

POLICE MISCONDUCT ON THE HIGHWAY OF TEARS: MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Abstract

This exploratory study examines 'The Highway of Tears' cases in Northern British Columbia. Qualitative interviews with local Indigenous Peoples and Elders on the Highway of Tears provide empirical data to inform the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in Canada. This research demonstrates the systemic and multi-faceted racism that continues to marginalize and oppress Indigenous Peoples. Such discrimination exists within Canadian society and the organizational structure of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. This research uses organizational and environmental approaches to police deviance and interviews with First Nations to contribute to understanding why the MMIWG cases are under-investigated and remain unsolved.

Résumé

Cette recherche exploratoire examine des cas reliés à la Route des larmes au nord de la Colombie-Britannique. Des entrevues qualitatives avec des communautés autochtones locales et des anciens ne s à propos de la Route des larmes fournissent des données empiriques pour mieux comprendre l'enjeu

des femmes et filles autochtones disparues et assassinées au Canada (FFADA). Cette étude démontre que le racisme systémique multiforme continue à marginaliser et opprimer les communautés autochtones. Une telle discrimination existe au sein de la société canadienne et dans la structure organisationnelle de la Gendarmerie Royale du Canada. L'étude s'appuie sur des approches organisationnelles et environnementales de la déviance policière ainsi que des entrevues avec les Premières Nations afin de mieux comprendre pourquoi les cas de FFADA sont sous-investigués et restes non-résolus.

Mots-clés possibles : Route des larmes, Femmes et filles disparues et assassinées au Canada, inconduite policière, Colombie-Britannique

Introduction

In 2014, shortly after the disappearance of Tina Fontaine, a Sagleeng teenager living in Winnipeg, Prime Minister Stephen Harper publicly dismissed calls for a large-scale inquiry into the growing number of deaths and disappearances of Indigenous Women and Girls across Canada. For Harper, the cases were not a 'sociological phenomenon' but individual crimes that ought to be investigated by the police. He insisted that the existing laws were sufficient in dealing with "crimes of violence not just against aboriginal women, but women and persons more generally" (Thobani 1). Harper, lacking a "sociological imagination" (Mills), ignored the fact the Indigenous Women are disproportionately more at risk to criminal victimization than any other group of women in Canada and disregarded the significant connection between colonialism and the fate of these missing women (Cotter; Chartrand & McKay; McGuire & Murdoch; Roswell; Stanton).

Violence against Indigenous Women has a long history (Thobani; Stanton) and there have been a number of reports and studies that have documented the extent of the problem (Amnesty International; Native Women's Association of Canada; Missing Women's Inquiry; Statistics Canada; The Honourable Opal; Human Rights Watch). While these studies have focused on Indigenous Women across Canada, one of the more studied areas is "The Highway of Tears" in British Columbia. Razack notes that over a quarter of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada disappeared in British Columbia (54). The Highway of Tears has had a profound effect on Northern Indigenous communities in B.C. The Highway of Tears refers to the series of disappearances and murders of mainly Indigenous Women and Girls along the 724 km stretch of Highway 16 (i.e., The Trans-Canada

Highway) between Prince George and Prince Rupert since the 1960s (Sabo). Various municipalities and twenty-three First Nations communities border the Highway of Tears (Appendix: Figure 1) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) maintains that eighteen women have gone missing along Highways 16, 97 and 5 since 1969 (“Project E-PANA”). The Carrier Sekani Family Services, however, claims that over forty women are missing (Carrier Sekani Family Services). The number of Women missing and murdered in the region is inconsistently reported and the exact figure remains unknown. Nonetheless, missing person investigations have been continuous and ongoing, although many of them are now cold cases (Human Rights Watch 7).

It can be argued that the mishandling of the Highway of Tears cases by the RCMP is a form of police misconduct demanding further investigation, especially when one considers the further allegations brought forth in the Human Rights Watch Report (2013) regarding the rape and abuse of Indigenous Women and Girls by RCMP officers. The mishandling of these cases and the alleged crimes committed by the force have acted to further oppress, subordinate, and marginalize the Indigenous population in Canadian society. However, it is important to note that the Highway of Tears is not an isolated issue of police neglect and misconduct. Rather, it is part of a larger, national crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), which stems from Canada’s long and dark history of systemic racism and discrimination towards Indigenous People which is perpetuated by the Canadian government’s propensity for neglecting Indigenous issues (Sabo; Singh). This discrimination stems from both colonialism in general, and the residential school system in particular, and is perpetuated by the misconduct of the police services of Canada. Through using organizational and environmental approaches to explain police deviance and incorporating personal qualitative interviews with local Indigenous Peoples and Elders, this paper seeks to understand and explain why the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls tragedy in Northern British Columbia continues to be a national disgrace.

