THANKS FOR LISTENING

Witnessing Métis Women & Girls Experiences of Violence & Pathways to Healing

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Thanks for Listening: Witnessing Métis Women & Girls Experiences of Violence & Pathways to Healing was developed by the *Sashing our Warriors* campaign in collaboration with Métis Nation British Columbia, and researchers Natalie Clark, Patricia Baraskas, and Robline Davey. We thank our reviewers: Sheila Lewis, Cassandra Dorgelo, Katie Trace, Jackie Lever, Colette Trudeau and Daleen Thomas of MNBC whose valuable input shaped the report. We also thank the key readers of this report Dory Laboucane and Carly Jones. Thank you to Dory Laboucane for providing Elder assistance through prayer and honouring the team effort. MNBC gratefully acknowledges and thanks all the contributors to the project. Funding for this report was made available through Civil Forfeitures Grant Stream - Violence Against Women – Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. This report has also been supported by Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development Canada (AANDC) Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada

Design and Sash Photography by Darcy Senger

Connection

Original Painting by Robyn Prosser

10"x10" on Wood Canvas

"The divine feminine through the Metis culture is what I wanted to express through this piece. The strong female figure that captures your eye is the focal point, the primitive feature that brings connection to the colours, symbols, and culture of this woman.

This piece has a water colour crayon background with acrylic paint used for the female. These vibrant colours jump at the viewer and give a strong contrast to the woman in the picture and to her culture. This piece was filled with passion and power while creating, embracing my Métis heritage."

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PREFACE: MÉTIS HEALING AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED READING AND WELLNESS

"she is
the healing
not the hurt

she is
the knowing
not unknown"
(Katherina Vermette, Excerpt from p 34)

MEDICINE FOR HEALING AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED READING

Before you read this report we offer medicine from our berry-picking basket to support you. The following is not a prescriptive list, but instead sharing a bead work pattern, animating the healing within each stitch, each recipe shared, each dance step, each written word. As you read this report, it is important to consider what has helped you to survive – to consider your resistance and coping in all the spaces you move in. Violence does not define you – it has been mapped onto your body by the colonial system. You are not risk. You are beauty, you are survival.

When we are triggered, or reminded of the violence, we can take care of ourselves through sensory and community wellness approaches. These include smell, taste, touch, sight, and sound. We encourage you to pause before you read further and to gather some medicines, wellness sensory items to have with you. What smells, what tastes, what touch, what image is part of this bundle? Take a moment right now and find an item that makes you feel good from a sensory place (a smell, a taste, something to hold/touch, a visual). Pause whenever you need to as you are reading this and take wellness breaks or wellness walks. A wellness walk of even a few minutes with intention and ceremony and paying attention to any sensory items that makes you feel good and could be part of your wellness bundle (smell, touch, taste, visual). You can also create a medicine bundle and wellness vision board that includes physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and cultural safety/wellness. Begin any reading about violence with grounding (ceremony, prayer, breathing, walking, meditation, yoga etc), and know when it is too much. Remind yourself that you have choice and control and to

stay connected to internal and external resources. Grounding allows for healthy emotional detachment from a flooding of emotions/flashbacks or otherwise that overwhelm the senses. Being present in the here and now. For example, "Métis dancing is a culturally safe, Indigenous-led initiative that includes storytelling, spirituality and community awareness. It can buffer the effects of colonization that have eroded Métis identity as a distinct nation in Canada with a unique history, culture and language." (https://medicine.usask.ca/news/2020/usask-researcher-and-métis-partners-collaborate-to-jig-away-cardiac-woes.php).

Here are a few questions to reflect on:

- What medicine and grounding practices to support wellness do I currently practice?
- Who are my support systems, my community of caring? Who do I turn to? If I feel alone, how can I take a step to reach out for supports (crisis lines, support groups, counselling)
- What is my vision for my wholistic wellness?

ABC'S OF WELLNESS

Here are the ABCs of wellness adapted to help guide you on your community of care and healing journey.

A - Awareness: Awareness of oneself, one's needs, limits, and resources

Tools/Medicines to apply here: grounding in our own Metis experience, values, ethics, and attitudes. Skills: including reflective journaling and other tools of self-awareness (meditation, mind/body practices, beading, cooking, spiritual practices)

B - Balance and Boundaries – Sacred yes and No

Tools/Medicines to apply here: knowing you have a right to set limits, take care of yourself given all the roles you have an (what is your sacred yes/no)?

C - Connection: Communities of Caring

Tools/Medicines to apply here: a willingness to ask for and seek support for your own counselling healing to improve practice and learn from others including Elders, and peer supervision/support, groups, and other spaces.

Adapted from: ABC's of wellness Natalie for the Ask Auntie program: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXvxezGpXbc

WRITING, PAINTING, DREAMING AND VISIONING HEALING

Storytelling and other creative writing, arts-based approaches and expression have always been a space for truth telling and a space to both resist and replace the colonial image of Metis women, girls, and non-binary/Two-Spirit/Trans folk. I know that many of you reading this, like those of us witnessing, have survived through writing poetry, through songs, through short stories, plays, through your baseball playing, your basketball, your skateboarding, your canning, your bead work, cooking your grandmothers' recipes - all the ways you needed to.

Dreaming is sacred. Maria Campbell was 33 when she wrote *Halfbreed* – she describes the process of writing "When I started to write Halfbreed I didn't know I was going to write a book. I was very angry, very frustrated. I wrote the book after I had the dream!" (1973, p.53).

- Write down your dreams – they are talking to you.
- Paint your dreams – activate your Ancestral knowledge and wisdom
- Speak with a trusted Elder to understand your dreams
- Create a vision board

ACTIVISM – MANIFESTING VISION

"All good stories end in a revolution" are the words from Christi Belcourt's last keynote speech and underlines the importance of collective work to truth-tell and confront violence in all the spaces. Think about getting involved in activism, creation and implementing a vision that stands against violence on the land and on the bodies of Metis girls, women, and non-binary/Two-Spirit/Trans folk. Here are some questions that can assist with visioning.

- What strategies do you and Métis girls, young women, and non-binary individuals in your community engage in to resist violence and support each other?
- What is your vision for change? How do you envision ending violence in our communities? How do you resist blame and shame and instead support girls, young women, and women in your community?
- What are some of the strengths, survival & resistance/coping strategies for healing and survival that

you have utilized, and that you have witnessed in other Métis women and girls?

- What are some of your desires, wishes and dreams, and those of other Métis women and girls? (Imagining our future)?
- What practices, programs do you need developed and delivered to best support and celebrates our Métis women and girls to prevent violence and support our futures?

FOREWORD AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We, at Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC), extend a sincere thank you to all the Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals (people who are Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, non-binary) who participated in the *Sashing our Warriors* survey and shared their stories. A special thank you to our reviewers: Sheila Lewis, Cassandra Dorgelo, Katie Trace, Jackie Lever, Colette Trudeau and Daleen Thomas from MNBC and key readers Carly Jones and Elder Dory Laboucane who gave valuable input to shape this report.

Sashing our Warriors is a holistic grassroots campaign, funded by Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC), aimed at creating the education and awareness needed to prevent further violence against Métis women and girls[1]. The campaign supports individuals and the community to heal and rebuild, through a Métis Sashing ceremony. This report comprises the second phase of the *Sashing our Warriors* project that, first and foremost, serves Métis women and girls, as well as gender-diverse individuals, living in British Columbia who have experienced domestic violence and/or sexual assault. Beyond this population, the project will target both front line service providers/organizations and policymakers to assist in enhancing their policy and programming responses to domestic violence and/or sexual assault against Indigenous women and girls.

Métis women and girls' experiences of violence are not easily accessible for many and varied reasons, which this report outlines. We[2] assert that the specific ways in which Métis women and girls are constituted, perceived, and gendered within colonialism and subsequently in Métis homes and communities involves the mapping of violence on to Métis women and girls' lives and bodies. We also know, through Métis women, girls' and nonbinary writings and the responses to the *Sashing our Warriors* survey, that Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse have clear histories of resistance and survivance and these

1 While the original survey did not specifically seek gender-diverse participants, we recognize and honour all those who identify as women and note that those non-cisgender women will have been disproportionally impacted by gendered violence. However, we honour those individuals who identify as gender-diverse who completed this survey. While we include this feedback, this is a gap in literature and more work needs to be done in this area to capture their experiences.

2 The language shifts throughout this report - where the report is speaking directly to readers, and/or is the authors' work and theorizing from their own work we utilize "we".

embodied, intellectual, and spiritual practices are also distinctively Métis, with liberation at their heart.

Examining violence against Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals is important, integral, and timely to provide a basis for much needed funding for programming specific to the needs of Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, that addresses their needs in a gendered and culturally safe way. As a first step, programming needs to be developed specific to Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse people at all stages of life who have experienced or witnessed violence. This programming must also address the root causes of violence in Métis communities. Further, we need to ensure that coping and the resultant support or health needs are understood within an intersectional framework that considers the context of colonization, patriarchy, racism, ongoing poverty, systemic oppression, and discrimination experienced by Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals daily. There is a need for programs that provide spaces such as Métis womens', girls' and gender-diverse groups that address their intersecting health needs, without furthering the construction of Métis women, girls and individuals as being at-risk, or further criminalizing, pathologizing, and medicalizing Métis communities. This programming must be violence-informed, strengths-based, grounded in Métis intersectional/interlocking identities, and responsive to the various situations we find ourselves in. Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals need to be acknowledged as distinct Indigenous peoples and require these relational and specific supports to strengthen their wellness and Métis identity. It is critical to ensure that resources, counselling, and other supports are offered in a culturally safe and violence-informed way and include Métis specific healing resources such as access to Métis women's, girls', and gender-diverse rites of passage ceremonies, groups, and access to medicines, and healers.

WE WRITE THIS FOR ALL OF YOU

This report is written in honour of all Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals who have experienced violence. This report's methodology (forthcoming Clark, Barkaskas and Davey 2022) and literature review (forthcoming Davey, Clark and Barkaskas 2022) is embedded in a web of relational accountability to Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals whose voices and lived realities of violence it is discussing. This responsibility is part of a practice of the authors' relational care that views Métis women, girls and gender-diverse people as experts in our own lives. The title of this report reflects this honouring and responsibility, as well as commitment to breaking the silence about violence. The title includes the words of one of the young women who participated in the research. After sharing her story of experiencing and witnessing violence, she ended her online submission with the words "thanks for listening." Her words invoke a long line of Métis women and girls writing, speaking to and sharing with each other. This methodology is grounded in the wisdom of Métis women such as Maria Campbell, Lauralyn Houle, Christi Belcourt, Kim Anderson, Lindsay Nixon, Christine Welsh, and others who have bravely written about Métis women's experiences with violence. Maria Campbell says: "I write this for all of you" in her important 1973 autobiography *Halfbreed* and we want to extend the same thought to all Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals who have experienced or witnessed violence, and not felt safe to share their story. We hold space for their voices and experiences in this report. We acknowledge the voices of gender-diverse individuals who responded to the *Sashing our Warriors* campaign survey. We write this for all of you.

1

The exclusion of Métis women, girls and non-binary perspectives from significant antiviolence research and processes... [fails] to meaningfully address violence perpetrated against us.

– (C. Jones p. 10)

1.0

INTRODUCTION

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

In 1996, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples identified that it is "more difficult to get precise statistics on Métis people; it is virtually impossible to say with any exactness the extent of sexual violence in Métis families or communities" (p.73). Over 20 years later, this is echoed in the Interim Report by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous (IRMMIWG) women and girls (2017)[1] and the subsequent conclusions of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019), as well as particularly by Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak – Women of the Métis Nation's (LFMO) Métis Perspectives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBTQ2S+ People (2019) and LFMO's Interim Report Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Implementation Framework (2020). Many studies referenced only consider violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals who identify as First Nations. These experiences do not reflect those of Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals.[2] The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Interim Report (2017) indicated that without a more detailed assessment of the unique challenges Métis women and girls face, their reports' recommendations would not be as effective. At the conclusion of the National Inquiry in 2019, it was evident this was still the case and a last-minute consultation session on Métis-specific experiences was held in Edmonton, Alberta to attempt to integrate these into the National Inquiry's findings. Unfortunately, the National Inquiry's final report, *Reclaiming Power and Place* (2019) does little to directly address Métis womens' specific experiences. As key reader Métis MSW student and researcher Carly Jones noted, "The exclusion of Métis women, girls and non-binary perspectives from significant antiviolence research and processes such as the National Inquiry holds the potential to result in an inaccurate depiction of the systemic and institutionalized racism experienced by Métis women and girls, ultimately failing

1 This report, and the literature review was first drafted in 2017. It was delayed in it's release due to changes in leadership within MNBC, and Covid 19. It has been updated in 2021.

2 This tendency to equate "Indigenous" to "First Nations" also excludes distinct Inuit perspectives and homogenizes the experiences of First Nations, status and non—status; therefore, this flattened research does not account for the lived realities of many Indigenous women, including Métis peoples.

to meaningfully address violence perpetrated against us." (C. Jones, personal communication, February 18, 2021). Unfortunately, the Inquiry's efforts to specifically include the experiences of Métis women and girls were limited or non-existent through the entirety of the information-gathering and public hearings processes - in spite of the high degree of involvement from Métis women and 2 Spirit people in both academic and community-based anti-violence work (i.e. Walking With Our Sisters, Keetsahnak / Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters), notably including Kim Anderson, Maria Campbell, Christi Belcourt, Gregory Scofield, Rita Bouvier, Sherry Farrell Racette, and many others. (C. Jones, personal communication, February 18, 2021).

A formal press release from the Women of the Métis Nation/Les Femmes Michif Otimpemisiwak (LFMO) on March 8, 2018, indicated the Inquiry had refused to consider the unique circumstances and perspectives of Métis women and girls, and stated: "Despite our efforts, the National Inquiry's hearings and research have excluded Métis women and girls." As key reader Jones noted this is a form of "a form of passive institutional violence that suggests violence against Métis women and girls is both tolerated and accepted by Canadian society" (personal communication, February 18, 2021). As a result, LFMO made the decision to work to support Métis-led projects to "gather data on Métis women and girls" and "ensure that the Métis perspective and needs are brought forward" (LFMO, 2018). LFMO affirmed its ongoing commitment to this work in their 2017—2018 Annual Report (LFMO, 2018b).

