

Report

"After Healing is Healthy Living"



Consultation on Sexual Violence and Aboriginal Community

March 21-22, 2011



Acknowledgement

On the second day of our meeting, we heard the news that an eleven-year old Aboriginal girl had been raped and murdered over the weekend at a hockey tournament held in Sioux Lookout. This report is dedicated to the young girl and all of the Aboriginal women, men and children who have experienced sexual violence in their lives.

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Executive Summary

Sexual violence is a silent issue in Aboriginal community. It is embedded in the historical legacy of colonization and today, sexual violence continues in many manifestations. The pain of the violence is so entrenched that it becomes a conversation that cannot start without safety and care around the person, the family and the community.

To address sexual violence in Aboriginal community it will require a coordinated, long-term, community healing process. All of the eight elements identified in the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women (Strategic Framework)* will need to be present to respond to sexual violence.

Ending sexual violence is related directly to the healing that needs to be done as a result of colonization. The first step in the process will be to name the issue and to understand the breadth and depth of the issues of sexual violence. This report is intended to provide some understanding of the issue. There have been few voices brave enough to speak of these issues. The voices at this consultation are to be recognized and honoured as leaders.

The consultation concluded with the same broad strategies that are part of the *Strategic Framework*:

- A commitment to long-term approaches and investments;
- Strong messages through public education that violence is not an acceptable way to behave;
- Strong organizations and a community capacity to address violence and dedicated resources to support the organizations; and
- Community leadership to show an accountability to address the issue of sexual violence fully.

**Report
Consultation on Sexual Violence and the Aboriginal
Community
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“ There is a profound silence on the issue of sexual violence.”

Sherry Lewis

Elder Pauline Shirt
opened the consultation.

A. Introduction

The Consultation on Sexual Violence and Aboriginal Community brought together representatives from the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, the Ontario Native Women’s Association, the Métis Nation of Ontario, the Independent First Nations and the Chiefs of Ontario. The full list of the participants can be found in Appendix A.

Four outcomes were identified for the meeting:

- Identification of key issues related to sexual violence and facing Aboriginal communities.
- Identification of current and potential innovative approaches to addressing sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.
- Strategies for discussing priority issues within Aboriginal communities and raising awareness of prevention, support services and healing strategies.
- A plan for each of the four Aboriginal organizations to engage their membership in these discussions using existing resources.

The report is a summary of the two days of discussions.

B. Setting the Context for the Discussion

There were a number of powerful presentations provided throughout the consultation that framed and guided the discussions.

Sylvia Maracle, Executive Director, OFIFC

Sylvia opened the consultation by providing a context for the discussion. In the last year, the Ontario government has engaged in a consultation process around sexual violence. At the time, the government approached Aboriginal organizations to participate in these consultations. The Aboriginal organizations that had developed the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women welcomed a consultation process that would be Aboriginal specific. While the Framework reflects all forms of violence, including sexual violence, the opportunity to look at how a specific manifestation of violence is reflected in Aboriginal communities was welcomed.

Sylvia then provided a number of key points to situate the conversation:

Prior to colonization, Aboriginal culture “looked to the natural world to get instructions for life.” Culture provided the guidance for relationships and described what was proper with one another. Violence was not a common element of our lives.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the level of violence in Aboriginal communities was revealed through a study done by the Ontario Native Women’s Association entitled “Breaking Free.” The report concluded that there were exceptionally high rates of violence affecting Aboriginal people.

In 1997, the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy was created with a key objective to address family violence in Aboriginal communities. In 2007, *the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women* was developed that again reaffirmed specific objectives and clear strategies to end violence in Aboriginal community. The government of Ontario has given its support for the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women.

In the Strategic Framework, violence is violence. Yet, we need to turn our attention to the specifics of sexual violence at this time because it is a form of violence that is rampant in the communities. Incest in many communities is a **public** secret – people know but it is not discussed. Gangs and gang rape are increasingly being described as part of an Aboriginal young person’s experience.

In Aboriginal communities today, there are 15-year-old young women with no power to speak out. There are young mothers being abused and often living away from the aunts and grandmothers who could support them. It remains true that nine out of ten women are not at the point to have a discussion about sexual violence. Some of the nine do not even know that they have been sexually abused because sexual violence has been normalized.

How do we stop sexual violence from happening? How can we respond when we see happy children becoming quiet, destructive and showing evidence of distress? Strategies need to focus on early intervention.

The Aboriginal approach to dealing with sexual violence will consider every member of the community that is affected: starting with the victim, then the abuser; the families of both and the community that has been a witness to the abuse. The concept of “blood memory” means that we have to care for generations (children, parents and grandparents) who have lived through trauma and not have one-off approaches to a specific situation of violence. When we don’t help everyone affected we leave individual members in the community vulnerable and traumatized. We know that there are entire communities in Northern Ontario that are in trauma and need support.

As described in the Strategic Framework, a coordinated, integrated approach that includes healing and accountability is required. The existing structures to address sexual violence (shelters, Chief and Council and Violence Against Women programs) are not necessarily the way to continue to do business. We need to change the funding environment so that shelters are not rewarded to keep their doors full of women experiencing violence but funding is going to programs that show a reduction in violence. Shelters need to be for men to heal and to be reeducated and women and children need

to stay in their homes. Each part of the issues wheel will have to be considered in order to move forward.

