. So right now I feel like we’re trying to go back to our safe place, on the land, when we do programs. Like, where they feel safe and to live in the present. Like, no more hurting is going to happen anymore. And to learn how to cope with so much anger.

The woman recognizes that, “lots of us in our community have lots of bad experiences.” But with support and healing, “we all come out of it stronger in the end.” Her own healing experience has taught her that. “Like, with the stuff that I went through, it’s like somebody else’s story now, but it’s mine. But I put it in the past where I’m living today with a better future with my children and my grandchildren and with [my husband]. It’s so different than before. It’s like a different story.”

Policing in Nunavut

Nunavut has the highest rate of domestic homicide in the country, and by a wide margin. A study of the 662 domestic homicides that occurred between 2010 and 2018 in Canada showed that Nunavut had a rate of 36.85, compared to 1.58 in Ontario and 1.62 in British Columbia.²⁰⁹ The reality of domestic violence in Nunavut came into bold relief when interviews for this project were being conducted. Community members were grieving the loss of yet another young Inuk woman just two weeks earlier. She was twenty-four years old and the mother of three daughters and two adopted children. Her ex-common-law partner had been charged with second-degree murder, along with several other offences related to breaching court orders.

A service provider we spoke to believed that the majority of the gendered violence that occurs in the community is between intimate partners. She elaborated on some of the dynamics involved in these relationships:

Unfortunately, a lot of the time it appears to have alcohol included in the violence, but not always. I hear a lot of stories around control, stories around jealousy, so there's a, there seems to be a common thread of insecurity in the couple-ship, which seems very common. Accusations that if somebody is happy that they must be having sex with somebody else and then a fight breaks out and then turns to violence. So, yeah, a lot of jealousy involved in the violent acts, accusations that the woman's doing something that she's not doing, that type of thing.

An elder shared her understanding of the violence that occurs between intimate partners. She believes that it "has always been an issue, kind of. And it's always going to be an issue. I mean, we can kind of slow it down or help people. I think nowadays it seems to be more because people can talk now. Otherwise, long time ago, few years back, it was kinda silent taboo kind of thing." The elder maintained that violence is especially prevalent in newer relationships among the young people, "those ones that just got together, they always end up doing that. Like, disagreeing or arguing on things, not being nice to each other when they get together. So there's that. And also, alcohol, drugs, that as well is a part of it. When that is present, when that is in the picture, there is bound to be that type of [violent] behaviour that comes along with it."

The elder pointed to differences in the communication styles of women and men as a source of the problem of intimate partner violence:

We are so verbal and men, most men, are not like that. Sometimes, for us, we get mad quicker. Men would be so silent for a long time. Then, when they get frustrated, they hit. I am not saying it is the woman's fault. It's just that it's always been like that. That us as women, we talk a lot and we go tell people off and we go "Awwwww!" Men, on the other hand, they don't say anything for long periods of time. And the men, they are not great talkers. For those that do not talk very much, that's the only way they know is "STOP THIS!" or something like that. That is why they do this. For that reason, some of them, women, do not always understand them. Lots of women don't understand this. They try to get away with doing all of that. And then finally they are hit or pushed or something. And then they think, "Awww he's abusing me. He's hitting me and all that." Because we tend to blame the other person only all the time. That element is not always comfortable to hear. But that's how I've been understanding this a lot.

The elder believes that “there is always going to be problems present. It is not always going to be all good things in our lives. These trying times are always going to be present in our lives.” But the problem of violence is also tied to how “Inuit’s traditional ways ... are not used anymore.” In the past, “couples that just got together that start arguing and not getting along” would seek the counsel of an elder. “Nowadays they don’t do that anymore.... They are not told how to do things better. That is how their life breaks down.”

The elder saw this issue as tied to the individualism that has accompanied the colonial encounter with *qallunaat*, where young people “are now stating that, ‘It is my right, I can do what I want to do!’ That is what they say now.” Young Inuit are now out on their own. “They have a home in whichever place they want to have now. They can do whatever activities they want to partake in. They are off drinking and in gatherings of sorts [parties]. By participating in those types of activities, these bad results are bound to end up with those types of negative results.” According to the elder, “Back in the olden days we were not allowed to conduct our lives like this.” The “great guiding principles, what they used to tell those in trouble, they don’t have that used any more now.”

A service provider echoed the elder’s point about how traditional Inuit ways have broken down, saying: “There was little crime before all of this colonial entities’ involvement.” Other participants also believed that crime and violence have escalated over time. As one woman in her fifties said, “Yeah, it’s changing over the years, it’s not the same anymore from when I was a kid.” Another woman commented that, “Nighttime it’s like scary ‘cause there’s lots of drunks out there, you know. There’s lots of things going on here like nowadays, not like before.” A third woman indicated that while she does not have concerns for her own safety, she has the benefit of living in a safer part of town.

Where I chose to live is in a part of town where it’s most safe. Some areas are known not to be safe, so again I’m able to make those choices. I make choices to work and have a good job so that I could buy a house in an area that I’m safe. Those choices, whereas some people don’t have the choice, if they, or even, you know, people on income support are more likely to be in an area that, you know, there may be issues faced by many, yeah.

Police Presence

According to participants, the RCMP have a visible presence in their community. As one woman commented: “On a daily basis you see them every day, every single day.... When I see them, they’re just usually talking to somebody or arresting somebody, mostly intoxicated people.” Another woman remarked: “They’re like a big help and they protect us. They’re nice and, like, you know, if you’re good to them, they’re good to you.” Other participants, however, indicated that the visibility of police took a particular form: “I see them every day, driving around or looking for somebody. But I never see them getting out of their [cars], unless they have, you know, like, if there was a very drunk person out on the road or something.” Another woman said: “I don’t see them as much as I want to see them. And if I don’t see them and, you know, the people that need them most don’t see them, I think they need to be seen more. I see them in their cars more than I see them out of their cars attending to situations.” As well, a service provider commented: “I don’t see them kind of like going into places and saying, ‘Hey,’ kind of get to know the people, at least, you know, get to know the community a little bit. I don’t see that, I don’t see that going on. I just see them in their pickup trucks usually just cruising around town.”

The Police Response

Several participants expressed concerns about police response time. As one woman remarked: “If it’s about violence or something, like, they take forever to show up. And if it was like a drug bust or something they would have been there like in a heartbeat.” Another woman commented: “When it comes to calling them, they take forever to come.” Police response times were especially an issue in smaller communities. One factor is that all of the calls are diverted to the police dispatch in Iqaluit, which then relays the information to the community detachment. As one woman explained:

So that’s three minutes, if you time a call, you’re calling three minutes, it’s going to be answered in one minute, two minutes, three minutes at the most, maybe five minutes, who knows. If someone’s calling in distress and that call, the dispatch, then has to communicate back to the community, to say, “Hey, there’s a situation.” Why am I able to call my community RCMP right now, get a direct line and get service and the rest of the smaller communities can’t? So that there is an issue.

One woman told of her experience living in one of those smaller communities. Her ex-partner was “always threatening to beat me up.” On one occasion, he “said he’s going to get a bat and he was throwing rocks.” She phoned the police for help, but it took them 40 minutes to arrive. By that time, “he was gone so they wouldn’t even do anything.” Concerned for her safety—and the slow response of the police—the woman felt that her only recourse was to leave the community. “I had to get away ‘cause I couldn’t depend on the police there.”

Another woman told of her experience living in another small community. She was walking alone one night when she “got attacked from behind with a two-by-four, so ended up at the hospital. Almost died ‘cause I lost so much blood.” The hospital staff called the police, but “they were hesitant to take my statement right away, and didn’t even take it, they waited like two days and then finally took my statement.... Like, they could have went out and arrested him right away. Like, not just wait. I had to wait a week and he finally got arrested. That was ridiculous.”

A third woman told of her experience two years previously when her four-year-old daughter went missing. She phoned the RCMP for help. The police dispatcher “asked me what she was wearing and I gave them all the details.” The police then phoned her back six hours later, saying they were going to start a ground search. “Why wait that long? Like, it could have been done quicker.... I was like, okay, this is not really helping me. I’ve asked for their help, but they’re not responding quick enough, you know.” Thankfully, the woman and her spouse found the missing child on their own.

Concerns about police, however, extended beyond the issue of their response time. As one service provider stated: “Anytime I’m talking to other people about the police or anything like that, especially if they’ve grown up here, it’s not usually very positive. Most people are either scared of them or distrust them or take issues with how they go about things.”

Racialized Policing

For some participants, police treatment of Inuit is racialized. As one woman observed:

As soon as they see Inuit, it is very and immediately noticeable when their faces change to a disgusted face when they realize it is an Inuk they are dealing with and not a Caucasian. When they are dealing with Caucasians they are so very welcoming to those civilians and so nicely taken care or handled. When the police are dealing with Inuit then they see [us] as something that is not good to deal with, for example. That is what I notice when I observe what happens when the police deal with people.

A service provider also commented on the racialized assumptions that are often made about Inuit in their encounters with police, “especially when there’s been intoxicated people in the drunk tank, and one that I know of who passed away in a cell because they didn’t take her injuries seriously. And some people with disabilities maybe, when they assume they are just drunk based off of their appearance. And just that, yeah, that behaviour when they confront Inuit, you know.”

Participants raised the issue of how the colonial history of police-Inuit relations has left a legacy of tension. One service provider commented:

Because of the dog slaughter and their role before, I think there’s definitely tension between Inuit and the police because of the history and the police not being educated about the history. So when people are getting mad at them they’re not really understanding why they’re are mad at them.

Another service provider pointed to the “colonialism kind of perspective that comes out,” leading to negative interactions between police and Inuit. “Police deal with a lot of intoxicated individuals, so then they start to take out that aggression on the police. It only makes it like worse. Then, like, Inuit in cells will start to threaten the police officers, then they get more charges and, you know, it doesn’t help.”

Participants were also concerned about how the police use their authority. One woman commented: “Because they’re authority, we have no say. I wish they would treat people better, especially intoxicated ones. I’ve seen young people that, you know, in public that were just leaving the police station after they’ve been in the drunk tank or whatever. I know they, there was one young person that walked by us one morning. He didn’t walk well.” Another woman remarked: “When they’re arresting somebody it becomes a little too, they approach a bit too aggressively, you know. Like, maybe if they were more talkative, to be like more respectful, you know.” A service provider also commented on the police use of force when dealing with domestic violence situations. “When they show up, the violence, like the violence, the aggressiveness of the RCMP is quite, I’ve heard that it can be quite aggressive.”

Fear of the police is an issue that several participants raised. As one woman said, “In every Inuk home we don’t knock. When a door knocks it’s the police. I think we all have that fear.” An elder commented, “Lots of people fear them. They think that they are just going to take them away and put them away, something like that.” A service provider put the issue in its historical context: “In the past RCMP came into communities and told people what to do and it was very intimidating. And some of them, some officers, are still like that. They still have that very authoritative way of being where if you’ve had trauma in your life and someone is acting that way to you it can be very triggering.” One service provider commented on how police seem to be “untouchable”:

It's the power that they have, that they seem untouchable. Like, you can't argue with a police officer, you can't, like, disrespect a police officer. And one police officer's idea of disrespect might be completely different than another, you know. So they don't seem like normal human beings. They seem, like, above, especially in the eyes of the law and with each other. I think they're well known to protect each other even though one of them might have legitimately done something wrong. There's like that whole brotherhood feeling going on.

Another service provider noted that this separation between police and the community was geographical in nature, connected to where officers live in the community:

The police are always put on The Plateau. So when you come into Nunavut or into Iqaluit, you come into the airport, and if you're in the airplane and you look to the left you see this, up on the hill, it's called "The Plateau." So that's where they put all the RCMP. And so, you know, even geographically they're up high and they're looking down on the people. So it's kind of, there's definitely a power imbalance.

"Don't Trust the Cops"

Several women spoke about their reluctance to call on police because of negative experiences they have had in the past. As one woman indicated: "I don't deal with the police very often, even when there is, even when I witness or even when we're fleeing violence, I don't call them (participant emotional).... Within my family we've had experiences with the police that are negative. Extremely negative... Even when I witness or fleeing violence because of alcohol and drugs happening, fleeing with the kids from home, I still don't report because of our past experiences with the police."

Some of this woman's past experiences with police occurred when she was living in an urban centre down South. On one occasion, she phoned the police when a group of men were fighting near the building where she lived. The police dispatcher asked her: "Are they Natives? The guys, can you see them? Are they Natives?" The woman said that she knew there were Indigenous men involved in the altercation, but she told the dispatcher: "It's dark. I cannot tell if they're Natives or not. Maybe you can just go there and find out for yourself." This racialized response by the police left the woman feeling unsafe. "I didn't feel safe anymore. That's why I stopped calling, when they said, 'Are they Natives?'"

But this wasn't the only occasion where the woman witnessed racialized policing. Soon after the first incident, one of her neighbours, "a tiny Inuk woman ... was trying to get home one night around 10, 11." She was outside the building, calling to her children and *qallunaat* husband. Her husband phoned the police, saying that she had been drinking. "She was not really drinking, maybe she did but she was sober enough when we were looking out the window with the window open, me and my other neighbour. I didn't know she was looking out the window and I was looking out the window. Police did not see us because the lights were out." The two women witnessed what happened next:

She was right beside the building and there was a police car. She was, she's tiny, and there were like five police officers and they were, one of them was questioning her and she kept answering positively. When she answered correctly that she wanted to go home, that's her home, one of the police officers punched her on the side of her head and BANGED it against the truck and they knocked her down. Experiencing that I have very little trust because I knew the kids wanted their mother. But it was Inuk and *qallunaat* family. The *qallunaat* got treated better than just because he did not want her home that night. They were just arguing over whatever, she ended up being treated like that. Police never saw me. Police never saw my neighbour. But to this day I always think I should have filmed, because even if I tried to complain they would say, "You have no evidence."

On yet another occasion, the women witnessed the police's treatment of an Indigenous man:

They were dragging a First Nations man down the stairs. I was looking out through my apartment peephole. My door was, the stairs I could see everything from the stair going that way, stairs going down around our area and then out. I could hear a lot of noise. I was looking through the peephole. There were a group of police officers and they threw the man, he was intoxicated, First Nation. He was not really bothering, but someone called on him. And they threw him like six or seven steps down and BAMPED against the wall and knocked him down. And the next thing they were dragging him out like a piece of trash. I was witnessing this and when they were dragging him his pants went down. Scraped everything on his bum and legs. He was bleeding, but they were still being very rough with him and threw him in the car and they drove away. And to me, if that were ever to happen to me or my family, that's why I don't call.

Since moving back to Nunavut, the woman and her family have also witnessed violence in their building. "Even though we hear so much fight we don't call, we don't call anymore.... A lot of us, I think, we just don't call because we don't want to be bothered by the police. We see, we hear, we stay quiet, maybe because of past traumas, yeah." These experiences have left the woman with "very little trust" of the police.

Other women spoke about how their past experiences with police have left them feeling wary and distrustful. One woman in her thirties commented: "Just 'cause they got the uniform on they think they can do anything they want." She bases that standpoint on an experience that happened when she was a teenager:

When my late father was still alive, we used to always have family night. And it was our family night and, I don't know, but there was like a big bang on the door. My late stepdad, he went to go open it and I looked out the window 'cause the door was, like, right there. When I opened it, frickin the cop, right when my late stepdad opened the door he just, he had his baton, just opening and he just started beating him. Like, no word, no nothing. Just started beating him with his baton.

Another woman said that, “I’ve just always known not to go to the police right from when I was a little girl.” She went on to say:

I remember, it was just always us against the police it seemed. I know, like, one incident I guess where we were literally living steps, I was just a little girl but we were literally living steps away from the police, like (chuckle) a one-minute walk, maybe. And a man had broken down our door and was threatening my mom and I was hiding in the room. But I don’t remember how or who called the police. I think it was after the man left my mom called the police right away. And it took them 45 minutes to get to our place. And they basically told my mom, “Well, what do you expect us to hunt him down?” or like, you know, they were just giving her attitude.

This same woman also recounted how the police had treated her aunt, who had been in a snowmobile accident. “Yes, she was intoxicated, but she was also bleeding severely from her head. And they threw her in the [drunk] tank and let her bleed all night. It wasn’t until the next shift officers came on shift, came on duty that they brought her or called the ambulance or something.” These experiences left her with the feeling of “don’t trust the cops.”

Normalizing Gendered Violence

Other participants spoke about how police interacted with them when they reported gendered violence. One woman had been in a violent relationship. “When I was with my ex I never felt safe with him anywhere, any day.” She “used to get physically beaten up” and was injured “lots of times.” When asked whether the police treated her well when she reported the abuse she replied:

They were not welcoming. They were not welcoming, and when they saw me, their faces were obvious or noticeable that they were thinking that, “Oh, you had brought this upon myself because you had put yourself or brought this upon yourself to be put into this situation.” Like, you could really tell by their faces they were thinking this.

A second woman had a similar experience with a police officer. She had been in an abusive relationship that went on for 14 years. “He did everything to me under the sun, so and it was just ongoing.... Just every type of abuse you can think of.” The violence was reported to police on several occasions. On one of those occasions, an officer came to her house to take her statement. “In the middle of taking my statement, he said to me that I sound like a provoker. And then that led me to asking him, ‘Are you telling me that I deserve this?’ And he said, ‘Well, it does sound like you kind of provoked the situation.’” The woman then got upset with the officer, who in turn told her: “‘See, this is how you react to things.’ Like, he used my reaction towards him as proof, more proof for him to call me a provoker.” The woman told the officer to “get the fuck out of my house and don’t ever come back.”