In 2019, LFMO published a tool on Métis-specific gender-based analysis (LFMO, 2019) and a new report focused on examining Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals particular experiences of violence and calling for Métis-specific responses (LFMO, 2019b). The LFMO's most recent update on their work from the Interim Report Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Implementation Framework, April 15, 2020, highlights and reasserts the importance of Métis-specific approaches to ending violence against Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals, especially given the global pandemic:

> *It is the mission of Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak is to ensure that Métis women from across the homeland are safe, connected, empowered and to have the capacity to work with other Canadian*

> *and Métis organizations to help create the conditions for healthy, vibrant and productive communities throughout the Métis Nation. It is the intent and primary goal of the Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, Call for Miskotahâ, "To create a safer, brighter future for Métis Women, Girls and LGBTQ2S+ Persons (p. 9).*

LFMO's work supports the conclusions of this *Thanks for Listening* report from 2018; it is well documented that the policy and programming responses to sexual assault and/or domestic violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals remains ineffective and underdeveloped. While there are programs that address violence against women and girls within other Indigenous populations, no Métis–specific programs exist (LFMO, 2017). Unfortunately, these anti-violence initiatives are often not inclusive of Métis women and girls. This is reflected in recent research by Métis researcher Renee Monchalin (2020) where Métis women in Toronto shared about their experiences of discrimination, avoiding, and/or not feeling welcome within Indigenous-specific services. To that point, several MNBC research studies (e.g., the *Youth Programming* and the *Identifying Existing Gaps* Reports) have revealed commonplace assumptions that the term *Indigenous* means *First Nations* and/or that all *Indigenous* people are a homogenous group. This is echoed by the report by LFMO (2019b) that notes that "Métis people are often described as being "*invisible* within the general population," and this invisibility is even more profound for Métis women. This is because, as victims of the consequences of colonialism and patriarchy, Métis women faced and continue to face a unique form of marginalization and discrimination; first, as Indigenous peoples; second, as Métis—the *invisible* among Aboriginal people; and third, as women. As a result, Métis women have been uniquely vulnerable to violence and lack a great number of programs and supports, such as those provided to other Indigenous peoples" (p. 9). As the democratically elected representative and governing organization for the more than 18,500 registered Métis citizens in British Columbia, and approximately 90,000 self-identified, this project is integral to Métis Nation British Columbia (Statistics Canada, 2016).

There is a knowledge gap that requires addressing before the National Inquiry or any other organization can make specific Calls to Action or Justice concerning the safety of Métis women,

girls, and gender-diverse individuals. Therefore, LMFO has developed specific Métis Nation's, Calls for Miskotahâ [Change], regarding "truth, justice and fair reparation," on behalf of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; MMIWG victims, victim survivors and their families. Further, this knowledge is necessary to ensure any targeted actions, policy or programming to end violence against Indigenous women and girls is inclusive of the unique needs of Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals in their efforts. The time has come for Métis people of all genders to tell our stories and seek ways of healing specific to our needs. In current scholarly literature, there is little information that specifically focuses on violence against Métis women and girls which is why this study is integral and timely. With the *Sashing our Warriors* study, the Métis Nation BC seeks to listen to the experiences of Métis women and girls who have experienced violence to ensure that these supports, and efforts include the Métis experience.

1.1

METHODOLOGY

A MÉTIS FEMINIST BEADWORK LITERATURE REVIEW

"...if I was to know peace I would have to search within myself. That is when I decided to write about my life"
(Maria Campbell, 1973, p.7-8).

"The road to freedom is paved with the intimate knowledge of the oppressed"
(Lee Maracle, 1988, p. 183).

"This is the story of my search for the voices of my grandmothers"
(Christine Welsh, 1991, p.15)

Literature reviews are in and of themselves colonial processes and practices. To resist the intrusion of colonialism in this report we have specifically drawn on the teachings and sharing of our grandmothers. Like the button and bead boxes stored in cookie tins or other special containers - this review is our attempt to look for, and to centre the knowledge of Métis women, girls and non-binary folks. The knowledge of Kokums shared with daughters and granddaughters is an important and necessary portal of survival, healing and resistance. We hold this work as sacred and important, and in this literature review, consider all the spaces where Métis women, girls and gender-diverse people share their knowledge, in the name of freedom, of healing and hope—whatever the shape of the container.

To limit the search for this review, we isolated the terms: Métis women and girls from the expansive body of literature that focuses on violence against Indigenous women and girls. Statistics for violence against Métis women and girls are not separated from the group that is defined as Indigenous, First Nations, Métis and Inuit. A comprehensive library search of scholarly journal articles and book chapters resulted in a dearth of peer-reviewed literature specifically on violence against Métis women and girls in Canada.[1] We found very few resources that address Métis women and girls directly, reinforcing that a thorough analysis of this topic is necessary, although case law research revealed some information related specifically to Métis women and their experiences of violence and sexualized violence.[2]

1 This literature review was completed in 2017 and it is exciting to note that in the last few years there has been an increase in Métis literature and where possible we included this in the 2021 update.

2 Ex: R. v. Gladue, [1999] 1 S.C.R. 688 and R. v. Barton, 2017 ABCA 216, presently awaiting an appeal decision at the SCC (File No. 37769).

The following search terms were used:

("Indigenous women" or "Indigenous female") AND ("sexual assault" or "sexual violence") AND Canada

("Métis women" or "métis female") AND ("sexual assault" or "sexual violence") AND Canada

Due to the ways that Métis experiences are *hidden in plain sight,* the review was expanded to also include peer-reviewed articles and thesis papers that focus on sexual violence more broadly, and systemic/structural violence against Indigenous women and girls. The literature review also examined the grassroots, and heartbeat literature, or grey literature, census data, statistics, community materials, and reports that address violence against Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals. After a thorough scan of the scholarly literature, a gap exists in the literature that reflects the diverse realities and experiences of Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, who have witnessed or experienced violence.

To establish a full picture of Métis women and girls' experiences with violence, and meaningfully include their voices, we expanded the literature review to include early works and writings by Métis women writers, often sharing our own books and articles, briefing notes, poetry about Métis women and girls. This recognizes the theorizing of lived experience, of "theory in the flesh" (Moraga & Anzadula, 1983) and felt knowledge (Million, 2014).[3] "A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born of necessity" (Moraga, 1983, p.23). Examples of this are found in the writings of Kim Anderson, Joanne Arnott, Christi Belcourt, Maria Campbell, Marilyn Dumont, Emma LaRoque, Catherine Richardson, Katherine Vermette and many more who informed this work. We also included Métis women's own research through graduate and doctoral theses as important sources of knowledge—almost like a form of literature search bead work—we were able to follow the patterns and learn from those who have gone before: Métis scholar Sherry Ferrell Ressette

3 see also Beniuk, 2016 for an example of Métis feminist theorizing

(2004); Lauralyn Houle (2004) Christine Welsh (1995) and more recently Cree Métis-Saulteaux Lindsay Nixon (2018) are a few that guided this work. This bead work methodology recognizes the sharing of knowledge like the sharing of beads, seeds, buttons, and recipes and other medicines in this work. The aspect of bead work in the methodology includes writing together collaboratively as a beading circle, drinking tea, wearing our earrings, and sharing our medicines and gifts in the service of this work. Evidence of this is found in Farrell Racette's (2004) observation that people, while being interviewed by her, used a beaded object as a mnemonic device for the stories it carried (p. 318). Beading is a metaphor and mechanism to ensure that knowledge production is reflective of the relational nature of Indigenous worldviews, because of its intimate relationship with storytelling and women's traditional roles in the community. Fluidity exists between the practices of beading and storytelling because patterns cannot be distinguished from stories (Simpson, 1999). In this way, we linked the various types of references that we found to create an overall pattern the way beadwork comes together to form an overall design. Each bead is just as integral to the design as the next, as well as linked together functionally by thread. In this way, each of the articles are stitched together to form an important story. Whether report, poem, unpublished dissertation, or published article, each is an integral bead in the overall narrative of Métis women and girls. It is a story representative of various voices and stories.

1.2

SURVEY

SASHING OUR WARRIORS SURVEY: MÉTIS FEMINIST WITNESSING METHODOLOGY

"They're all true. They're all true. I lived it. I saw it" (Poitras, 2004, p. 126). This assertion by Métis residential school survivor Angie Crerar in the collection of Métis experiences of residential school, *Métis Memories of Residential School: A Testament to the Strength of the Métis* is a form of witnessing, to the truth of what she witnessed and of the truth of the testimony of others. Similarly, in working with the *Sashing our Warriors* survey results, we approach our engagement with Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals accounts from a place of witnessing, which creates relational encounters to ensure frameworks of responsibility that hold up the experiences of others' lives as we have witnessed them on their own terms (Brant, 1994; Harjo, 2011; Hunt, 2014; Clark, 2016).[1] As we have come to understand Indigenous feminist witnessing methodology, we view these experiences as shared with us in the context of reciprocal relationships with an Indigenous cultural framework, and in witnessing the stories, we are obligated to ensure they are not denied, ignored or silenced (Hunt, 2014, p. 37).

The witnessing methodology in this literature review and research report is two-fold as it draws on the diverse expertise of Clark, Barkaskas and Davey in addressing sexualized violence in all the spaces where we live and work, and it is rooted in a deep witnessing and listening practice. This witnessing practice is a Métis and Indigenous intersectional approach (sometimes referred to as GBA+) (Clark, 2012), a feminist and holistic model that follows in the tradition of Indigenous, Métis and Black feminist theorizing of love, rage, desire, resistance, and resurgence as the foundation from which to challenge sexualized violence (Clark, 2018). Love is rooted in a Métis feminist intergenerational approach (Belcourt, 2016). From the early writings of Métis writer Maria Campbell (1973) through to the voices of our Indigenous friends and sisters and the Métis feminist activists writing and speaking out today, this knowledge of the interlocking arteries of colonialism, in particular age, race, and gender, has always been part of our truth-telling (Clark, 2012; de Finney, 2014; Hunt, 2014). As Maori scholar Moreton-Robinson (2000) states, "the intersecting oppression of race and gender and the subsequent power relations that flow from these into the social, political, historical and material conditions of our lives (are) shared,

1 Kwagiulth scholar Dr. Sarah Hunt's methodology of witnessing also informs the basis of this epistemological approach. We thank her for her contributions to our understanding of witnessing.

consciously or unconsciously" (p. 5). As such, Métis feminist intersectionality is necessary to assist in understanding and acting on the issue of violence against Métis women and girls' individuals.

We considered the following questions in our witnessing engagement: How can we bear witness to these stories of violence—as shared by Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals[2] (400+ responses)—as a form of testimony and evidence? How does witnessing the stories of violence, including the qualitative narratives and stories of witnessing and experiencing violence shared by Métis women and girls impact different individuals across the intersections of Indigeneity, gender, age, and geography? Considering these questions, as part of our analysis, we developed an intimate and embodied witnessing practice and methodology.

Our approach to witnessing the stories and sharing our response is a form of what Tanana Athabascan theorist Dian Million (2014) calls "felt theory" or "felt knowledge" whereby "the stories, unlike data, contain the affective legacy of our experiences. They are a felt knowledge that accumulates and becomes a force that empowers stories that are otherwise separate to become a focus, a potential for movement" (p. 31-32). This includes witnessing the intergenerational stories of Métis women and girls from residential school through to the *Sashing our Warriors* surveys, to interweave testimony and resistance in an intergenerational narrative or love, resistance and survival. As Million (2014) reminds us:

> *Even though I know intellectually that the agony of the child in (name community) now is not the same experience as the child raised forty years ago in the confines of (name a residential school), I cannot shake the feeling of déjà vu. I feel a desire to feel/link these experiences that is stronger than any knowledge I might have of the value of their historical "specificity." (p. 31).*

Further, as co-author Clark (2016) reminds us "it is vitally important in our listening and our witnessing that we do not continue to create narratives of risk and harm separated from the stories of strength, resiliency and survivance" (p. 54). Thus, this report surrounds the stories shared with poetry, teachings and wisdom from Métis women, Aunties and Elders.

2 Insert the genders of survey participants

2

[We] are Known as the, Free People, Halfbreeds, Apeetokosisan or, in Cree, Otipemsiwak, lii Michif; the Métis of Canada connect their origins to the first meetings of European men and First Nations women.

—Forgotten: The Métis Residential School Experience, p. 3

2.1

CONTEXT

MÉTIS AS DISTINCT PEOPLE IN CANADA AND BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Métis emerged as a distinct people or nation in the historic Northwest during the 18th and 19th centuries. This area is known as the "historic Métis Nation Homeland," which includes the three Prairie Provinces and extends into Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and the northern United States. James Teit in his research with Secwepemc Elders identified the presence of Métis within BC (1908). Teit ascribed the name "Le'matcif or Le'matcip" in a map of the Shuswap territory (Teit, 1909). This historic Métis Nation had recognized Aboriginal title, which the Government of Canada attempted to extinguish through the issuance of "scrip" and land grants in the late 19th and 20th centuries. The Métis are recognized as one of the three Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, alongside the First Nations and Inuit under section 35 of the *Constitution Act*, 1982. In 2002, the Métis National Council adopted the following definition: "Métis" means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation (MNBC, 2019; RCAP, 1996; Métis National Council, 2011).

In 2011, 451,795 people identified as Métis. They represented 32.3% of the total Indigenous population and 1.4% of the total Canadian population. Among census metropolitan areas, Winnipeg had the highest population of Métis, 46,325 people, or 6.5% of its total population. Vancouver has the third highest population of Métis in Canada with 18,485 people reported. Statistics Canada further identified that over 70% of Canada's Métis reside in urban settings (Statistics Canada, 2013). Statistics Canada also reported that 69,475 Métis reside in British Columbia (15.4%) (Statistics Canada, 2018a).