**Issues Framework from the Strategic Framework to
End Violence Against Aboriginal Women**



Sherry Lewis

Sherry opened her remarks by describing how she has lived in many different communities, both urban environments and in her home community of Six Nations. When she last returned to Six Nations, her boys noted how wonderful it felt to be in the community and not have to deal with racism. Their comments provided her with the opportunity to reflect on her experience of community. She recognized that safety was still an issue for women in the community. The question she was left with was “why is it so safe to be a man and not a woman on a reserve?”

The violence is obvious if we look:

- On reserve there are names for women who watch lacrosse and are assumed that they will have sex – “lacrostitutes.”
- Gang rapes are part of the experience of teenaged and young men and young women’ experience especially when alcohol is involved.
- We have communities that are hot spots – where there are high incidences of sexual violence targeted at Aboriginal women.
- A couple of weeks ago, a young woman in Six Nations was murdered. She was found naked and beaten to death in a party room. No one has anything to say about it despite there being people who participated and those who were in the room watching.

In the last situation, no one working in the area of sexual violence in the community even knew that this had happened. There is a profound silence on the issue of sexual violence.

When Aboriginal women are at risk and when they have experienced sexual violence they are not accessing services, including sexual assault centres. Two years ago, a young woman was murdered. She was five months pregnant and the murderer was a lacrosse player who had partied with her and did not want responsibility for her or the child. Initially there was not a lot of support for the family when she was murdered. However the community came together and held ceremonies, listened to them and cared for them as they went through the court system.

When Sherry worked as the Executive Director of the Native Women's Association of Canada, the President, Beverly Jacobs traveled across the country to hear from women and their families. Women were leaving their community for school, medical care and jobs and were never heard from again. The majority of the women who are part of the Sisters in Spirit database experienced sexual violence.

There is not a lot on sexual violence against Aboriginal women. Sherry noted that the women at this consultation are the pioneers in naming and addressing this issue. There are many layers of sexual abuse that have occurred in the communities and outside of the communities. This is racialized, sexualized violence.

The media are very difficult to engage in providing the story of violence happening to Aboriginal women. Once NWAC established relationships with the media, the story did move from page 25 to page 10 but it was never given front-page attention.

We need to apply a culturally based gender analysis to this issue. What makes Aboriginal women targets in our communities? What makes us targets in other communities? We know that the history of residential schools has led to incest in our communities and intergenerational impacts but how did we get to the institutionalization of sexual violence against Aboriginal women?

Sisters in Spirit focused on Aboriginal women who were in urban environments. To expose the sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, is to expose multiple, complex community and family issues.

Sherry then highlighted some key factors to consider when talking about sexual violence in Aboriginal community:

- Aboriginal women are feminists but we do not use the terminology. Many Aboriginal nations are matriarchal societies where women were valued and where equality is part of the relationships. We need to create our own language that reestablishes the equality that we are striving for in relationships.
- If we ask women if they have been sexually assaulted, they will likely say "no." If we ask women if they have ever had sex when they did not want to, most would say "yes."
- In the Aboriginal community, the numbers are not one out of ten women but nine out of ten women who will experience violence.
- The key message to share with women is that "It is not your fault."

- When women look at the sexual violence in their lives, 95% will not go to an Aboriginal helper but will look for different ways to heal. There are 150 ways to do your healing journey and we cannot judge one as better than another.
- Human trafficking is part of sexual violence. Aboriginal women are trafficked not only for sex but also for organ harvesting. Aboriginal women are vulnerable to violence as sex trade workers, as targets for organized crime and vulnerable to all forms of crime.
- Policing is part of the issue. Police need specialized training to work with Aboriginal people, to work in Aboriginal community and to understand the complexity of the issues facing Aboriginal women.
- Many Aboriginal women have low standards and low expectations in our relationships. We accept disrespectful behaviour from our partners because “at least they do not beat us.” We need to listen to each woman and her story. We need to understand that her story is hers to create. How can we help women and families talk about the abuse?
- How do we deal with the community when the abuse is based in the religious and spiritual life of the community? We know of faith healers and spiritual leaders that are sexual abusers.
- How do we support the leaders in our community who have endured sexual violence and now we are asking them to lead the conversations on this issue?

Sherry left us with a message of openness. When we start to open up the discussion on this issue there will be many nuances and many stories.

Tana Troniak

For the last four years, Tana has been the Executive Director of the First Step Women’s Shelter in Sioux Lookout. The shelter serves 26 First Nation communities, most of them fly-in communities. Tana shared the many things that she has learned since becoming Executive Director:

- The women who are coming out of the Northern communities are coming out of third world conditions and they often are living in homes with up to 10 other people.
- 99% of the women that the Shelter sees have experienced incest, date rape or some form of sexual violence. What is increasingly obvious is that the girls are getting younger who are experiencing sexual violence.
- The rules, policies, processes and clinical work at the Shelters do not work for Aboriginal women and have to change. The zero tolerance policies means that many women are kicked out of the only safe place they have. Also, women are supposed to leave at a specific time even if there is no other place for them to stay.
- A harm reduction approach is more appropriate. Part of the work of the shelter is to help women to develop coping mechanisms for their addictions and mental health issues before they start dealing with them. In many cases, the women can only deal with one issue at a time.
- The helping approach that the Shelter uses is “supportive listening” instead of counseling. As soon as we use counseling we impose a framework on the women.
- Our job is to build on the strength of the women, to build resiliency and rely on humour to give good energy to the women.