A third woman told of three separate experiences of gendered violence. She recalls those experiences as “Terrifying, I remember being scared, helpless.” When asked whether the police treated her well she responded: “Just, they were cocky about it. Like, the look on their faces when I was [talking] was like, ‘Oh, this is normal.’” The woman gave a statement on all three occasions “and I never heard back from them again.” Asked what police could have done differently, she said: “When you’re in a job like you can’t, like especially in such a position like that, you can’t, when someone’s taking a statement or something you can’t be cocky about it, you have to like be serious, not, like, it’s not a joke, yeah.”

A service provider attributed such experiences to the normalization of violence against Inuit women: “I think domestic violence is normalized by people like the RCMP. Yeah. So therefore I think if they normalize it, they think, like, I think that some people think, ‘Well, that’s the way the Inuit are.’ So almost like there’s no changing it kind of thing. I get that impression. That it’s normalized. It’s not taken as serious as it actually is until it’s actually happening and then there’s another homicide.”

Policing Challenges:

Intimate partner violence is known to be one of the most high-risk situations that police officers encounter in their work. As a service provider noted: “That’s the number one type of call that a police officer dies at, gets killed at, is when it’s family violence and the police officer has to intervene. They’re the most dangerous.” However, in addition to responding “when violence is happening and lives are at risk,” police work also involves making a connection with the person on the receiving end of the violence. Making this connection involves officers paying attention to the “softer side of things.”

It takes time for the victim to work through things, there’s so many things, like working with the victim to plan out an emergency plan, like, get them to think about packing a bag if they have to leave the house before it escalates, having, you know, clothes for their children and whatever so that they can go to school okay the next day. Keep them from seeing some of the violence. Like, there’s that softer side of things and I think police need to be seen as not just the big muscle that comes in and grabs people and stops the behaviour. But the softer side, working with the individual, seeing that the police are fair, like, you know, they’re really trying to keep the behaviour from happening long-term.

The problem, however, is that officers in Nunavut are under-resourced. As one service provider said, “The lack of support here is just, it’s through the roof. Like, it’s unbelievable the lack of support here.” Another service provider noted: “There aren’t enough supports in place for dealing with the issue for individuals or even for organizations or systems. There just isn’t enough support.” This was especially the case given the absence of Victim Services in Nunavut; “it’s just wrong that there isn’t a Victim Services.” A third service provider indicated that:

[The RCMP] have identified some of their challenges being a lack of resources in the community, a lack of continuity in what service providers are in the community, the high rate of turnover in staff within community-based offices. At times they have been challenged trying to connect with staff, whether staff may be away on leave, away sick from the office, whether those agencies are also dealing with multiple competing priorities and are not able to be as responsive as the RCMP would like them to be. The RCMP have also identified in the course of their conversations with us feeling challenged with the lack of resources at a community level for family violence.

This lack of resources has special implications for the police's role in responding to gendered violence, "because your role is to take the complaint, hear from the complainant or victim, and then you have to leave them to then deal with the offender or gathering evidence against the offence. So you need a support to have the victim feel supported and not just left in their current trauma."

The absence of resources was reflected in the account of one woman who had been in an abusive relationship. She was put on a waiting list for eight months to see a counsellor, "and by the time I was able to see a counsellor I told them I didn't need them anymore 'cause I waited eight months and I just helped myself and talked to friends and family."

High Turnover of Officers

Complicating the police's ability to provide an effective response when gendered violence occurs is the high turnover of officers, since RCMP officers are usually posted in a community for "two, three years, maybe four years." As one service provider noted: "With the high turnover of officers coming through, how are you supposed to be able to police people when you don't know anything about them?" A community participant made a similar remark: "We just have people coming up, leaving, coming up, leaving. So a lot of our community can't just trust, right." The constant turnover of officers has implications for women who have experienced gendered violence. This same participant told about a client's experience. "She would make a statement, couple of times made a statement, and then her abuser's court date kept on getting postponed. So she probably went through like 10 different officers with the same questions over and over. And she got frustrated and didn't even want to go to court anymore." As this participant noted, "Why should she keep repeating over and over like 10 times, say the same statement to different RCMP officers? And then having to go to court and say the same thing over and over. It's like trauma, trauma, trauma, trauma, right."

One service provider was of the view that shorter terms for officers were a benefit, given the pressures associated with the job: "Some communities, you're busy 24/7 on-call, so there's a burnout factor. And when you're on your own, when the pressure's on to work with limited sleep, then you can handle things not in the best manner. Your temper may be short, your crankiness is elevated. You're tired so you make more mistakes. So there's a benefit to keeping shorter terms." But the service provider was also aware that with such a short stay, "you're not learning the community, you're not as aware of the issues in the community."

Police officers' lack of knowledge about Inuit was also a matter of concern for participants. As one woman said: "People are still coming to my territory not knowing about the culture, that's a disrespect right there. And if you don't know who these people are how do you serve them?" In particular, concerns were expressed about the lack of knowledge and inexperience that new recruits bring with them to the community. As an elder remarked:

When they are so very young they come here. When they became a police man, they are 19 or 20 years old, and they have no idea what life is at all.... And also when they come up North, they have no idea what the North is all about. The have absolutely NO IDEA when they go up there about those things. I mean, they know absolutely nothing. My son, my youngest one, ... if he goes down South and he tries to do something, like any of the important stuff down there, he wouldn't know anything at all what the *qallunaats* do down there. He has a little bit of an idea of how but it's different. It's the same thing with the *Qallunaat* police officers. When they come up North they have no idea. Many of them they struggle with those uncomfortable circumstances.

Inuit Officers

The retention of Inuit officers was also an issue of concern. As one woman noted:

They had how many Inuit? At least five or six that I could count off the top of my head. And they're all gone. And, yeah, we want to retain them and how do we retain them when they have that, the rule of having to switch every two years? Is there research that they have to leave and change community every two years? What's the research that they have that we don't know that? Like, it's to do with not getting used to the community and the people, but they serve the people. And what's better than knowing the person that's serving you consistently? So to me that comes across my mind. And some do, some are able to request another year in the community and gain that respect from the members, from the community. And, you know, not enough support for those Inuit members, I've seen.

A service provider spoke to the important role that Inuit officers play—and the particular stresses they encounter:

The Inuit officers that do exist, they're maxed out even more than the non-Inuit because they're not only doing their own job but they're assisting others extra on top of their jobs. They're helping to, you know, translate or like Inuit officers are always aware of dangers to their fellow officers because they don't understand. So they're often, like, have to look after the police, have to look after the public.

One woman told of an encounter with the police that confirmed for her the importance of having Inuit officers on the police force. The woman's ex-partner had shown up at her house intoxicated. He was upset about an incident that had happened involving their daughter, who had been badly beaten by two other young people, and was threatening to take a knife and seek revenge. "So I called the cops not wanting the situation to escalate, they just need to find this crazy ex of mine 'cause he's about to go murder somebody, whatever." The police finally arrived "after I called, maybe the third time or so. I think it was about, I think I had to call three to four times. Again, not a big place, how long does it take you to get there?"

Two police officers, an Inuk male and a Francophone female, pulled up in their vehicle. The Francophone officer began yelling, "Where is he? Who is he? What's your relationship?"

And she's still standing, she didn't even fully get out of the vehicle, she's standing with the door open and yelling at me. And I'm like, I kept telling her, "Slow down, I don't even understand what you're saying to me right now." 'Cause she had a very thick French accent. And her partner, the Inuk man, is trying to explain to her "Hold on." Like, and I'm trying to tell her but her lack of, I don't know what, I was trying to tell her, "He's my ex, he doesn't live here, blah, blah, blah." But she just kept repeating herself, repeating herself. And her partner, the Inuk cop, was trying to tell her, like "Settle down. She's answering you if you stop and listen." It ended up that the Inuk cop had to yell at his partner to shut up and listen. He literally said, "Shut up. Would you just let her talk," is what he said.

The woman commented that in that situation, "you would think that the female officer would have a bit of empathy towards me or something. But she had none." Instead, it was the Inuk officer who brought the situation under control. The woman believes that, "when an Inuk officer shows up, even in those drunken brawls and things like that, it's just an automatic sense of— 'cause I've seen it happen too where people just calm down right away.... They de-escalate, like almost instantly. And I'm not saying that's in every situation but I've seen it happen." In contrast, she believes that non-Inuit officers "just have their assumptions and their biases and they know nothing about Inuit.... Where they come in with authority, that doesn't do well with most people. But the Inuit cops tend to come in calmly and just be like, 'Come on guys' ... 'Go to bed,' you know. They'll say stuff like that 'cause it's just more on a personal level."

One of the benefits of having Inuit officers on the police force is their ability to converse with community residents in Inuktitut. As one woman noted: "Some people may not understand English, some people may only speak Inuktitut or [be] comfortable speaking Inuktitut, especially when they're questioned. 'Cause some [police], not all, just some understand a little bit. Or when they're responding to somebody, what if that person didn't speak English and the police didn't know how to speak Inuktitut? How would they communicate each other? That's one of my concerns, you know."

Providing Inuit with an opportunity to express themselves in their own language becomes especially significant when making a statement to police.

The Language Disconnect:

The structure of the Inuktitut language and its accompanying thought process has special ramifications for women who are disclosing experiences of gendered violence. A service provider explained that Inuit will express themselves differently when speaking in Inuktitut. “So they have words in-between that will link and Inuit often go in a linear way. Like, they’ll tell the story and then they’ll go back to the beginning and then back to the end and then into the middle again and then they’re just repeating themselves throughout.” As well, although an Inuk woman may be able to speak and understand English, “that does not mean she will be able to properly articulate herself in English. She’ll not be able to tell you certain words or parts of the story might sound different to you. But because it makes, in Inuktitut it makes perfect sense, in English, it doesn’t. And the way Inuit talk is different. So there might be a complete sequence of events, it can go back and forth. But if you’re speaking in Inuktitut, the way they piece it together, it makes sense.”

Given the different structure and thought process of Inuktitut, a woman required to make a statement to police in English “makes absolutely no sense and it does sound like they’re lying because they’re going back and forth and, ‘Oh, maybe it wasn’t that. Oh, I meant,’ you know. They’ll say stuff, I’ve heard them, some victims say, ‘Oh, I meant this, not that.’ And it’s not that they’re lying or they can’t keep their story straight or whatever. It’s just the language.” As the service provider noted, “until you understand both languages you wouldn’t get it.” Given this disconnect, “sometimes the police will come in with their biases around Inuit, I guess, and they unfortunately will think someone is less intelligent than they actually are just because they can’t articulate themselves in what [police] think should be the proper way. And it all surrounds the fact that English is their second language.”

Having an interpreter present in the room so that a victim can make her statement in Inuktitut can also be troublesome, especially when the interpreter is required to do a literal translation of what is being said. According to the service provider, who has acted as an interpreter in such cases: “I don’t know if it’s part of their policies but the officer did tell me that it was like their policy that it would be looked at as my interpretation of the story as opposed to the victim’s if I were to start trying to explain what she means.” But providing a literal translation of what the woman was saying meant that “her story didn’t make sense according to the police officer.” As a result of the misunderstandings that are created, the service provider has “seen cases get thrown out of court.”

These misunderstandings are exacerbated by other police protocols. In cases of major crimes that occur in the North, the policy of the police in Ottawa is to send a “third party” officer to investigate. According to the service provider, “they did set it up that way on purpose that this third party knows nothing about Inuit or the North, so they won’t be biased at all in their opinions.” However, as the service provider explained:

Up North is a totally different world, like, completely, and again everybody is just human beings, so you're taking these officers to deal with a very difficult situation, trained or not, rookie or not, it doesn't matter to me, they are human beings and you're making them go into a totally different environment to take statements from people they have no understanding of, that they may not even speak the same language. So they're going into these towns and not understanding the "yes" with our eyebrows and the "no" with our nose and that type of body language or how Inuit are direct and may not have the "Yes, I understand" and "Yes." You won't hear that out of Inuit. They typically will sit there and just listen till you're done talking and then they will talk if they feel necessary to talk. And then sometimes they may not have the right words, sometimes they're nervous, but they were also taught just to say, "Yes, yes, yes sir, yes sir." So this third party that's sent to deal with major crimes to go take statements from victims that may have witnessed a murder, for example, they're going up with absolutely no understanding of Inuit or the social dynamics up there or anything, which I find more harmful than it is helpful.

The Housing Crisis:

In addition to voicing their concerns about the police response to gendered violence, participants also highlighted the lack of community resources, especially in relation to housing. As one woman explained: "We have no transition house up here for homeless mothers and children. Like, we have families who stay up to two years at our shelter. And they have nowhere to go, absolutely nowhere to go. Shortage of housing is a big thing. And we need more support for our people, mothers and children need more support in housing up here." Given the housing crisis, women will often "just go back to their abuser. 'Cause they have nowhere else to go, right. But if we had a transition house up here, they can move on with their life and don't need to go back to their abuser."

Another service provider explained that the women's shelter in Iqaluit extended its policy of only allowing six-week stays in recognition of the housing shortage. But if women are coming to Iqaluit from another community, their chances of securing housing are slim. "If you're in the shelter and ... you had to leave with your entire family from, say, Pond Inlet, you have to be in Iqaluit one entire year before you go on the waiting list, which is three to five years. So our women, unfortunately, many of our women know this. So then they'll stay in the relationship and it just contributes to the high stats of women who are actually losing their lives in the relationship."

Another woman explained that prior to Nunavut becoming its own territory in 1999, "our women and children were able to go to Yellowknife where they had transition housing." That option was cut off once Nunavut was formed. "We're 2019 now going on 2020, this was 1999 and we still don't have anything up here." In order to secure housing, many women are leaving the North. "And then when they move south it's culture shock and then they're just, it's not good. And then their kids are taken away, they become alcoholics, everything, drug addicts, alcoholics, anything, you name it. Like, at least 80 percent, probably 90 percent of people who move down south for housing ends up on the street anyways, because everything's so available and there it's too much, it's a big change and they're away from home, they're away from their people, their country food, it's everything." At the same time, the woman pointed out that "all these newcomers, non-Inuit who come up here just to work, they get a place just like that, just like that making so much money. Why not our people? Take care of our people first?"

What Needs to be Done?

Interviews with Inuit women, elders, and service providers revealed some fundamental concerns about policing in Nunavut, especially in relation to the police response to gendered violence: slow police response times and the lack of a meaningful police presence in the community; fear and distrust of police; racialized policing practices; and the normalization of gendered violence against Inuit women. These interviews also uncovered many of the challenges that police encounter in carrying out their role, including: working in high-risk situations where domestic violence is present; lack of referral resources to support those on the receiving end of violence; high turnover of officers; officers' lack of knowledge and experience about the North; and language barriers and difficulties in retaining Inuit officers.

In addition to these concerns, several participants pointed to more fundamental problems with policing in the North. An elder recalled that "Long time ago, maybe still now, in the smaller communities, if a white person comes, he is the boss. He does everything and we are just there to listen. You know what I mean? This is what they used to do. That is how they did it in the past. Instead of telling him, 'Okay, you are here and this is what we do. This is the kind of life we lead. This is our leader, and those things.'" A service provider made the point that, "The North, and Inuit society in general, is a completely different world than the officer world or than down [in the South]. Just completely different." So "until these institutions are developed, run, and led by the people they are trying to serve, so developed, run, and led by Inuit for Inuit, it's never going to work." Another participant noted: "That hierarchy structure does not do well with Inuit at all. If you come with a, 'I'm higher than you. I'm the authority figure here,' Inuit don't take well to that in my opinion." These comments suggest the need for a dramatic shift in how police are positioned within the communities they are mandated to serve. Participants offered suggestions for how the police could begin to make that shift, including recommendations for improving the police response to gendered violence.

Primarily, participants maintained that officers need to be better educated about Inuit history, "and understand our culture and language." The police also need to improve their capacity to deliver services in the language of the community they are serving. As one elder said, "I do feel that the police should have Inuktitut speaking persons all the time if they are, when they are arresting or knocking on people's doors." For another participant, those services should be extended to the provision of interpretation translating services "in all areas, from statement to court to everything."

As well, more effort needs to be made on the part of police to connect with the leadership in the communities. As one service provider noted:

Police are very process people. They follow direction and just do what they're told to do. But we have to have detachment commanders that know how to communicate with local leaders, to really develop that support for addressing community violence by the community. It can't be just police addressing the violence. There has to be local leadership, and sometimes the real leaders in the community aren't the mayors and council, sometimes there's other leaders. So police officers don't know that, they're not from here, they come in and they think the mayor is the leader of the community so they try and talk there. But sometimes that's the wrong person to talk to. So it's about detachment commanders having the right tools to communicate and build support for their own community. Like, some of the leaders in the community need to be informed so they can start making changes for themselves.

According to this same service provider, officers also need to be more aware of their accountability to the community. “When there’s new officers in the community it’s important to take the time to introduce the officer to the community because if you don’t then the officer is just indebted, like, they’re just, they only feel accountable to their supervisor, the RCMP. They don’t think of being accountable to the community.” According to another service provider, police officers also need to make more of an effort to get to know the residents. Doing so would break down the fear and distrust that seems to prevail.

It’s a small enough town that, you know, they can get to know residents and get to know people who live here and like erase some of that or ease some of that fear of the unknown where they can maybe go to someone’s house and be like, “I know who lives here. I know if they’re a danger or not usually. I know their family, like, how to talk to them and stuff. And they know me.” And that can, I think, help a lot, especially the fear of police and the hatred. If you know someone as a person before knowing them as, you know, a police officer then it can be a little bit more settling.

The community, however, also has a role to play in refashioning the police role. In that regard, a service provider believed that “ceremony is missed between community and police.”

In the past it was an igloo. You welcome somebody in, you warm them up, you hang up their clothes to dry, you heat them, heat them up, warm them up, feed them. We don’t have those protocols in this current society. So we as a community have to figure out how to be more welcoming and lay down the rules for the police who are foreigners to our land. We have to take responsibility too, it’s not just the police, but the police should be open to asking the community as well, and a lot of police officers don’t. They just assume their duties and authority, without thinking that, you know, maybe there’s local etiquette.... But in Nunavut we’re poor at telling outsiders what the rules are.

