



National Aboriginal Women's Summit – *Strong Women, Strong Communities*

June 20 – 22, 2007 Corner Brook, NL

Issue Paper Theme: Health Safety and Wellness

Topic: An Overview of Risks and Opportunities in Family Violence and Abuse Prevention in Inuit Communities

ISSUE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INUIT

RISKS

Women in the North more likely to suffer spousal assaults

Monday, October 2, 2006 11:00 AM ET [CBC News](#)

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2006/10/02/statscan.html>

"Women living in Canada's territories are far more likely to be sexually assaulted and murdered by their husbands than those living in the provinces, says a Statistics Canada survey released Monday.

Twelve per cent of adults living in the three territories who had lived common law or been married at some point in their lives experienced violence at their spouse's hands in the five years prior to the 2004 survey. That compares to seven per cent in the provinces.

Also, the use of shelters was higher in the territories than anywhere else in Canada.

The insight comes from a 2004 Statistics Canada study that interviewed for the first time women and men in the three territories about their experiences with spousal violence. The Statistics Canada report also pulls together previously released data from 1999 to 2004.

The report shows that women are nearly 2½ times more likely than men to be the victims of the most severe forms of spousal assault, including homicide, sexual assault and stalking.

Police reports show spousal homicide rates in the territories are the highest in the country and that rates of sexual assault are also higher than in the provinces

"Fewer than 10% of sexual assaults in both survey years [1993 and 2000] were reported to the police," the researchers wrote.

"Victims' decisions to report the violence to criminal justice and social services depend on a variety of factors, some of which include fear of the offender, shame and embarrassment, and regional availability of services. The majority of victims of spousal assault and over 90% of sexual assault victims did not seek support from the criminal justice system..."

- **In Nunavut**, it is estimated that only 29% of spousal abuse cases are reported. Nunavut has 6.5 times the national reported spousal abuse rate.
- **Inuit Housing is in Crisis** - There are a few safe shelters and little in the way of alternative housing. There are increasing numbers of 'hidden homeless' or 'couch surfers' in northern communities. This is an on-going and severely under-addressed crisis that has widespread consequences. A lack of privacy and space contributes to increased stress, increased violence, and low self-esteem. Overcrowding causes much higher incidences of communicable diseases and exacerbates social issues. Family violence, child sexual abuse, and substance abuse have been linked to the dehumanizing housing conditions.
- **Safe Shelters** - There are only 12 Safe Shelters serving 53 communities in Canada's Arctic.
 - Many victims must leave their communities to access a regional shelter in order to escape child sexual exploitation and domestic violence.
 - Inuit women may lose custody of their children when they leave abusive relationships.
- **Inuit Offenders** – the majority of Inuit in Federal penitentiaries are incarcerated for violent and sex crimes

WHAT IS PAUKTUUTIT DOING ABOUT IT?

1. National Strategy for Abuse Prevention

Statistics Canada reported that women in Nunavut¹ were admitted to shelters because of abuse at a rate of over 10 times that of the Canadian average². The underlying reasons for this unacceptable rate of abuse are complex but are integrally related to the interwoven effects of poverty, high unemployment, substance abuse, overcrowding and a host of other socio-economic factors. Addressing the issue of domestic violence and abuse has been a top priority for this organization since its inception. One of Pauktuutit's most recent and successful projects in this area has been to develop and implement the *National Strategy to Prevent Abuse in Inuit Communities*. Its goal is **a steady reduction in incidents of violence and abuse in Inuit communities, and the promotion of caring and respectful relationships**.

The primary objective of the strategy is to improve the coordination of abuse prevention services and resources in Inuit communities through the identification of root causes, gaps in services and best practices. Pauktuutit conducts research, maintains a national Inuit database for abuse prevention and shares information with the public.

¹ Inuit comprise 85% of the population of Nunavut, representing the largest Inuit population in Canada. As well, Inuit comprise a majority in the Nunatsiavut region of Labrador, Nunavik (Quebec) and the Inuvialuit region of the Northwest Territories.

² Measuring Violence Against Women – Statistical Trends 2006. Statistics Canada. Page 60.