- Suicide is common and is a direct result of having to deal with the issues they face and the pain of recovery and withdrawal of addictive substances.
- Women do not want to go to court and as such they do not want to tell the police.
- The police often do not follow up when women accuse men of violence including sexual violence if the women are drunk.
- There is a need for transitional housing so women can have concentrated support to deal with the multiple issues that are part of their lives.

Research and Knowledge on Sexual Violence and Aboriginal Community

The research is quite limited on sexual violence and its incidence and impact on Aboriginal people and communities. There is limited work to look at from the United States and across Canada. The Hollow Water experience in the healing process of victims and the victimizers in situations of sexual abuse, sexual assault and family violence of a First Nations community within Manitoba would be a place to start.

A number of research questions need to be explored:

1. What is the research on sexual violence and Aboriginal people?
2. Why don't women report sexual violence?
3. What is the incidence of sexual violence in our communities?
4. Why do Aboriginal men perform acts of sexual violence?
5. What are the perspectives of non-Aboriginal people and what has been the impact on Aboriginal women around sexual violence?
6. What is the impact of alcohol, religion and losing one's culture on being a victim or perpetrator of sexual violence?

Initiatives that are Responding to Sexual Violence in the Aboriginal Community

There is not a high investment in addressing sexual violence. As a consequence the response to sexual violence has been primarily through the mainstream sexual assault centres or the Aboriginal shelters. This has not been an appropriate approach for Aboriginal people.

Some key strategies have emerged to respond to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities that are not always directly related to sexual violence investments.

1. If you are in a leadership position and running a program that can support women who have experienced violence, push the rules and approaches to respond to the needs of Aboriginal women.
2. Use harm reduction models.
3. Offer supportive listening instead of structured counseling.
4. Create programs that allow sexual violence to be discussed in the context of other issues: wellness, reproductive health and sexuality.
5. Be resiliency and asset focused in all the work that we do with women.
6. Provide sensitivity training to the government so they can understand the issue from an Aboriginal perspective.
7. In program work, offer alternative models (Reichi, massage, etc)

8. Look at how existing programs can be adjusted to promote healthy relationships and provide women with a safe place to disclose sexual violence. Some programs that were suggested included: Healthy Babies, shelter work, housing work, Court Workers Program.

In addition to the work being done around the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*, the OFIFC Initiative, *Healthy Indigenous Males* (HIM) provides an opportunity to focus on men as abusers and as abused, as participants in their healing process and as leaders supporting other men to heal.

C. Issues that will impact on the consultations on Sexual Violence

1. Issue is not widely acknowledged

Women, communities and leaders do not yet know the magnitude of the issue of sexual violence. In most communities, sexual violence is portrayed as either a one-off incident or the most horrific situations are being presented. The embedded nature of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities makes it difficult to raise the issue.

The consultations will need to be cognizant of the impact of the conversations and anticipate that people will be overwhelmed. There is shame and stigma in talking openly about the issues of sexual violence. The conversations cannot instill shame, fear or hopelessness as that can lead to suicides.

2. Difficult for leaders to speak on the issue

Since sexual violence has been an unspoken part of many women's lives, it has likely been unspoken for many leaders. Leaders may feel that they cannot disclose sexual violence because they will be perceived as being weak. The leaders will need to be supported and new messages need to be presented. Strength needs to be defined not as silence but as speaking out and healing. A woman who has survived sexual violence is STRONG. To stay silent is just another form of control.

3. A family and community approach is required to address the issue

The approach described in the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women* recognizes that the issue of sexual violence, particularly the issue of incest, requires a family and community approach. Each individual family member needs to have time to address their healing needs and the family, as a whole, needs supports and interventions.

As people start to speak about their individual experience as a victim and name a perpetrator, other community members get involved by either coming forward as being victimized, in defending the perpetrator, in threatening or ignoring the victim. To create safety, the community, as a whole, needs to be supported to have the conversations.

4. A culturally based gender analysis will be used

The Aboriginal perspective on sexual violence is based on a different worldview. When engaging with the mainstream on these issues, the conversation has inherent tensions. An example used was the conversations around the sex trade. The mainstream position is that the sex trade is not inherently violent and is based on a woman's choice.

When we apply an Aboriginal worldview, sex trade work is rooted in colonization and the resulting patriarchy that defines the historical conditions for Aboriginal women as having few choices, and which is maintained through systemic discrimination. As such sexual violence and sex trade work is part of the continuum of violence against Aboriginal women that started with colonization.

5. The current systems in place to address sexual violence do not work

Once someone is identified as having experienced sexual violence, they are categorized as "victims." Women are resilient and have multiple identities. The definition of "victim" reinforces learned helplessness and is based on relationships of dependency that were established as part of colonization.

Clinical Approach

The experience for many Aboriginal women in clinical counseling is often one of shock and horror. "How bad is your story?" It then can move to a focus on the negative and create a deficit approach that is not helpful for healing.

Justice system

Women do not want to use the judicial system because it does not address their multiple needs: the violence to end; healing for themselves, often healing for the perpetrator and maintaining a family structure. It reinforces the woman as a victim. The judicial system also has huge systemic barriers: inadequate responses; racism; time consuming; high cost investment; revictimization of women and reinforcement of the shame.

Victim Witness Assistance Program

The program has limited value, because it is an arm of the crown and therefore cannot hear the victim because they need to be neutral in the process. There is little confidence in the video process in protecting victims, especially those in small, remote and rural communities.

6. The resources and capacity is not fully there to address the level of trauma.

There is insufficient support for sexual violence survivors. The shelters are often relied upon when women raise issues of sexual violence, yet shelter workers are not necessarily trained to deal with issues related to sexual violence. Aboriginal women are not going to Sexual Assault Centres even when they are available in their community.