At the same time, community organizations and services also need to work at connecting with the police. As one service provider suggested: “It is about building partnerships and I use the plural, no one agency can build a partnership, so it, it has to be done as a collective.” The service provider went on to elaborate:

I think that strengthening the relationship with the RCMP is, it doesn’t fall to any one agency or any one department or any one person. It should fall to the collective within a community. So it is, you know, the RCMP, community-based justice outreach workers, Children and Family Services, mental health. I think it is everyone recognizing the intersections and the role and the work that is that we do to ensure community safety.

Another participant suggested that trust could be built between the police and the Inuit community by bringing back special constables:

Long ago actually when the RCMP were sent up North in the sixties or fifties they used to, they were, like, everything was done for them by Inuit. And they hired a special constable every time someone was hired and I think that could be brought back to the community level. There's no special constables in the communities. Why not have a local special constable who's going to be that, that's a job and that's connecting and helping develop that trust. So I don't know, I know they do that here ... but I think in the communities they need to bring that back, they need to try really hard to do that.

Improving the role of the police in the community will also require ensuring that supports are in place to assist women who are being victimized by gendered violence. Several participants pointed to the need for a safe house for women, "a family home that could take somebody who needs to escape violence." As a service provider explained:

They don't all want to go to the shelter because it's very public and it's a little bit more longer term than one night usually, that's how it's kind of evolved. But if there was a private safe home and you got to know like these are the safe homes as a victim, if you learned what the safe homes were then if in an emergency you could either through the police or whatever way you could get in touch or through a social worker, whatever, get in touch with the safe home to stay for the night. But we need the police to help identify those homes. They would know best what homes are free of violence that are able to take on something like that.

In addition, supports are required in the form of "stable Victim Services in every single community, a Victim Services personnel office in every single community." Realizing such supports points to the problem of funding for such services. Under the present funding arrangement, Nunavut is not able to tap into the federal government's First Nations Policing Program, which is based on a cost-sharing agreement of 52/48 between the federal government and the provinces.

So First Nations have a better funding, federal funding arrangement. Inuit, we rely on the GN [Government of Nunavut] to fund 70 percent, the feds only put in 30. And yet the social issues come from, one of the first entities to come to Nunavut was the police. So and the police were an extension of Ottawa's decision-making, so they were only executing what Ottawa said to do with Northwest Territories at the time. So the social issues are a result of decisions being made in Ottawa. So why isn't Ottawa funding us like other [Indigenous communities]?

Participants also had more pragmatic suggestions for improving the police response to gendered violence. One strategy was to provide women who are being victimized by gendered violence with "life line" or contact information, "the safe homes, the whatever, like, some phone numbers. Like, some way if you suspect, like when a police officer comes, the victim may not necessarily be able to say, 'He's here, he's hurting me, I need help.' She may turn away the police and say, 'No everything's okay' because he's like just threatened her again or something. So there needs to be a way to, and it's usually contact in the face, you can tell there's something but you have to respect what the person has said. And as a police officer you may have to leave, but you want to give them a lifeline somehow." Another service provider suggested providing "up-to-date flyers" or pamphlets that offer information on Emergency Protection Orders and other avenues a victim might pursue.

At the same time, participants were mindful that individual officers also required supports. “I think the officers need more support services too ... and I think that’s all across the board. Every police service doesn’t have enough people on board to deal with their PTSD and their vicarious trauma and whatever else is going on in their lives. ‘Cause they’re just human beings too.”

Participants were also aware of some of the good work being done by police in their communities, and how much of that work goes unnoticed or appreciated. As one woman noted: “I think it would be great to see those officers that are doing a great job highlighted.” A service provider also commented:

There are people out there that are trying to do good and trying to use their position to do good things. And they’re not getting any, I don’t think that they’re get any sort of attention, which is bad not just for them but also for all of us. ‘Cause we don’t know about the good stuff that’s being done at all.... If there was a few more stories about some of the stuff that they do is good, it could help make a stronger relationship between people.

The reality of gendered violence against Inuit women came to the fore with the death of an Inuk woman by her ex-partner shortly before our interviews were conducted in Nunavut. One of the participants spoke of that relationship—and of the importance of offering the services needed to prevent another death. She indicated that in the case of the woman who died, there were “numerous encounters of police coming and going and neighbours calling because they’re hearing the ruckus going on in the apartment. And so before the murder, this man was apprehended or taken by RCMP and this man had to be taken numerous other times from abusing other women.” The woman questioned what was being done “to build that man to be a better man or to send him out or to provide trauma care if he had any traumas in his life to have constantly created this environment.” Without those resources, “this man kept coming back and again I’m sure the woman felt stuck and I know what stuck feels like.” The participant believed that more things could have been done “to help that victim and the person at fault,” including “if somebody’s a threat to the community and to themselves” sending them “for treatment for trauma.” In the case of the woman who died, she queried: “So where’s this being exercised here? Where is the RCMP collaborating with the correct people in the government? Where is that happening? That could have been prevented, that woman could have been living. She has children. Now they have to live for the rest of their lives with no mother, like many others.”

Policing in Nunatsiavut

Gendered violence is a matter of serious concern to service providers who work in Nunatsiavut. One service provider recalled participating in a sexual assault workshop in 2010. One of the workshop contributors made the point that “it wasn’t a matter if it was going to happen, like, if you were going to be sexually assaulted, it was a matter of when. That’s how rampant it was. But that was in 2010.” The frequency of gendered violence, however, continues to be a pressing issue. As another service noted,

Provincially it’s a problem in Newfoundland and Labrador in general, but definitely the more remote you get and the more rural and remote as well as in Indigenous communities, the numbers even tend to be higher. I know provincially the last statistic I have is that one in two women over the age of 15 will experience at least one incidence of sexual or physical violence in the province. I’d say those numbers are much, much higher within Nunatsiavut.

Participants were of the view that gendered violence against Inuit women has become normalized. One woman believed that gendered violence has been taught to Inuit men:

That’s how they are here. Not all of them, but man, pretty much all of them. They’re going to mistreat you. They’re taught. Whether it be an uncle, a father, grandfather, like, you know, when you hear of cases of men raping their daughter or their granddaughter or niece, when that is happening in the home and other little boys are growing up with it, with all that violence, whether it be physical or sexual, “Oh, that’s normal.”

A woman in her forties told of her experience growing up:

For me violence was something very common in our household. I was culturally adopted, and all my older brothers and sisters are really my uncles who grew up in domestic violence. Like, I’ve seen them punch their girlfriends, I’ve seen them kick them, throw them, drag them by the hair. I’ve seen all that growing up. And for me to grow up knowing that and nothing is being done, you become numb to it, to think that this is normal. This is how you think that it’s supposed to be ... Like in the 80s when I was growing up, it was common practice to see a woman walking down the road with a black eye or bruises. It was common.

Another woman in her forties shared a similar standpoint: “It was hush hush back then in the 80’s. It was hush hush, you kept quiet, you didn’t say anything even though women were walking around with bruises and black eyes. It was hush hush. And you don’t talk about it ‘cause that was what you were told, you don’t ever talk about that kind of stuff.” While both of these women believed that people are now more vocal in saying “No. That is wrong,” they were also aware that “there’s still a lot of abuse that happens behind closed doors and that’s not talked about.” As one service provider indicated, “There’s a lot that goes on in this town, and it’s things that are so unspeakable. Like, you don’t hear about it, a lot of the stuff that women endured ... like, horrible, horrible stuff.”

Women's Reluctance to Report the Violence:

While gendered violence is an ongoing concern in Nunatsiavut, participants cited several reasons for women's reluctance to report the violence. One reason is "the isolation for women in the community." As a service provider noted: "These are fly-in communities. There really is nowhere to go." Another service provider elaborated: "Isolation is a huge issue for [this community], due to the fact that women cannot easily get in or out of the isolated community due to the high cost of flying and due to isolation. You know, it makes things much more difficult to get on a flight, to get away with her children. She just can't up and go and get out of there, you know, when she fears for her safety of herself or her children or both."

There are also practical reasons why women either do not report the violence or, if they do, request that charges be dropped. One service provider noted: "They need their partner home to help with the children, they need their partner home as they're the person who has the income or they need assistance with practical things around the house, getting the wood to help heat their home for the winter. So very practical reasons for which they need to reunite with their partner." Another service provider commented: "I've heard stories before of women who took the men back because she couldn't, you know, she couldn't chop the wood, she couldn't bring the wood in, you know, she couldn't keep her home warm."

Another reason for women not reporting the violence is the threats they encounter from their partner. As one service provider noted: "I've even heard people say, 'If you tell the cops, well you're going to get it worse next time.' And like what, they will be scared to tell the cops."

The length of time it takes to process charges is another reason for women's reluctance to turn to the criminal justice system when gendered violence occurs. As a service provider explained: "In Nunatsiavut it's circuit court, so they're flying in once a month." This means that "the court process takes so long that often women are left for a long time without matters being resolved which can, one, affect their willingness to participate, two, can I think many then question whether the process is worthwhile for their situation." Another service provider added: "And oftentimes the outcome is a light sentence, so it's kind of like all that work for nothing." Several participants were of the view that women had "no protection for them to go through the court process. There's no benefit to them to have the charges go through or to try to do that, so I guess the risk outweighs the benefit."

According to one service provider, women are not turning to the police for help "because of some with a very strained relationship and trust of RCMP and also with the courts and the justice system." For some women, their strained relationship with and lack of trust in the RCMP dates back to their youth.

One woman recalled what happened when she turned to police for help as a youth:

When I was 12, 13, I was living with my mother and she had a boyfriend. She's not with this boyfriend anymore.... I was upstairs and my mother don't drink and her boyfriend was drinking that night. He came home drunk ... loaded. Anyways he started assaulting her with a weapon, like, a kitchen weapon. And I got tired of him hurting her. She was crying, screaming, all that. So I ran down to the RCMP station that's only down the little bank, not even a five minute run. I ran down there and ringing the doorbell and I asked the officer at the time, "I need your help. This man is abusing my mother. I need your help," and all that. And he said he can't remove the abuser, I have to go somewhere else. Yeah, and I was a kid. He told me not to go back up there and he can't remove the abuser. And I was just, like, I knew the difference.

Another woman believed that "a lot of women don't want to speak up or they're scared" to contact the police when they have experienced gendered violence. She empathized with these women, given her own experience when she was a child. She explained that, "Growing up I saw a lot of violence and it was common for my mom to call the RCMP.... And I didn't like when the RCMP would come in." The woman recalled that the police would tell her mother "that it was her own fault for getting hit and all that." She also remembers the RCMP "pointing at me and my brother when we were very small and telling us to 'Get the fuck out of the house,' and my mom assaulted and my dad being arrested and me and my brother being really scared. Saw ugly stuff like that, really ugly." The woman believes that this strained relationship between Inuit women and the police has continued into the present:

I still see it to this day and I hear it to this day.... And, like, how could they keep doing this? I feel like they treat Inuk women especially like they're no good. And what did we do to them? Like, holy man, you're coming to our town to make people feel safe, and they don't feel safe. And here I am, adult woman, and I probably wouldn't call them because I know how they are. And I want to speak up because I feels like it's happening yet and people don't want to speak up. They're too scared or they feel like it always happens and no one will listen.

Not all encounters with police have been negative. One woman told of a positive experience she had in reporting a sexual assault in the early 1990s. "I remember being a teenager when I left my hometown to go to a sports team event. And I woke up with this man on top of me and I didn't know what he was doing and I felt totally violated." She reported the assault to the RCMP, and recalled that it was a "very positive" experience.

I'm one of the lucky ones who was able to give my statement, was believed and the person was brought in. And I've never had to go to court because he admitted that he had done that and then he ended up, like, I didn't have to testify, I didn't have to get hauled through court to talk about my story. Like, I wasn't, I didn't feel like a victim over and over and over again because I felt for me justice was served in that case.

The woman, however, doesn't believe that this kind of positive experience with the criminal justice system is happening now. In her view, "There's more rights for a person who is accused than there are for the victims. I feel that. And they know how to work the system to their advantage. So they'll plead not guilty even though they know they've done it." Her position is that, "I don't think I would go through court. It's set up for the accused not for the victim."

Another woman had been in an abusive relationship when she was a teenager. “And when it got like to the worst point that’s when I did get help.” She said that the police “did help me and I felt like I trusted them.... They helped me take him to court and everything. And like he was on house arrest and I just felt more safe then.” While the woman had a positive experience with the police on that occasion, she said that she wouldn’t turn to them now. “I just feel like they would blame me if I went to [them] or call me like crazy or something if I went to them now.” When asked what had happened to change her mind, she told about her experience of witnessing someone try to kill themselves with a shotgun. The experience left her traumatized.

The woman said, “I didn’t really know what I was thinking” but she “kind of got it in my head somehow that everybody was going to shoot everybody. And I kind of drove around like a crazy person trying to save everybody. Like, I was running in people’s houses and making sure they were okay.” The police arrived and “they really, like, man-handled me.”

They grabbed my arm so tight and handcuffed me and they were like throwing me in the *qamutiik* [sled] box. And when they took me to the jail cell that night and I had to spend the night there. And I had to like have a shower and take off my bra and everything. Like, they thought I wanted to hurt people or I wanted to hurt myself. But I was really just trying to save people. And I was trying to tell them that and it felt like they didn’t understand. Like, when I was having a shower they were like banging on the door and saying like, “C’m on now, hurry up!” And like it just, like I just wanted them to understand. Like, if they understood I say those thoughts in my head would have went away a lot faster.

The woman said that police “made me feel like a criminal when I was trying to be a hero. I know it wasn’t real what was in my head but if they helped me figure that out I would have trusted them more.” Over the past year the woman has been seeing a counsellor. “And I had my cries, so now I want to use it to help, to change. ‘Cause I don’t want anybody to go through anything like that. That was hard.”

Women also spoke about the silencing that occurs around gendered violence. One woman who had experienced abuse from a relative in her childhood explained what happened when she disclosed the abuse to her mother.

And when I told my mom, who grew up in a totally different generation of not having any education about it whatsoever, like, I totally understand why she responded the way she did. But for me as a young child going to my mom to tell her that I was being touched my response from her was, “Oh you have to be quiet. You don’t say nothing about that.” So when you grow up being told that from a person who is supposed to protect you, you grow up thinking that you can’t ever say anything about that kind of thing. So that was my learning as a young child growing up.

As the woman grew older, she came to understand that, “no, this is not normal. You can speak out and you have every right to.” Nevertheless, she chose not to report the assault because she believed telling would do harm to her family. “Our families have to take care of each other. We’re Inuit people, we hunt, fish, we gather, we have family gatherings. That would cause more harm doing that than it would doing any good.” Instead, she disclosed the abuse to a sister and the two of them “kind of protected, made sure that we’re able to tell who was around not to be around him.” She also confronted her abuser: “I took it upon myself to tell him that I know what he did and I remember what he did. And that was enough for me. Yeah, that was enough for me for him to know that I knew, I remembered.” The woman believed that “even though I know it’s not getting justice, that is much more safer than going through the charging route.”

The woman has encountered other incidents of violence involving her family members, but believes that turning to the criminal justice system is problematic: “I feel like I should be reporting but also at the same time why would you want to report when you know nothing’s going to happen? That’s the way the system is, they got off it all the time anyway. Why would you want to do that? Why would you put yourself through that?”

Turning to the Police for Help

While many women appear to be reluctant to turn to the police for help, some of those who do have found that the police response was unsupportive or jeopardized their safety. In some cases, the women found the police response to be unprofessional—and racialized.

One woman who had ended an abusive relationship three years previously told about turning to the police for help to deal with her ex-partner and the troubles she encountered in getting police officers to treat her situation seriously.

The first time she called on police they responded “relatively quick.” Her ex-partner had shown up at her door. “He was forcing his way into my home while I was holding my baby and so I was thrown back while holding him. And he was trying to take my middle child. And my oldest was there and I think he was caught off-guard by my oldest standing up for me. And that gave me enough time to dial 911.” Although the man had left before the police arrived, “he came back and they had arrested him outside of my home.” The woman said that police officers “were good with me then. They were understanding and spoke to me with sincerity and wanted to help me. And they explained things to me saying, you know, they’re the ones that’s going to press charges against him for domestic abuse and that they will tell him the same so that he don’t blame me for the charges. So that time, they were good and helpful.”

The woman attended to the police detachment to provide a statement. “I went in for two hours and made a video statement about everything.” The charges, however, ended up being stayed at the man’s first court appearance. When that happened, the restrictions imposed (including a No Contact Order) were also withdrawn. The woman said that she was “caught off guard” because “they didn’t let me know what was going on after the fact or at the time.” With no court-imposed restrictions, the ex-partner showed up at her home again when she was at work. “He’s in my house, calling me at work from my home, with my baby in the home with the babysitter.” She phoned the police right away, “and that’s when it took 45 minutes for them to come to my workplace next door to respond. And by that time, he was in my home, he went to the school and picked up my middle child, he took him. He was threatening me over the phone when he was talking to me in my home. And I explained all of this to the police and they didn’t care then.” The woman was terrified for her children’s safety.

There's was a lot of threats over the telephone. I just, I was gone numb with fear because he was threatening to take my kids, that I would never see my kids again. I didn't know if that meant he was going to kill my kids or not because he threatened to kill my kids before, and me. So, I mean, to wait 45 minutes for them to come next door is a long time when you think he's going to kill my children. And then when they finally respond knowing this information and they treat you like it's not a big deal, it's devastating.