Approximately 90,000 people (2%) of the total Canadian Métis population report residing in British Columbia (Statistics Canada, 2017). From the census population of 2016, 7.8% of Canadian Métis youth report having a mood disorder. 54% of Métis reported being in good health, and 67% reported feeling in good mental health. Regarding employment, 70% of Métis women between 25-54 report being employed in 2006, which slightly increased to 72% in 2016. Education statistics vary. 32,066 women have no diploma or degree but 47,232 report having a college diploma and 70,400 Métis women report having a bachelor's degree. Victimization statistics are broken out only for Indigenous women, but not specifically for Métis women, validating a need for this research. Out

of 1000 incidents reported in Canada, 220 were reported as being perpetrated against Indigenous women, and 81 perpetrated against non-Indigenous women (Statistics Canada, 2018b).

Métis people have been historically misrepresented, misunderstood, and marginalized. Their rights, ignored and abused for generations, are in urgent need of recognition and restoration. As one of the Indigenous peoples of Canada, Métis people have a right to be recognized as having their own unique cultural, legal and political traditions. Like other Indigenous peoples, land and self-determination are central issues. Métis people are seeking to build their own institutions and organizations based on the foundation of their culture (RCAP, 1996).

One consequence for many Métis people from colonialism and residential school is isolation from their community or cultural origins and "the disruption of matrilineal social kinship and intergenerational knowledge exchange systems" (key reader 2021). Research has shown that being situated within your Indigenous community is a source of protection and resistance underlying primary prevention of mental health problems of First Nations and Inuit people due to the influence of spirituality, family strength, elders, oral traditions and support networks (Heavyrunner & Marshall, 2003). The fact that this collective sense of resistance and resiliency goes beyond the colonial definition of resilience as being "the capability of individuals to cope and flourish successfully in the face of significant adversity or risk" (Reid et al., 1996) is existent, means that Métis women could potentially suffer negative consequences if they lack of tight knit community, or have experienced a loss of culture (Stats Can, 1991; RCAP, p. 202). This may indicate that it is necessary to reformulate the basis of prevention initiatives for Métis women, girls, and all genders based on loss of culture and community, and not belonging to a reserve or band. Although historically Métis communities were deeply interconnected collectives, many with ongoing ties to their First Nations' relatives through relational engagement and reciprocity. Many of these communities became dispersed into smaller family units because of Canadian policies specifically intended to disenfranchise Métis people of their lands (Devine, 2004; MacDougall, 2010; MacDougall 2013, Teillet, 2013; Vowel, 2016).

The *Manitoba Act*, 1870 and the *Dominion Lands Act*, 1872 both contained policies directed at extinguishing Métis land title but also as noted by our key reader "the imposition of European

systems of patriarchy onto Métis and the traditional roles/high status of Métis women in our communities." (2021). As a result, the granting of scrip in the difficulties and destitution in wake of the failed North West Resistance of 1885, left Métis people vulnerable to prospectors (Teillet, 2013). This period was the beginning of a century of intergenerational injustice (Friedland, 2018) in which numerous Métis communities were broken up and Métis families dislocated. Culture for many families living without larger community support went underground and had to be hidden from the general Canadian populace due to racism (MacDougall 2017). Evidence of cultural loss is cited in RCAP statistics about Métis people in 1991 (Stats Can, 1991). Métis people's participation in traditional Aboriginal activities, especially in the areas of the Métis Nation, is dramatically lower than for other Aboriginal groups (RCAP, 1996, p. 202). In 2013, 65% of Métis people reported living in urban areas. (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Migration from a reserves or northern communities to cities often results in the fracture of kinship and peer bonds for Indigenous peoples; migrants must navigate their new social context, developing access to social support from newly truncated family units (Stewart et al.,

2008; Spitzer et al., 2003). This type of migration over generations for Métis peoples may have contributed to loss of culture and community and tight knit bonds for many Métis individuals and nuclear families, leaving them without the support of the larger intergenerational kinship and community bonds they needed.

On April 14, 2016, the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Daniels* v. *Canada (Indian Affairs and Northern Development)*, 2016 SCC 12 granted a declaration that under section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867, "Indians" was intended to include Métis and non-status First Nations people. This means the federal government has the authority to make laws affecting Métis and non-status First Nations people. The Court in *Daniels* also observed that the legal ambiguity about whether s. 91(24) captured Métis and non-status First Nations had resulted in a deprivation of necessary programs and services due to neither provincial nor federal governments taking responsibility for this legislative authority. Unfortunately, the SCC's declaration does not force the federal government to do anything, including pass laws, relating to Métis and non-status First Nations people. It does create clarity that the federal government is the level of government Métis people should address when seeking policies and improved services and programs. It is still unclear how this decision might impact Métis people's benefits in areas such as medical services, housing and essential services for Métis women and girls who have experienced or witnessed violence.

Identity is another aspect that is highly gendered and impacted by colonialism. Issues are complicated with regards to proving identity and affiliation to Métis Nation. For access to services, one must be able to trace family history directly to the Métis Homeland. Just as with Bill C-31 in 1985, C-3 in 2011 and now S-3 in 2017, which were all amendments to the *Indian Act*, there has been a historic use of sexist colonial legal definitions of status Indians that have negatively impacted Indigenous women, impacting women and girls' ability to access services. Just as for First Nations women and girls who cannot prove status under the *Indian Act*, and thus be granted status cards, individuals without the ability to prove status as a Métis person are at a disadvantage. The rules are complex and difficult, and erasure or denial of identity is an integral part of Métis identity. Often, although a family may know they are Métis, through family history, oral tradition and passing

down of Métis cultural practices, documentation does not exist to support their claims. In some cases, even where documentation may exist, access may be denied; for example, confidentiality of provincial adoption records (RCAP, 1996, V4) makes it arduous to prove identity in some cases.

In other cases, due to the impacts of colonialism, people may have been forced to move away from their Métis communities and may not have grown up aware of their cultural identity. Through the colonial process of nation creation, obfuscation of Indigenous identities through imposed legal policies and regimes has resulted in formalized identity rules. The trickle-down effect is that these rules have created inequality and lack of status for numbers of women (RCAP, 1996, V4). Until the *Daniels* case in 2016, Métis people were not seen as "Indians" under section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act*, 1867, and thereby did not fall under federal responsibility per the constitutional division of powers. Without any recognition that they fell under federal jurisdiction, Métis peoples have historically been excluded from services specifically provided for First Nations and Inuit peoples through federal funding and programming.

2.2

LIFESPAN

MÉTIS WOMEN & GIRLS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

2.2.1 Who are Métis Women and Girls?

In this research, we seek to centre the voices and knowledge of our Métis grandmothers and knowledge holders. In her master's thesis, Nixon (2018) describes how much of Métis history is couched in the masculine perspective. Louis Riel, politics, and land rights are integral to Métis identity construction, as opposed to the feminine frameworks that define women. She asks: "Why are we refusing and forgetting our grandmothers, as Métis scholars?" (p. 34).

Despite histories of displacement, migration and survival movement—Métis women have kept a strong connection to land. Métis feminists have been quick to identify the gendered nature of legal responses to the Métis peoples. Nathalie Kermoal (2016) in her examination of Métis women's environmental knowledge and rights identifies not only the sexist but colonial and binary nature of most ethnographic testimony and research, including coding the land and wilderness as masculine, and the home as feminine. Further, the neglect of Métis women's knowledge, in relation to the land, is part of a greater trend (p. 109). Kermoal cites Van Woundenberg (2004, p. 81) "The silence surrounding women's traditional relations with the land could easily be used to disinherit them legally in the present" (p. 114). Kermoal cites Métis Elder Lucy Desjarlais Whiteman, "Women never stopped talking about the lost lands. They were more bitter than the men who were told there was more land and they believed that" (p. 117).

Challenging the colonial gendered binary of labour is an important part of decolonizing our understanding of Métis women and girls. Métis women were, and still are, hunters, trappers, fishers and stewards of the land (Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016). Elders interviewed for In the Words of Our Ancestors: Métis Health and Healing (2008) testified to the central role of Métis women in the health and wellness of Métis communities. Métis women were medicine women, healers, artists, and midwives—this medical knowledge, or Lii Michin "the medicines" was first passed on from First Nations grandmothers and then down through Métis mothers, daughters and granddaughters (Kermoal, 2016). Traditionally, Métis women were the keepers of culture and knowledge systems, they were responsible for the transfer of knowledge, values and beliefs to their families. They held influential positions of authority and were actively involved in various forms of governing, socially, economically, and politically, including having substantial authority over land and property (RCAP, V. 4, 1996).

In Métis and Feminist, Emma LaRocque describes the historical specificity of Métis experiences due to colonialism and the imposition of Canadian law (Green, 2007). She relates that her family experienced poverty as "social warfare on our bodies" (p. 58). Her story of growing up Métis in Alberta amplifies many of the harsh realities set out in Campbell's story and echoes the truths of Métis women and girls' distinct experiences as "suffering from unimaginable poverty and racism, complete with both layers and waves of social and legal dispossession" (p. 58). LaRocque's Métis feminist analysis reveals the lived frustrations and limitations of the Métis women and girls in her family, who dealt with the constraints of being poor and disenfranchised mothers and daughters who bore the primary responsibility for manual labour in the home, despite being adept harvesters, hunters, and trappers (p. 60).

Due to the gendered division of labour, she recounts that her mother "lived with the frustration of remaining financially dependent on my father—something she viewed as an affront to her dignity" (p. 60). The responsibilities of childbearing and motherhood, combined with the lack of opportunities to pursue education, which LaRocque largely attributed to two main issues, namely lack of money and racist public schools, meant Métis women and girls were not able to express their freedom, an inherently valuable concept in Métis culture, including to hunt, trap, and work outside the domestic sphere, as readily as men.

LaRocque indicates that the links between patriarchy and misogyny, reinforced by Catholicism, created an environment where not only was women's labour deeply underappreciated, but women came to be considered as less important overall (p. 58). Together with racism, which includes internalized racism, she states that such prevalent sexism set up situations where violence, including sexualized violence, was able to flourish against Métis women and girls; though she does not allow colonialism to be used as an excuse for men engaging in such violence (p. 61). Métis artist and activist Christi Belcourt also notes how violence became a fact of life for many Métis women and girls:

> *The thing I think about is my grandma—her name was Matilda—my dad's mom. I think about what she went through. I also think about her mom, and her mother. So I think about my grandmothers going all the way*

> *up, and what they had to go through in the communities where they lived. Violence was part and parcel of life in Lac Ste. Anne. It just was. I think about how the women in that community didn't even have the power to say no. There was no choice back then. You had to put up with it. I am so grateful that my daughters now have that choice and don't have to put up with it. So things are changing (Anderson et al., 2018, p. 312).*

Belcourt and LaRocque's observations are useful in understanding some of the historic factors that have contributed to Métis women and girls' individuals' experiences of violence, but also of our/their own perspectives of violence as part of our/their lived realities. This is not to suggest that we accept violence as inevitable, but rather that it seems to be a ubiquitous factor in the lives of Métis women and girls precisely because we/they are Métis. Unpacking this further, we suggest that the ways in which Métis women and girls are constituted, perceived and gendered within Métis homes and communities involve the mapping of violence onto their lives. This violence, much like the poverty described by LaRocque, seems to be written onto Métis women and girls' individuals' bodies. In effect, Métis women and girls' individuals embodied lived realities are imbued with the abstract violence of colonialism, enacted through laws and policies that left Métis people poor and landless, as well as the concrete violence of physical and sexual assault, as a direct result of colonialism, as a common experience.

2.2.2 Resistance and Survival

However, we also know, through Métis women and girls' writings and the responses to the *Sashing our Warriors* survey, that they have clear histories of resistance and survival and these embodied, intellectual, and spiritual practices are also distinctively Métis, with liberation at their heart. Indeed, as Belcourt indicates, "things are changing" (p. 312). This is due to Métis women and girls' ongoing resistance in the face of colonialism and its ongoing legacy, as LaRocque states:

> *Many Aboriginal beliefs and practices, the real traditionally based practices—and those reinvented—also offer models and concepts on gender equality that can enhance woman-centred notions of equality and valuation. Naturally, we need to transform those traditions that obstruct gender*

> *equality; we need to confront thinking and institutions that violate our rights and we need to ensure that our contemporary First Nations and Métis liberation efforts move away from that either-or pattern of sacrificing women's equality in the interests of the ever amorphous* ***collective****.*
> *We must be both decolonizers and feminists (1996, p. 68).*

Clark asserts that Métis women and girls' survivance is found in sisterhood, storytelling, shared medicines, and movement on the land—as we have been surviving violence on this land since colonization (Clark, Barkaskas, Davey forthcoming). Métis Cree scholar Shalene Jobin (2016) describes how her grandma hung on to the teachings of her grandmother and taught her to snare and to collect medicines: "I used to follow behind her as she gathered medicines and listen as she told me what they were used for" (p. 52). Jobin (2016) asserts that "...recounting of that knowledge is an act of resistance to assimilation, one that insists on the importance of collective narrative memory" (p. 52) and that challenges gendered notions of Métis labour and relationships to the land. Even the telling of stories—including the stories of violence—is done for others. This resonates within the *Sashing our Warriors* surveys and the testimony of residential school survivors.

Métis Indian Residential School (IRS) survivor Donna Roberts makes this medicine visible in her description of why she chose to tell her story of residential school: "I am a victim and a survivor… I would like to tell my story to other survivors who are out there and tell it the best way I can remember" (Donna Roberts, 58, St. Henri IRS, 10 years, November 2003, p.51). Métis IRS survivor Angie Crerar (2003) echoes this:

> *I don't usually bring stuff out. I bury it, but I know it's important, and I am doing it for the others, for the survivors of the forties, the fifties, and the sixties who walked that path and took that long journey that had no end, that had nothing, no goal at the end, there was nothing for us. There was no such thing as warmth. No hugs, no love except what we gave each other. We made ourselves survive. We gained strength from each other—in that world there was nobody, there was nobody (p. 126).*

Métis IRS survivor Angie Crerar asserted the important role of Métis girls' friendships in the survival of residential school genocide.