The ability to address sexual violence in another person's life requires specific skills and abilities.

- Helpers need to be supported to do their own personal work around sexual violence.
- Sexual assault teams need to be created that are Aboriginal specific.

- A strength and resiliency based approach is needed.
- Many healing processes need to be in place for people to choose from, including healing circles.
- Develop ways to support women to address sexual violence earlier in their life and not carry it as a burden and shame for so long.
- Restorative justice is a tool that needs to be shared and used more.

7. Support healthy relationships and healthy ways of living

For many people, particularly young people, they are not clear on what is a healthy relationship. Sexual violence becomes part of family life, dating life and being accepted.

There is a need to describe and show healthy ways of living. The medicine wheel and other teachings that reinforce healthy ways of living are good tools to use.

Part of the healing process includes learning about the different roles that each person has to play, particularly the role of men and fathers to protect the people they love.

Elder Pauline Shirt

While we need to find ways to support people to heal from what has happened to them, there is an equal need to ensure that the next generation of children is not exposed to sexual violence. As a community we need to support parents. There are teachings out there that guide us in our responsibilities as parents and caregivers. When we give the children and youth a foundational base, we provide them with tools to live an anti-violent life and to have resiliency when bad things happen to them.

8. There is a clear relationship between sexual violence and concurrent issues.

There are many factors that have a direct impact on the individual, the family and the community's ability to respond to sexual violence. Sexual violence is often connected to the other issues: an addiction; specific mental health conditions (PTSD and Anxiety Disorders); teen pregnancy; homelessness and FASD. A person who has multiple issues is often ignored when they name sexual violence as being part of their lives.

Social determinants have a direct impact on the incidence of sexual violence. There is a direct relationship between being under-housed and being exposed to situations that make a person vulnerable to sexual violence. It is known that pimps are using Homeless shelters to house women they are trafficking.

9. Social systems can play a role in addressing sexual violence

Key systems including: child welfare, education, criminal and housing can work in ways that will reduce the incidents of sexual violence.

10. Aboriginal Men

Aboriginal men's experiences of sexual violence have a number of perspectives. What has to be considered:

- Men need to do healing as people who have survived sexual violence as children; as youth (gang rapes and bullying) and as men (in institutions and in prisons);
- They need to take accountability as perpetrators of violence, including understanding their violence and taking steps to not re-offend.
- They have responsibilities as leaders and men to stop the violence in themselves and in other men.
- They have responsibilities as fathers to protect their children; to not abuse their children and to avoid patterns of multiple partners, each having children, as a way to avoid dealing with their own issues.

11. Specific constituencies

- **Men and women in the prison system** require supports in the system and when they reenter society, that allow them to address, heal and be accountable for the sexual violence in their lives.
- **Youth** have a normalized relationship with sexual violence. It has become incorporated into their sex lives and the relationships they are establishing. Young women in their relationships are often pressured to have sex with threats and intimidation by their boyfriend. Students at school have specific pressures because sexual violence is often part of the social norms.
- **Two-spirited people**, particularly youth, have few places to address sexual violence. The lack of awareness and homophobia leads to youth not speaking about their sexuality or sexual violence, particularly same-sex sexual violence. An organization, "Two Spirits in Motion" did a study that found that 1/3 of the youth who attempted suicide in northern Alberta were youth were questioning their sexuality.
- What is happening in the communities of **Northern Ontario** is very different and specific solutions need to be developed: women are often living in sub-standard housing and are sharing space with up to 10 people in the same house; they are isolated if a situation does occur and often have to wait weeks or months for a perpetrator of violence to be moved away from the community or for them to leave. The level of addictions in the Northern communities is high.

12. Address the external messages that normalize sexual violence

Over time stereotypes become reality. The direct result of colonization is that Aboriginal people see images of themselves that are disrespectful and stereotypical. Any group of people, put through the circumstances of colonization, would manifest in similar ways. The media and public institutions today have a responsibility to end any stereotypical images and messages that lead to the promotion of violence.

- The media and social media reinforce particular messages about sexual violence.
- Pornography continues to be normalized. Child pornography continues to be prevalent. Like the South, Northern Ontario First Nations communities can get access to over 100 stations that are pornographic. What learned behaviour and messages are being reinforced?

- The lack of mainstream media coverage on stories about sexual violence, particularly when it relates to Aboriginal women, makes it invisible.
- Social media is creating new forms of sexual violence: sexting, internet photographs, and facebook exposure.
- The Internet lures women into situations that make sexual violence probable.
- Women hating women is reinforced and a form of misogyny. There is an increase in the number of gangs and bullying. Young women are becoming as aggressive as men. We are creating circumstances where women, girls and children are violated and their violence is a coping mechanism.
- Institutionalized patriarchy is entrenched in many key institutions. For example, the church has reinforced ideas that women and children are not to talk about sexual violence; and lateral violence and vicarious trauma is happening in many workplaces and educational settings.

13. Each partner has a role in this work

Governments as part of their history (residential schools, legislation) have played a role in perpetuating sexual violence in the Aboriginal community. Jurisdictional issues facing cross-border communities needs to be addressed so that when sexual violence needs to be addressed, jurisdictional issues are not a barrier.

All of the Urban Aboriginal Organizations and the Chiefs' organizations have a role to play.

D. Moving Forward

Before determining the strategy to move forward, a number of presentations were provided on what has been done around other issues.