Once her children were moved to a safe place, the woman went back to the RCMP station and asked the officer who she had been dealing with earlier why the initial charge was stayed. He replied: "Oh, I thought you didn't want to go through with it." So she had to make a video statement a second time. "They set up the room again, the whole nine yards. I had to do it again."

It took another three years before the case was finally dealt with by the court. In the meantime, her ex-partner "kept breaching his conditions." But the woman persevered. "I made them take me seriously. I am not giving up. I am going to keep coming and I'm going to keep calling. I am not going to let him do this to me and my kids. Once they did that for me, he stopped coming to the house. He stopped calling me."

On one of those occasions when she appeared at the RCMP station to provide evidence that her ex-partner had been breaching his release conditions, one of the officers was "particularly cruel" to her. She explained what happened:

He wouldn't look at me when he was speaking about me when I was right in front of him. He would look at other officers or other staff and say like, you know, look at what I had printed out and shown them, like, "Look, this is in writing. He's threatening me. He's already charged. He's not supposed to be in contact with me." And this officer's looking at other staff and I'm next to him, like looking at him. And he wouldn't look me in the eye. And he's like, "Where's the breach? Where's the breach? There's nothing I can do. My hands are tied." And then he started talking about another person's confidential, like so and so, he named names, like talking about "That's this person, such and such," and talking about such and such, and he's like, "Remember that?" I was like, "Oh my god I'm not supposed to hear this," let alone you shouldn't be treating me this way. So I spoke up then. And that was my first time yelling at an RCMP member. I just remember saying, "I'm right here, you can look at me and speak to me. I never asked to be threatened like this. I'm asking for your help. You are supposed to help me." I said, "I'm not here to waste your time." ... And I just remember yelling at him, and putting him in his place. And then he started speaking to me like I was a human being for that one time.

The woman was also frustrated that the police chose not to act on other incidents.

There was a lot of things that he did that were chargeable but it is up to them whether they decide what to charge him for. And the only thing that they were interested in at the time was that one where he threatened to kill me and the kids. They kind of overlooked the physical violence, the mental abuse, like, you know, the other threats. They didn't really care too much about threats about, like, he threatened to post sensitive pictures of me on the Internet and I had it in writing. And they didn't care about that. Like, they didn't want to even bother going down that road to charge him for a lot of other things. So it was just that one that I hung onto. And that's what it is, like that's what it comes down to, whether the RCMP here decide to act upon it.

The woman is thankful for the support she had in the community. "It was beyond what I could have imagined and asked for, that was the only way I survived." But she wishes that the RCMP could have been more supportive.

It would have made things a million times better. I am not a person who calls often. I am not seen as a person who is drunk in my community all the time. There was no reason for them to look at me and go, "She's a troublemaker. Let's not help her. I'm sick of her kind of attitude." I can only imagine people struggling with their alcoholism or, you know, drug addictions, anything like that, who are seen by the RCMP as problems. I can't imagine what they have to go through to be taken seriously.

Such experiences with police readily generate a lack of trust. One woman told what happened when she was visiting her daughter, who lived in another community.

She lives there with her boyfriend and he apparently assaulted her that night or the night before, sorry. So we called the RCMP and they said they were going to go over and check on him and take him out of the house so that she could go over and pick up her things. And she asked, "Okay, how long do I have to wait before I can go pick up all my things? How will I know he's gone?" And they said to her, "In a half an hour we will have him out of the house and then you can go straight over. So give us a half an hour." So a half an hour from now and they made it very clear to her, so they weren't going to call her back and say, "Go over." They just said, "Give us a half an hour and then you can go over."

Just to be safe, the woman and her daughter waited 45 minutes before they went to the house. "And by the time we got over there it was probably near an hour since she spoke to the RCMP." The two women entered the house. While her daughter was gathering up her things, the mother went outside with the dog. "And then all of a sudden, she was on the steps and she said, 'Oh my god mom, he's still here!' And I was like, I'm getting goosebumps, I was like, 'What do you mean he's still here?' She said, 'I just heard him in the bathroom.' And I was like, 'Get out here right now! Outdoors right now!'" They left the house and as they were preparing to drive away, the RCMP arrived. As the woman said, "We were just very lucky. And this person was not sober. We were just very lucky that they didn't hear us in the house and then come out after probably both of us, right. We didn't know."

Asked whether her daughter would call the police again if she needed help, the mother replied: “No, she won’t. Because in the end, on top of all that, those charges were dropped.” As the mother said, “When it’s a female being violated in that sense and then to be told you know you’ll be safe, you can go back in half an hour, there’s a trust issue now, right.”

Two women told of an experience they had with police a few years ago. A man had shown up at their house late one night, and was trying to break in. “He was banging on all of our windows, banging on all of our doors, going around our house.” While one of the women “was on the other side of the door, holding the door in,” the other phoned the police. But police didn’t arrive until four hours later. In the meantime, the women were able to scare the intruder away by telling him, “I got a firearm in here and I’m not afraid to use it.” When the police finally did arrive, the women said that, “they were really very unprofessional.” One of the women explained:

They were ignorant. They put the blame on us, asking us why someone would want to break in our house. The RCMP had an ugly tone of voice when they talked to us. They were very negative. And it was at the point where I said to him, “This is very unprofessional.” He was very surprised that people was going to speak up and he was like, “You’re not from around here, are you.” I said, “Yes, I am.” And I said, “I am from around here.” And he’s like, “No you’re not.” And he’s like, “I don’t hear people talking up like this, especially women.” And I was like, “How dare you make a comment like that. You should be ashamed of yourself working for this community and you couldn’t even give us a good response time, four hours later.”

When the officer informed her that no charges would be laid she told him: “If it happened to your wife you would have a whole fuckin’ force down there, guns drawn, that whole building, everything taped off, probably have CBC and everything doing interviews. They would send people in, make there be interviews with your family. You would have support put in place, like counsellors and all that.” The woman believed the police officer’s response was racialized, governed by the fact that it was two Inuit women who were at risk. “We’re probably the same as being found dead on the road.”

This same woman also told of a recent encounter that a friend had experienced with police.

She said to me that she was getting beat up and she called the RCMP and they said, “Yeah, we’ll be up there” and “What’s your address?” and all that. They thought that they hung the phone up and they didn’t. And she heard them saying, the cop said to another cop, “We’ll take our time going up there. They’ll probably have each other beat up by the time we go up.” And that woman had to hear that. And she was beat up and all that too. And when the cops come there, she didn’t even want to go through the charges and all that. She felt like, what she heard them say, that, “Oh just let them beat the shit out of each other” and that. And this was pretty recent.

The woman was of the view that police officers “should at least be respectful and mindful, like you don’t make comments like that, no matter if you’re white, brown, black, Chinese, Indian, whatever, to say like, ‘Oh let them beat the shit out of each other.’ And that poor woman. Here, nine times out of ten, that woman is going to get it compared to the man. And what, her life don’t matter ‘cause her colour of her skin?”

Another woman was aware of the racialized context in which policing occurs:

We're only a little community and out of the way, a northern community. We kind of don't matter. "Oh, it's an Aboriginal community." And sometimes, you know, that's the case too where, "You look really Native, so I'm not going to really take you seriously." Sometimes I'm happy that I look more whiter than what I am. Just because most people will help me. I can't imagine looking Inuit.

Police-Community Relations

A service provider was of the view that "We don't have great relationships with the RCMP here." According to this participant, "there's a lot of reasons" for the poor relationship.

A lot of it has to do with historical stuff and a lot of it has to do with recent stuff. And through the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry, you know, what Inuit women and all Indigenous women have been saying all along came to full light through that inquiry. There has been a lot of things done by the RCMP and a lot of disrespect done to them of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls through investigations or lack thereof and [not] taking things seriously.

Other participants believed that a separation existed between police officers and the community. That separation was in part geographical: "They're all living down there in that little commune and don't even be part of the community. They're segregating themselves. Why do you want to be here for if you're not going to do that?"

Police officers were also seen as separate because of their lack of interaction with community members. As one woman said: "They don't interact with you. It's like you're separated. To me it seems like they're not allowed to interact with community people. Yeah, and that's what I think has caused a lot of rift between their relationships with community members.... It's like a hierarchy. Different place, their position in the community is different."

According to this same woman, the separation extends to the wives of RCMP officers: "Even the wives don't even interact with the community unless it's something that they need. For example, if they have small children, they might go to a family resource centre where they offer services and they're okay there. But that's as far as it goes based on their need. But yet they don't interact with anybody else."

According to one service provider, the lack of interaction on the part of RCMP officers and their families leads community members to feel "like we're being judged because 'Oh, you shouldn't get to know us.' Like, they've already made the decision up for us that our community is not good, getting involved with the people is not good, you know, when really it's not like that for everybody. Like, it just seems to be one judgement for everybody when everybody is not like that." The service provider believed that the lack of interaction was especially problematic in Inuit communities: "The way we are as Inuit people, we just talk to everybody, you know. Like, I find that, I don't know, it doesn't seem to be working for here when they don't interact and they feel like, don't be a part of the community."

Duration of Postings

One factor that exacerbates the lack of interaction between the police and community members is the short period of time that officers are stationed in the community. As one woman said, “There’s always new ones comes in and new ones go out.” Another woman commented: “You do get really nice ones here and I’m sure some of them do care but it’s sad to say that there’s a lot that’s just here and, like, they’re just filling in their two years, that’s it, that’s their posting, and then gone.” A service provider noted that, “It’s like when you finally get to recognize somebody or know that they’re RCMP and you finally get to know their name and they’re gone. So it’s like you’re constantly having to adjust to new members. And you finally got around to getting to know somebody or at least their name and seeing them around and then they’re gone.”

A service provider drew comparisons between the RCMP and the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC), the provincial police service:

We have two police forces in our province, the RNC which is our provincial police force and they’re based in three centres, three towns, cities in our province. And they don’t rotate, whereas the RCMP again they rotate their officers. And I don’t know if that works really well in forging strong community relationships. I think the best community relationships are forged when officers become part of the community and it becomes their residence where their families grow and they become part of the community like everyone else.

One service provider noted: “I don’t know if they ever become really part of the community, because they’re there for such a short period of time as are many other professionals. And so the relationships are not forged strongly. And I wonder if there’s a mistrust then too because of that.” Another service provider also spoke about the RCMP policy and how it impedes relationship building and perpetuates mistrust of the police:

The RCMP have a policy that you can only spend so many years in remote locations. And that’s kind of frustrating ‘cause it feels like as soon as you build a relationship and, like, we’ve had RCMP officers in the community that’s very much respected and liked and they like the community, but they were not allowed to stay past, I don’t know if it was four years or five years or three years. But there is like a set limit. And it can be frustrating, especially when there’s already a lot of mistrust of the community and the police, which is, I think, most communities have mistrust of the police, but when you also put in like the kind of the legacy of some of the enforcement with, you know, the sled dog culls and, yeah, I guess anything to do with colonialism, you’re going to have a lot more distrust of police. And it’s kind of a shame that once you build a relationship with somebody and start to develop that trust that person tends to get moved. So yeah, it can be really difficult.

One woman also queried: “How can you patrol a community when you don’t know the community? Like, I know they got a community map and all that, but they don’t know, they don’t have a clue.” Another participant pointed out how difficult it is for officers to carry out their job: “If you’re having a high turnover of police officers every few years it can be hard to just even navigate the geography of, you know, like, we don’t have street signs up and there’s no Google Maps and sometimes you’re driving a skidoo and you’re driving blind and you have to find so-and-so’s house. You don’t know what that looks like and that can be, I can imagine can be quite typical.”

Police Presence in the Community

Participants were also asked about how visible the police were in the community. One woman indicated that police officers “get involved in different community events. They do like a bike rodeo for children, they do Canada Day events, you see them whenever there’s a community event going on that I’ve attended.” Other participants commented that police were most likely to be seen “in their vehicles driving around, probably mostly daytime. Not late in the night, like not when it’s really dark.” However, one participant indicated that police officers are referred to as “men with no legs ‘cause they don’t get out of their truck.” As well, police are less visible during the winter months: “You don’t see them in the winter. Because the trucks are put away. ‘Cause we don’t get our roads groomed, we use the skidoos, the snowmobiles.”

When participants were asked about their sense of safety in the community, several indicated that their safety became an issue at night when intoxicated people are around. As one woman indicated: “After dark in the later parts of the evenings, so I don’t know from 11 o’clock onward, I guess, it seems to be a more worrisome time for people being beyond drunk or have had way too much to drink.” For this reason, participants believed that police needed to have a greater presence in the community during the nighttime hours. A service provider also commented that, “Kids are scared of the police” because “they don’t see them around the community and don’t know them. So they will shut down when being interviewed by them.”

The Call System

One significant concern raised by many of the participants was the inaccessibility of the RCMP’s call system. One woman recalled that, “They used to respond when I was young. They used to respond right away when people used to call for them.” Now, however, when a community member phones the local RCMP “You don’t directly speak to a person, it’s a system that you call. And you have to press 1, 2 or 3 to get to somebody.” As one woman said, “Imagine somebody’s attacking you and you got to wait to listen to the person on the phone, ‘If this is emergency please press,’ you know.”

The automated call system is especially troublesome for residents whose first language is Inuktitut. “A lot of our people in our community don’t understand English very well and you’re calling the detachment and they say, ‘Press 1’ for I don’t even know what it is, ‘Press 1 for emergency,’ ‘Press 2 for a general call,’ or ‘Press 3 for whatever else,’ like, they don’t know what to press.” One participant queried: “I wonder how many people have actually done that and haven’t been able to get the services that they were looking for?” Another participant suspected that “if they’re not understanding the language they probably don’t even call. You know, like, that’s probably causing people to not call in.”

Service providers also indicated that they too had difficulty contacting the police. “We don’t even have the number directly to the detachment. We have to either call the clerk and like wait or call St. John’s.” As one woman remarked: “That whole calling operator thing that you got to press 1 for this press 2 for that, that should be taken away. That’s just silly.”

After hours, calls to the police are re-routed to the RCMP station in St. John’s, Newfoundland. Participants indicated that, “The system after hours is even worse.” One of the women elaborated:

If you call in the middle of the night and you're in a state of emergency, somebody's attacking you and you need help now, so you pick up the phone, you call the RCMP, you get St. John's. St. John's then puts you on hold while they try to reach the main station or somebody who's on call at the station, one of the RCMP members. So you're on hold getting beaten to a pulp while you're waiting for somebody to finally respond.

As another woman said, "Them few minutes that you're waiting to get transferred out, that could be the difference in someone's life."

Participants also noted that calling to St. John's takes longer because "now they want to know how old you are and when is your birth date. But you don't care about that when something bad is really happening. You just want to say, 'Can you get the police here? There's something happening and can you please come over right away.'" Another woman noted, "You got to give your address and names and whatnot. But if I got an officer here I could say, 'I'm at the arena' and they'll know exactly what I'm talking about. They don't need building numbers and street names. They probably will know who I am."

Police Response Time

The inaccessibility of the police extends to how long it takes them to respond to a call. In one woman's experience, "When people come into my house to use the phone 'cause they got none, they [the police] don't come around for like hour, hour and a half, maybe longer. And it takes a while, like, you know, somebody came in to use the phone to find out the cops can call and help them, even if it's all hours of the night, and it takes forever to come and they don't come at all. And I feel unsafe because that person that's doing something to that person might come in the house and do something." Another woman has found that, "their time to come to your home is really long." As she noted, "This is a very small community and you can get everywhere in this town in 10 or 15 minutes. And you don't need to come see someone hours later. That's not acceptable, we're not in downtown Toronto." Service providers made a similar comment, saying that when called in the middle of the night, "We rush in there and we're waiting for them. So then it impedes our ability to do what we're supposed to be doing. And if a woman is being assaulted, like in that amount of time, like, two hours later by the time we get there, well, a lot can happen in two hours." As they noted: "We're not in a big city here. This a very small community. You can be everywhere here in a matter of minutes. And it's sad."

Service providers have also experienced a lack of support from police officers in attending to a house where violence might be occurring. "There have been times I've called and said, 'Can you come with me? Like, I'm really scared. I don't know what these people are like, what might happen given the history in the home, like, of violence.' And I've had them come before and park around the corner. Like, they can't even see us at the door. It's like they don't even want to." One service provider wondered: "What are they doing to other people if they're acting like that towards us who are supposed to be working alongside with them?"

In addition, service providers raised the issue of the delay that often occurs in receiving referrals from the RCMP. "We would expect as per the legislation that they send us referrals immediately like as soon as possible. But it will sometimes be like up to a month later before we get information about incidents that have happened, which then makes it difficult for us to help those people, because we're like, 'Well, this happened a month ago.'"

Police Officers Can Make a Difference

How police officers choose to represent themselves can have an effect on their relations with the community. One woman recalled an officer in her hometown when she was growing up. “Everyone called him ‘Robocop’ because of the way he dressed and the way he presented himself in the community when he was working. He had gloves on, he had the sunglasses like exactly the movie Robocop. That was why he was called Robocop. And because of that he was higher than, like, he had authority and then he wanted people to know that he is not to be dealt with.”

Participants, however, also spoke of officers “who were really good, really well-respected. You know, very non-judgmental and supportive and just trying to do the best for the community. So we did have a couple of officers who were really good at that. It just would be lovely if they could stay.” Another participant recalled a “really good sergeant” who had served in her community:

He extended his stay a year with his family and his family was involved in everything. He took them out, his kids were in hockey, his wife knew people and it wasn’t, it was just something very good to see that. And he donated his time volunteering as a coach with the minor hockey ‘cause his kids were in there and he was helping. And he was the kind that treated you as a person. He respected you. It didn’t matter where you are. He was able to talk to people, no matter if he knew you were a criminal who was back and forth or you were somebody who wasn’t, you know, he didn’t treat you any differently. That was something that I found was really helpful for here.