> *I have witnessed many many brutal things that happened to the girls and boys in those ten years…. I have nothing, no good memories except the memories that we made among us girls. We formed an alliance, we formed a friendship, we formed a strengthening. I don't know what we would call that now. I am trying to think what we called it: "**you are my strength, you are my friend, you are my trust**". We tried to look after the little ones and tried to avoid some of the beatings that were not necessary. There was no such thing as respect but we taught ourselves respect (Angie Crerar, 68, Fort Resolution, IRS, 10 years, July 2004, p. 126).*

It is also important to name that movement, running away and migration was and continues to be a survival strategy for Métis women and girls. The shared description of movement, running and away and migration, is a survival strategy used by distinct cultural groups fleeing genocide.[1] This is reflected in the over 400 testimonies from the *Sashing our Warriors* survey and throughout the testimony of the survivors of residential schools. In her testimony about her experience at residential school, Métis IRS survivor Magee Shaw described how her mom picked her up from residential school and they left for BC: "I stayed there until about my fourteenth birthday when my mom came to visit. She took me out for the day (from the residential school). We left there and went to B.C. to live" (St. Bernard IRS, 3 years, Red Deer, 2004, p. 7). This statement reveals how mobility, in this case, leaving Alberta for BC was necessary to get away from the horrors and memories of residential school. Another anonymous survivor's testimony reveals that running away from residential school was her resistance:

> *When I was 13 years old I'd had enough – I couldn't take it anymore – I ran away from there and dad brought me back, so I ran away again. I ran all the way from that old mission to my dad's house. I ran all the way over there with just a sweater on and this*

1 The evidence is strong about a shared experience of Indigenous peoples around the world of movement.)

was in November. He (the priest) would lock me up in a room all day and then one day the nun came and asked me 'you hungry, you wanna eat? I said, "No, I'm not hungry". She said, "Okay, I'll go get you a nightgown," but she didn't lock the door. When she went out–I ran and took off outta of there–the way I was dressed. I ran all the way across that bay, not on the main road because people were coming in to see a movie that night. I didn't want to meet nobody, so I ran all along the shore in the deep snow. When I got home I was peeking in the window and dad spotted me. He came and got me and said "where did you come from?" I said, "From the mission." He said, "Like this? I said, "Yeah". They sent two boys to come and get me and dad said, "No, I'll take her back myself". The next day he took me back to the mission. "Stay there," he said, "just this one trip and then I'll take you out". I stayed there, but then again I ran away before it was Easter... I left when I was 14 and I never went back there again. (Anonymous, 69, IRS 7 years, January 2004, p. 116-117).

Leaving and movement is a sustained survival response. The statistics from McCreary Centre (2016) on Métis homelessness in BC reveals how this survival response continues to this day and reflected in the *Sashing our Warriors* survey responses.

2.3

VIOLENCE

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: VIOLENCE AGAINST MÉTIS WOMEN & GIRLS

Over 20 years ago the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP, 1996) reported that it is "more difficult to get precise statistics on Métis people; it is virtually impossible to say with any exactness the extent of sexual violence in Métis families or communities" (p.73). The situation of Métis women is compounded by sexist stereotypes and racist attitudes towards Indigenous women and girls. Violence against Métis women is tolerated and accepted due to societal indifference to the welfare and safety of our women (RCAP, 1996). Sandra DeLaronde, (President, Métis Women of Manitoba, Winnipeg in 1993) concluded that government failure to provide Métis people with sufficient and specific resources to address social issues is an indication of the public policy indifference (RCAP, 1996) which still reverberates today.

Specific data, outside of the *Sashing our Warriors* survey responses, was not found for violence against Métis women and girls' individuals. Regionally, specific data for Métis in British Columbia was likewise limited, except for the work of the McCreary Centre Society and specific data on Métis youth health (2016) again highlighting a need for this and future research that may be used to design and implement appropriate programming for Métis people in BC. The 2020 report by the Representative for Children and Youth Invisible Children: A descriptive analysis of injury and death reports for Métis children and youth in British Columbia, 2015 to 2017 was the first report to examine and centre the experiences of Métis children and youth. This report found that "the most common type of injury reported was sexualized violence, with 44 of the 183 injuries falling into this category. The Representative is particularly concerned about the heightened risk of sexualized violence and exploitation for female Métis children and youth in care, who were the most likely to experience this type of injury" (p.3). These statistics are not just statistics but contain stories about the continued reverberation of sexualized violence in the lives of Métis children and youth.

The Métis youth health in BC report (2012) based on the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey (AHS) found that Métis girls had higher rates of violence than Métis boys—physical, sexual and emotional abuse. 30% of Métis girls (compared to 16% of boys) had been physically abused, 22% sexually abused, (compared to 6% of boys) and 13% had experienced both. In addition, female Métis youth were twice as likely as males to have missed

out on mental health support they felt that they needed (24% versus 12%)—reasons were fear of being seen, not wanting parents to know and fear of what the doctor would do (p. 5). Violence coping responses included 24% of Métis girls reported self-injury and 19% of girls had considered killing themselves 9% attempted. McCreary found that for females the risk of suicidal ideation was increased by physical abuse, racism, sexism, heterosexism and experiencing despair (p. 10). Protection was found in feeling safe at school and having a supportive adult in their family (Tsuruda, Smith, Poon, Hoogeven, Saewyc & McCreary Centre Society, 2012).

Unfortunately, we could find no specific statistical or other information with respect to the experiences of violence of Métis gender-diverse individuals, including those who self-identify as women and girls, at the time of this report. Cree scholar Alex Wilson (2018) notes that a 2009 study on gender-diverse American Indian and Alaska Native women found that "in comparison to the general population, two-spirit [sic] women are four times more likely to be sexually or physically assaulted, and they are 50% more likely to be assaulted than Indigenous women who are heterosexual" and that in another study almost half of respondents who were Trans and Two-Spirit stated they had either been "chased" and/or "threatened with physical violence because of their sex/gender identity" (p. 161). Wilson suggested what is most troubling with respect to gender-diverse issues in Indigenous communities is that "many queer and trans [sic] Indigenous youth do not feel supported, welcome, or safe in their own families and communities or in ceremonial spaces" (2018, p. 161). Similarly, Holmes and Hunt note that for Indigenous gender-diverse individuals:

> *In many contexts "the family home" may not a place of comfort and refuge, but may be a site of oppression, violence, and surveillance; for example, the heterosexual or cisgender family home for LGBTQ2S+ people, or non-Indigenous foster homes for Indigenous children. However, as we discuss here, family homes can also be sites of resistance, critical dialogue, support, and allyship (Holmes and Hunt, 2015).*

The information specific to Métis gender-diverse individuals was about homelessness and Métis youth, which could provide a starting place for future research on Métis youths' experiences of violence. In the 2014 McCreary

Centre Society survey of almost 700 youth ages 12-19 in communities across BC. 12% of the respondents are self-identified as Métis. Métis youth in the survey 30% identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and 21% identified as Two-Spirit and a small percentage as transgender. This group was overrepresented amongst homeless youth—and 65% of them had been in the care of the Ministry. Of these youth who were homeless—52% had a family member who had been in government care—and 47% had a family member who had been in a residential school, 65% had a family member who had a substance use problem, and 56% had a family member who had died by, or attempted suicide (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). Homelessness Métis youth had first become homeless under the age of 12 (27%) and 40% (13 or 14) and 33% over the age of 15.

For Métis people in Canada, an accurate depiction of population health and well-being is almost non-existent, "...predominant reason being the lack of adequate, accurate and accessible data and information on Métis health and well-being" (NCCAH, 2018). The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAH, 2018) publication notes that notes that there is a scarcity of Métis specific academic research studies and outlines several factors that contribute to the lack of Métis health and well-being data/information such as Métis identity issues, lack of ethnic identifiers, inadequate federal and provincial will, insufficient representation of Métis in decision making bodies, lack of research guidelines, the legacy of colonization, and other systemic and structural factors (NCCAH, 2018).

NCCAH found that when searching for "Métis-related research in health sciences and social sciences research, of 254 Aboriginal health-related publications between 1992 and 2001, only two provided data on Métis" (NCCAH, 2018). Brenda MacDougall's 2017 NCCAH publication, Land, Family and Identity: Contextualizing Métis Health and Well-being, may serve as the only exception. MacDougall points out the jurisdictional vacuum created by the lack of federal fiduciary duty to Métis people (prior to the 2016 Daniels decision), which resulted in a silent historical record. In 1996, Statistics Canada did start keeping some statistical information about Métis people. However, MacDougall notes that there is a gap in data that prevents "establishing baseline health data, income, and educational statistics related to Métis people" and that without such information, "we lack any comprehensive

statistical knowledge necessary for conducting health research, developing programs, or making definitive statements about the health and well-being of Métis people" (2017, p. 7). However, she also observes that the information we do have "when triangulated with the lived experiences of Métis people, nevertheless, tells us a great deal not only about contemporary life, but also serves as a window into the historical experience of colonialism and resultant intergenerational trauma" (MacDougall, 2017, p. 7). Given the degree of health related physical and emotional harm shared by the *Sashing our Warriors* participants—health specific research and programming is needed.

It is well-known that Indigenous women and girls experience much higher rates of violence than non-Indigenous women and girls (Akers & Kaukinen, 2009; Andersson & Nahwegahbow, 2010; DuMont et al., 2010; Statistics Canada, 2006, 2018). According to the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization, Indigenous females had an overall rate of violent victimization that was triple that of non-Indigenous females and more than triple that of non-Indigenous males (Canadian Public Health Association, 2014). Those who face higher risks are Indigenous women, women with disabilities and transgender individuals" (Simpson, 2018) and specifically Métis women and girls and gender-diverse individuals are at higher risk (IRMMIWG, 2016). Research shows that Indigenous women are physically assaulted, sexually assaulted, or robbed almost three times as often as non-Indigenous women (Simpson, 2018). Even when all other risk factors are considered, Indigenous women still experience more violent victimization.

Statistics Canada reported that 54% of Indigenous women had experienced severe and potentially life-threatening violence. It was reported that 24% of Indigenous women and 18% of Indigenous men said that they had suffered violence from a current or previous spouse or common-law partner in the five-year period up to 2004 (Statistics Canada, 2005). Andersson and Nahwegahbow cite the following fact focused on experience of physical abuse in pregnancy 2010: 16.6% in Saskatoon (Muhajarine & D'Arcy, 1999), 17.9% in Vancouver (Janssen et al., 2003) and 18% in Winnipeg (Heaman, 2005). We can only assume that this includes Métis women, because it isn't evident from the cited data that Métis women are included in non-Indigenous or Indigenous categories.

Marginalization and discrimination put communities at risk of violence and deny victims protection of the welfare and justice system.

In 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) noted 520 cases of missing and murdered First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, but we now know that number is at least 1,200 cases between 1980 and 2012, according to the RCMP's 2014 National Overview (IRMMIWG, 2017, p. 7). The individual and community catastrophes that lead to women, girls and gender-diverse individuals becoming vulnerable can be situated within a spectrum of gender violence cases that includes family violence, illustrating how their occurrence signals a convergence of system breakdowns (Andersson & Nahwegahbow, 2010). There is also a lack of Canadian-based research on rates, experiences and types of violence amongst Métis women and female identifying individuals (LFMO, 2018).

The Canadian Public Health Association has noted that "Indigenous women are among the most marginalized populations in Canada and are overrepresented as sex workers" (2014). Broadly speaking, First Nations, Inuit and Métis women in Canada experience rates of violence 3.5 times higher than non-First Nations, Inuit and Métis women—a risk further heightened for First Nations, Inuit and Métis sex workers" (Canadian Public Health Association, 2014).

There is likewise a shortage of Canadian-based research on the perspectives of gender-diverse individuals and Indigenous women, let alone Métis women specifically, when it comes those who engage in sex in exchange for money, housing, or anything else related to their well-being or survivance. All levels of the government should provide support to Indigenous women as they wish to be supported in their experiences with sex trade work and the resources and services, they require to be safe on their own terms. This includes supporting the needs of Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals who engage in sex for trade.

Awareness of the much higher rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls has slowly translated into targeted action for Indigenous women and girls, aimed at either support for survivors or efforts to prevent future violence. Unfortunately, these anti-violence initiatives are often not inclusive of Métis women and girls as the term Indigenous is often assumed to mean First Nations. This means that, although Métis women and girls do experience violence at a much higher rate than non-Indigenous women and girls, adequate supports to meet this need are not in place (LFMO, 2017).

2.3.1 Under-Reporting, Normalization and Hiding Violence

The literature reviewed for this report identifies a tendency towards underreporting exists in Indigenous communities, so this indicates the potential for higher percentages of violence perpetrated against Indigenous women and girls (Andersson & Nahwegahbow, 2010). There exists a 25–50% prevalence rate of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Indigenous adults surveyed across Canada in the past 20 years. For the purposes of definitions: CSA is defined as any sexual activity perpetrated against a minor by threat, force, intimidation, or manipulation. The array of sexual activities includes fondling, inviting a child to touch or be touched sexually, intercourse, rape, incest, sodomy, exhibitionism or involving a child in prostitution or pornography (Department of Justice Canada, 2006). Removed from the context of colonialism, the statistics can create narratives of risk and blame within Métis communities and families. The introduction of patriarchal systems, and the fear of child removal have all been linked to the silence in racialized, Indigenous communities with respect to sexual abuse and violence. This reluctance to report could be exacerbated among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, although there is no formal research on the subject, and none specifically on Métis women and girls' individuals.

