



Study of Gender-based Violence and
Shelter Service Needs across Inuit Nunangat

Executive Summary



Project Background

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada is dedicated to building a future free from violence for every Inuk woman and girl in the country. Today, violence remains a pervasive social reality that actively shapes the lives and well-being of women and children across Inuit Nunangat. Compared to the national average, Inuit women experience rates of violence 14 times higher and violence continues to be the leading cause of preventable morbidity and mortality. Available data shows that the Canadian territories consistently record the highest rates of police-reported violence against women (Statistics Canada, 2013). In Nunavut, the rate of violent crime experienced by women is nearly 13 times higher than the national average, with women representing almost two-thirds of police-reported crime victims (Statistics Canada, 2018a). While these statistics are alarming, they do not even begin to capture the immense and immeasurable impacts of family and community violence on the lives of individual Inuit women and their families.

Despite increasing attention by federal, provincial and territorial governments to the devastating impacts of violence, Inuit women lack immediate access to safety options and essential long-term support services. More than 70% of the 51 communities across Inuit Nunangat do not have a safe shelter for women and children experiencing family violence. Currently, Inuit communities report an urgent need for crisis and long-term counselling, safe shelters, second-stage housing and training of Inuit front-line workers to address the issue of violence and its related challenges. In particular, mental health services to address unresolved and intergenerational trauma stemming from the experience of colonization have been identified as critical to preventing future violence. In many cases, the inadequate access to safety, supports and services has directly led to the loss of lives.

Purpose and Objectives

The Study of Gender-based Violence and Shelter Service Needs across Inuit Nunangat was conducted to increase understanding of the factors affecting Inuit women's experiences of violence. The study explores the determinants of gender-based violence in Inuit communities and identifies service gaps to improve the effectiveness of actions that aim to address the needs of Inuit women experiencing violence. The research project was guided by four primary objectives.

1. Identify the determinants of violence against Inuit women, including the relationship between violence and other determinants of well-being
2. Understand the impacts of violence in direct relation to shelter needs
3. Examine the cost of violence on the health care system
4. Map the services and programs that currently exist to assist women or those at risk of becoming victims of violence across Inuit Nunangat

Methodology

To address the research objectives, a qualitative research methodology was employed to bring forward the experiences and perceptions of survivors of violence, shelter workers, service providers and community members across Inuit Nunangat. To understand how experiences and determinants of violence may differ across Inuit regions and communities, the research engaged 10 communities in Inuit Nunangat and urban centres. The sites for data collection were: Inuvik and Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories; Cape Dorset, Clyde River and Iqaluit in Nunavut; Kuujuaq in Nunavik; Nain in Nunatsiavut; Happy Valley-Goose Bay in Newfoundland and Labrador; Ottawa in Ontario; and, Montréal in Quebec. Semi-structured interviews and discussion circles were used to collect the data in a way that privileged the voices and lived experiences of participants. In total, the research engaged 164 participants made up of:

- 70 community members;
- 44 service providers;
- 13 shelter workers; and,
- 37 key informants.

Participants represented diverse backgrounds, including professionals from the health, criminal justice and social sectors. All qualitative data was thematically analyzed using NVivo software.

Main Findings

To improve understanding of the unique reality of experiencing violence in Inuit communities, the research aimed to identify the determinants of violence against Inuit women and girls. The study examined both the individual conditions in a woman's life related to experiencing violence and the broader social, economic, political and cultural determinants described by participants as contributing to violence against women and girls in their communities and regions. The data suggest that the primary determinants of violence across Inuit Nunangat include:

- disruption of Inuit culture and identity;
- normalization of violence;
- impacts of colonial government policy;
- challenges with the criminal justice system;
- increased alcohol and substance abuse;
- inadequate and overcrowded housing;
- economic inequality and income instability; and,
- food insecurity.

These factors are directly linked to historical and ongoing Inuit experiences of colonization in which policies, programs and legislation were introduced with the aim to control and assimilate Inuit communities by destroying cultural knowledge, social structure and leadership, practices and identities.

Second, to increase awareness of the impacts of violence and improve the effectiveness of emergency supports, the research aimed to explore current gaps in shelter services across Inuit Nunangat. The study investigated the perceptions of shelter workers, as well as community service providers and survivors of violence, to identify the challenges of addressing the needs of Inuit women and their children at risk of experiencing violence. The data demonstrate that the three main barriers for providing adequate and effective shelter supports and services are:

- the lack of resources and funding available to maintain the operational costs of shelters;
- high staff turnover rates at shelters and other support services; and,
- the deficit of supports available to support women and their children when it is time to leave the respite of the shelter.

