



## **Reclaiming Power and Place: A Response**

June 3, 2019 marks a pivotal moment in the history of Canada. This was the day that the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released their final report during a ceremony rich in culture and ringing with the echoes of the loved ones who have been left behind. *Reclaiming Power and Place* details the root causes of the crisis Canada is facing in regards to the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and it tells us – all of us – what we can do to stop the needless violence and death. The Calls to Justice that are presented are not only calls to government, and large systems, they are calls to all Canadians. We all have a part to play, and together we can make the needed significant changes.

As we, at the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, and our members work within community each and every day, we consistently see the negative impacts of sexual violence on individuals, their loved ones, our communities, and our society overall. There are myriad circumstances that affect these impacts, and how it is felt throughout the lives of those who have been affected by sexual violence. What we know, and what is confirmed in the report released June 3, is that Indigenous women and girls experience violence at a rate higher than the general population. As cited in the report, and documented by Statistics Canada, this rate is up to three times higher than the violence experienced by other women. We must begin to challenge the social norms which uphold this unjust reality and this report offers each and every one of us tangible guidance on how to go about doing so.

*Reclaiming Power and Place* speaks truth. We need to hear, acknowledge, and understand these truths in order for reconciliation to begin. This report sheds light on the effects of colonialism, racism, and sexism by providing an analysis on how these individual, institutional, and systemic forms of oppression lead to violence against Indigenous people, and more specifically sexual violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

Sexual violence is a crime of power and control. Because of this, individuals and groups who are seen as having less power and control experience sexual assault and abuse at higher rates. The impacts of this are influenced by perceived marginalizations related to; gender, race, class, and sexual orientation among others. The effects of colonialism, racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia intersect to create unique experiences of complex trauma within the lives of Indigenous women and girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people who have experienced sexual violence. Added to this are the effects of intergenerational trauma, and the earned mistrust of systems throughout Canada – the government, legal system, social services, educational systems and faith-based systems. If someone does not feel safe accessing a service, or if they experience discrimination, they will more than likely not seek help from those systems. All of these

factors, and others, converge to create a Canada where Indigenous women and girls do not feel safe, and have very few places they feel they can turn to for healing and justice.

This feels overwhelming, but there is hope. *Reclaiming Power and Place* shows us – all Canadians, and especially those of us who are settlers and their descendants – what we can do. There are some very manageable steps we can begin with. The Calls to Justice near the end of the report (and available separately here: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>) ask us to seek the truth. The truth about colonization, and the history of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. This education will allow us to examine our attitudes and beliefs, and change them when necessary; Training service providers about the history and impacts of colonialism will improve the services that we provide. When we know better, we do better, allowing us to augment the specialized response necessary in cases of complex trauma and sexual violence.

We are called to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, and to work from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We can also stand up to racism when we see it happening, and correct misinformation when we hear or see it. Justice calls us to challenge ourselves as organizations by recruiting and retaining Indigenous individuals to provide culturally sensitive and safe services, and to build and strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities. Creating understanding will allow the necessary work towards cultural safety; allying in spaces where Indigenous women and girls feel empowered and safe to heal. Most importantly, we can stand with Indigenous Women and Girls as they stand in, and reclaim their power.

There is a way forward, together. At AASAS, we are committed to our reconciliation journey and eliminating sexual violence. These are both lofty, and achievable goals. It will take humility, and hard work; we are all learning alongside one another. It is this teamwork and curiosity that will allow us the opportunity to create positive change – in a good way.

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