Sherry Lewis – Strategies for Discussing Sexual Violence in the Community

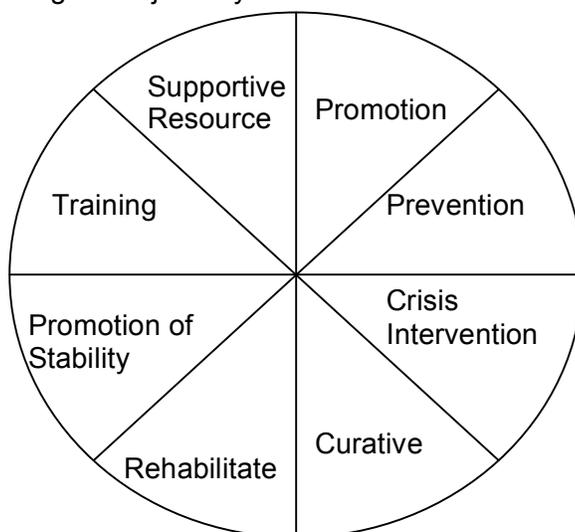
There are many lessons to learn from the experiences that the Native Women's Association of Canada had when they went into the communities to talk about the missing and murdered Aboriginal women under the Sisters in Spirit initiative. When we went into the community, the communities were prepared for NWAC to come and yet there were some issues that they were not ready to discuss, including sexual violence. Some things to consider:

- Ensure that in each group, there are peers so that every woman can have someone who shares her perspective. If there will be older women then have older women as the facilitators.
- The language that is used needs to be respectful. Have a set of key messages and reinforce them throughout the consultation process.
- Use a variety of interventions and approaches to engage with the women.
- Do the groundwork so you can speak about the experiences of sexual violence that have happened in the community. It is important to understand the pain and strength of the community that the consultation will be held in. What has been done to ensure survival in that community?

- The connection to sexual violence, gangs, bikers and the criminal element is real and in some communities it might not be safe at this time for anyone to have a conversation about sexual violence.
- The Elders need to be specifically trained to do this work and they need to be cared for because the work can be draining for them.
- Have people from service organizations be part of the consultations and make sure that individuals are connected to helpers before they leave the consultations. If there are no service providers than make sure that people have a buddy from the group after they leave the consultation. No one should walk away without some extra support in their life.
- It is important to figure out, beforehand, whether the consultations will be open to the media. If any part of the consultations will be open to the media, everyone needs to know and feel safe. The media need to be briefed and educated if they are to be part of any process.
- Be ready for those who oppose having any conversations about sexual violence in a community.
- Connect with the Sexual Assault Centres because they have resources and understand the issues. Their ideas can be adjusted to be appropriate for Aboriginal communities.
- The police play a key role in the communities around sexual violence. It is a long term relationship that will need to be started as part of the consultations but the relationship between the police and key community members will need to continue once the consultation is over.
- Be prepared to hear that there are some violators that consistently fly below the radar -- they are often the unspoken truth that everyone knows. If community members start to talk some of these people will be exposed.

Sylvia Maracle – The Healing Continuum Wheel

Sylvia noted that there is a particular wheel that would be appropriate for this process and that shows that healing is the journey and wellness is where we want to go.



Throughout the process, wellness is to be reclaimed and there is no need to wait until the end of healing before we can experience a good life.

Sylvia reminded us that on the issue of sexual violence we are at “promotion” on the wheel – we are beginning to talk about what we can do.

Promotion: When we begin to talk about what we can do.

Prevention: We are asking the question of how to avoid the crisis or the situation. By asking this question we can develop programs that are proactive in avoiding the negative situation.

Crisis Intervention: Government often focuses on crisis intervention because it needs to respond to the immediate issues.

Curative: When we look at a situation and see that it continues to repeat itself, then we need to look at the systemic and individual change that is needed.

Rehabilitative: When we address issues, there is a recognition that change has to happen on many levels. Kizhay is a good example. The program is being offered in the prison for Aboriginal prisoners. But for it to have greater impact, the program is also being shared with the prison guards and the system so that they can respond appropriately to the changes in the Aboriginal people in jail.

Promotion of Stability: There cannot be a constant state of change on any issue. Leadership at times needs to recognize the progress and allow time for the change to be absorbed and lived. In some cases, the changes we seek in our communities are profound and require that each individual community member have the opportunity to learn, to change and then experience that change in their lives. (e.g. men who choose not to use violence in their personal relationships)

Training: Aboriginal organizations are often offering not only a different way of looking at an issue but different ways to address the issue. Training is often required for workers and for leaders.

Supportive Resources: This can simply be funding for any of the type of programs above. But it is also intended to be the shift in power where there is a sharing of resources and power through significant changes in legislation and policy.

Working Assumptions

When talking about sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, the discussion will recognize that there are many forms and dynamics with respect to sexual violence. In particular the discussion will be based on the following working assumptions:

- A. Sexual violence is rampant and pervasive in Aboriginal community. There are “hot spots” where sexual violence is concentrated. In some communities, the incidence of sexual violence is 9 out of 10, much higher than the reported incidence of 1 in 10 in the mainstream.
- B. Sexual violence against Aboriginal women happens in both Aboriginal communities and in non-Aboriginal communities. Many of the Aboriginal men who are perpetrators of sexual violence have also been victims of childhood sexual abuse.
- C. Aboriginal women and children are targets for sexual violence and other forms of violence and exploitation.
- D. The majority of Aboriginal women who have experienced family violence have also experienced sexual violence.
- E. The perpetrators of sexual violence are primarily men, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The incidence of women being perpetrators of sexual violence is rare.