Police Deviance: Bad Apples, Bad Barrels, and Bad Orchards

Police misconduct or deviance is a well-studied topic and is of great interest to the public (Seagrave). Media accounts exposing police incidents are common and researchers continue to study the various factors that contribute to its occurrence. Police misconduct refers to a wide range of behaviours including occupational code violations as well as criminal actions committed by police officers in connection with their official duties, which may lead to miscarriages of justice and sometimes involves discrimination (Ellis). Earlier “bad apple” theories emphasized

individual character flaws (Muir; Sherman) and sought to develop strategies of identifying individuals who may be susceptible to police deviance. These theories failed to address the fact that often police officers enter the police force as respectable citizens but are socialized within the police force to engage in police deviance (Tator & Frances). More recent theories have examined the organizational (Chappell & Piquero; Gottschalk, et al.; Kappeler, Sluder, & Alpert) and environmental influences on police misconduct (Kane; Kane & White; Klinger; Punch).

Organizational focused studies have looked at how police departments are formally organized and overseen and have found that the greater the discretion afforded police, the greater the potential for police misconduct and the development of deviant subcultures (Eitle et al.; Klockars et al.). Similarly, other organizational studies have examined the role that rules, procedures, and control mechanisms play in minimizing police misconduct. Those police departments that increase their structural complexity (range of duties and responsibilities) but not their structural control (formalized codes, rules, and reporting procedures) tend to rely on more police discretion and, therefore, put themselves at greater threat of police deviance (Maiguire). These theories argue that poorly organized police departments (rotten barrels) encourage deviant police officers (bad apples).

Environmental focused studies explore how individual police officers and police departments are influenced by broader environmental influences including the norms and values of the broader community (Punch). Studies using this ecological approach have found that community, regional, and cultural characteristics were significantly related to police misconduct (Kane; Klinger). In communities where there are high levels of crime, deviance, and disorder—basic social disorganization—police officers are more likely to engage in various forms of police misconduct because of the overall cynicism police officers develop while on the job. Moreover, they are less likely to view crime victims in these communities as deserving their protection and may come to view police deviance misconduct as a normal part of the job (Klinger). Finally, socially disorganized communities and marginalized people may not be able to organize effectively to counter the police misconduct and experience higher levels of police mistrust and police-citizen conflict (Kane; Eitle et al.). In other words, deviant police officers (bad apples) and poorly organized police departments (bad barrels) may be shaped by broader environmental factors (rotten orchards).

Organizational and environmental theories demonstrate the complexity of the problems surrounding police deviance. When studying police misconduct, it is essential to move beyond individu-

al focused theories and to incorporate theories that demonstrate how police organization and the broader communities they serve shape and influence policing behaviour, including police deviance. The police mismanagement of the missing Women and Girls along the Highway of Tears and the allegations of police sexual assault must be understood considering these broader theories, otherwise the crimes will never be resolved, and the misconduct will continue to be perpetuated.

Methodology

In addition to primary and secondary sources, this paper relies on qualitative personal interviews with local Indigenous Peoples and Elders. Through personal connections, a small, non-random, purposive sample was gathered. This sample consisted of four personal interviews in 2017, with one man and three women. The interviews included two First Nations Elders (both female), the Chief of Carrier Sekani Tribal Council (male) and women's rights advocate and organizer of the Walk4Justice Initiative (female)¹. All participants identified as Indigenous and lived in the affected communities along Highway 16. Each interview provided information on the Highway of Tears cases based on the participants "lived experience" (Berg) with dealing with police and other government agencies.

Policing the Highway of Tears: The Legacy of Colonization

With organizational and environmental theories of police deviance in mind, the police misconduct surrounding the missing, sexually assaulted, and murdered Women on the Highway of Tears, must be understood within the larger context of colonization and marginalization. Indeed, the "Stolen Sisters" report stressed "the dangers of being an Indigenous Woman in Canada" and identified "poverty, homelessness and prostitution" as issues of particular concern that contribute to the victimization of these Women (Amnesty International). The impact of imperialism and colonization on Indigenous Peoples of Canada is well documented (Minister of Supply and Service; Neu & Therrien; Tatz). The British government, colonial administrators, and, eventually, the Canadian state, all formulated bureaucratic policies that were designed to deal with the "Indian problem" and take ownership of the land regardless of those who have lived here for thousands of years. Canadian settlement was prioritized to such a degree that Indigenous heritage and land use was disregarded and diminished by both settlers and government. The general idea was that Indigenous People were uncivilized and that their cultural land use was unproductive, inefficient, and in desperate need of replacement with western means of production and commercial development (Colebrook). Indeed, the marginalization and degradation of First Nations by European settlers during