Several participants also commented on the newest RCMP sergeant in the detachment. One woman remarked: “He’s new and he’s young and when you talk to him he genuinely takes the time to listen to you. And if you’ve got any issues, like, if you’ve got any concerns you can go to him and he’ll come back to you if he doesn’t know the answer to a question. Like, you can do that.” The sergeant has also “made positive changes based on what he feels would be good for here and it has been positive.” One change that participants had noticed is that police officers are “making more of a presence, like, they’re patrolling more, they’re making themselves more visible. They’re doing stops and I think it might help deter and something from happening. ‘Cause you didn’t see that, like, this time last year.”

Participants were aware, however, that the duration of the sergeant’s posting will be limited. As one service provided said: “I hope their patrolling and their presence continues and I hope that there’s a transition time where that the sergeant can speak to the incoming sergeant and, like, kind of go through the ropes with him and let him know, like, this is working and this isn’t and we could do better in this area.”

Policing Challenges

Participants were aware of the challenges that police encounter in carrying out their role. One challenge is the weather. As a service provider noted:

Maybe if they had to get somebody in or out of the community by police plane or something, right. Maybe due to courts or something, in and out by plane due to weather cancellations or things like that. I guess that would be a challenge, you know, whether they're trying to arrange to get a woman and her children out for safety or whether they're trying to take somebody out for their own personal safety or whether they have to arrest somebody and get them out of the community as such, right.

Another service provider noted that officers' response times are affected in winter time. "They have to wait for the snowmobiles to warm up if it's in the winter. Like, you can't just go on and take off on a machine without having a snowmobile having to warm up to be able to take off, right. So that is one I know for sure and I don't know how much in time response that has added to the time that they're not available."

Other participants commented on the lack of cells to accommodate the people being picked up by police. One service provider said: "I know how crowded it could get down there. And it saddens me that if someone is abusive or they're intoxicated, causing trouble, they kind of have to choose who they're going to lock up because space is an issue." One woman said, "What I've been told was they don't pick up people who are drunk in public in the day or the night because their cells are already full. So they just bring them home, but then it doesn't mean they're [not] going to go out and do something."

Another challenge that police encounter in carrying out their role is a lack of understanding of life in the North. As one service provider noted:

You have some that are more suited for the North and some that are not just strictly personality-wise. I mean, it almost takes a northerner to understand a northerner as such, you know. Because due to the way of the lifestyle and the way things are to fully understand a lot of times where these women are coming from and the kind of life that they're living. A lot of RCMP come from away and have no idea, no [way] can he comprehend what some of these women and children are going through and the way that they have to live.

For another service provider, this challenge extends to a lack of knowledge of the colonial history of the North:

I think some RCMP officers come up and they're not fully aware of the history of the RCMP in the community and the impacts of colonialism and trauma and intergenerational trauma and historical, like, I think many of them are just completely unaware of that, which to me is, I guess in my position is shocking. But at the same time, they're not social workers, they're not counsellors, they grew up in southern Canada and where it's not talked about as much. I mean, I think it is now in recent years it's much more visible, but I don't think people are fully aware of the damages, like I say, of residential school and the Sixties Scoop and how those reverberations from those events are still being felt today.

This challenge also extends to a lack of understanding of Inuit culture. One woman commented on how a cultural disconnect often occurs when police and other service providers come to work in the North. “I find people from away ... when they come here they have no clue as to our culture, our ways, sometimes.” She gave the example of working with a social worker. “She was doing a risk assessment for a family to determine if their kids were going to be taken or not.” During this process, the woman could sense from the body language of the parents that they were feeling intimidated:

I could really see them, when the questions were being asked, their body language, they were shrinking in the chair. They were going lower and lower and lower. And even the questions were really hard. They just answered “yes” partly because they weren’t understanding what was being asked because of the way the questions were in the language. But also too because of her authority figure and tone. They just felt they had to answer “yes” to any of her questions, even though they weren’t even fully understanding what they were being asked.

During a break, the woman requested to speak with the parents. She asked them: “Are you understanding what is being asked?” And they responded with, “I don’t know.” So when the interview resumed, the social worker asked the same question again and the parents responded, “Yes.” When the woman asked the question “in what I knew they would understand, from the way they understand,” the parents said, “No.” “So it was two totally different responses based on authority, hierarchy, and the way questions are being [posed].”

The woman gave another example of an Inuk being asked questions.

They put their head down because you don’t like to have eye contact sometimes. That’s still something that is still very prevalent here in our Inuit community is you don’t look at a person directly because you don’t want to disrespect the person, right. So the person was being asked a question and his head was down and the person got mad. She said, “You look at me when I’m asking you a question.” And so he put his head up and she asked a question and he raised his eyebrows. And she said, “You answer my question.” When all that time I said, “Do you realize he’s already answering you? He’s saying ‘yes’ with his eyebrows.” ... Those things are things that people don’t know if they’re not from around here.

The woman believed such encounters have relevance for the RCMP: “The majority of RCMP members who are here are from away, so they don’t understand the culture.... I don’t even know if the person is even understanding what is being asked them when they’re giving [a] statement.”

Another challenge raised by participants was the lack of trauma training for RCMP officers, especially in relation to dealing with cases of gendered violence. As one service provider explained:

I’ve heard a couple of those stories where people have reported sexual violence to the police, and most of it is unintentional, when somebody kind of uses language that can be interpreted as victim blaming. And I think it goes back to the lack of training and understanding that after a sexual assault somebody is hyperaware of every word that you are using and tone of voice. And even though you may not be intending to hurt them, it hurts them. And it bothers them greatly.

Participants were also concerned that police officers do not have enough training on the legislation and protocols relating to child protection. “They make the assessment for us whether they think we should be involved when we should be making that determination.”

What Needs to be done?

Participants had a number of suggestions for improving relations between police and the Inuit community, as well as the police response to gendered violence.

For one, participants believed that officers need to be better educated about the communities they are mandated to serve. As one service provider noted: “The RCMP they need to be trained up their own selves by us people, right, by us, by Inuit people. But if they’re coming into our communities we need to somehow ensure that this is happening before they come in so that they’re prepared, that they’re prepared for us and our life and our culture. ‘Cause they’re coming to us, right.” Another service provider said: “My suggestion I think might be if they had cultural training, you know, just to understand different things about our culture. Like, elders, the importance of elders and the importance of the history, you know, of what happened to our people in the past, like, relocation or residential schools, all that stuff.” A woman commented: “I think if they did cultural awareness on just the body language and understanding, that kind of thing, that would be so much more helpful. I think that could be used in a positive way.”

Other suggestions had to do with better integrating police officers into the community when they arrive. As one woman noted, “They’re not introduced to the community at all when they come.” Another woman pointed out that there used to be a welcoming committee for newcomers: “The community used to go up into the gym and all the new teachers coming in, all the new social workers, RCMP, nurses, all, they used to come up to the gymnasium and the community used to go up and they used to introduce each other and stuff like that. But that don’t go on no more.” One woman believed that, “That welcoming used to make a difference, though. ‘Cause we knew who they were, we knew.”

Beyond their initial introduction, officers need to become more involved in the community. As one woman said, “The only way you’re going to make yourself be more known in this town is go out in the community and be part of it. You cannot police a community if you don’t know your community. You can’t.” Another woman added: “Like, just being a part of what’s happening in our town, stuff like that. Like, get involved somehow. If they are more visible then they would be more trusted, I think.”

Participants were also aware that the RCMP needs to build trust with the community. As one service provider said: “They really need to build trust back and their reputation needs to be built back, and especially with women.” The service provider suggested that police officers could organize gatherings with women in the community, “that could be just like meet and greet, sewing circle, could be something different each month, some little craft, something, maybe they could get a guest speaker to talk to the women. They could give them some information and resources. You know, different things, right, just to build up that bit of respect and rapport and that trust.” Building rapport with other service providers would also improve the response to gendered violence:

And we also know that we often at times as well need to approach RCMP very quietly, very discreetly and say, “Gee you know you might want to keep an extra eye on this woman here and this household here and the kids and stuff, right. You might want to do a few more drive-by’s to that house a little more often or something because we got reason for concerns of safety and stuff.” So it’s important for not only women but us as service providers if we know these things to be able to have that rapport and that relationship with the RCMP where that trust is built there, that if we fear for a woman’s safety, we can say, “Hey,” you know.

The service provider suggested that this community involvement could be facilitated by hiring a cultural facilitator, someone who “people respect from community, who they trust from community but who’s employed by the RCMP to be that connection between them, that liaison to help build the trust that way and rapport.”

Participants, however, were also aware that the police need more resources. As one service provider said, “I think they are overworked. I think that’s a challenge to do their job the best they could and that they’re probably understaffed.” The service provider went on to say: “I think for their mental health and their attitude and for the services they provide, they could use more members. I’m sure if they weren’t overworked or constantly on the go, they’d have a better attitude.” With more resources, including more officers, the RCMP would be in a better position to respond to calls more quickly, as well as patrol on a 24/7 basis. Doing so would increase the police presence in the community and enable a more proactive response. As one woman commented:

You’re not going to cut down on your crimes and all that if you’re only doing response, you got to be proactive about it. And one way of being proactive, go out and patrol. ‘Cause you’re probably not going to be doing bad stuff in the night if you see police going around nonstop. I’m not saying that’s going to cut down all the crime rate of probably violence in people’s homes. But you know what, it’s probably going to come into their mind, like, “Oh my god there’s police actually around tonight, maybe I shouldn’t do that.”

Participants also pointed out that, “The telephone system in our town does not work.” As one woman commented “There should not be an answering machine. If you’ve got an emergency line, you should have help straightaway. There should never be a, ‘Oh just hold on, and I’ll see if I can find someone for you.’”

Service providers suggested the need for improvement in the service standard of the RCMP. As one participant noted: “I have numerous times, like, printed out policy or legislation, faxed it to them, been, like, ‘Please review this. Like, you need to do this, like, as per this policy or this section.’”

Service providers also pointed to the need for more training to RCMP officers “on how to respond to disclosures of sexual violence in a way that doesn’t kind of perpetuate secondary wounding or re-traumatization.” According to one service provider, by doing so, “It’s going to make their job easier to investigate if they kind of understand how trauma works, how narratives sometimes are not linear after an assault, and how taking the time in the beginning is going to give you more information in the long-term to be able to investigate the trauma, the incident, correctly and do their job.”

Several participants recommended that more female RCMP officers be hired, especially in relation to dealing with cases of gendered violence. As one woman noted: “I’d rather go see a woman police than a man one. Because a woman talking to a woman is easier than talking to a man. Like, if you’ve been hurt by a man you don’t want to talk to a man. You’d rather talk to a woman.”

Similarly, several participants spoke about the role that community constables could play, “somebody who’s not fully a police officer, like, they do not carry a weapon and they kind of accompany the police, they can accompany the police to certain events or certain calls and kind of act as maybe somebody who ... could help with cultural awareness.” According to another service provider, a community constable “could bridge the gap between the community and the RCMP. Like, doing their part in outreach and ... making the community more aware of the RCMP’s roles and maybe why they do the things the way they do things. And bringing the community’s concerns directly to the RCMP so that the RCMP is aware that, ‘Oh, this isn’t working.’”

Participants also recalled, “There used to be a foot patrol team just done by the community as volunteer. Like, people would just volunteer to do it. They’d go out a certain time in the evening and just patrol around town, basically, in groups, right.” While a community patrol hasn’t happened in a number of years, participants said that they “felt safer knowing that that was happening.” For another participant, “pairing up community folks with the RCMP” would be “a good way to show that they’re here to help us not just to lock us all up when we’re being bad (chuckle). Because really, that’s how some people perceive the RCMP, they’re here to boss us around and make rules. That’s not the case.”

In the view of one service provider, police have a “wonderful opportunity” to be a resource for women who encounter gendered violence.

They have such an opportunity with any individual but particularly with victims of partner violence to educate and to provide safety and to talk to them about options and get them well connected. So while they may be dealing with a woman who may not want to pursue charges and who may not want to talk in detail about what’s happened to her, they have a wonderful opportunity as that contact to provide positive messaging to them about their circumstance and then provide them with opportunities or options for other services, resources that can help them safety planning. So a lot of that education piece can take place with the police.

Participants also saw the need for more social services and resources in the community. As one woman said, “We’re just like bare minimum, always in the North bare minimum.” Recommendations offered by participants included: a helpline for women who have encountered gendered violence; more counsellors to support people who are experiencing trauma; supports for elders and men who encounter violence and abuse; the use of nurse examiners in sexual assault cases; second stage housing for women leaving abusive relationships; and programs to educate young men and women about healthy relationships.

As well, social service providers saw the need for a better coordination of the services that are currently being offered. One service provider commented: "I find the organizations are doing separate things. Like, we're doing things on our own, but really we should be coming together but more like a case management where you're able to talk about all this and how we can best meet the needs of the community." Another commented on the need to have services "knowing what each other does and having a point of connection and referral to each other." Having a better coordination of services would mean that:

If someone accessed our service as a victim of partner violence then if they needed housing, we would have a contact and know exactly who to go to. If there was something around income support or family court they needed, we would have points of contact with each other, so that it would be more coordinated and it would be more than just providing a list of numbers where you can go for various things.

Finally, one woman made the point that "It's good to have all the research and stuff but we don't have the actual funding to be able to actually do the stuff that needs to be done on the ground.... You can have all these recommendations, all these things that the community is saying, but there's never any follow-up, follow through, based on the recommendations that people are saying over and over and over again."

Policing in Nunavik

Safety did not used to be a matter of concern in Nunavik communities. As one woman commented, “When I was a kid, we never locked doors. Even when we were down south for a week, we’d leave our doors open.... Nobody locked their doors back then.” In recent times, however, problems with alcohol and drug use have been generating safety concerns: “There’s so much alcoholism and drug abuse now that it’s so usual. It’s the norm now to see people staggering uncontrollably down the street or people fighting in the street. It’s scary, it’s really scary.” Another woman made a similar comment:

I know like for my kids, I fear for their safety any time of the day. ‘Cause there’s people completely whacked out, just like drunk or whatnot on the corners of the streets. One time a guy just walked into my house in the middle of the day. He didn’t know where he was but he was obviously very intoxicated.

But the threat of gendered violence has also prompted safety concerns: “There’s so much sexual abuse in this community, in all the communities in Nunavik. There’s so much sexual abuse, there’s so much domestic violence, there’s so much child sexual abuse. And it’s really, like, on a regular [basis].”

These safety concerns raise the question of how effective the police are in responding, especially when gendered violence occurs. In Nunavik, that responsibility falls on the Kativik Regional Police Force (KRPF), although when a major crime such as sexual assault occurs, the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) is called in to investigate.

Calling for Help

The women in Nunavik talked about their experiences with the police when their safety was threatened or violence occurred. In one case, fear for her safety resulted in one woman encountering violence from the police when she called on them for help to deal with her unruly partner. She said that this was the first time that she had feared violence from her partner, “the one time that I asked for help.” Instead of the police assisting her, however, she was “violently arrested.”

The incident happened after the woman and her boyfriend had been out at a lounge for the evening, where he consumed a large amount of alcohol. On returning home after midnight, the boyfriend became agitated and began “pacing up and down the hallway and started punching the walls.” The woman did her best to get him to calm down, but he was “coming closer and closer” to her and she began to fear for her safety, so she phoned the police. Two officers arrived at the home. The woman explained to the police that she wanted her boyfriend out of the house as “I’m afraid for myself and my kids.” Seeing the police officers, her boyfriend began acting “like nothing ever happened, calms down, gets a glass of juice, standing there like nothing’s ever happened.” Believing that “it will start again” if the police were to leave, she asked that he be removed. But the officers told her: “Well, if he lives here, we can’t do nothing about it” and that “Nothing happened.” She responded: “Oh, you want something to happen before I call you guys again? Do I literally have to be hit for me to call you guys again?” The woman explained what transpired next:

I started to get very, very angry with the fact that I cannot get help from the local police force when I am afraid for my safety. So I pointed my finger at the cop and he was coming closer and closer to me. And I have boundary issues. I don't like people too close to me. I don't like people touching me. And this is my right to have my, this is my safe zone. So he literally went over my safe zone and he was standing above me, over me [as she was sitting in a chair].... So I pointed my finger at him. I said, "Get the fuck out of my house."

Next thing the woman knew, the police officer twisted her arm and smashed her face on the table, breaking one of her teeth. He then proceeded to forcibly arrest her:

He jumps on my back, literally on my back, and he's got his knee on my back, in the middle of my back here. I'm immobilized completely. I cannot move at all, whatsoever. And he physically, severely, violently arrested me. I was completely black and blue all down my arms from the cuffs, and from his knee on my legs. So this whole situation caught me completely off guard. I was in severe shock. I couldn't say anything. I couldn't, I had no tears. I had nothing.

The officer then proceeded to push the woman out to the porch. It was a minus 30 degree Celsius evening. "He shoves me out the door in my bare feet. So going down my stairs I cut the bottom of my foot. I guess my foot must have got stuck 'cause it was so cold and then it ripped my skin from underneath. So I was arrested and incarcerated for the night."

The woman was charged with resisting arrest and "molestation of a police officer" and released the next morning with conditions (no drugs or alcohol, "do not harass police officers"). "So calling for help I ended up having all these charges. I had to live with these conditions in a small town, in a very small town, so everywhere I saw cops." It took two years before the charges were dealt with by the court. In the meantime, the woman kept being stopped by the same police officer who would ask her, "Have you been drinking today?" Given the frequency of these stops, the woman deemed the interactions to be a form of police harassment.

The woman lodged a complaint with the police commission, which saw merit to her case since the surveillance cameras at the police station demonstrated no evidence that she had been resisting arrest—despite what had been written in the police officer's report.