- F. Sexual violence is rooted in the legacy of residential schools, colonization and systemic discrimination that resulted in the loss of culture, roles, family and community structure. Alcohol, religion, and the loss of culture actively undermines and directly impacts on the incidences of sexual violence. Sexual violence is intergenerational. The unequal and violent relationships being built between Aboriginal people today are directly rooted on the historical legacy.

The use of Terminology

One of the small groups developed a working definition of sexual violence. The terminology around sexual violence often defines the type of sexual violence based on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator or the type of activity.

- Incest (family, extended family, sibling)
- Institutionalized Violence
- Sexual Assault
- Rape
 - stranger
 - date
 - marital
 - familiar
 - group
 - gang
 - authority figures
 - organized religion
 - spiritual healers
- Trafficking and Sex Trade.

A Working Definition of Sexual Violence

Sexual Violence is a sexual violation that impacts our emotional, mental, physical and spiritual well-being.

All forms of sexual violence can lead to other forms of violence including murder.

The Question for Discussion

There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence that suggests that when women are asked, "Have you experienced sexual violence?" the answer is usually "no." There are many reasons for this response including a lack of understanding of what is sexual violence; the normalization of sexual violence in our lives and the shame of naming the experience.

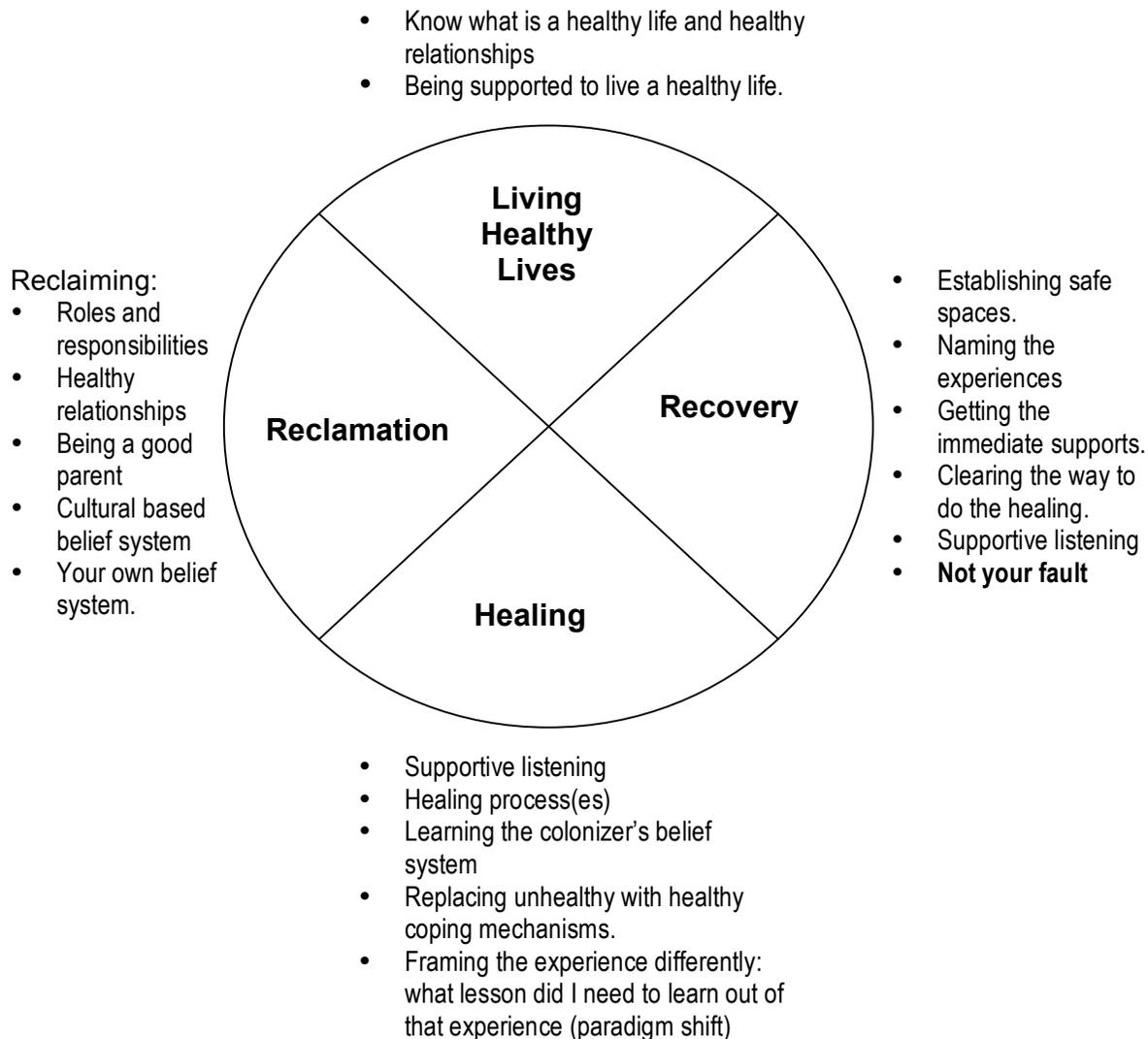
The group proposed that any conversation about sexual violence be started:

- By discussing other issues (e.g. wellness, sexual health and reproduction). When we come to the issue of sexual violence, we can ask a non-specific question: ***Have you ever had sex when you did not want to?***
- By linking sexual violence to other forms of violence that women are more comfortable talking about. For example, start with saying "family violence and sexual violence."
- Develop questions that have meaning and relate to the real experience of people.