this time was often recorded by government officials who, for example, argued that Indigenous People “were little better than wild animals that rove over the hills” (British Columbia Sessional Papers). As such, forcing Indigenous People from their homelands to live on reserves was seen as an acceptable and civilized solution. Nevertheless, taking Indigenous land was not enough to rid Canada of its Indigenous Peoples and their cultures. This required a special method of cultural assimilation.

Of course, the use of residential schools by the Canadian government to deal with the “Indian problem” is one of the most extreme cases of state-sponsored cultural genocide (Neu & Therrien; Tatz). During the late 1800s, and up until the late 20th century, Indigenous People were expropriated and relocated to residential schools where they were to be ‘colonized’ and learn the Western curriculum as a mandatory requirement set forth by the 1894 and 1920 amendments to the 1887 Indian Act (Minister of Supply and Services). Children who were taken from their homes and placed into the residential school system were no longer able to speak their Indigenous languages or continue their cultural practices; they suffered physical and sexual abuse among many other hardships which has contributed to the rampant alcoholism, drug-use, and poverty in First Nations communities today (Neu & Therrien).

While all Indigenous People have suffered from the implementation of reserves, the use of residential schools, and systematic racism in general, it can be argued that Indigenous Women have, historically, been acutely marginalized by ethnicity, low socio-economic status, and their gender. Therefore, Indigenous Women have experienced extreme racism and discrimination. Decades of government policy have impoverished and broken apart Indigenous families and communities, which has resulted in a loss of identity and culture, leaving many Indigenous Women and Girls at a heightened risk of exploitation and attack (Amnesty International 3). Acoose (1992) argues that the ideological foundation of Euro-Canadian literature is informed by white-Christian-patriarchy and fosters images of Indigenous Women that contributes to their victimization. Indigenous Women have been perceived and labelled as “Indian princesses, squaw drudges, suffering helpless victims, and tawny temptresses, [sic]” which serves to foster racist and sexist stereotypes that encourage violence (i).

The fact that investigating the Highway of Tears cases has taken so long, and that most have gone cold, implies police mishandling and discrimination within the force. In the opinion of an interview participant, “More proactive measures were taken in investigations involving white women” whereas those of Indigenous Women were not actively pursued in the same way (Participant 1). This can be seen in the missing person cases of Nicole Hoar and Madison Scott, both white, upper-mid-

dle-class girls (*Highway of Tears*). Nicole Hoar went missing on the highway in 2002 hitchhiking from Prince George to Smithers, British Columbia. Prior to her disappearance, no press coverage, police discussion or notice to the public of the missing person cases along Highway 16 had **ever** taken place. Many women before Nicole had gone missing but news coverage and public awareness of the Highway of Tears cases was not triggered or present until after her disappearance. Madison Scott went missing in 2011 while camping at Hogsback Lake outside of Vanderhoof, B.C. with her friends. Large-scale search and rescue efforts were active and ongoing for this twenty-year-old white woman for months and news stories on her disappearance were endless (*Highway of Tears*). The RCMP was quick to act on Madison's case and provide the necessary resources in search parties. Nevertheless, a proactive search to this degree has never taken place for a missing Indigenous Women or Girl on the highway (Singh 18). Therefore, demographic factors are hard to ignore in asking why the media and police failed to extensively address the issue before Nicole Hoar, and why cases concerning white women are given more coverage (Gilchrist 388) and active policing (Singh 14).