The experience has left the woman with severe anxiety and a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It has also cost her \$15,000 in travel and dental expenses to repair her broken tooth. Asked if she would call on the police for help in future, the woman replied: "I don't know if I would call the cops. I think I'll call my brothers. I have big brothers, you know what I mean? It's like, I don't know, I'm not there. I'm not comfortable yet with trusting that with the police."

When interviewed, other women also expressed a lack of trust in the police. This lack of trust is being generated by a number of factors, one of which is the divide that exists between Inuit and outsiders.

The Divide

The development of extractive industries in the North and social services in the permanent settlements have led to the arrival of more and more *qallunaat* to take up jobs. According to participants, Nunavik communities are characterized by a divide between the locals and the non-locals. Part of that divide is due to the transient nature of the non-local population, as workers “are coming in for two years and then leaving again. So like the locals don’t really feel like having a relationship with them ‘cause, like, what’s the point?” When they are in the community, the non-locals are provided with “really good pay, they’re offered housing, nice housing, the housing is a lot nicer than the local housing, at a really low rate. They’re offered trips and they get, like, I think it’s like three months, they can get three months out of the year vacation. Whereas the locals don’t get any of that.”

This divide between locals and non-locals extends to the police. Participants believed that KRPF officers are poorly integrated into the community. One reason for this lack of integration is that officers are only in the community for a short period of time. According to participants, this affects their ability to do their job, “because the Inuit like to see the same person and get to know that person and get to trust that person.”

Another factor is the officers’ lack of experience. When asked whether the police were doing a good job, one woman replied:

They’re doing what they can and with the amount of training or experience they have. They do whatever the amount, like, two or three years of police training and then right out of school they’re put to the North where the crime rate is a lot higher than the South. I noticed in the South their police officers are a lot more mature, they have a lot more experience. And here they’re like babies. So it’s almost expected of them not to know or have the patience to handle situations, especially if they’re overworked and they’re, I don’t know, they’re just like, I feel like they don’t get training on how to be street smart in the North, you know. They’re just put there ‘cause we need police officers.

For this same participant, the police’s lack of knowledge about the community puts her safety at risk:

It doesn’t make me feel safe knowing that they’re not community street-smart. They don’t know if a situation is happening. Like, let’s say for example there’s a polar bear in the community and somebody calls them. They don’t know which hunters to go see to shoot the polar bear, you know.

According to one of the service providers, KRPF officers’ lack of knowledge about the community extends to not even knowing where the women’s shelter is located.

One time I had to call, we had an emergency and I called 911 and this police officer answered and said, “Where is the shelter?” “What? You don’t know where the shelter is? You should be the first one to know where the shelter is.” So I had to explain to them where the building is. And I was so surprised of that. They have to know where the shelter is ‘cause I think anybody should know where the shelter is. I mean, they’re the police here.

Participants also believed that police officers are constrained in doing their job because of their limited understanding of the history of Inuit communities and the root causes of the problems encountered, especially with drug and alcohol use and domestic violence.

We have some really fantastic police officers. But most of the police officers that come on are very young, right out of the academy and finding their cop legs, I guess, and don't know, I don't know what it is, I'm not going to figure their part out. But I know it's difficult to work in the North, be away from home, I get it. At the same time, if you're going to work in the North I think it's important that you get to know us and get our community and our ways and our culture and try to understand why things are the way they are, why is there so much alcoholism and why is there so many women getting beat up by their husbands. Get involved and learn and try to learn before judging, I think.

Another participant shared a similar viewpoint about the police's lack of knowledge, suggesting that it has led to a negative view of the community on the part of police:

I feel like they don't get that [cultural awareness training]. And I feel like if they were properly taught why the communities are so like, for sure our crime rates are a lot higher than down south per population. If they were told why we're this way, they would understand more. And they go to a community and the first experience they have is negative 'cause they have to police them, you know. So I feel like they see the community negatively 'cause all they're doing is, like, they're not integrated in the community, they're policing us.

This divide between police and the community is exacerbated by language barriers. As one woman observed: "Sometimes some officers are hired that hardly speak English at all." Another woman believed that she was treated with more respect by a police officer once it became evident that she was able to "properly speak English, that I'm able to make a complaint and everything. I felt like he had a lot more respect for me. Like, his attitude changed, which was really annoying." On the other hand, she believed that Inuit who have trouble speaking English or French are treated with less respect by police; "they don't take them seriously at all."

One woman emphasized the importance of police officers being able to communicate in Inuktitut: "We need someone to speak in Inuktitut when we call the police. When we need to call the police, we want to know that someone will answer us in a language we can understand, that we can communicate with them." This issue is especially important when women are reporting a sexual assault. As this same woman explained:

Because we express ourselves more really truly if we say it in our language. Because in a situation like that [a sexual assault report] we have to switch to a different language when all the things that were going on were going on in Inuktitut, suddenly we have to have our words written in English. I know it's the only way to get it into the court but I would have liked to speak with an Inuk officer at that time.

A police officer we interviewed agreed that language barriers are a significant challenge to policing in Nunavik:

It's definitely an advantage having someone that speaks the language working for us. I find that things definitely don't escalate as quickly. I mean, just, communication is the basic, you know, fundamental aspect in policing, right. So definitely having someone that speaks the language definitely helps with the, you know, to resolve situations.... Oftentimes people that are from Nunavik, Inuktitut is their first language and then often it would be English their second, English or French and then a third language English or French again. And our police officers that are coming from Quebec, well, French is their first language and English is their second language. Well, when you have someone speaking their second language to someone else that's their second language, guaranteed that there's language barriers. So and then like I said, communication is the fundamental of policing, right. It's to de-escalate a situation. So it's definitely a challenge.

One of the service providers suggested that the language barriers lead to a lot of misunderstandings when police are called, and "that's why there's a lot of arresting."

For many of the participants, this divide between the police and the community breaks down along racial lines. As one woman commented: "I seen a lot of policemen treat Inuit like they were nothing. They have more respect for French people and English people around here."

Another woman told of her frustration with police in dealing with her abusive partner: "Two weeks ago he beat me up and kicked me out of the house. And he always gets away with it. The cops are always on his side 'cause he's white."

A third woman commented: "If a white person calls and says something, they'll take the white person's side without regard, without even seeing anything." This woman's daughter had been in an abusive relationship. The family had tried to have her partner charged, but nothing ever happened. As the woman told us through an interpreter: "He's never spent more than a night in jail here. He's never gone down South. He's threatened her, broken into her house, dragged her daughter out, beating her up. He's done many, many things. But she's never seen a day in court to prove her side, to show the court, the judge, her side of what happened. And he's always gotten away with everything."

One woman talked about her experience of having to attend court. "So many of us wait in one big room, all of us for court to be, sit and we wait there." While they are waiting, police officers will happen by, and make comments such as, "Oh, you're here again. What did you do this time?" or "Are you actually sober today? You're going to be here, are you going to make it through the court?" The woman found these interactions to be demeaning to Inuit, "and so sad that Inuit don't think they're being humiliated or they're just so humble to the point where they just laugh at it. 'Yeah, I did something again,' you know. Some people are like that and some people are, like, can't do anything about it, so they have no choice but to keep their mouth shut in order for them not to be pressed charge again. 'Oh, can't talk to you, if I try to say something about this, what you're saying to me, I'm going to be arrested, so I can't say anything.'"

This divide between the police and the community is exacerbated by several other factors.

Under-Resourcing of the KRPF

Participants were well aware of how under-resourced the KRPF has been, which affects their ability to respond when violence occurs. As one police officer explained to us, the KRPF doesn't provide 24-hours-a-day patrols: "Our police officers in most villages stop between 2 in the night till 8. They're sleeping and they're responding to calls on their radio." Calling the police in the late hours of the night, however, can result in no response. One woman told of an incident where her friend had been badly beaten. But when they tried to call the police for help, there was no reply. "This is at 5 in the morning, 4 in the morning, and I couldn't believe it. Like, we kept calling them and there was no answer."

Another woman believed that the under-resourcing of the KRPF leads them to make mistakes. "They're so busy they start to screw up a bit, I guess. That's what happened when they broke my door down." She told about being home one evening, giving her child a bath, when a police officer burst into her home. "And I said, 'You just broke my door.' He goes, 'We were told that there was somebody with a rifle in here.' 'Do you see anybody?'" With the house unsecured, the woman had to find another place to sleep for the night and then arrange to have her door repaired. The experience left her feeling "scared." "They should be very careful to get the right house, you know. I know it's hard to hear on the walkie talkies but you have to be [more careful]. I didn't like it. I feel violated."

As well, with few police officers on duty at any one time, the response when violence occurs can be slow. A woman who was in an abusive relationship said, "Once you call the police to your house it takes a long time for them to come to your rescue." A service provider echoed this viewpoint: "When they're responding to an emergency or answering a call to an emergency, they kind of slack, takes a while for them to answer.... They ask what's going on and if they think it's not big of a problem, they take their time to come."

Another service provider believed that the under-staffing of the KRPF has an impact on their ability to respond when gendered violence occurs.

You can see sometimes that if they're on a call either they're worried for the next call 'cause they need to go, they want to close up things as fast as possible. So when it comes to, for example, a woman as a victim of violence, they won't necessarily take the time to sit down, see how you're doing, and like touch up on the human side of it. 'Cause they're more in the "Emergency, emergency, emergency. I might get another call."

This same service provider gave the example of a recent case where a woman showed up at the police station after a sexual assault, wanting to press charges.

I don't know what else was going on at that moment but the answer of the police officer when the person that was at the station called was, "Well, it's not an emergency right now. Can she come back?"—which is, according to me and a lot of people, completely unacceptable. But I can understand to some extent that if you were on a call with someone with a gun inside a house, I don't know what the other situation was. But if you're putting on the ice someone that's coming up that might have taken all their courage to come and press charges, and you're like, "Yeah it's not the time, come back tomorrow," it's not the right answer.

Participants also expressed concerns about how police go about their investigation when gendered violence occurs.

Investigating Sexual Assaults

One woman told a harrowing story of the sexual assault of her young daughter. The assault occurred one night when her daughter was home alone. A man came into her daughter's bedroom "and he attempted to have intercourse with her. It didn't work, it didn't happen. But other things happened. He covered her face with his shirt so she couldn't see his face. But she saw his tattoo on his neck and that's how she knew who it was."

The daughter disclosed what had happened a month later to a school counsellor, who informed the mother. "She didn't want to tell me. She thought I was going to be mad 'cause she didn't lock the door, you know, it was her fault kind of thing. Anyway, we got that cleared up and, you know, 'It's not your fault.'" After meeting with a social worker, they made the decision to press charges, "cause I wanted to make sure she was okay with it 'cause I knew what was coming." Despite the mother's cautiousness about going forward with charges, what transpired was worse than she had imagined. As she told us: "I cannot tell you how horribly this was handled by the police."

When the assault was reported to the KRPF, the mother was told that her daughter would have to speak with an SQ officer about what happened. Several weeks later, they went to the police station to meet with the officer.

When we arrived at the police station, you know, we're talking about a 10-year-old girl who hadn't even gotten her period in life yet. And you have some guy going in her house trying to have intercourse with her. And so you'd think there would be some kind of a soft, welcoming, friendly atmosphere. Like, maybe a woman would be nice to have there or like, but no. There was one man ... whose English wasn't very good. He was French. My daughter's Anglophone and Inuktitut, speaks French too from school but, you know, it's not her first or second language. And so she was told that she was going to have to do an interview on camera, which we already knew. And this was, he said, "You do it this way then you don't have to go to court," right. Thank god.

The mother, however, was told that she wasn't allowed to be in the interview room with her daughter.

A man, a strange man, speaking to a 10-year-old girl who has to tell him that he [another man] tried to put his penis in her vagina. Come on. But you know I'm, I don't know how this works so. And I'm usually pretty outspoken but I just kind of said, "Okay sweetie, I'm right here. I'm right outside the door." 'Cause I asked him why, he said "'Cause we can't have any unbiased" or whatever. Okay. So I said, "I'm right out," she was crying, "I'm right here, I'm right here, okay." So she went in. They were in there for about 20 minutes and came out. She was very upset, very shaken. We went home. She was like, "That was horrible, mom." I said "It's over. You did it. I'm proud of you."

Three weeks later, the mother received a call from the SQ officer, telling her that they needed to do a second interview.

And I said “Why do you have to do an interview? You told my daughter that this was going to be it.” He said, “Well, there’s still a few questions. We have a second SQ investigator coming up and we’d like to interview her together.” “Can I be in the room with her this time?” “No, you’re not allowed.” So this time it was two men, one she had already had the interview with, but now it was another guy that was asking even more detailed questions. Again, I couldn’t be in there with her. No social worker, no woman, no support, no nothing, just a 10-year-old girl, two men that she doesn’t know and a camera, talking about what happened to her. So she did the interview again. And she was like, “I don’t want to do this again.” “Sweetheart, you won’t have to. They told you, you know, they told us.”

A year later, the case was scheduled to appear in court. Believing that the case would proceed without her daughter having to appear as a Crown witness, the mother attended court to observe the proceedings. Instead, however, she was told by the Crown prosecutor that the hearing had been delayed, and that in order for the case to proceed her daughter would have to testify.

I went home and I told my daughter what had happened. I had to tell her. And I said, “Sweetheart, they think you’re going to have to testify in court.” And her eyes, she said, “I don’t want to do it. I don’t want to do this anymore. I don’t want to talk about it anymore. I don’t want to do this anymore.” And I said, “Okay.” What could I do? I cannot make my daughter continue reliving this. She’s been going through counselling and therapy ever since it happened, at school and at the hospital. But I can’t force her to sit in a courtroom and face the man who did this to her. And so that’s why I wanted to come and talk about the way that things are handled with police and women. It’s not fair. It’s not right.

Meanwhile, the perpetrator remains in the community—with no repercussions for his sexual assault on a young girl.

Investigating Deaths in the Community

Participants were also concerned with how police investigations of deaths in the community are conducted. When a 17-year-old girl was found dead at the local sewage ponds, the SQ was called in to investigate. But “within 24 hours they ruled it a suicide and it was gone.” The community was provided with little information about the girl’s death. “There was no statement, there was no updates. *Nunatsiaq News* never did an article on it. Nothing. Zero. It’s like it didn’t happen.... It’s like she didn’t matter.... Like, we didn’t have a right to know what was going on. It’s like, I can guarantee you if a woman was brutally murdered like that down south, you’d hear about it, there’d be a statement made, there’d be something.”

Community members suspected that the girl was murdered. “So she’s just another statistic, she’s another missing and murdered Indigenous woman and she was murdered. She did not commit suicide, and I’m not in denial about suicide.” Another woman commented: “They’re calling it an automatic suicide when there’s evidence going against all of their, you know, when there’s evidence that don’t support that. And they’re calling it a suicide and not even doing a hard time investigating.” Participants made a comparison between how the death of this young Inuit girl was treated and the death of a Francophone nurse in the community: “When the white girl was murdered it took them two, three days to find the murderer. They were everywhere, knocking on doors, everything.”

Other women talked about the lack of services and supports when women and girls have been sexually assaulted. One woman told what happened after her daughter had been raped. “We brought her to the hospital. The worker that came, it was in the middle of the night, the worker that came just came, she didn’t know what to do. And I said at least she cared enough to show up, but she was not trained to talk to a rape victim.” The woman also said that the police were not helpful in dealing with the rape and its aftermath. “I didn’t find them accommodating to what we needed. They didn’t refer us to anyone, they didn’t take us step by step on what was going to happen. Like, they have no feelings. That was a dreadful, dreadful, dreadful thing that happened.” The woman felt that the police “don’t care.” She explained:

I think they’re scared to care. They’re scared to show any emotion. I would have thought in that attack they would have sent an older, more experienced officer and they sent a very young officer. And I felt sorry for him. I felt sorry that he had to feel all this raw emotion when we were making a statement to him. There was no one there with him either. So it’s like things are just technical for them. But it must surely affect them too to hear all these horrible crimes. They have to write down what happened. What does it do to them eventually?

Responding to Domestic Violence

The lack of resources also impacts how the KRPF respond to domestic violence situations. One woman who encountered abuse from her partner said that on two occasions when the police were called, they told her to leave the house. “And the house is under my name and I was the only one paying the rent. And the police take me out of my home and put him in my house.” A service provider explained why the police will remove the woman from the home and not the man: “There’s a women’s shelter, but if the homeless shelter is closed or, anyway, they’re intoxicated, they have nowhere to bring the men to other than in prison. Literally, they have nowhere to bring this person other than at the police station. And so I have seen a situation where they preferred bringing the woman to the women’s shelter, even though she would have had the right to stay there than having to find a place for the man.”

One of the common criminal justice strategies used in response to cases of domestic violence is to impose a No Contact Order (NCO), which prohibits a person from being in physical contact or verbal communication with another person. The service providers we interviewed said that NCOs “are not working” in the small communities of Nunavik. As one service provider explained:

So if you can’t communicate, I mean, look, in reality we have three stores in one, some communities there’s one store, there’s one hospital, there’s one church, there’s, how can not you communicate, or you’re not to be where that person is.... Maybe he could be living next door to you, if you’re not to communicate with him or, yeah, these procedures are very hard, very hard for clients. That’s why, because it’s too hard, they just say “Ah, forget it,” which they do most of the time, which is sad.

One woman spoke about the difficulties she has encountered as a result of her troubled relationship with her husband. Her husband had been physically violent towards her in the past. When her children called the police, she didn't want charges laid as she didn't want him to go to jail. Her husband, however, started up a relationship with the woman's best friend. On one occasion, the woman went to confront her husband and her friend about their relationship. In her despair, she became intent on harming herself. The police were called and made the assumption that she was going to be violent toward the other woman, so charges were laid against her and a No Contact Order imposed. The woman talked about how difficult it is to abide by an NCO in a small town:

It's hard, humiliating enough, as this one, the judge told me, "Okay, I'm going to cut down all this stuff for you," he had to tell me. "Wherever you happen to be in a public place you're going to be the one who has to walk out from wherever you see them, not them." "Like, what about in a store?" "No, if you see them you have to walk out." "What about like anything, like a public place?" "If you see them you have to be the one." "What about them?" "No, it's not them, you, if you do anything, if you proceed anything else, you're going to go straight to jail." That's like, it was so humiliating.... And having to see them around, I have to turn around. If I'm trying to go into a store, if I see their truck, I have to turn around. Like, that's stupid.