Addressing Sexual Violence in Aboriginal Communities

The discussions throughout the two days led to the creation of a wheel that conceptualizes the work that is required. It is important to reinforce that the starting point is to **end** sexual violence and not just to **talk** about the issue of sexual violence.

The wheel starts in the east with recovery. Safety and telling the story of the experience of sexual violence is the beginning of the process. In the south is healing where people can have the opportunity to understand their experience. In the west, each person can reclaim the strengths and roles that can move him or her beyond the experience of sexual violence. In the north, people can live a healthy life.



E. The Engagement Process

A thoughtful plan that addresses the Aboriginal context will be required as this is a topic that few want to approach and that many Aboriginal people and communities are not ready to address. When the consultation with Aboriginal people is completed, hope and a vision that the issue of sexual violence can be dealt with in a good way needs to be left behind.

Four specific steps are proposed and a set of parallel activities is suggested to support the work being done in the consultations.

1. Preparing to have the conversations on sexual violence

i) Have an inter-connected Urban and Reserve Strategy

A many-prong approach that respects the specific needs of the Aboriginal community will be necessary. This would include First Nation people living in their community, First Nation (status not in their home community and non-status), and Métis people living throughout Ontario.

ii) A Healing Strategy to Healthy Living

The intent of these conversations is to support healing. As such, the consultations need to be as much about healthy living and healthy relationships as it is about sexual violence. It was suggested that a “Gathering the Voices” be held prior to any work in the community and would bring together Elders and Healers to provide guidance on how to do this work.

A new vision and goals need to be set when we talk about the violence in the lives of Aboriginal people. One goal is that there be a shorter period of time for disclosures (e.g. from 35 years to 35 days).

iii) Use the appropriate language for these conversations

Language holds a worldview and the language of the consultations need to emphasize Aboriginal knowledge and experience. Each person would be supported to find their voice and no outside voice would interpret or define their experience, and Aboriginal culture and worldviews be the language offered to understand the experience. This will require thinking about what words and phrases are used, appropriate to age and literacy level, and that provide respectful and safe language for the conversations.

iv) Develop key messages

The consultation will offer a way to rethink the story of sexual violence from an Aboriginal perspective which begins with culture and answers different questions, including, How does this violation impact on our spiritual, emotional, physical and mental life? There are many spiritual people who are inviting Aboriginal people to reframe life experiences in a completely different way. The consultation process could provide that opportunity.

There are a number of key words and messages that need to be part of the consultation process, such as: love, resiliency, wholeness, and forgiveness with accountability.

Some of the key messages are:

- The story is yours. Tell it in your way.
- The healing journey has many starting points and many tools. Choose what and who works for you.
- It is not your fault.

v) Address roadblocks and concerns

A key question for organizers before any consultation is how to deal with roadblocks to having these discussions. The experience of sexual violence is one of isolation. There are many components to isolation including geographical and cultural isolation. Breaking through the isolation is part of the process in dealing with sexual violence.

The influence of the church and the reluctance of the church to have these discussions has had a huge impact in some communities.

There is a process to recovery from sexual violence. Once it has been named, there are often other issues (e.g. addiction, mental health issues) that are part of the person's way of coping or hiding from the trauma of sexual violence. All of these issues need to be considered and addressed.

Other concerns that will need to be addressed: avoiding re-traumatization; being triggered as facilitators; being targets for the pain; being challenged when using the teachings and Elders as part of the process; the normalization and denial of sexual violence; and lateral violence.

vi) Train the facilitators and Elders that will go into the community

Everyone responsible for these conversations will need to recognize the context around sexual violence and most particularly how sexual violence has become normalized in Aboriginal communities. The training would include:

- An understanding of the historical context;
- The dynamics of power and control;
- The scope of the term sexual violence;
- Community preparedness;
- Using the same language;
- How to handle disclosure;
- How to handle difficult questions.

A suggestion is to do a train-the-trainer process that would build capacity in communities before and after the consultations particularly if the intent is to have more than one session in any community.

vii) Find the leaders and heroes

Gather more people around us to do this work. Bring the heroes and leaders to the community as they bring hope to the conversation.

2. Planning for individual community sessions

i) Use a community development approach

The ideal process would be a community development approach where each community is supported to take ownership for the issue and ensures that supports are in place for community members before, during and after the consultation.

For each community, there would need to be some preparation and some key questions explored:

- Has the issue of sexual violence been raised in the community before?
- Have there been charges of sexual violence in the community?
- How did the community deal with it?
- Are the leaders working on it?
- What are other violence issues happening in the community?
- What are community strengths and resources?
- Who are our leaders? Followers? Saboteurs?
- After an incident of sexual violence, what is the response? What are the supports in place?