An examination of the news coverage in the *Prince George Citizen* between January 2013 and February 2014—when there was a flurry of articles concerning the Highway of Tears—reveals an ethnocentric, discriminatory, and biased voice concerning the nature and cause of missing women along the highway. News articles quoting interviews with the RCMP regularly spoke about the MMIWG from a standpoint of “blame the victim,” accentuating their high-risk behaviour (e.g., history of drug use, alcoholism, or prostitution) as a primary reason and contributor to their disappearance or death. As one participant explained: “I feel like there’s a blame that goes on...well, ‘she shouldn’t have been there’ and you know, ‘it was her lifestyle:’” (Participant 2). Such stereotypes and judgement are not evident in articles describing missing and murdered white women. Gladys Radek, women’s rights advocate, and organizer of the Walk4Justice initiative, lost her niece Tamara Chipman on the Highway of Tears (Chartrand). She went missing in 2005 and her case is now cold. When discussing her niece’s disappearance in an interview with me she claims:

...you gotta remember that sex-trade workers and high-risk behaviour are uhm...basically stereotyped together, right? It could be anything from hitchhiking to drug abuse to uh...sex-trade working. So, they need to clarify that not all of these women are sex-trade workers or fall into these negative categories, and just because these are Aboriginal Women does not mean that they are sex-trade workers. Like Tamara, they said was high-risk—she was

hitchhiking—but look at the other end of the spectrum at Nicole Hoar—she was also hitchhiking but not living a ‘high-risk lifestyle.’ So, what that says is Tamara’s the whore and Nicole’s not the whore (Participant 1).

The negligence on behalf of the RCMP to take accountability for their failures in policing the Highway of Tears demonstrates racist beliefs and values towards Indigenous Women and Girls. Furthermore, the argument that officer misconduct is the result of a few “rotten apples” and not a systemic issue on the part of the force denies institutional responsibility (Blanchfield). In the final report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (2012), Commissioner Wally Opal writes: “...the initiation and conduct of the missing and murdered women investigations were a blatant failure” (41). He describes various policing problems, including poor report taking and follow-up (43-48), failure to consider and properly pursue all investigative strategies (71), mismanagement of informants and information sources (75), failure to follow major case management practices and policies (81), and failure of internal review and external accountability mechanisms (91). He goes on to explain that the causes of these failures are discrimination, systemic institutional bias, and political and public indifference to cases involving Indigenous Women (93). All of these policing problems must be addressed and rectified by revising prevention (i.e., training) and restorative policies (i.e., standards and approaches) for future investigations to be successful.

These racist attitudes towards Indigenous Women have been perpetuated by the mass media. In looking at media coverage on Indigenous Women and Girls, both Goulding (2001) and Singh (2015) contend that the Canadian news perpetuates and reinforces intersectional invisibility (i.e., failing to recognize people with intersecting identities) in society by showing indifference towards cases of missing Indigenous Women. Cases involving Indigenous Peoples, no matter how pressing, are repeatedly unacknowledged by news media or discounted in importance (Goulding 218-219). Monchalin (2016) argues that the Canadian government has framed the vast overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples within the justice system as being an “*Indian problem*,” when, in fact, their disproportionate victimization and criminalization is truly a *colonial* problem. For Monchalin, the root cause of much of the violence and abuse in these communities is the abuse that they have experienced in their own lives by the government and Canadian society. The assimilation policies of colonialism advanced a cultural genocide (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 1), and created immense generational pain felt by these communities, which has resulted in an increased vulnerability to drug use, alcoholism, domestic/sexual abuse (violence), and their

overrepresentation in prisons. As one interview participant claimed:

...we're the ones high in child welfare, we're the ones high in the criminal, and we're the ones high in the murdered and missing and I think that's all for a reason: is that our family systems have been broken down. Some families have survived and generations later they're still doing well, you know? Eight and a half years of social work and I'm working with third and fourth generations that I know of. Like, there could be more, and... the life they live with drug abuse, domestic abuse, alcohol...you know? To them that's so normal (Participant 2).

In addition, Indigenous People are disproportionately represented as victims within the criminal justice system, especially Women. It has been estimated that although Canada's Indigenous Women make up just 4.3 percent of the country's female population, they represent approximately five times as many female homicide victims (Statistics Canada). The criminal victimization of Indigenous Women has largely been ignored by the RCMP, and such neglect or mishandling can be considered an abuse of power or police deviance. Rather than being the result of a few corrupt or negligent police officers, the Highway of Tears can be seen as the result of ineffective police departments operating in a broader cultural environment that is largely indifferent to the plight of Indigenous People, especially Indigenous Women. This organizational argument has been supported by Michalko (2016), a former Mountie, who documented the mistreatment of Indigenous Women by the force, which eventually led him to resign and continue working the cases as a private investigator for the victims' families (17).