Breaching an NCO can result in further criminal charges, drawing the person further into the criminal justice system.

The Inuit Way versus the Southern Way

For many of the participants, the police are an outside force. As one woman commented: "They're not here to help the Inuit. They're just here to criminalize us." Another woman said:

They're not there to resolve problems. They're there to make them, create them. If you call them, they're not there to help you solve the situation. They're there to arrest somebody. And it depends on who they want to arrest. And they'll come to save you or not depending on who you are.

Participants were well-aware of the disconnect between the Inuit way of resolving conflicts and the southern way.

Let's say that you and I have a problem and you call the cops on me but we never see each other, but we're going to see each other in court, like, [in] five months, you know what I mean. This is the southern way, you know. Like, you don't see your abuser or accuser until it's court date. Inuit don't wait one minute. You face the face with your issue right there and then and you deal with the issue with the person you're having an issue with rather than having a third party resolve it for you.

Rather than exercising the police's power to criminalize by making arrests, participants saw merit in the Inuit way of peacemaking; "they're more counsellors than enforcing the law, you know, by the book with this Criminal Code."

But going on the land and just being on the land for a few days, even a week will change the mood of any Inuk and it's, and I think with like cultural programs where let's say that you have to do a, how do I say, you committed a big crime, for sure there's going to be bigger consequences, but for the petty crimes where people are getting stuck in the system for, let's say that somebody, they got into a brawl with somebody in the bar. You're charged and then you have these conditions that linger for years and you keep violating your conditions, because you're not supposed to drink or you're not supposed to be around the person. But you're in a small town, so your charges keep piling and piling and piling. This is the justice system right now. So people end up with bigger problems than they started with. I think in the Inuit way, you solve the problem before you build other problems.

What Needs to be Done?

We have to have police, we have to have law enforcement, but the way that it's happening I don't think necessarily is working for us in the North.

As it stands, a significant divide exists between the KRPF and the communities it serves. In addition to identifying problems and challenges, participants had suggestions for how policing could be improved in Nunavik to bridge that divide.

Participants believe that police officers need to "be more understanding, be more compassionate, be more available." As one woman explained: "They should be people that you could approach and be comfortable with." This same woman believed the police need to become more involved in the community: "They should have more activities which involve just the citizens, and maybe explaining to them what they're actually doing. 'Cause people don't have a very good image of the police, especially if they've had problems with the police or the lack of support from the police."

Participants were also mindful of how the shortage of police officers affects their work. As one woman said: "I'm pretty sure having more police is going to help so they don't feel overworked, overwhelmed, over, like, they need counsellors too to debrief. So I think once there's more people working there they're going to be able to provide better services."

The language barriers that impede police work also need to be addressed:

The communication has to change. There has to be an interpreter available at all times. If that means you have to have a ride along in your car with you, in case you get a call, then that's just what it means. Like, they should always have an interpreter. So when they walk into a house and they say, "What's going on?" and nobody can speak English, well, there's an interpreter that's going to tell you what's going on.

Given the disconnect between the Inuit way and the southern way of policing, several participants were of the view that Inuit needed to become more involved in resolving conflicts in the community. One woman believed that having more Inuit involved in policing Inuit communities would make a difference: "They would be more understanding towards the Inuit instead of, you know, violently restraining them or something like that."

Another woman suggested the use of natural helpers: “somebody in the community who people naturally go to for advice, for help, somebody who, and that could be a male or a woman, somebody who is always ready to help, doesn’t matter what time of day it is. And we have those in this community, or somebody who’s approachable and that cares, that really cares and shows that they care.” A third woman agreed:

I know people in crisis they respond differently to non-locals than they do to locals. Like, the counsellors here they have such a good relationship. Like, the community looks at them very highly compared to the police ‘cause they know how to deal with certain people, they know what certain people have gone through in their family or in their history, so they understand and they see more empathetic towards the person.

A service provider also believed that drawing on the skills of Inuit cultural workers or natural helpers would “be more in line with traditional values and the way things were. ‘Cause like conflict is universal, but there are different ways of dealing with conflict. And police barging in is not always appropriate or the way.”

In these terms, drawing on the skills of Inuit elders and cultural facilitators within the community would refashion the role of police. Rather than an outside force, the police could be better positioned to work in collaboration or partnership with communities they are mandated to serve and protect.

In the meantime, participants believed that Inuit need to be better informed of their rights in relation to policing and the Canadian criminal justice system. This would involve Inuit feeling “more comfortable in knowing their rights and knowing when they can say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or what they have to do or not do in contact with the police.”

And even if police led those workshops I think it would even make it better, ‘cause it would show that yes we have power or things that we can do, but we also have limits to that power and we want to make sure that you know your rights when we are interacting and what are my limits and what are your responsibilities and your limits as a citizen. And if you need help, who you can contact, because like I’ve had people who think that they need, if they’re a victim they’re the one paying a lawyer. And we don’t think to go around and like make sure everyone knows that if you’re the victim of a crime, the Crown is the one that will represent you. Society will represent you. You can get a lawyer if you want, but if you don’t have the money for that it’s okay. Even the same thing with Legal Aid, unless you’ve already been involved with the law, people don’t understand how that works. And so I’m sure there has been occasions where a police officer overstepped or took advantage or maybe people were victims of police officers.

Based on our interviews with police officers, there are signs that some of these suggestions are being taken up by the KRPF. Several initiatives were mentioned:

- Working with Université Laval to offer a three part cultural training course for KRPF officers;
- Using cultural facilitators in each of the 14 communities to assist in crisis situations; “a respectful person in the community that can talk and have a kind of a communication to de-escalate the situation”;
- The new tripartite agreement is providing an increase in funding to purchase new equipment (including 24 new vehicles) and updating the police radio system;
- Plans for a call centre with Inuktitut speakers (a long term project);
- Third-party reporting for sexual assaults;
- Agreement with the school board to do more prevention activities with students and teachers;
- Video appearances for those in custody;
- Agreement with the police union for more time off (3 months on and 1 month off) and an increase in salary to address retention issues;
- Pairing a social worker with a police officer; a “mixed patrol unit” to respond to mental health calls

Nevertheless, participants were aware that policing alone cannot resolve the pressing social issues confronting Nunavik communities. As one service provider put it, the current focus is on “putting out fires.”

Everybody who is a service provider is doing that in Nunavik.... ‘Cause we never have time to put out a fire and keep it out and build on something ‘cause when we put out this fire, okay that one’s out, we’re going to do this, no we got to go put out that fire first. Okay, so now we can go back, no because that one. It just never stops. It never, putting out fires never stops.... We have to start getting to the point where we’re dealing with stuff before the fire actually happens, the prevention aspect.

In these terms, meeting basic social needs—including adequate housing—is paramount. As one service provider commented:

The major issue is housing in all the regions and I really do believe that it is the basis, not the basis but like it’s one urgent thing that we should really get straightened out.... So, yeah, if we start from the basis of making sure that basic needs are answered that would already be great and then maybe people could concentrate on healing from what they’ve been through, if they’re not worried about what they’ll eat or if they have an addiction issue how they’ll get the next dose or if they don’t know where they’ll stay tomorrow or how they’ll pay for rent.

Moving Forward

Interviews with Inuit women and service providers have offered an important window into the police response to gendered violence. These interviews evidence the pervasiveness and severity of the violence that Inuit women experience—and the challenges they encounter in finding safety and security when violence occurs.

To fully comprehend this gendered violence requires situating it within its colonial context. Colonialism has disrupted Inuit ways of being, including relations between Inuit men and women. Gendered violence is one manifestation of the lived experience of trauma that colonialism has produced.

Historically, the RCMP played a key role in bringing colonialism to the North. In that regard, policing was racialized: it was designed to enforce Inuit conformity to the colonial regime. Policing practices included relocating Inuit families to the permanent settlements, transporting Inuit children to the residential schools where they could be taught *qallunaat* culture in preparation for their assimilation into the colonial social order, and slaughtering Inuit sled dogs, effectively cutting Inuit ties to the land and access to their traditional source of livelihood.

Interviews with Inuit women have revealed that racialized policing persists. Several participants believed that racism colours police officers' encounters with Inuit:

They'll look at you other than being a human being, a person like anybody else.
[Inuvialuit participant]

As soon as they see Inuit, it is very and immediately noticeable when their faces change to a disgusted face when they realize it is an Inuk they are dealing with and not a Caucasian. [Nunavut participant]

I seen a lot of policemen treat Inuit like they were nothing. [Nunavik participant]

I feel like they treat Inuk women especially like they're no good. And what did we do to them? [Nunatsiavut participant]

However, racialized policing is not simply a matter of some individual officers holding racist beliefs and stereotypes about Inuit. Rather, it is systemic in nature, embedded in institutional policies and practices. One example involves the language barrier. As a police officer emphasized, "communication is the fundamental of policing." Yet, when officers have little to no knowledge of Inuktitut, police call systems are run with non-Inuktitut-speaking operators, and Inuit women are required to convey their experiences of gendered violence in a language that is not their own, the ability of police to fulfill their role is seriously compromised.

Clearly, individual officers can and do make a difference. As one Nunavik woman said, "We have some really fantastic police officers." Some of the women shared positive stories of their encounters with police officers. And police officers who were interviewed affirmed their commitment to carrying out their role in addressing gendered violence. As one officer commented, they are "passionate" about what they do.

Nonetheless, the picture that emerges from these interviews is one of a deep divide between the police and the Inuit communities they are mandated to serve. The police are very much an outside force that is separate from—not an integral part of—the community. This divide readily causes fear and distrust of police and hinders an effective police response to gendered violence.

The systemic nature of the problems that colonialism has created have been demonstrated in numerous reports and commissions of inquiry. Over two decades ago, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded that colonialism and its ongoing impact provided the most convincing explanation for the persistence of disadvantage among Indigenous people.²¹⁰ The Commission also maintained that violence in Indigenous families was distinct in that it “has invaded whole communities and cannot be considered a problem of a particular couple or an individual household,” it emanates from efforts by the colonial state to disrupt or displace the Indigenous family, and it is “sustained by a racist social environment that promulgates demeaning stereotypes of Aboriginal women and men.”²¹¹ More recently, the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls held that the cultural, structural, and systemic violence that colonialism has generated call for foundational changes—not band-aid solutions—to ending violence against Indigenous women and girls.²¹²

Moving forward, therefore, will require a fundamental shift in how policing is carried out in Inuit Nunangat. In order for police to respond effectively to gendered violence, they need to move from being an outside force to become a part of community revitalization. Making this fundamental shift necessarily involves the police in a process of decolonization.

Decolonization

As the National Inquiry explains, decolonization (or, more accurately, “decolonizing” since the process is ongoing) “is a social and political process aimed at resisting and undoing the multi-faceted impacts of colonization and re-establishing strong contemporary Indigenous Peoples, Nations, and institutions based on traditional values, philosophies, and knowledge systems.”²¹³

Decolonization begins with acknowledging the harms that corporate colonialism has done, and is doing, to Inuit communities. Individuals, families, and communities need to heal from the intergenerational trauma that colonialism has fostered. Inuit who have been harmed need to experience what one Inuvialuit woman shared in her story of healing—so that their lived experience of trauma can become “someone else’s story,” put in the past so that they can realize a better future with their partners, children, and grandchildren. For this to happen, Inuit communities require the resources necessary to undertake that healing process.

Decolonization also involves restoring control and decision-making authority to Inuit. As several participants emphasized:

Until these institutions are developed, run, and led by the people they are trying to serve, so developed, run, and led by Inuit for Inuit, it’s never going to work.
[Nunavut participant]

Once a community comes together to work together, they’ll be able to, the community members, work alongside with the agencies to make our community safer ... because our community members will let them know what our problems are in the community. [Inuvialuit participant]

We're taking our power back as Aboriginal people. And if we take that power back then we're more able to freely assist the service providers that come into our town. [Inuvialuit participant]

In this sense, decolonization means reversing the colonial strategy of assimilation. Rather than expecting Inuit to accept or comply with the colonial order, it is police and other social service agencies that need to assimilate into Inuit ways.

Decolonization therefore requires the active participation of *qallunaat*—who have benefitted enormously from corporate colonialism's advance into the North. In these terms, non-Inuit have a role to play in decolonization as allies, walking alongside and not in front of Inuit in their quest for change. In this way, the police and other service providers become active participants in community revitalization. As well, governments at all levels will have to make a firm commitment to not only ensuring that Inuit have more control over the process of, and financial benefits derived from, natural resource extraction but also investing in the healing, education, employment, and family-strengthening measures that will re-invigorate Inuit communities. As the National Inquiry emphasized, meeting the needs of Inuit must include "equitable, sustainable, and long-term resourcing and funding" in order to obtain substantive equality.²¹⁴

Indigenous Peoples—Inuit, Metis, and First Nations—are not homogeneous. They have different cultures, different traditions, and different conceptions of peace and good order.²¹⁵ As well, their colonization occurred at differing time periods, in different ways, and in different regions of Canada. As such, decolonization will be specific, recognizing and reflecting the distinct needs and governance structures, and the diversity of histories and cultures among and within Indigenous groups.²¹⁶ While there is no pan-Indigenous or one-size-fits-all template for decolonizing, some general principles can guide this process.

The Expert Panel on Policing in Indigenous Communities promotes an evidence-based approach to decolonizing policing that is grounded in Indigenous knowledge and world views, holistic, and relationship-based.²¹⁷ Rather than an outside force engaged in law enforcement and crime control, police are positioned as working in partnership with other social service agencies to foster community safety and well-being through problem solving and conflict resolution.

As the National Inquiry has emphasized, Inuit self-determination must be at the core of such an approach, which means that actions must be Inuit-led, rooted in Inuit laws, culture, language, traditions, and societal values.²¹⁸ As an Inuit elder explained, the "great guiding principles" of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (IQ)—"that which Inuit have always known to be true"—offer the basis for living a good life. The Nunavut Government, for instance, has taken the initiative of incorporating the following IQ principles into its governance practices:

Inuuqatigiitsiarniq: Respecting others, relationships, and caring for people.

Tunnganarniq: Fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming, and inclusive.

Pijitsirniq: Serving and providing for family and/or community.

Aajiiqatigiinni: Decision making through discussion and consensus.

Pilmaksarniq: Development of skills through practice, effort, and action.

Qanuqtuurniq: Being innovative and resourceful.

Piliriqatigiinni: Working together for a common cause.

Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq: Respect and care for the land, the animals, and the environment.²¹⁹

While these principles need to be at the centre of decolonization, policing itself must be culturally appropriate—adapting to individual communities and responsive and relevant to a particular community’s needs.²²⁰ As the National Inquiry noted, “Inuit are entitled to receive police services in Inuktitut and in a culturally competent and appropriate manner.”²²¹

Cultural competence pertains to both the individual and institutional levels. At the individual level, police officers must be well-versed in Inuit history and culture, including “knowledge of a community’s history; of its traditions, values, and practices; of its current challenges; and of its future goals and aspirations. This knowledge must be community-specific rather than generically designed for service in any Indigenous community.”²²² As the Expert Panel noted, this knowledge should also include “structural competence,” understanding the “social, political, and economic systems that lead to disadvantage, marginalization, and oppression.”²²³ At the institutional level, cultural competence means that policing policies and practices—including standard operating procedures—are in alignment with IQ. For instance, the Use of Force Framework commonly adopted by police services may fail to incorporate the specific social contexts in which policing occurs in Inuit Nunangat and downplay the potential for de-escalating conflicts when they arise.²²⁴

According to the Expert Panel, adopting a relationship-based approach places the emphasis on “overcoming distrust and establishing mutual respect and reciprocity, achieving these goals in ways consistent with Indigenous knowledge, law, history, culture, and spirituality.”²²⁵

A relationship-based approach draws attention to the web of relationships that are involved in generating and sustaining community safety and wellness.²²⁶ Police are one component of this web, working in close partnership with other allies committed to decolonization—including education and income support workers, housing services, child and family services—but accountable to the Inuit communities they serve. Primarily, therefore, police would take their lead from community leaders, elders, cultural facilitators, and natural helpers, who are at the centre or hub of this web.

At the same time, adopting a relationship-based approach means putting Inuit women at the centre of this web of relationships, whereby they occupy a principal role in directing how gendered violence should be dealt with in their communities. Enabling Inuit women to have a strong voice can engender feelings of empowerment, something that is severely diminished by virtue of the nature of gendered violence. Putting women at the centre of this web of relationships also draws attention to the importance of gender-based, trauma-informed policing and ensuring that the rights and needs of those harmed by the lived experience of trauma are being upheld and met.

While decolonization offers a general framework in which to situate the role of police in responding to gendered violence against Inuit women, more specific recommendations can be offered that have the potential to assist the police in making this fundamental shift.