Reporting rates have not increased since the early research in the 1980's that indicated only 3–5% of CSA victims ever disclose to authorities (Finkelhor & Hotaling, 1984), our ability to accurately estimate the full scope of CSA is limited. It is particularly difficult to assess the scope of CSA in Canadian Aboriginal communities. Some studies conducted with Aboriginal adults have reported shockingly high rates of CSA, while the number of sexual abuse cases reported to child protection authorities is low. In their 2017 report for the Canadian Department of Justice, Access to Justice for Indigenous Adult Victims of Sexual Assault, Barkaskas and Hunt note:

> *While the 2014 General Social Survey on Victimization indicates that Indigenous people are more than twice as likely to experience violent victimization (Boyce, 2016), and more than three times as likely to experience sexual assault (Boyce, 2016), we know that these figures only partially reflect the extent of sexual violence due to underreporting related to stigmatization and shame, and a lack of trust in reporting systems (p. 11).*

In the original version of Métis Elder Maria Campbell's novel Halfbreed, she describes being raped by an RCMP officer in her home. There were three attempts to erase this incident. The first erasure was due to trauma of the violent incident—Campbell does not remember the actual rape. Her grandmother, who tends to her, feels compelled to keep it from Maria's father, to protect him from himself, for fear that he will go after the RCMP officer, and then end up hung. Later, when the book was prepared for publication, the editors recommended that the incident be omitted from the final version due to fear of RCMP retaliation that could impact the book. They were successful in their erasure of this event in the published manuscript. This is certainly a reflection on the RCMP, as an oppressive colonial agent, that the editors feared the organization might attempt to get an injunction against the publication. The roots of RCMP oppression and violence against Métis people specifically have a long and well documented history in Canada. The fact that the redacted incident was unearthed by Reder and Shield (2018) speaks to Métis strength, persistence, and endurance. Reder and Shield state that by putting the incident back into the story, it completes the narrative. Without it, the story had a hole in it. For instance, Maria's own brother, who witnessed the incident, goes on to have a problematic relationship with the RCMP and ends up in jail. This is an example of how erasing stories interrupts the narrative, creating a disjointed story. Silencing violence is normalized in communities, for fear of reprisal, fear of colonial institutional power and due to fear of becoming a target. Women and girls are described as being urged to keep these stories to themselves.

Métis scholar, Houle (2004) uses her understanding of the Cree word *kiyam*[1] as meaning "never mind, leave it alone" (Cardinal & LeClaire, 1998). In Houle's 2004 master's thesis she reminds us of the power that can be manifested when the opportunity exists to tell these stories, to share and speak truth. This allows us to "restore ourselves as strong women" rather than hide, erase, and redact these stories. By redacting, we interrupt narratives, and disrupt the meaning-making of our own experiences. Implicit in the Cree term *kiyam*, is that

1 Metis languages include Michif, Cree, Ojibway, and French also the impact of gendered/colonialism rape culture on silencing of sexual abuse through words like kiyam

silencing sexual assault stories is normalized in community as a response to gendered-colonialism and rape culture and implies that for an individual to share the sexual assault story breaks the pattern of *kiyam*, but more importantly, breaks with established community norms that emerged in response to colonialism. Campbell indicated in her 1973 autobiography that no one would believe a Halfbreed, and this included the publisher removing the truth of her rape by the RCMP in her book—and the *Sashing our Warriors* study reveals that this continues to resonate today.

2.3.2 Economic Insecurity Is a Consistently Reported Association of Gender Violence

A study of the relationship between public policies and migrant health data found that a 21.6% reduction in social assistance payments resulted in increased mental health problems and a rise in abuse against women (Steele et al., 2002). Migrant Indigenous women, who are often isolated and lack extended family support, who wish to access formal support services as a way of preventing or dealing with gender violence may not find emergency shelters and their attendant programs to be culturally appropriate or linguistically accessible (Agnew, 1998; Shirdwadkar, 2004; Smith, 2004). MacDougall reports that despite Métis experiences of colonialism as different from other Indigenous peoples, the results of colonialism are the same, including "poor health, poverty, and a lack of educational attainment" (2017, p. 7). According to her analysis, such factors also have the consequence of creating economic insecurity throughout Métis peoples' lives. A decade ago, for instance, only 13% of Métis between the ages of 25 and 56 had a high school diploma and only 9% of Métis completed a university degree (Janz et al., 2009). The annual median income for Métis people is approximately $21,000, $6,000 less than was earned by non-Indigenous Canadians (White & Dyck, 2013). This discrepancy in wages and educational achievement has directly impacted the health and well-being of contemporary Métis families (p. 7).

The links between the impacts of colonialism and negative effects on Métis peoples' health and well-being are apparent. And while MacDougall lists numerous direct negative physical health consequences for Métis people, we know from Métis women and girls' writing, testimony recorded by the RCAP and TRC, and responses to *Sashing our Warriors* survey, that the overall circumstances of intergenerational injustice, including lack of

educational opportunities and living in poverty, is tied to experiences of experiencing and witnessing violence.

A comparison of Indigenous and non-Indigenous survivors of sexual assault and their receipt of and satisfaction with specialized health care services demonstrated that Indigenous women have unique needs, even if they rated high levels of satisfaction with the services received. They reported experiencing sexual assault in different contexts than non-Indigenous. For this and many other reasons, it is important for providers to be attuned to this for Métis women (DuMont et al., 2017).

Assaults on Indigenous women appear to be increasingly severe, but this could be correlated to factors such as the fact that police are more likely to be notified in cases of violent victimizations involving Indigenous women (DuMont et al., 2017). The fact that Indigenous survivors are more likely to come to a hospital within 24 hours of being sexually assaulted could mean that the assaults are more severe, requiring hospital care. This fact allows for timely provision of acute health care services, and the collection and documentation of forensic evidence (DuMont et al., 2017) and would seem to indicate an opportunity for improving care post-trauma. This study did not capture the experiences of Indigenous women and girls who have disclosed or sought alternate support or care post victimization, outside a hospital, or in the future – however, Indigenous survivors were more likely to be referred to agencies in the community for ongoing support, which may suggest community services are a key source of social support (DuMont et al., 2017).

In a report (Bucik, 2016) for The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women by Eagle Canada Human Rights Trust in partnership with the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association-North America Region (ILGA-NA), many recommendations are outlined, including the use of an intersectional lens to view and legislate crimes and perpetrators, as well as an intersectional approach to support by first-responders. Interrupting gender-based, Indigenous, heteronormative and cis-normative assumptions is key to providing support when treating survivors.

2.4

JUSTICE

SYSTEMIC AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND BARRIERS TO JUSTICE

Due to systemic racism, lack of accountability and abuse in some cases, government officials create or perpetuate an atmosphere in which Indigenous women and girls are devalued, contributing to this high rate of abuse, violence, and crime (Palmater, 2017). Pam Palmater, and other Indigenous feminist lawyers and legal scholars, have noted that Canadian courts have been ineffective in acknowledging the violence Indigenous women encounter and experience.

For example, in R. v. Gladue, [1999] 1 S.C.R. 688 the Supreme Court of Canada discusses the manslaughter sentencing of a Cree/Métis woman, Jamie Tanis Gladue, who was raised primarily by her Métis father. Ms. Gladue stabbed her common law spouse. Evidence was presented at her initial trial that she had previously been assaulted by the deceased while she was pregnant, a charge for which the deceased had been convicted and served jail time. The facts of this violence against Ms. Gladue were dismissed as irrelevant by the trial judge and not reconsidered by the SCC. All of this even though records of the preliminary inquiry in Ms. Gladue's case reveal that the violence she was experiencing at the hands of the deceased was so terrible that it was what compelled her father and sisters to move from Alberta to Nanaimo to live with her and try to keep her safe. Moreover, these same records suggest that on the night of the murder, Ms. Gladue may in fact have been trying to prevent further violence by the deceased against her sister, rather than acting out in a jealous rage as was put forward in her case (Sheehy, 2014).

Much more recently, the manslaughter conviction of Bradley Barton for the killing of Cindy Gladue on February 19, 2021, serves as another example of the violence and injustice Métis women experience. Barton was eventually found guilty of the death of Cindy Gladue, a Cree/Métis woman who was killed after allegedly agreeing to engage in sex for money. Initially, a jury found Bradley Barton not guilty of Ms. Gladue's death on the charge of first-degree murder (R. v. Barton, 2015 ABQB 159). The Alberta Court of Appeal found the trial judge had erred in his charge to the jury, which failed to provide them with appropriate instruction about not buying into myths or stereotypes about sexual assault, women, Indigenous peoples, and sex trade work (R. v. Barton, 2017 ABCA 216). The decision was appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada (R. v. Barton, 2019 SCC 33). The violence of Ms. Gladue's tragic and horrific death was amplified by the trial court's failure to acknowledge

her lack of consent to sexualized violence causing death and the state's abject dehumanization of Ms. Gladue when the trial judge allowed the Crown to enter part of her body as evidence in the court proceedings.

The LMFO's Intervener's Factum and oral submissions of their counsel, Métis lawyer Jean Teillet, IPC, in the Barton appeal at the Supreme Court of Canada sets out that the violence enacted by not only the accused in the case, but also the state, is a perpetuation of the ongoing violence of colonialism in the lives of Métis women and girls. At paragraph two of the Factum the LFMO Factum and Ms. Teillet's submissions highlight the importance of considering Ms. Gadue's Métis identity in understanding the violence she experienced: "Cindy Gladue was a Métis woman. Her Métis culture, history, laws and values were ignored in this case. They should not have been ignored" (LFMO, Intervener Factum, SCC File No. 37769, p. 1). At paragraph 38 of Factum the LFMO also submit that the extent to which the state's revictimization of Ms. Gladue was an assault on her as an Indigenous woman and as a Métis woman:

38. The dismemberment of an Indigenous woman's body and the use of it as evidence in a trial was a shocking assault by the state on Indigenous women. This is a matter of great importance to the Indigenous women of Canada. It should be a matter of great concern to this court because it has brought the justice system into disrepute. This horrific act is the part of the trial that has overshadowed all other considerations in the minds and hearts of Indigenous women in Canada. We are horrified by what happened. Now in Canada, quite justifiably, Indigenous women fear gender-based violence by the state in the name of "justice". The state cannot be permitted to re-victimize women in this manner. No justice was served by this barbaric, cruel and violent indignity to an Indigenous woman. It was a secondary assault by the trial process itself on a family already traumatized by the crime. It was also an assault of all Indigenous women. (pp. 9-10).

Throughout their submission, Teillet on behalf of LFMO, maps the historical and ongoing reality of gender-based violence against Indigenous women, including in this case a Métis woman, and the necessity of ending the general societal indifference to and to address the systemic and structural nature of this violence:

39. If we are to reconcile the rift in society between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, all state

actors must acknowledge their role in creating and maintaining that rift. The criminal justice system in this trial ripped a hole in the fabric of our society with this one shocking act. There is evidence that Indigenous women were fearful of the justice system before this trial. Now their fears have been proven true and they have lost what little confidence they had in the justice system.

40. We ask this court to raise its voice on this issue, which is of such overriding concern to Indigenous women in this country. We ask this court say that it was wrong. We ask you to do everything in your power to ensure that no other Indigenous woman is dismembered, dehumanized, her body used as evidence and violated by the courts of this country. Please say that this horror must never take place again. We beg this court, in its reasons for judgment to send a resounding affirmation of the need to protect Indigenous women from state violence during every trial in this country. Justice demands it (LFMO, Intervener Factum, SCC File No. 37769, p. 10).

These are just two cases that highlight the normalization of individual and state violence perpetrated against Indigenous, and specifically in these examples Métis women through the erasure of their dignity and humanity. In Gladue, Jamie Gladue's circumstances also emphasises the need to explore reasons for Indigenous women's incarceration. As Barkaskas and Hunt provide, criminal court cases that result in Indigenous offenders, especially women and Two-Spirit and Trans individuals, being incarcerated for violence often occur within the context of immediate or past violence, such as assault, or sexualized violence as a factor of the accused's personal history (p. 20). Indeed, it is for this reason we contend that a gender specific inquiry into factors for criminalization and incarceration of Métis women and girls is necessary (LFMO, 2017).

2.5

REMOVALS

MÉTIS GIRLS—FROM RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL REMOVALS TO CHILD WELFARE REMOVALS

Métis families have experienced intergenerational oppression and violence at the hands of the government and government actors—from residential school to other colonial institutions like child welfare and Indian hospitals—these have all contributed to the trauma and violence experienced by Métis women and girls (Reder & Shield, 2018). The narratives of the Métis women who shared their testimony of residential school are included in this report alongside the *Sashing our Warriors* testimonies as they reveal the historical and sustained extent of colonial/sexualized violence targeted against Métis girls.

It is important to remember and situate the health and vitality of Métis families prior to the traumatic impact of removal—either through residential school, day school or child welfare. The testimony of Angie Crerar, 68, Fort Resolution, IRS, 10 years old, July 2004 reminds us of the health of Métis families prior to residential school.

> *Good afternoon. I'm here to tell my story–I'm starting to feel the pain already–because it's something that I had buried for so many years. As a child I was raised in a Métis community with my three sisters and four brothers. We had a happy life, my mother did a lot of gardening, and she did a lot of herbal medicine. My dad worked at the Hudson's Bay Company and also as an interpreter. We had a very happy childhood and my dad instilled of us the value and the pride of being Métis. I lived a very happy life – was a happy child – we all were. My mother did a lot of sewing and we always had new parkas, new mittens, and mukluks, and so on. We always had adequate food as my mother was a very good cook. She could cook from scratch and that's something she taught me which I brought down to my own children. On January 15th, 1948, that all came to an end (p. 126).*

Indian Residential Schools (IRS) existed in Canada until 1996. It is well documented that Métis children attended both residential schools and the day programs run through the IRS. Funding was nonexistent through the federal government for Métis children who were forced to attend the schools; therefore "for far too many children, this meant that they were used as virtual slave labour" (p. 5). The collection Métis Memories of Residential School: A Testament to the Strength of the Métis (2004) by the Métis Nation of Alberta is one of the

few documents that published testimony from Métis girls who attended IRS. Documentation supports that the IRS schools saw Métis as "half-white" and therefore half civilized and often did not educate them as a result (p. 5). Further, to receive funding many churches identified Métis as "Indians' who "lived the Indian mode of life" given that many Métis were living as hunters, trappers and speaking the Cree language (p. 6).

The impact of the removal from kinship circles of Métis grandmothers, aunties and mothers can be particularly felt in the number of testimonies describing the day the girls first began menstruation while in residential school. In many of the narratives the women share vivid detailed accounts of the day they began their menses—revealing the degree of continuing trauma reverberating from these experiences.