Matt Smiley's documentary, *Highway of Tears*, has highlighted the racism perpetuated by the Canadian criminal justice system. His interviews, along with the eighty-seven interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch 18), reveal the harassment, assault and sexual violence experienced by Indigenous Women and Girls by RCMP officers along the Highway of Tears. Not surprisingly, the interview participants identified a deeply rooted, historical mistrust of law enforcement as a consequence of this long-standing mistreatment. This confirms research which found that Indigenous People are significantly less confident in the police than their non-Indigenous counterparts largely because of the long history of racism and the strained relationship between the police and Indigenous Peoples (Cao 515). The Women interviewed indicated that in times of crisis they often do not contact the RCMP as they do not trust them. This was due to their own and others' experiences of rape and abuse by officers in the force as was outlined in the Human Rights Watch Report (2013). An Indigenous Elder claimed:

...my daughter, my oldest daughter, goes missing once in a while. The last couple years...and I don't even bother reporting it because I know what the cops do to our girls. You know? I know they rape them—I've been raped twice by cops. I don't trust them. So, if I'm going to be reporting my Aboriginal daughter, I may as well just be putting a red target on her head. RCMP are a part of the problem, and you know what? It was RCMP officers who were "offing" some of these girls. They are responsible for some of their deaths, I have no doubts. Dropped off to hike on the side of the highway after being abused physically or sexually—this issue is very real for all of us. We know they are not there to protect us; they are there to hurt us, degrade us and marginalize us. So how can we trust them? We can't! I don't want any more officers until these police officers are trained properly... They definitely need to be taking mandatory human rights courses in their training packages before they become police officers, only then are equipped to properly police Indigenous communities (Participant 4).

The literal translation for police in many of Northern B.C.'s Indigenous languages remains "Those who take us away" (Human Rights Watch 2). This illustrates the enduring impact of Canada's assimilation policies on these communities by stressing the negative relationship that continues to persist between First Nations and the RCMP, criminal justice system and government.

All of the participants emphasized that after decades of mistreatment, subordination and marginalization in Canadian society, reconciliation is not enough; the government must do more than simply apologize to the Indigenous population (Stanton). Instead, action must be taken in the form of funding for preventative measures that address the core issues of policing, transportation, social services (for counselling, cultural education, and reintegration, etc.) and basic human rights such as clean water and health care (hospitals, pharmacies, addiction treatment/rehabilitation centres, etc.). These women and girls know better than to hitchhike, and billboards and signage has been implemented all along Highway 16 and other parts of B.C. for years (Figure 2) to inform them of the risks. In blaming the hitchhikers, what is ignored is any thought for the socio-economic reasons for hitchhiking and an acknowledgement of the enduring impacts of colonialism on Indigenous Women's mobility (Morton 317). Still, when there is no available transportation in and out of these isolated communities, people still need to access the social services offered by

larger, urban centers. As one of the participants stated: “These women didn’t just get up one day and go missing...they were on the road for a reason” (Participant 4). The participants indicated that they feel marginalized and discriminated against on a daily basis by both police and the general public, suggesting that social change is necessary within institutions to alter the beliefs and values of Canadian society.

Rather than “Othering” (Said 10) Indigenous Women as prostitutes and drug abusers, and being blind to the role of intersectionality, as is inherent in the traditional crime-control model of policing Indigenous communities, the fundamental causes of these murders and disappearances must be highlighted to create better policing policies, plans and procedures that appropriately deal with the scale of the issue (Singh 15). Decades of government policy have impoverished and broken apart Indigenous families and communities, which has resulted in a loss of identity and culture, leaving many Indigenous Women and Girls at a heightened risk of exploitation and attack (Amnesty International 3). As one participant said: “they stripped the Indian out of us” (Participant 3). By recognizing these underlying issues, police can become more sensitive to and understanding of these communities in developing more effective policing strategies under the due-process model. Accountability and positive relations must also be established between Indigenous Peoples and the police in working towards replacing their fear of the RCMP with a level of trust. Most importantly, the government must be held accountable for the state of these communities today, as these conditions contribute to police mistreatment of Indigenous People. An interview participant from Nisga’a First Nation stressed that:

...they (the Canadian government) really need to take ownership of what they stripped away from the people and what it was replaced with. It was replaced with addictions, whether it’s alcohol or drugs. Street drugs. You know? Own *that* and face *that* in your awareness. People are murdered and missing because they didn’t know how to deal with or work through a traumatic experience in their life... So, we need to bring awareness to that piece. (Participant 3).

Although recent efforts at Truth and Reconciliation by the Canadian government promote a new relationship with First Nations and outlook on their lives and cultures (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 1-5), racism and sexism towards Indigenous Women is still heavily woven into the beliefs and values of Canadian society. A respondent indicated: “You have to remember that racism is the big step here and racism is taught at home” (Participant 1). Clearly, fixing a systemic issue such as racism is complicated, requiring broad-scale

changes on both macro and micro levels.

