



# FACT SHEET

## INDIGENOUS WOMEN & JUSTICE

### Are Indigenous Women over-represented in the Justice System?

- For many complex social and political reasons, Indigenous women are over-represented in the justice system at all levels.
- Statistics show that Indigenous women are more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators, and are more likely to experience higher rates of violent victimization. <sup>iii</sup>
- Both Indigenous men and women in Canada are disproportionately represented in the correctional system.
- Despite the fact that men are more likely to be perpetrators of crimes than women across Canada, *“the representation of Indigenous people in custody is even greater for women than men.”* <sup>iv</sup>

### The Root Causes of Over-representation:

- Indigenous women’s involvement in the justice system is tied to intersecting factors of discrimination based on both race and gender. Indigenous women have been and continue to be impacted by colonialism in ways that are distinct from their male counterparts.
- Lack of access to social determinants of health mean that too often Indigenous women face circumstances such as extreme poverty, homelessness, sexual abuse and exploitation. These circumstances are often linked with interactions with systems such as police and negative interactions with the justice system.

### Costs of Incarceration:

- Incarceration of women in Canada is an expensive proposition. As of 2016 data, the cost of housing an inmate in Ontario has grown to \$78,475 per inmate, per year. <sup>v</sup>
- Given that the number of Indigenous women in correctional facilities has steadily increased, considerations for bed and facility expansion must be calculated as well. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer Report, it costs a projected \$259,894 per bed in any effort to expand women’s facilities. This number grows to \$533,765 per bed for women incarcerated in structured living environments. <sup>vi</sup>
- Children of Incarcerated women end up in child welfare systems that do not have adequate resources to fully address their needs. Already coping with the loss of their mother and the weight of historical traumas, Indigenous children also face emotional and psychological trauma from the separation. In this sense, Incarceration of women exacts further human, social and economic costs on children, their development and their communities.

### What is ONWA doing?

- ONWA recognizes that Indigenous women are strong and resilient, despite the trauma and intergenerational trauma they have endured.
- ONWA thus incorporates a strengths-based approach, striving to build upon the existing capacity of Indigenous women, recognizing that healing begins women, their families and communities. ONWA addresses issues that continue to negatively impact Indigenous women

by responding to policies and legislation and seeks to minimize factors that disempower Indigenous women.

- ONWA is providing the first ever Gladue Program specifically for Indigenous women. This program, which includes: Gladue Reports, Gladue Aftercare Supports and a dedicated Gladue Researcher / Policy Analyst; strives to reconnect Indigenous women to culturally-grounded supports that seek to address the contributing factors to a woman's involvement in the criminal justice system.
- ONWA is involved in the Effective Programming Initiative, which not only surveys Indigenous Youth Justice programs across the province, but also recommends and advocates for systemic changes that will help meet Indigenous needs, while liaising with several Youth Justice Committees, The Ministry, and the youth themselves. With this initiative, ONWA will help redefine correctional approaches to Youth, helping to build services that honour Indigenous people, culture, and healing processes.
- ONWA provides a plethora of trauma-informed, gender-based front-line services and supports for Indigenous women and their families including: The Aakode'ewin Courage for Change program which supports the unique needs of Indigenous women and girls that are affected by sexual exploitation; the Badaamendam Trauma-Informed Care Program which supports women with trauma recovery and aims to empower Indigenous women to live healthy balanced lives.



## Recommendations:

- Indigenous women and girls require culture-based, wholistic wrap around services; the needs of women must be specifically taken into account so they can be redirected from criminal behaviour. Respect for the history and culture of Indigenous women is essential to a healthy life and healthy choices.
- At-risk Indigenous women and girls who have made contact with justice systems must receive increased advocacy and support, especially in the area of child welfare.
- Increased Indigenous community based Restorative Justice programming throughout the province as alternatives to the mainstream justice system.

## References:

- <sup>i</sup> Statistics Canada. 2016. Homicide in Canada, 2016. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171122/dq171122b-eng.htm>
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- <sup>iii</sup> Burcycka, M. and Conroy, S. 2017. Family Violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2015. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14698-eng.pdf>
- <sup>iv</sup> Hotton Mahony, T. 2011. Women and the Criminal Justice System. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11416-eng.pdf>
- <sup>v</sup> Frechette, Jean-Denis. Update on Costs of Incarceration. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. [https://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/web/default/files/Documents/Reports/2018/Update%20Incarceration%20Costs/Update%20on%20Costs%20of%20Incarceration\\_EN.pdf](https://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/web/default/files/Documents/Reports/2018/Update%20Incarceration%20Costs/Update%20on%20Costs%20of%20Incarceration_EN.pdf)
- <sup>vi</sup> Frechette, Jean-Denis. Update on Costs of Incarceration. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. [https://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/web/default/files/Documents/Reports/2018/Update%20Incarceration%20Costs/Update%20on%20Costs%20of%20Incarceration\\_EN.pdf](https://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/web/default/files/Documents/Reports/2018/Update%20Incarceration%20Costs/Update%20on%20Costs%20of%20Incarceration_EN.pdf)

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