> *I went there in 1944 or 1945 and it was the summertime of June. I think. Being in Grouard, Sister Clara, was a very mean nun, she was very mean. When I became a young girl, I think I was 12 or 13, I started menstruating. I went up to her, all the girls were sitting in silence there in the big room and I was crying and I told her something was wrong. She pulled my hair and said, 'has the Brothers been bothering you, have you been fooling around with the Brothers?' I didn't know what she was talking about and I'm crying and she got the scissors and just chopped all one side of my hair off in front of all the kids. I always remember that very clearly and it was Sister Clara that did it (Magee Shaw (age 71) St. Bernard IRS, 3 years, January 2004, p.8).*

Another account from an anonymous residential school survivor reveals the violence, sexual shaming and absence of ceremony:

> *One thing I remember, it was summer and I was bleeding like I was dying, bleeding to death. I went to one of the nuns and I says, 'I'm dying, I'm bleeding to death'. She hit me so hard, she knocked me out. When I came to, she threw a rag at me and she explained what was wrong with me (menstruation) and she says, 'you put that under your panties and you wear it and when it gets dirty you wash it and you dry it'. She gave me two: one to put on and one to keep clean. I asked the older girls what was wrong with me and they*

explained. When you start to form breasts, they gave you tight bras because it was a sin to have breasts. They push your breasts in to hide them (Anonymous, 63, IRS 6 years, January 2004, p. 38).

And a third account of neglect instead of motherly care:

When I had my period that first time, I told a nun, 'I'm bleeding/ She said, "why don't you just go and wait in the bathroom, wait for me there." She told me what to do after that but it was an hour or more that I had to wait there in the washroom. I was so scared I was bleeding to death maybe or something. (Anonymous female, 66, IRS, 10 years, January 2004, p. 89).

These stories are shared in their fullness to reveal the depth of sexual shaming, violence, neglect and harm done to Métis women and girls'—that continues to impact today. This deeply embodied and gendered violence included a loss of ceremony and access to the rites of passage for girls, and being together with Métis grandmothers, aunties and mothers in the sharing of these teachings.

These testimonies of violence are in sharp contrast to the teachings about Indigenous and Métis girls Rites of Passage shared by Métis/ Cree author Kim Anderson in the book Life Stages and Native Women. Anderson describes the berry fasting ceremonies and rites of passage that would have accompanied a young woman at the onset of menstruation (2011). It was also a time where Elder women would teach the girls about sexuality, dating and other aspects of adult woman life. Some girls would receive visions and along with "the power to heal, act as medicine people, or become other types of leaders" (p. 87). Anderson identified one Elder Rose, who received the teachings about menstruation at age 9 from her grandmother. "Rose was lucky to receive this information from her grandmother, as by the 1930's residential schooling, pressure from the church, and the repression of traditional practices had made it difficult to talk about sexuality or to acknowledge the transition to womanhood" (p. 90).

These stories of power and ceremony that Kim Anderson collected is in deep contrast to the fear and shame present in each of the IRS survivors' testimonies that instead reveal the violence experienced by the girls in the absence

of knowledge, alongside shaming of their bodies and spirits.

Contrast these stories with the love with which Métis Elder Maria Campbell describes ceremonies and Rites of Passage. Campbell describes:

> *Stories upon stories upon stories contain the family and tribal histories; these are the taboos and the laws of the people. There were naming ceremonies, walking out ceremonies. Ceremonies for a first tooth, for a first meal cooked, a first basket made and finally a ceremony to celebrate her passage into womanhood. The child was given kisaywatisowin, kindness, gentleness, and above all, a safe place to grow up (Lindberg, Campeau & Campbell, 2012, p. 95).*

In the testimony from the women about their experiences in residential school they described the breaking of family bonds, and attachment and the sense of loneliness and isolation, alongside stories of sexual violence. The testimony of Theresa Meltenberger, 79, Lac La Biche IRS, 5 years, January 2004, stands in sharp contrast to the important role of family, and sisters in survival described by Campbell and Anderson. "I'm put in one end and my sister put in the other end and this was kind of hard for me to accept. The Sister told me, "You'll go where I tell you and your sister is not going to protect you" (p. 27). Another Anonymous Métis woman in her testimony shared:

> *One time the nun got us girls upstairs. We gotta go to each room and strip naked so I went in that room. She told me to lie down and she threw a sheet on top of me and she says 'spread your legs'. She says, 'we're checking you to see if you had any sex with boys'. I was scared. How can you have sex with boys when you can't even see your own brother? (Anonymous, 63, IRS 6 years, January 2004, p. 39).*

Contrast this with the role of sisters, and parenting described by Métis Elder Maria Campbell:

> *Neepin is the summer, a time of growth, beauty and strength. The ceremony of passage has been completed and Iskwew, the woman takes her place in the circle of*

sisters. This is the time for love, passion, for birthing and parenting, for nurturing, providing, and protecting. It is a time of motherhood. A time when there was equality and balance when Grandmother owned half of the circle and her societies and ceremonies taught women to be fierce and courageous protectors and nurturers (Lindberg et al., 2012).

Métis writer, Maria Campbell's novel Halfbreed, is evidence that Canadian societal institutions—schools, police, media—created an environment in which Indigenous people or those with Indigenous ancestry, felt shame for who they were. Campbell's great-grandmother states: "They make you hate what you are" (Campbell, 1973, p. 90). Many Métis survivors describe the impact on their identity of the racism they experienced in residential school. IRS survivor Magee Shaw describes the racism,

Don't you ever talk about those savages around here, he'd say… that's my mom and dad. I told him I didn't have a father and he said "that savage" he used to call him that." That stayed with me in my mind, — this savage thing—even after I got out of the mission. It just seemed like when you talked about Indians, they were on welfare or drunks. I stayed away from them–I didn't bother with anybody because that is what I learned in the mission–that they were savages" (St. Bernard IRS, 3 years, January 2004, p. 8).

Even though this survivor spoke Cree, her statement is evidence of the dissociation from her Métis/Cree identity. Another Elder described how the racist and cultural genocide she experienced impacted her relationship with her father. "When I was there, they called my dad a savage and I thought that's why they put me in there–because my dad's a savage–it's his fault I am in here. I never saw the guy again, my dad, but I hated him because it's his fault I'm in here" (8).

The impact of child welfare removals is like that of the removal that happened during the IRS time. The testimony of Métis Elder Angie Crerar describes the removal of Métis children by the government she notes continues to this day:

How many times, the government in its knowledge and wisdom said: "Oh we're going

to take children and we're going to give them better life, we know what's best for them". They take away; take us away from our family. Many children were literally taken right out of their mother's arms. Many of them were born there, many of them came in as babies and with never a touch of love, a touch of affection or the idea that somebody cares for them. So many have committed suicide! So many have lived a life of destruction! So many of them looked for happiness in the wrong place! (p. 127).

The continued harm done through child removals to Métis families and communities is ongoing to this day. The 1987 inquiry findings into Richard Cardinal's death reveal one such story. Cardinal, who was placed in 28 different foster homes in his 14 years in the child welfare system, committed suicide near his last foster home at the age of 17. The documentary about his story, directed by Abenaki director Alanis Obomsawin, Cry from the Diary of a Métis Child, included his journal writings that he "never got what he needed most—to go home." (http://www.nfb.ca/film/richard_cardinal/). Almost 30 years later none of the 22 recommendations have been implemented from the report into Cardinal's death addressing systemic harm through courts, government, schools, child protection, hospitals and the media (Henton, D. 2013). As noted in British Columbia's McCreary Centre's research with respect to homelessness – Métis girls who have a relative who attended residential school, or who was in care are more likely to be homeless (Smith et al., 2015). The ongoing reverberation of dislocation from land and kin continues to this day.

2.6

IMPACT

VIOLENCE, TRAUMA & IMPACTS ON WELLNESS AND COPING

And they say today: "We're going to heal you." I'd like to know how in the heck they are going to heal us. How do they heal something that you endured? How can they make it up? There is no way you can make up for those thousands of boys and girls that are buried, who never knew a smile, never knew a hug, never knew those simple words that we all say to each other "I love you", and to heal. What is your version of healing? What is the government doing now? They spend a bunch of money mostly on that administration and you are supposed to heal yourself. They say: "We are going to heal you". I'd sure like to know how they are going to do that" (Angie Crerar, 68, Fort Resolution, IRS, 10 years, July 2004, p. 127).

Historical and ongoing colonial trauma has been repeatedly linked to mental health and wellness, including substance abuse and other survival coping responses (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Brave Heart, 2003; Cedar Project, 2008). It is a documented fact that Indian residential schools had a detrimental impact on Indigenous peoples, affecting the students who attended the schools, but also, often the rest of their communities and subsequent generations (Bombay et al., 2009; Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2014).

The term "intergenerational trauma" is defined as "the effects of sexual and physical abuse that were passed on to the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of Aboriginal people who attended the residential school system" (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2006; Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2014). Hadley Friedland points out that we might also reframe the notion of intergenerational trauma through an Indigenous law lens, so that in recognizing the historic and ongoing impacts of colonialism on Indigenous communities as protracted and purposeful state interventions on our ways of being and knowing we can call these impacts what they truly are: injustice (Friedland, 2018).

Métis feminist analysis of colonial violence considers trauma to be in response to the interlocking of colonial systems experienced at the individual and collective level. This definition resists Western medical model definitions of trauma that locate trauma and violence within individual bodies that are pathologized and in need of saving (Clark, 2016a, 2016b) and even justify removal of children from mothers based on diagnosis of trauma (Million, 2014; Clark, 2016a).

Violence and trauma are instead part of historic and ongoing racism and sexualized violence in systems such as child welfare, education, justice and the resultant, policies, programs and practices that have disrupted Métis kinship networks, connections to land and to community and care networks to support healing.

3

...generational abuse affects individual, family, and community spirit.

– Houle, 2004

3.0

FINDINGS

SHARING MEDICINE, SHARING BEADING

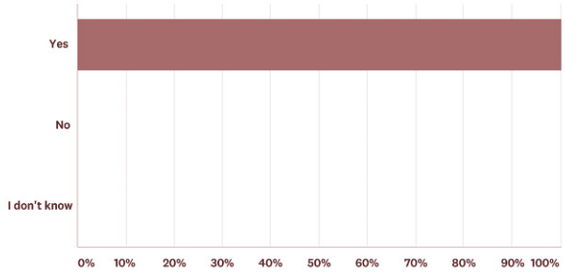
The narratives of the participants in the *Sashing our Warriors* survey are multi-dimensional. An analysis of survey stories, together with the narratives of Métis women and girls' truth-telling in their writing, in their sharing between sisters and friends, and in their formal testimony about residential school are shared in this report. These stories combine to form a larger narrative and shared meaning that both bears witness to the realities of ongoing gendered-colonialism and violence in the lives of Métis women and girls' but also centres their ongoing resistance and survivance. Métis women and girls' ways of knowing and lived experiences across the lifespan are shaped by a shared experience of racism, colonialism and by their relationships with land and kin.

In the absence of qualitative interviews or focus groups, the data from over 400 survey responses resulted in eight themes that are interconnected. First, violence was experienced across the lifespan at all ages, from childhood to late adulthood. Second, violence is intergenerational: mothers and grandmothers experiences impacted family systems and parenting. Third, participants revealed that there were not many safe spaces anywhere. The ubiquity of violence because of gendered colonialism and the introduction of patriarchy to Métis and Indigenous families, translated into disruption and trauma creating many and various opportunities for harm to be perpetrated. A fourth theme is defined by the notion that for many Métis women, violence was normalized. It includes the notion that witnessing violence against others is akin to experiencing violence. The fifth theme centered around silencing as another form of violence experienced that prevents healing and the ability to obtain justice. A sixth theme focused specifically on the experiences of Métis specific racism, bias and violence. The seventh theme reflects the lifelong trauma, impacts and outcomes for Métis women due to experiences with all types of violence. The final theme, and possibly the most important, is that of survival strategies detailed by many participants. Despite being asked, they told stories of resistance, survival and healing, which can inform potential programming and supportive measures going forward.

The *Sashing our Warriors* campaign shared the survey through a network of social media, personal invitation, a launch event and through a link directly on the MNBC website. 407 responses were gathered to 8 questions hosted on Survey

Q1 Given the information outlined above, do you consent to participating in this questionnaire?

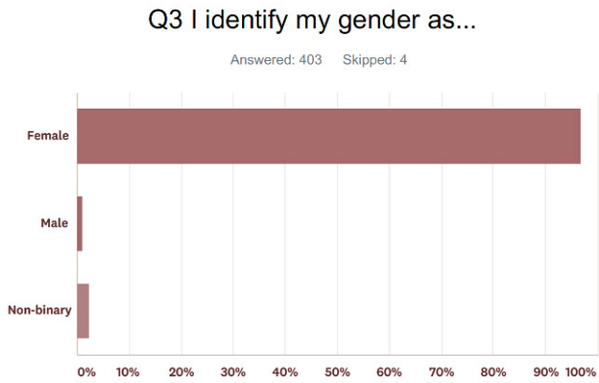
Answered: 400 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	100.00%	400
No	0.00%	0
I don't know	0.00%	0
TOTAL		400

Monkey. Consent was established at the beginning of the survey. It was described and disclosed, in an online consent form, the reasons and benefits of the survey and risks associated with sharing traumatic experiences. Participants were provided with crisis line numbers, urged to take care of themselves afterward if necessary, that their anonymity would be preserved, and identifiable information disclosed would be redacted from the transcript. The *Sashing our Warriors* team was listed to contact with questions, and it was disclosed to participants that participation was voluntary, that they would be able to withdraw their story at any time, if they decided to do so. Answering yes to the first question "Given the information outlined above, do you consent to participating in this questionnaire?" indicated their consent and that they understood the consent form details. A participant was not able to continue to complete the survey without answering yes to this first question.