Third, to examine the cost of violence on the health care system, as well as the systemic cost more broadly, the research examined the economic impacts of violence against Inuit women and girls on provincial and territorial health, legal, policing and social services. The study findings suggest that the direct and indirect costs associated with gender-based violence across Inuit Nunangat include: medevac services; hospitalization and direct medical costs; long-term mental and physical health costs; economic costs of lost wages and productivity; and, policing and justice services. While adequate data is not available to calculate the current total economic cost of violence against women and girls in Inuit Nunangat, the data that is available suggest that this figure is likely to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars per year.

Finally, to inform the development and maintenance of services that respond to the needs of Inuit women and families experiencing violence, the research mapped existing community programs and actions that assist those at risk of becoming victims of violence across Inuit Nunangat. The study identified programs and services in each Inuit region that are accessed by Inuit women, and explored participants' perceptions of the specific elements that make these supports effective for the community members using them. The data suggest that the five program areas critical to supporting Inuit, families and communities in responding to and healing from the impacts of violence are:

- awareness of violence as a community issue;
- land-based resurgence and on-the-land programming;
- youth centres;
- transition housing; and,
- access to country food.

Recommendations

In response to the research findings of this study on the determinants of violence in Inuit Nunangat and the current gaps in supports for Inuit women experiencing violence, 14 recommendations have been determined.

1. Develop violence intervention, prevention and healing strategies that are Inuit-specific, led by Inuit women, and respond to the unique cultural, political, economic, social and historical context of Inuit Nunangat.
2. Prioritize funding for the development of appropriate, safe and affordable housing across Inuit Nunangat at all levels of government.
3. Enhance the provision of Inuit-specific and Inuktitut services for survivors of violence and offenders to interact with and navigate the federal and provincial criminal justice systems.
4. Promote community-based collaboration between survivors of violence, police, service providers and community members to identify effective measures to ensure the safety and well-being of Inuit women and their children.
5. Provide adequate, sustainable and flexible funding in Inuit communities for emergency shelters serving Inuit women and children experiencing violence.
 - a. The Government of Canada must reverse its policy that excludes Inuit communities from accessing operational funding for shelters through the Family Violence Prevention Plan (FVPP). Shelter funding must be made available to Inuit communities at a minimum equitable amount to that provided for shelters on First Nations reserves.
 - b. Funding should support the operation and maintenance of existing shelters and the development of new shelters in consultation with communities.
 - c. Eligible costs for shelter funding should include: general operations and maintenance; staff training, retention and professional development; and, programs and supports responsive to the needs of Inuit women.
6. Examine the feasibility and community readiness for transition and second-stage housing services in Inuit Nunangat in consultation with Inuit organizations, shelter directors, service providers, and survivors of violence.
7. Conduct a needs assessment to determine the gaps in culturally safe services for Inuit women experiencing violence in urban centres, including the need for Inuit-specific emergency shelters and transitional housing services.
8. Collect data on the use of medevac and emergency health services that is disaggregated by gender and cause to support increased understanding of the prevalence and cost of violence against women and girls in Inuit communities.
9. Undertake research to estimate the economic cost of violence against Inuit women and girls in Inuit Nunangat at the individual and systemic levels.
10. Prioritize upstream investments in prevention, intervention, postvention initiatives to both enhance the quality of Inuit women's lives and reduce the hard financial costs of the highest rates of violence in the country.

11. Develop and promote Inuit-specific public education and multimedia campaigns to increase awareness of gender-based violence among men, women and youth, including forms of violence, causes of violence, and available support resources.
12. Enhance funding for family-centered and community-based healing programs for victims of violence and perpetrators.
 - a. Healing programs should integrate *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* and on-the-land activities and be available in the regionally appropriate dialect of Inuktitut.
13. Develop and enhance safe community spaces for Inuit youth and children that are accessible outside of normal working hours, such as youth centres.
14. Provide comprehensive and Inuit-specific cultural safety training for all *qallunaat* (non-Inuit) service providers in the health, justice and social sectors in Inuit Nunangat to improve the capacity of services and to address the needs of Inuit communities.