The Strategy is based on information collected for Pauktuutit's abuse services database, interviews conducted with service providers and Inuit counsellors/healers, a special project to record Inuit cultural approaches to healing, and the knowledge and expertise of the project partners. The Strategy was created through consultation and collaboration among those most affected by abuse and those agencies whose mandate includes abuse prevention and treatment, safe shelters, justice and corrections.

The strategic priorities of the *National Strategy for Abuse Prevention in Inuit Communities* are to:

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

Pauktuutit is now implementing the strategy and is actively welcoming partners and resources to do so.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Currently, we are undertaking 'Supporting Communities to Achieve Wellness' across Canada's north. These wellness initiatives are healing models and are community based and culturally appropriate.

Healing and Wellness Work to Date

1. Supporting the development of the Family Counselling on the Land Program in Nain, Nunatsiavut. The family counselling on the land program is set for August, 2007;
2. Worked with traditional counselors to develop a couple counselling service (healing model) in Cape Dorset, Nunavut.
3. Supported the adaptation of the 'Somebody's Daughter' Project (on the land program) in Paulatuk, NWT. This program is a promising practice model and being introduced in another Inuit region. This program has two components: learn literacy skills (writing as part of healing) and traditional skills.
4. Supported the development of a Community Healing Circle Model in Inukjuak, Nunavik. The core prevention committee from various agencies and organizations has been re revived and will start to undertake healing sessions in their respective groups.

Violence Against Women and Children: Municipalities and their policies:

Pauktuutit has written to all the Mayors of Nunavut requesting the municipality councilors to adopt/pass a Zero Tolerance on Violence resolutions. Several municipalities have adopted the resolution..

National Inuit Women's Shelter Association is an action item that grew out of the Abuse Prevention strategy. The establishment of the *National Inuit Women Shelter Association* is key

in northern communities in aiding a high quality, safe service delivery, addressing integral components such as; training, standardization in service delivery, safety protocols, legislative protocols, documentation, victim safety, worker safety, ethical healing practices and the gathering of statistical data for analysis to better serve victims of violence in Northern Canada.

National Inuit Residential School Healing Strategy

Phase I (2005-2007) of the project focused upon the development of the Strategy. The methodology for the project included two years of consultation and planning work involving former residential school students, family members, Elders, counsellors, Inuit organizations and leaders from each of the four Inuit land claim regions, as well as Inuit living in urban centres.

The *National Inuit Residential Schools Healing Strategy* identifies the following Priorities for Action:

1. Strengthen Inuit languages and culture;
2. Form partnerships and strengthen relationships;
3. Increase the number of Inuit who can help others.
4. Develop the knowledge of service providers in Inuit communities;
5. Educate and raise awareness about Inuit in residential schools;
6. Share information and effective healing practices and
7. Identify and fill gaps in healing services.

In Phase II of the initiative (2007-2010), Pauktuutit is coordinating initial implementation of the Strategy, providing support to specific activities, and continuing to build partnerships and support. With appropriate support and cooperation from key stakeholders, the Strategy promises to be an important tool to assist Inuit communities to address the harsh legacy of the residential school system.

PROMOTIONAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

A comprehensive National Inuit Data Base on Abuse Prevention was developed, identifying key abuse prevention projects, programs, services and resources. It is available on Pauktuutit's website at: <http://www.pauktuutit.ca/nuluaq/>

OPPORTUNITIES

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREMIERS

- Invest in and implement the *National Strategy to Prevent Abuse in Inuit Communities* working in partnerships with Pauktuutit and communities and other partners;
- More National financial and policy support for enhanced programming regarding family violence and abuse for prevention, care, healing initiatives/treatment and support;

- More holistic approaches to policy/program development and collaboration between government departments and levels of government; i.e. include housing, abuse issues, food security, health promotion, economic independence etc.;
- Provide support to the National Inuit Women's Shelter Association;
- Federal/provincial/territorial government must ensure that financial resources are increased for the family violence initiatives and abuse prevention programs. For your information Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, family violence initiatives branch has 11 million dollars dedicated to First Nations - Inuit gets \$47,500.00. If we want to see Inuit communities take on more roles in abuse prevention then the financial resources have to be available.
- There is lack of programs and services for child sexual abuse and elder abuse. More resources are needed in this area to help our children and our elders.
- Invest in and implement the *National Inuit Residential Schools Healing Strategy*