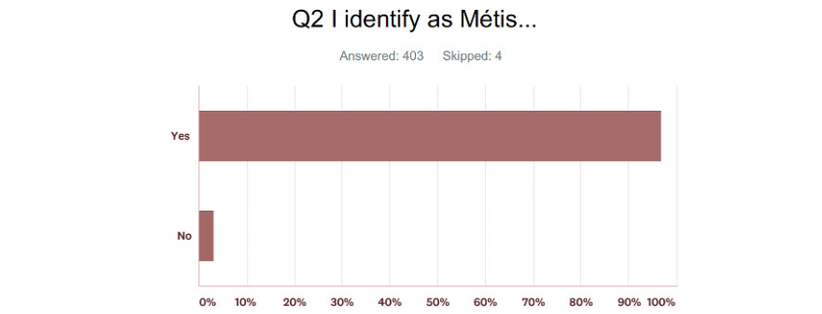
This report recognizes the importance of a decolonial understanding of consent—that recognizes that consent is ongoing and a dynamic process. Many of the testimonies reveal a deep embodied understanding of consent, one that is actively chosen. As one respondent of the *Sashing our Warriors* survey said "I'd rather not at this time, as my experiences just exhausted me to speak and think about it right now. Thank you



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	96.77%	390
Male	0.99%	4
Non-binary	2.23%	9
TOTAL		403

for your understanding!!" (Respondent 1, Question 8). Another indicated that "my experience is disturbing so I'll keep it light here. Not sure how much of the violence I witnessed and experienced was because I was Métis, if any at all" (R. 115, Q. 8). Another respondent's response reveals a deeply lived understanding of consent, power and disclosure. She writes, "I chose not to speak about these incidents because they affected others. I don't feel these incidents are completely my stories, and don't feel comfortable sharing" (R. 50, Q.8). Another echoed this, "I choose not to share at this time" (R. 78, Q. 8). In order to abide by our understanding of engaged consent, and due to the inability to return to the respondents to check ongoing consent for the long narratives presented by many respondents for inclusion in this report- we have chosen to present general themes and narratives that were indicative of many stories or short quotes that summarized these without revealing an individual's personal story. Our decolonial consent includes the ways in which we do witness their stories and the meanings shared—wrapping them in an intergenerational "felt knowledge" and love. Co-author Clark notes the importance of ceremony in witnessing this truth-telling:

This methodology brought tears, I went to the stories four times—offering sage, tobacco, wild rose, womens medicines, prayer and my dreams.



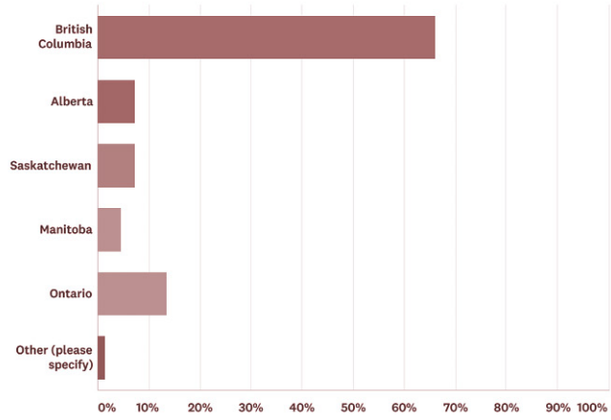
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	96.77%	390
No	3.23%	13
TOTAL		403

I offered them my love. I made tea. I listened to music. I offered them my witnessing. I offered them my accountability. I offered them my commitment to change. ReSister, sacred sister, for those who did not share, for those who took their stories to the spirit world with them. I hear you. I witness you. Somewhere the Métis sisters of this land are dancing in my dreams. I see them living in the between. They dance beside the river. (2021)

In addition to processes of consent, minimal demographic data was gathered, and respondents were required to choose to self-identify according to gendered categories created for the survey as follows: 96.78% of respondents identified as female; 2.23% of respondents as non-binary; and another 0.99% of respondents self-identified as male. It is not clear how many individuals in these categories may otherwise have self-identified across a more nuanced spectrum of gender identity. For example, we do not know, other than when specifically indicated, if the individuals who identified as non-binary may have preferred to specifically self-identify as Two-Spirit or Trans, or in some other way within the gender-diverse spectrum or otherwise, nor do we know if the respondents who self-identified as female or male may also have chosen to self-identify as cisgender or not. We acknowledge this degree of specificity with respect to gender identity is outside of the scope of the *Sashing our Warriors* survey results. However, we

Q4 In which Province do you currently reside?

Answered: 289 Skipped: 118



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
British Columbia	66.09%	191
Alberta	7.27%	21
Saskatchewan	7.27%	21
Manitoba	4.50%	13
Ontario	13.49%	39
Other (please specify)	1.38%	4
TOTAL		289

do want to recognize the specific experiences of those who did self-identify as non-binary and hold space for the experiences of Métis individuals who self-identify outside of the gender binary female/male and their stories experiences of violence as lived in a heteropatriarchal colonial society. Except for one response (R. 1, Q. 6) non-binary respondents' answers to the survey question may not appear on the surface the ways in which they were targeted for violence as a result of their gender identity. However, we are aware that gender-diverse individuals experience targeted violence and sexualized violence as part of their lived realities and one that is exacerbated by racism for people of colour and Indigenous people (Wilson, 2018; Holmes, Hunt and Piedalue, 2014).

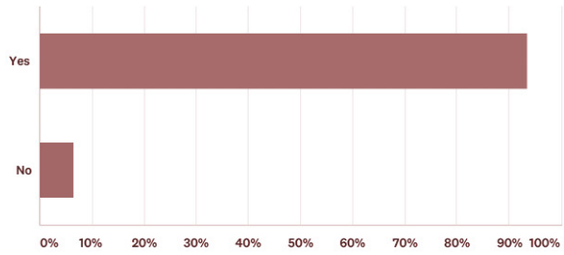
Question 2 related to Métis identity: 390 identified as Métis, and 13 completed the survey although they did not self-identify as such.

Question 4 asked respondents to indicate in which province they live currently. Overwhelmingly, the respondents reside in British Columbia, but the survey does not gather data regarding where they have lived their lives, or if in rural or urban settings. For programming development purposes, this is important to deliver programming that is rooted and based in local relations with land and place.

For the survey, violence was defined as physical, emotional, sexual, and/or financial.

Q5 Have you ever experienced violence? Note: Violence can be defined as physical, emotional, sexual, and/or financial.

Answered: 370 Skipped: 37



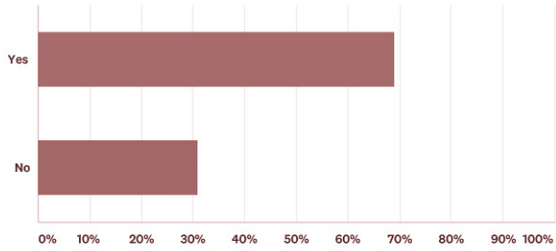
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	93.51%	346
No	6.49%	24
TOTAL		370

Questions about violence included Q. 5: Have you ever experienced violence? 346/370 respondents (93.51%) who answered said yes, and 24/370 answered no. There was a group (37/407) that chose not to answer this question, but the survey did not gather data regarding reasons for skipping the question. Nor did the survey ask participants their own definition of violence although several participants shared this in their answers. As one participant shared, "I hold abuse as actions which degrade someone and are never re-approached in healing" (R. 9, Q. 8).

Question 6 was open-ended, requesting participants to share personal experience(s) with violence. 322 respondents chose to share those stories. The following word cloud is a snapshot of terms aggregated from the numerous narrative responses to Question 6: If yes, please share your personal experience(s) with violence.

Q7 Have you ever witnessed violence against Métis women and/or girls within your own family? Note: Violence can be defined as physical, emotional, sexual and/or financial.

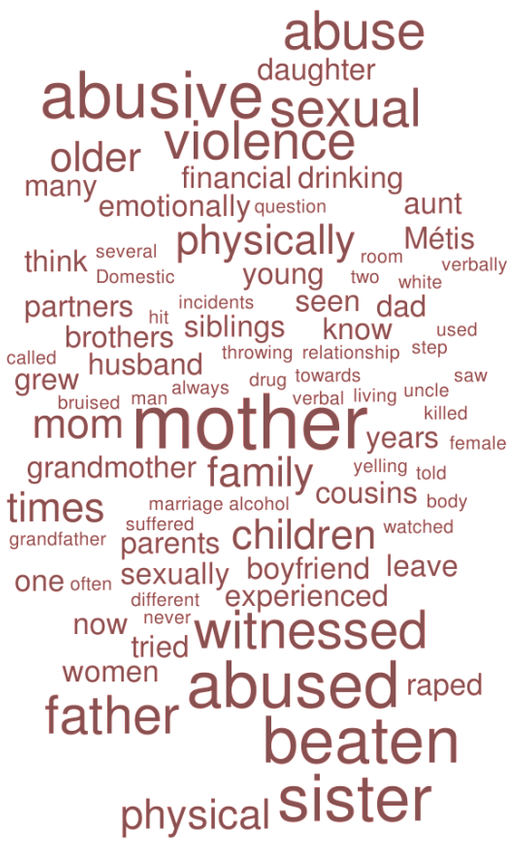
Answered: 353 Skipped: 54



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	69.12%	244
No	30.88%	109
TOTAL		353

The next two questions were specifically about witnessing violence. Question 7: Have you ever witnessed violence against Métis women and/or girls within your own family? This number is significant, but less than the percentage of respondents that experienced violence. 69.14% or 244 of 353 respondents said yes. Again, we do not have data regarding the reason for 54/407 respondent's decision not to answer the question.

Question 8. If yes, please share your experience(s) witnessing violence against Métis women and/or girls within your own family. It is notable that every single respondent who answered yes (244 respondents) in Question 7, chose to share their experiences of witnessing violence against women and/or girls in their own family.



3.1

INTERSECTIONAL

"ALL BEFORE HER 10TH BIRTHDAY:" INTERSECTIONAL VIOLENCE ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

The stories shared by respondents to the *Sashing our Warriors* survey, like the quote "all before her 10th birthday" (R. 214, Q. 8), indicate sustained and ongoing experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that began in early childhood—and for many continued throughout their life. The narratives weave together to reveal a story, but also the stories are a way of theorizing what Tanana Athabascan Dian Million (2014) describes as a "felt knowledge" of how racism, sexism, ageism, and sexualized violence come together and become normalized throughout the lifespan of Indigenous women and girls. A powerful example of this theorizing about the intersectional nature of violence across the lifespan is evidenced in the quote, "all aspects of violent physical, emotional, financial types of abuse by a very young age—*that is just so wrong…*" (R. 78, Q. 6 emphasis added). This is a form of embodied knowledge, a "felt theory"—that intersecting violence starting at a very young age and reverberating throughout the lifespan is "so wrong."

Another example of the interlocking experiences of violence across the lifespan is represented by the following quote: "I have experienced physical, financial, emotional and mental abuse by different people in my life at different times. At some times it was a mixture of these. It started very young in my home so it made it seem very normal as I grew up. It was hard to break the cycles that I kept falling into" (R. 284, Q. 6). Or another example: "I have experienced all of the listed forms of violence throughout my life" (R. 13, Q. 6).

Many of the respondents not only name the sustained and interconnected violence as present throughout their childhood, adulthood, and into their elder years. Several respondents said there were so many experiences of violence that it was challenging to describe just one or two incidents. As one respondent shared, "Physical, emotional, sexual, financial, mental. I have had numerous incidents from age 3 on to age 20. It was basically a continual reality so it's hard to describe one or two incidents." (R. 37, Q. 6). The narratives of violence shared were often long, detailed and named the age when the assault(s) happened and the relationship to the offenders. As one woman wrote, "my dad left and my step-dad came in the picture…I avoided him until the day he died. I am 52 and alone" (R. 74, Q. 6). This last quote reflects a major theme of the survey that emerged: abuse has lifelong effects that continue to impact the respondents detrimentally even after the abuse has stopped. In addition, emotional abuse is a common

theme that went alongside sexual abuse by family with lifelong impacts.

The early onset of abuse is present in many of the stories, with respondents sharing memories of experiencing and witnessing violence, in particular sexual abuse, that indicated they were small children, infants. The youngest memory shared of sexual violence is 18 months old (R. 38, Q. 6). "Starting at age 3" is repeated and again in the narratives of sexual violence. "From age 1-6 years" "When I was a child…." "I was a small child" "I was about 6", "My earliest memories include violence." Given the age of many of the assaults described in the stories shared, there is a deep sense of the interlocking factors of age and the dehumanization of children, along with the intergenerational nature of abuse, as a factor in the violence.

For many respondents, even if the violence stopped as they got older, the scars remained. One example is of the severe physical abuse and dehumanization that she and her siblings experienced at the hands of their father, noting that although the violence stopped as they got older the "scars for life" remained (R. 109, Q. 8).

Poverty is another important interlocking factor linked in most of the stories to experiences of abuse, violence, low self-worth and shame. For example, "We also suffered from financial abuse and most times had not enough food to eat, our clothes weren't always the best and were usually second hand. Because of the physical and financial abuse, I believe this led to me having low self-esteem and not always believing in myself." (R. 112, Q. 8). This financial abuse was also structural, as one narrative describes, "I also witnessed as a young child my mother being physically abused and financially struggling at the hands of her husband and financially and emotionally by the government" (R. 123, Q. 8).

These testimonies speak to just some of the ways that Métis identity particularly influenced experiencing and/or witnessing violence because of both colonial, white supremacist, heteropatriarchal conceptions of Métis women and girls, and also the socio-economic realities for Métis people as a result of historical and ongoing colonial state policies and practices.

3.2

INTERGENERATIONAL

"THE CIRCLES CONTINUING WITHOUT RELEASE": INTERGENERATIONAL VIOLENCE

Another important theme of intergenerational trauma and violence is echoed in many of the narratives. What one respondent described as, "There are intergenerational traumas that are manifesting and the circles continuing without release" (R. 97, Q. 8.). Another described this normalization of this violence in the past and present:

> *I grew up seeing this, it was normal. All of my Aunties were/are in abusive relationships… This was all normal to me. I grew up hearing the stories of the abusive (sic) they endured. They all faced racism, and lateral violence as well. I could go on and on and on… the abuse was/is terrible (R. 220, Q. 8).*

It is critical to situate the violence experienced by participants in the survey within the context of ongoing impacts of residential school and other sites of gendered-colonialism past and present in schools and other institutions in the lives of Métis families. It was and is terrible. Many of the respondents directly linked their mothers', grandmothers' residential school survival and the impact of both, the child welfare and colonial education systems, with the abuse they experienced and witnessed. Many of the stories shared linked the abuse and dislocation they experienced, from family, land, and kin with the residential school system. As one respondent's story and testimony reveal: "We were all physically and emotionally abused in my family growing up… we had a mother, who was a survivor of the residential school system. I have 11 siblings, but only 5 of us grew up together" (R. 14, Q. 8).