Conclusion

The reports and recommendations set forth by The Highway of Tears Symposium (2006), Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (2012), Human Rights Watch (2013) and Amnesty International (2014), were all key for contextualizing the Indigenous Women's issues and Highway of Tears cases. Each report stipulated appropriate solutions for effectively addressing the multi-faceted and complex issue of MMIWG in Canada. However, what was missing was an adequate appreciation of theories of police deviance and how they can inform this problem. The mishandling of these cases by the RCMP reveals the institutional racism and discrimination within the force which can only be addressed through altering the beliefs and values of officers by significantly changing their organization, leadership, policy, and procedures. In addition, the broader environmental factors within Canadian society must also be addressed, although this is a much more challenging task that requires cultural change.

In addressing the police mishandling of the Highway of Tears cases and the allegations of rape and abuse by Indigenous Women, accountability must be accompanied by organizational change including better policies, practices and procedures that improve relations with the Indigenous population. As one participant suggested, training procedures for the RCMP should be amended to set in place requirements for officers to take human rights and Indigenous rights and history courses that guide more equal and respectful practices within the force (Participant 1). Similar recommendations have stressed increasing the educational requirements of police officers, especially those in supervisory and leadership positions who play a significant role in shaping the culture and practices of the police organization (Lim & Sloan).

Policing must account for the remoteness and isolation of these Northern communities which makes their lives unique (Lithopoulos & Ruddell 435-7). Seagrave emphasized the need to shift from a crime control model in these communities to due process where all are treated equally. Police must be equipped with culturally specific practices to appropriately police Indigenous communities and develop better relations (263). With more information and awareness of the interconnected issues in these communities, culturally specific plans, policies and programs can be developed. Compassion and sensitivity to the state of these communities is necessary in learning how to police them appropriately and effectively.

From a broader, environmental policing perspective, police

failures in protecting Indigenous Women and mishandling the Highway of Tears cases illustrates the systemic racism that still characterizes Canadian society in general. While government initiatives such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are important steps, it is unlikely that existing beliefs and values towards Indigenous People will change unless broader changes are implemented within all social institutions, including our educational system and the mass media. Education in Canada must make a more concerted effort to better educate young Canadians about the history and consequences of colonialism, adopting some of the goals and strategies of social activists to bring about meaningful social changes (Lund). As Cao contends, “the dominant mythology of Canada as a non-racist nation must be challenged and meaningful social change and social justice must be implemented” (517). Knowledge on social injustice perpetuated against Indigenous People is not enough. Our education system needs to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives throughout its curriculum which would help normalize and destigmatize Indigenous culture (Scott). Similarly, the mass media must be more responsible and thorough in its coverage and portrayal of Indigenous Peoples, their cultures, and their experiences with colonization. Recent films, such as *Snare* (2016) and *This river is a woman* (2016) are examples of filmmaking designed to raise public awareness about violence against Indigenous Women (Brady).

Finally, the quality of life for Indigenous communities must be improved. If the Canadian government and its society are truly multicultural and support people in their endeavours to preserve, enhance, and share their cultural heritage, then it is necessary to allow more self-governance and economic development (Cao 517). This requires a commitment to several key factors: recognizing that control over one’s own destiny, rather than subordination to outside political authorities is essential to social justice; that ending economic dependence requires a fair distribution of wealth; that Indigenous culture must not only be protected but valued and enriched; and placing a priority on eliminating existing social problems such as health, housing, poverty, and addiction (Frideres & Gadacz). The resulting self-esteem of Indigenous People would be strengthened and allow them to become equal fellow citizens with the rest of Canadians. More importantly, the criminal victimization of Indigenous Women and Girls would be recognized by the Canadian criminal justice system, and all Canadians, as a serious social problem requiring immediate and meaningful intervention to restore justice and order in our Indigenous communities.

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APPENDIX: Figures 1 & 2.



Figure 1: Indigenous Services Canada. “First Nations in British Columbia.” 1 May 2019. Online Image. First Nations in British Columbia. https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-ISC-SAC/DAM-ST-SCRD/STAGING/texte-text/map_room_ind_peoples_land_BC_FN-communities_1615812992272_eng.pdf



Figure 2: Hampton, Morgon. “Red Dress Day: A History of the Highway of Tears.” 5 May 2021. Online Image. Merritt Herald. <https://www.merrittherald.com/red-dress-day-a-history-of-the-highway-of-tears/>