It is important to establish strong partnerships in the community from the beginning. Where there is a Women's Council in the community, it would be good to involve them in the process from the beginning. (Elders; matriarchal leadership)

ii) Decide on the appropriate approach for the community

The community will need to decide on how to introduce the issue in their community. There were two primary directions proposed:

- a) Embed the discussion in a related topic to start the discussion, including Aboriginal women's issues, Health and Wellness and Sexuality.
- b) **"Create the fire"**: hold small groups of 10-12 people in the community and have the first conversation. After that conversation, return to the community and invite everyone back from the first round and ask them to bring a person.

iii) Development of content

The content of the consultations in the community could include:

- The context of sexual violence for Aboriginal people;
- The opening approach to discuss the issue;
- The self-care plan for after the meeting;
- Places to go after the meeting.

iv) Building a consultation Safe Space

The consultations will be built around assuring safety to talk about the issue, to disclose and to receive support after the consultations. There will need to be a plan for offering safety plans and ensuring that the trainers and helpers are doing self-care throughout the consultations. There are many lessons that can be learned from the Truth and Reconciliation hearings on how to create safe spaces when people are talking about painful issues.

v) Establishing community supports for the post-consultation

To ensure that safety and care exists for each person after they participate in the consultation, the planning would include networking with the appropriate agencies and ensuring that a list is handed out to each participant or a buddy or helper is identified for people who want one and that the Elder(s) who are working with the group is able to continue to work with group members after the session.

3. At each community session

The community session will be built on good planning that ensures safety and the facilitators, helpers and Elders will be prepared to respond to the issues as they arise in a caring and supportive way. Each session will create confidentiality and confidence that it is a safe place.

i) Have multiple ways to communicate

Use multiple vehicles to communicate the issues including using creative approaches (plays, drama, dance, art).

ii) Address the multiple issues that will be in the room

Any number of dynamics may arise in the room and it is important that the facilitators and helpers can comfortably address issues that arise around: Aboriginal status, gender, age, declaration of suicide intent, abusive perpetrators at the meeting; family complexities, leaders who are perpetrators, power dynamics and cultural competency.

iii) Have helpers and ways to promote help at all times in the sessions

There will need to be plan to take care of the facilitators and helpers, participants and the community

iv) Have healthy people as role models at the meeting

People need to see evidence of what a healthy life can look like and what recovery can look like. People need to see women who are not in crisis but have been there who can be models of healing living. If they cannot attend, have a video that inspires people.

v) Provide material

Offer everyone who comes information about how to be supported after the meeting. Provide a helper, the crisis line and organizations that they can reach out. The list would include help for the individual, couple and family.

4. After the session

i) Debrief

As part of the learning and the care for the facilitators, Elders and helpers provide the opportunity for a debrief so people can talk about their experience of each community session and suggestions on how to move forward in that community.

ii) There is a responsibility for the next step

Ideally someone in the community (organization, leader, Council, group) will take up the responsibility to continue the conversations.

iii) Provide on-going support to the community

Ideas to support communities in an ongoing way including: samples of community protocols, role models, access to resources, teachings and people including Elders and networking to other communities.

5. Other work to happen simultaneously

i) Build connection between the political leaders and service providers

In the way that this work is done it can enhance and strengthen nation-to-nation networking and regional delivery systems.

ii) Connect sexual violence to other social determinants

Raise the issue of sexual violence when other issues are being addressed, particularly the issues of housing, homelessness, addictions and mental health.

iii) Public Education

Continue to support public education campaigns that are working (e.g. Kanawaytowin) and look at how do we make sexual violence socially unacceptable? (eg. Lessons learned from MADD)

iv) Advocate for the services that are needed

Ongoing multi-year resources are needed to deal with the trauma of sexual violence.

F. Next Steps

Sexual violence will continue to be embedded in the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*, however there is a need for specific investments in two areas:

1. To engage the community in a safe, coordinated and community building approach.

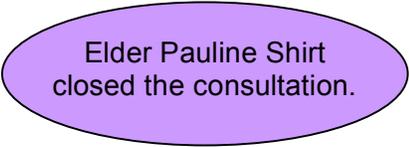
Get ready to do the consultations in an appropriate way. It will require a lot of planning. There are approximately 206 reserves and settlements in Ontario and major urban Aboriginal populations in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa and Toronto. How will we reach out to the different communities? It is important that we find the communities that are prepared to walk through this process with us.

2. To educate partners and the public to the issue.

Recognizing that we are at the beginning of the wheel, there are many conversations that need to be held. A number of suggestions were made to move the issue forward and engage a greater number of partners:

- Present the issue to the Ontario Joint Committee on Violence Against Women.
- Develop a supplementary report to the consultation report to add value to the discussion.
- Use the Ontario election as an opportunity to discuss the issue.
- Link the issue of sexual violence to the work being done by the different organizations around mental health and addictions.

- In all of the work around the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*, make sexual violence an explicit topic.
- Share the report and this knowledge with our organizations and partners. In particular, talk to the leadership about the issues.
- Recognize that this is a new area for discussion and videotape some of the conversations of the heroes and leaders that are speaking about the issues.



Elder Pauline Shirt
closed the consultation.

Appendix A Participants

Pauline Shirt	Elder
Sylvia Maracle	Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
Terry Swan	Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
Katherine Minich	Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
Joan Chalifoux	Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
Sherri Lewis	Keynote Speaker – Transitional Housing Project Manager – Ojistoh House, Brantford Native Housing
Tana Troniak	Keynote Speaker: Executive Director First Step Women's Shelter
Shelley Gonneville	Métis Nation of Ontario
Melissa Pigeau	Métis Nation of Ontario
Lisa Talbot	Métis Nation of Ontario
Betty Kennedy	Ontario Native Women's Association
Tracy _____	Ontario Native Women's Association
Tasha Shields	Ontario Native Women's Association
Gloria _____ (Day 2)	Ontario Native Women's Association
Sherry Antone	Chiefs of Ontario
Joan Riggs	Facilitator: Catalyst Research and Communications