Recommendations

- **Culturally competent policing:** Investments must be made to ensure that police officers receive ongoing, in-depth cultural competency training on Inuit history and culture. The training should be community-specific, developed and led by Inuit, and include language training on the local Inuktitut dialect.
- **Inuit Advisory Committees:** Composed of elders, community leaders, and cultural facilitators, the primary purpose of these committees will be to ensure that police practices and protocols are in line with *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* principles. In addition to placing the emphasis on Inuit methods of problem solving and conflict resolution, these committees will foster mutual understanding and respect between the community and the police.
- **Trauma-informed policing:** Investments must be made to provide police with adequate training in trauma-informed approaches to policing. This training must be made relevant to the history and contemporary experiences of Inuit. With a firmer understanding of trauma and its indicators, police will be better positioned to de-escalate situations, build more positive relationships with the community, and assist in ensuring community wellness and safety.
- **Vicarious Trauma:** To help manage the personal stress resulting from daily policing activities in Inuit communities and the effects of vicarious trauma on first responders, police officers should be encouraged to seek emotional support and guidance from community elders, counsellors, or natural helpers.
- **Gender-Based Violence Training:** Police officers must undergo ongoing, specialized education on the dynamics of gender-based violence, training that would be more effective if it were delivered, at least in part, by victims' advocates. Second only to victims, advocates have the most comprehensive understanding of the realities of gender-based violence. An enriching element to the training would be the inclusion of input from Inuit survivors of domestic violence to educate the police on their experiences.
- **Gender-Based Policing Protocols:** Police protocols, including investigative strategies to respond to sexual assault and domestic violence, must be evaluated and revised to ensure that the police are responding in a culturally appropriate and victim-centred manner.
- **Female Officers:** To achieve a more supportive experience for female survivors of gendered violence, there should be a female police officer present, if not leading, the statement-gathering process.
- **Gendered Violence Prevention Liaison:** This community-based position would be geared toward providing those harmed by gendered violence with a dedicated support person tasked with coordinating access to resources offered by police and other social service agencies. Such a position would enhance partnerships between agencies in ensuring the multiple needs of those harmed by gendered violence—safety planning, counselling, housing, etc.—are being met.
- **Community Integration:** The RCMP and KRPF should develop protocols for introducing new officers to the communities they serve. These protocols would be developed in close consultation and collaboration with Inuit community leaders, elders, and cultural facilitators. The aim would be to reinforce officers' accountability to those communities as well as to facilitate the integration of officers into the community.

- **Duration of postings:** The RCMP should reconsider the policy of limiting postings to two years in duration. Where possible, posting contracts should be extended to sustain positive rapport between Inuit community members and regular service members, and enable trust and reciprocity to be built into police-community relations.
- **Inuit Civilian Positions:** In order to improve the effectiveness of policing services and better integrate police into the local community, Inuit must be employed at each police detachment, and in a number of capacities:
 - **Inuit interpreters and translators** to ensure that community residents can interact with police in the appropriate local dialect.
 - **Cultural facilitators and/or natural healers** to act as a liaison between police and community members, including identifying and responding to people at risk.
 - **Special constables, police aides, community patrols and/or peacekeepers** to assist officers in meeting the community's need for safety and security.
 - **Administrative staff** to relieve police of administrative and organizational tasks within the detachment in order to devote more time and energy to problem solving and community engagement activities.
- **Police Accessibility:** Funding must be immediately provided to address the lack of formalized and local police (and emergency services) dispatch systems across Inuit Nunangat. There must be Inuktitut speakers available to answer (emergency) calls at all times.
- **Community Education:** Investments must be made to create Inuit Nunangat-specific, multilingual public education programs in two main areas:
 - **Education about the Criminal Justice System:** To provide information to the public on the role and function of the police and citizen's rights in relation to the criminal justice system, these programs could take the form of messages through routine uses of existing media, such as television, radio, newspapers, and social media, as well as a variety of local community forums.
 - **Education about Gender-Based Violence:** To foster confidence in the criminal justice system, police need to take a key role in the development, design, and implementation of gender-based violence prevention and education efforts. This task could be accomplished through the police leading specialized workshops, campaigns, and programs focusing on encouraging victims to report abuse. Such police engagement with both the general community and those deemed to be at risk of gendered violence could help provide those suffering in silence with the assurance that the police are available to assist them, thereby increasing women's confidence in police and reducing their reluctance to report abuse.
- **Community engagement:** Police integration and presence in the community should be enhanced through planned events (such as sewing circles) and the dissemination of positive police-citizen encounters (through social media) in order to build trust and a positive police-community relationship.
- **Federal Government Responsibilities:** Given that policing is an essential service, the Government of Canada must ensure that all regions of Inuit Nunangat have effective and substantively equitable policing services. In addition, the government has a responsibility to ensure equitable funding of victim services in every community across Inuit Nunangat.

These recommendations emerge from the insights, knowledge, and experiences of Inuit women and service providers in the four regions across Inuit Nunangat. As one Nunatsiavut participant emphasized, “You can have all these recommendations, all these things that the community is saying, but there’s never any follow-up, follow through, based on the recommendations that people are saying over and over and over again.” She makes an important point. The changes needed to address the pressing problem of gendered violence against Inuit women will not occur without the funding, commitment, and support required from all levels of government to make that change happen.

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Notes

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- 2 Juristat, *Family Violence in Canada*, 26.
- 3 Mahony, 9-10.
- 4 Mahony, 12.
- 5 O'Donnell and Wallace, *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women*, 41.
- 6 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 55.
- 7 Rotenberg, *Police-reported violent crimes against young women and girls in Canada's Provincial North and Territories*, 2017.
- 8 NTI, *Annual Report on the State of Inuit Culture and Society*, 23.
- 9 Ibid., 23.
- 10 Pauktutit et al., *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Written Submission*, 8.
- 11 Burczycka and Conroy, *Family Violence in Canada*, 49.
- 12 NIMMIWG, 2019a, 56.
- 13 Pauktutit et al., 3-4.
- 14 Arriagada and Bleakney, "Wage and Land-Based Economics in Inuit Nunangat," 3.
- 15 ITK, *Inuit Statistical Profile 2018*, 8.
- 16 Ibid., 21.
- 17 Ibid., 19.
- 18 Arriagada and Bleakney, 3.
- 19 Ibid., 5; 12.
- 20 Ibid., 9.
- 21 Ibid., 11.
- 22 ITK, 17.
- 23 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a.
- 24 Tester, "Colonial Challenges and Recovery in the Eastern Arctic," 22.
- 25 McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 7.
- 26 McCalla and Satzewich, "Settler Capitalism and the Construction of Immigrants and 'Indians' as Racialized Others."

- 27 Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native"; Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment*.
- 28 Inuit were never included under the Indian Act, "which would have acknowledged them as wards of the Crown, while forbidding them to control land or other property." Instead, Inuit were "viewed as British subjects and Canadian citizens," but also seen as requiring "special protection" (QTC, *The Official Mind of Canadian Colonialism*, 32). While a 1939 Supreme Court decision held that Inuit were "Indians" under the Indian Act, "the decision had little real effect outside of Quebec, where it excused the provincial government from paying for social programs for Inuit" (p. 32).
- 29 Unlike the settlement of the West, where farmers, rail workers, and city dwellers took up permanent residence, *qallunaat* who came to the North—police officers, bureaucrats, military personnel, contractors, teachers, welfare workers—were more likely to be transients. "In both regions, however, new government institutions, economic structures, and land-ownership patterns proved to be permanent fixtures on the social, political, and cultural landscape of Indigenous peoples" (QTC, *Paliisikkut*, 10).
- 30 Palmater, "Death by Poverty"; Comack, "Corporate Colonialism and the 'Crimes of the Powerful' Committed against the Indigenous Peoples of Canada."
- 31 Pauktuutit, *The Inuit Way*, 8.
- 32 Wachowich, "Inuit Women in Pond Inlet Speak about Power," 11.
- 33 Pauktuutit, *The Inuit Way*, 22.
- 34 Ibid., 22.
- 35 Wachowich, 26.
- 36 Billson, "Opportunity or Tragedy," 190.
- 37 Morrison and Germain cited in Billson, "Shifting Gender Regimes," 72.
- 38 Karetak and Tester, "Inuit *Qaujimaqatuqangit*, Truth and Reconciliation," 3.
- 39 Ibid., 3.
- 40 Ibid., 6.
- 41 Brice-Bennett, "The Inuit," 2.
- 42 Ibid., 4-5.
- 43 Ibid., 6.
- 44 Pedersen, "Labrador Inuit (Labradormiut)," 4.
- 45 Brice-Bennett, 6.
- 46 Wachowich, 12.
- 47 Ibid., 12.
- 48 Ibid., 14.
- 49 Williamson, "Significant Aspects of Acculturation History in the Canadian Arctic," 28.
- 50 Tester, "Colonial Challenges and Recovery in the Eastern Arctic," 22.
- 51 Ibid., 22.
- 52 Williamson, 28.

- 53 Ibid., 28.
- 54 Tester, "Colonial Challenges and Recovery in the Eastern Arctic."
- 55 Ibid., 23.
- 56 Williamson, "Significant Aspects of Acculturation History in the Canadian Arctic."
- 57 Ibid., 58.
- 58 Ibid., 58.
- 59 Ibid., 60.
- 60 Tester, "Colonial Challenges and Recovery in the Eastern Arctic," 23.
- 61 Ibid., 23.
- 62 Ibid., 26.
- 63 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 303.
- 64 Tester, "Colonial Challenges and Recovery in the Eastern Arctic," 27.
- 65 Milloy, *A National Crime*, 246.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid., 247.
- 68 TRC, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume One*, 67.
- 69 Tester, "Colonial Challenges and Recovery in the Eastern Arctic."
- 70 Ibid., 28; see also QTC, *Illinniarniq*, 38.
- 71 Milloy, *A National Crime*; Knockwood, *Out of the Depths*; TRC, *Final Report*; and Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment*.
- 72 Williamson, 40-41.
- 73 *llagiit nunagivaktangit* loosely translates to mean "a place used regularly for hunting, harvesting, and gathering." Implicit in this meaning is the concept of home. While the English word "camp" is more often used, it connotes a more tenuous kind of settlement; i.e. "a temporary overnight lodging out of doors, typically in tents" (QTC, *The Official Mind of Canadian Colonialism*, 21-22)
- 74 Billson, 1990.
- 75 Williamson, 64.
- 76 Ibid., 67.
- 77 Tester, 29.
- 78 Williamson, 25.
- 79 Brice-Bennett, "The Inuit," 6.
- 80 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 307.
- 81 Tester, 33.

- 82 Williamson, 67-68.
- 83 Tester, 34.
- 84 Wachowich, 29.
- 85 Billson, "Shifting Gender Regimes," 74.
- 86 Wachowich, 16.
- 87 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 309.
- 88 Ibid., 309.
- 89 Nettelbeck and Smandych, "Policing Indigenous Peoples on Two Colonial Frontiers," 357.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Brown and Brown, *An Unauthorized History of the RCMP*, 127.
- 92 Razack, "When Place Becomes Race," 74.
- 93 Hamilton and Sinclair, *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba*, 54.
- 94 QTC, *Paliisikkut*, 12
- 95 Pauktuutit, *The Inuit Way*, 9.
- 96 Ibid, 9.
- 97 Ibid, 12.
- 98 Ibid, 10-11.
- 99 QTC, *Paliisikkut*, 12-13.
- 100 Billson, "Shifting Gender Regimes," 72.
- 101 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 296.
- 102 QTC, *Paliisikkut*, 18.
- 103 Ibid., 25.
- 104 Ibid., 25-26.
- 105 Ibid., 30.
- 106 Wachowich, 15.
- 107 QTC, *Paliisikkut*, 22.
- 108 Tester, 35.
- 109 Ibid., 35.
- 110 Ibid., 25-26.
- 111 QTC, *Paliisikkut*, 41.
- 112 RCMP, *The RCMP and the Inuit Sled Dogs*.
- 113 QTC, *Analysis of the RCMP Sled Dog Report*, 57.

- 114 QTC, *Paliisikkut*, 41.
- 115 Northern Service Officer, for instance, was a position created in 1954 to coordinate government activities in northern communities, primarily with a view to assimilating Inuit into the dominant Canadian society. See: Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarnitt*, 325-39.
- 116 Ibid., 31.
- 117 Ibid., 31.
- 118 Ibid., 31.
- 119 Ibid., 38.
- 120 Kulchyski and Bernauer, "Modern Treaties, Extraction, and Imperialism in Canada's Indigenous North," 9.
- 121 Ibid., 19.
- 122 Williamson, 77.
- 123 Tester, 39.
- 124 Pauktuutit et al., *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Girls Written Submissions*, 6.
- 125 NTI, 27.
- 126 ITK, 7.
- 127 Arriagada, 29.
- 128 Wachowich; Karetak and Tester; Pauktuutit, *The Inuit Way*; and Billson, "Opportunity or Tragedy."
- 129 Billson, "Shifting Gender Regimes," 74.
- 130 Ibid., 74.
- 131 Wachowich, 29.
- 132 Pauktuutit, *Strategy to Engage Inuit Women in Economic Participation*, 4.
- 133 Ibid., 6.
- 134 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 584.
- 135 Kinnon, "Engaging Inuit Men and Boys in Ending Violence Against Women and Girls," 14.
- 136 NTI, 27.
- 137 Billson, "Shifting Gender Regimes," 75.
- 138 Atkinson, *Trauma Trails*.
- 139 Ibid., 50.
- 140 Ibid., 92.
- 141 Comack, *Coming Back to Jail*.
- 142 Billson, "Shifting Gender Regimes," 76.

- 143 Arriagada, 30.
- 144 Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, 34.
- 145 Hamilton and Sinclair, 498.
- 146 ITK, 18.
- 147 NTI, 18.
- 148 Ibid., 18.
- 149 Pauktuutit et al., 16.
- 150 Billson and Mancini, *Inuit Women*.
- 151 Ibid., 192.
- 152 NTI, 24.
- 153 Ibid., 17.
- 154 Paletta, *Understanding Family Violence and Sexual Assault in the Territories*.
- 155 Chartrand and McKay, *A Review of Research on Criminal Victimization and First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples 1990 to 2001*, v.
- 156 Lane et al., *Mapping the Healing Journey*, 10.
- 157 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 310.
- 158 Comack, *Racialized Policing*.
- 159 RCMP, *Mission, Vision and Values*.
- 160 Ibid.
- 161 RCMP, *Strategic Priorities*.
- 162 Ibid.
- 163 RCMP, "Serving Canada's Indigenous People."
- 164 Ibid.
- 165 NIMMIWG, *Truth Gathering Process Part 2 Volume 6 Institutional Hearings*, 39.
- 166 Ibid., 39.
- 167 Ibid., 40-41. Although Commissioner Lucki indicated on cross-examination that the goals and objectives of bias-free policing have not been empirically evaluated or measured (281).
- 168 Ibid., 48.
- 169 Ibid., 52.
- 170 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place* Volume 1a, 677.
- 171 NIMMIWG, *Truth Gathering Process Part 2 Volume 6 Institutional Hearings*, 44.
- 172 Ibid., 47.

- 173 Ibid., 60.
- 174 Ibid., 59.
- 175 Tranter, "100 days in, Nunavut's RCMP commander still focused on Inuit recruitment, building trust with communities."
- 176 Public Safety Canada, *2014-2015 Evaluation of the First Nations Policing Program*, 3.
- 177 Ibid., 2-3.
- 178 Public Safety Canada, *Policing in Indigenous Communities*.
- 179 RCMP, *Working Together to End Violence Against Women and Girls*, 4.
- 180 Kativik Regional Police Force Webpage
- 181 Ibid.
- 182 Ibid.
- 183 Agreement on the Provision of Services in the Kativik Region for the Period from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014, 6.
- 184 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 681.
- 185 NIMMIWG, *Truth Gathering Process Part 2 Volume 8 Institutional Hearings*, 16.
- 186 Pauktuutit et al., 8.
- 187 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 683-4.
- 188 NIMMIWG, *Truth Gathering Process Part 2 Volume 6 Institutional Hearings*, 45.
- 189 Ibid., 47.
- 190 RCMP, *Strategic Priorities*.
- 191 Pauktuutit et al., 10.
- 192 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 683.
- 193 Rogers, "Nunavik Police Force Faces Staffing Shortage."
- 194 Ibid.
- 195 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 681.
- 196 Pauktuutit et al., 10.
- 197 Tranter.
- 198 RCMP, *Strategic Priorities*.
- 199 NIMMIWG, *Truth Gathering Process Part 2 Volume 8 Institutional Hearings*, 231.
- 200 Ibid., 19.
- 201 Public Safety Canada, *Inuit Perceptions (Synopsis) – Royal Canadian Mounted Police – "V" Division*.
- 202 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 685.

- 203 NIMMIWG, *Truth Gathering Process Part 2 Volume 8 Institutional Hearings*, 62.
- 204 Kativik Regional Police Force Webpage
- 205 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. Volume 1a, 682.
- 206 Ibid., 685.
- 207 See, for example, Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* and Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.
- 208 Government of the Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics, *Summary of NWT Community Statistics*.
- 209 CBC, "Study: Domestic homicide in Canada averages 70 deaths per year."
- 210 RCAP, *Bridging the Cultural Divide*.
- 211 RCAP, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Volume 3. Gathering Strength*, 52.
- 212 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place* Volume 1a, 76-77.
- 213 Ibid., 78.
- 214 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place* Volume 1b, 202.
- 215 Johnson, *Peace and Good Order*, 93.
- 216 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place* Volume 1b, 201.
- 217 CCA, *Toward Peace, Harmony, and Well-Being*, Chapter 6.
- 218 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place* Volume 1b, 202.
- 219 Government of Nunavut, *Incorporating Inuit Societal Values*.
- 220 CCA, *Toward Peace, Harmony, and Well-Being*, 85.
- 221 NIMMIWG, *Reclaiming Power and Place* Volume 1b, 208.
- 222 CCA, *Toward Peace, Harmony, and Well-Being*, 122.
- 223 Ibid., 123.
- 224 CACP, *A National Use of Force Framework*; Iacobucci, *Police Encounters with People in Crisis*.
- 225 CCA, *Toward Peace, Harmony, and Well-Being*, 127.
- 226 Ibid., 127-28.



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