The degree of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse shared by participants in the survey, including the violence of witnessing this on sisters, aunties, and kin, reveals the ongoing legacy and reverberation of colonial violence in Métis families. Respondents also displayed a deep intersectional theorizing about violence, and the barriers to breaking the cycle of violence - including patriarchal blaming of women for the violence, financial dependence, lack of housing, and rurality. As one example amplifies, "… women being told it is their own fault by family members, either for not leaving him or getting themselves in that situation. It is not easy for a woman to leave especially if financially they are dependent on the men, or there is no available housing for them to live up north." (R. 97, Q. 8.).

Others theorized and understood that their mother's experiences of violence reverberated in their mother's parenting and their mother's choices of partners. Even when physical violence was not

present the use of threats of violence as a parenting approach continued. "I grew up in a home in which my own mother had survived much physical, sexual and emotional abuse. She was a single parent for us kids, and while she tried not to use hitting as punishment, she constantly threatened it. It is very real when one is afraid of the threats." (R. 12, Q. 6).

Many respondents described violence at the hands of Métis men, fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers. As one respondent shared, violence at the hands of Métis men that she witnessed: "Physical violence towards my daughter by her biological father. Physical and emotional violence towards my mother by her husband, both Métis" (R. 33, Q. 8). Another wrote, "Against myself. My father (who is Métis) was emotionally and psychologically abusive" (R. 68, Q. 8). "My Métis father was brutal and I understand his father was also prone to violence against his children" (R. 115, Q. 6). One respondent theorized about the abuse her mother experienced: "the men she dated treated her like a second-rate sexual object and servant. There were some elements of goodness in those relationships, but there were at least equal parts emotional, sexual and financial abuse. I hold abuse as actions which degrade someone and are never re-approached in healing" (R. 9, Q. 8).

As Métis scholar Houle (2004) found in her study on sexual abuse that "...generational abuse affects individual, family, and community spirit. The young women in this study have not only had to fight their individual abuses but they also live with the experience of their parent's unhealed abuses and that of the communities." (p. 26). Similarly, in the *Sashing our Warriors* surveys, women and girls shared many stories of sexual, physical, and emotional violence experienced within their families, including witnessing this violence on their mothers, sisters, aunties, over and over again. This abuse is a direct result of colonialism and the impacts of residential school. All the women survivors in the Métis testimony from residential schools shared about the impact the experience had on their capacity to love and parent. The loss of relationships with family, land and kin is strong throughout the testimonies of the Métis girls who attended residential school. Many of the Métis women survivors of residential schools expressed this direct impact on their parenting and the desire to break the intergenerational cycle of abuse:

> *I didn't know how to raise kids. The way I thought was best, I raised my kids the convent way – I beat them and I hit them – like I was*

hit. I abused my kids because that's how I learned and they suffered a lot through me. I tell them, I apologize now, I'm sorry but I don't tell them why because I don't want to destroy their lives. I don't want them to raise their kids like I raised them. I don't want the kids to be hit. I want the kids to be loved, to hold them on the quiet nights and be there for them. To hold them, that's important for me. My grandkids, that's what I live for now, they keep me going and I love them. Breaking the cycle is really important because you are beginning to recognize what happened to you. You don't want that happening to your children or grandchildren" (Anonymous, 63, IRS 6 years, January 2004, p. 41).

Another testimony shares a similar impact on parenting and their capacity to express love resulting from their experiences at residential school:

As a parent I really lacked parenting skills because I didn't know how to be a parent. I believe my kids suffered because of my parenting style. I was rigid you know, and didn't know how to show the kids love because I never knew love myself" … I was looking for someone to say" I love you", but it was never there (Donna Roberts, 58, St. Henri IRS, 10 years, November 2003, p.53).

The sense of ongoing loneliness and alienation from self and from others stemming from experiences of violence is also present in the testimonies from the survivors of residential schools as well as the *Sashing our Warriors* survey. Many of the stories from the survey share a deep disconnection and loneliness, as one survivor shared, "Today I have a hard time trusting people. I'm very antisocial and I keep to myself" (R. 93, Q. 6). Another respondent theorizes about aloneness as a form of safety and protection reporting that after the abuse she experienced in relationships she prefers to be alone in order to be protected from male violence "I am 56 now and still have to stick up for myself to be a woman but never married, happy to live alone, less stress, not all men abuse but a lot do" (R. 130, Q. 6 emphasis added). Another respondent's testimony also reveals the survival strategy found in walking away: "My first memory of being sexually abused was at the age of 4 years… The violence never stopped in my life until I walked away from my life and started over" (R. 21, Q. 6).

3.3

LOCATING RISK

"I WASN'T SAFE ANYWHERE": LOCATING RISK FOR SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ABUSE, AND INCEST

All respondents described multiple male offenders across their lifetime and feeling unsafe and targeted for sexualized violence in multiple spaces, and often the testimonies included direct theorizing about patriarchy and sexism as part of the violence. Risk of sexual violence is not situated within Métis women and girls nor within Métis families and communities but is instead the direct result of gendered-colonialism and the introduction of patriarchy within Métis families. The linking of colonization and patriarchy with sexual violence is also evident in the testimony from the *Sashing our Warriors* survey respondents. One respondent shared that the extreme physical, sexual and financial violence she witnessed of her mother would continue until her mother submitted, "because men are the master and should be never questioned…" (R. 23, Q. 8 emphasis added).

Another respondent theorized that witnessing abuse contributed to the intergenerational abuse within her family. She herself experienced spousal abuse by her husband, her mother experienced the same, and additionally, her daughter experienced and witnessed it, because of the patriarchal attitudes perpetuated in society: "He was raised as a chauvinist and I believe it was inter-generational abusive attitudes towards women" (R. 206, Q. 8). Another respondent also theorized about patriarchy and its impact in her life, wondering if this form of sexism was abuse. She described the "intimidation'' to conform to my fathers' views on the world which was followed by anger if his views were ever questioned" (R. 125, Q. 6). Another theorized, "A lot of sexual violence because of entitled men who particularly prey on vulnerable women" (R. 37, Q. 6). Another individual shared that, in addition to many rapes, she experienced "too many sexual verbal assaults to count. I am a 60-year-old woman and in those days, we were just to put up with it. Many men are just gross pigs who just don't get it, they believe women are here for their benefit…" (R. 227, Q. 6).

Most, if not all, of the respondents, shared stories of violence that occurred across their lifetime, in multiple spaces including public spaces, online, schools, work, and within familial and intimate relationships. As one respondent wrote, "I wasn't safe ANYWHERE…" (R. 249, Q. 6 emphasis added). Many shared about the interlocking experiences of racism with sexual harassment in public spaces, including transit, taxis and by Uber drivers. Examples included,

"verbal sexual harassment from strangers, unwanted touch on bus" (R. 40, Q. 6), "sexually assaulted on subway in Montreal and Toronto" (R. 91, Q. 6); in grocery stores "was called a drunken Indian by a complete stranger while shopping…" (R. 89, Q. 6). Another described "a beer can was thrown at me from a car, and they screamed 'go back to the reservation, squaw" (R. 271, Q. 6).

Others shared stories of sexual violence at the hands of teachers, doctors, RCMP officers, foster parents and others in positions of trust. In fact, the interlocking of child welfare experience, with poverty, and not having "a home" resulting in risk for sexualized violence. As evidenced by this respondent's theorizing, "As a child growing up in foster care and a ward of the superintendent of child welfare, I experienced violence towards me, sexual abuse, and financial hardship. I often went hungry as a youth because I had no money or a home to call home" (R. 193, Q. 6).

Many of the stories contain a deep self-witnessing and naming of the lifetime of violence and sexualized violence in all spaces moved through. These are exemplified by one woman's testimony about the abuse she experienced in private spaces and in her home - the sexual abuse by her grandparents, and her father, alongside the lifelong neglect, emotional and physical abuse and the witnessing of abuse - to the abuse in public spaces "sexual harassment, online threats of abuse and violence, assault and stalking on streets, in public spaces, and on transit from adult men and from boys starting at 10 years old throughout to adulthood. Sexual assault and harassment from teachers, peers, and from own dates/boyfriends starting around grade 6 through adulthood" (R. 38, Q. 6).

These experiences have had lifelong impacts on participants' identities. As one respondent said, before telling the story of her many assaults: "sexualized violence has been a part of my entire life. It has shaped who I am as an adult today, informed the choices I have made and continues to impact me as a wife and mother… Sexualized violence transcends poverty and education. I don't know why me? —and why over and over and over, but I have often reflected that men see Indigenous women and girls as disposable and target us. This is my story: At the age of 6…" (R. 36, Q. 6). Many stories contain a deep self-witnessing and acknowledgment of sexualized violence in every and all spaces, and across their lifespan. As one woman shared about sexualized violence in all

spaces she moved through along with physical abuse, emotional abuse, "sexual harassment, online threats of abuse and violence, assault and stalking on streets, in public spaces, and on transit from adult men and from boys starting at 10 years old throughout to adulthood." (R. 38, Q. 6). This respondent also highlights the reality of not being safe anywhere or from anyone, "Sexual assault and harassment from teachers, peers, and from own dates/boyfriends starting around grade 6 through adulthood" (R. 38, Q. 6). Her observations are significant evidence of recognition that although some people are supposed to be safe and those you can turn to for help, such as teachers or intimate partners, she acknowledges that even these individuals in her life abused her. This is a poignant personal realization of the betrayal felt when people who are supposed to be safe cause harm and the lifelong consequences that can result in one's ability to trust and form relationships.

Experiences of continual sexualized violence included daily experiences of sexism, alongside sexual abuse, incest, experienced in the home by people who should have been trusted protectors. Most of the respondents shared childhood sexual abuse and violence including rape and abuse from male family members. Abuse and incest at the hands of male family members was a major theme in the survey responses. As one woman described it, "I got raped by my family" (R. 240, Q. 6). Fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, brothers, cousins, the stories contain ongoing and horrific details of sexual violence from a very young age—often the earliest memories of rapes and sexual violence—at the hands of family, often one story after another. One respondent wrote, "sexually abused by addict family members continuing the cycles they experienced...by every single family member my entire life..." (R. 148, Q. 6).

The narratives of sexual abuse, physical abuse, spiritual abuse, and racism all intersect in each woman's testimony. As one woman said, "too many incidents to document" (R. 113, Q. 6). Most of the responses included vivid details of the assaults, in particular, sensory data indicating the memory is stored as trauma. These stories with the full details are not told here out of respect for engaged consent processes, but all the stories were witnessed and held with sacred love. They join with the other documented stories of violence shared by Métis residential school survivors, they come together as in tributaries of

water, coming together to tell a story of sustained gendered, colonial and sexualized violence, but more importantly they come together with their strength, their survival, their lived theorizing and intimate knowledge of resistance, of safety, and consent.

3.4

NORMALIZATION

"I GREW UP SEEING THIS IT WAS NORMAL"— THE NORMALIZATION OF VIOLENCE AND WITNESSING OF VIOLENCE

Many respondents shared detailed stories of the normalization of violence in their life and shared about experiences that often are not seen as violence in particular witnessing violence and silencing of violence. In the words of one respondent, "I grew up seeing this—it was normal." Further, witnessing violence often goes alongside experiencing it—and these narratives cannot be easily separated. For the purpose of this report, it is important to note, the *Sashing Our Warriors* survey asked separately about experiences of witnessing violence and did not ask about lateral violence or silencing - but these were named throughout the narratives. Witnessing violence is also experiencing violence—these experiences come together to underpin the lifespan of Métis women and girls. More than half of the respondents, over 220/407 Métis women and girls chose to share stories of witnessing violence. All the narratives shared reveal the deep intersections of violence in their lives. Many of the 220 respondents, who shared their experience of witnessing violence, describe witnessing violence against their mothers at the hands of their fathers, stepfathers, and boyfriends—testimonies included 220 stories of witnessing violence against mothers, aunties and sisters—narratives revealing deep familial intersections of violence in the lives of Métis women and girls. The abuse witnessed is often extremely violent including rapes of their mothers, sisters, as well as traumatic physical assaults. This abuse is multiple and various, including physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse. Most of the respondents described experiences of financial abuse that they witnessed of their mothers, combined with physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse as evidenced in this quote: "Growing up my father was abusive towards my mother, and still is to this day...He has not physically abused her in many years, but the emotional abuse has to be worse for her" (R. 10, Q. 8). Others described partners who took advantage of their finances: "I have seen within my own family of my aunts being sexually abused. Beaten up for their pay cheque. Told they were worthless and put down" (R. 56, Q. 8).

Again, like residential school survivors' testimonies, *Sashing Our Warriors* survey responses reveal the cost of witnessing violence combined with sharing one's own experiences of violence (a form of witnessing as well). The reverberation of these memories is present in all the stories and with visceral details that are graphic and difficult to witness. In addition, the

memories continue to be experienced in vivid details, evidence of post-traumatic stress for many of the respondents. As one *Sashing Our Warriors* respondent said "My mother is a survivor of brutal domestic abuse for many years. The memories of her trying to protect herself and me—still impact me to this present day" (R. 16, Q. 8). One respondent's story reminds us that witnessing violence is not just with our eyes, but with all our senses as she describes hearing the violence of her uncle beating her aunt. Respondents also described witnessing the aftermath of violence alongside a deep intersectional theorizing, a form of "felt theory" about violence, and the barriers to breaking the cycle of intergenerational violence (Million, 2014). As evidenced in this quote, "I have also witnessed many women being told it is their own fault by family members, either for not leaving him or getting themselves in that situation. It is not easy for a woman to leave especially if financially they are dependent on the men, or there is no available housing for them... (R. 97, Q. 8.).

3.5

SILENCING

"DON'T TATTLE-TALE": INTERGENERATIONAL SILENCING OF VIOLENCE

"...no one ever believed Halfbreeds" ...
(Campbell, 2019, p. 102)

It is important here to say that many respondents experienced other individuals doing nothing to protect them from harm, and in fact as demonstrated in the above quote perpetrating more violence through structural inaction, or through the lateral violence of blaming them for the abuse. The system and the colonial policies are the source of silencing generation after generation is what Hadley Friedland calls "intergenerational injustice" (Friedland, 2019, p. 102) Even when violence is disclosed, the response of parents and caregivers, and the criminal justice, education, or child welfare system, also reveals the barriers to disclosures to seeking help. One respondent shared details of sexualized violence that began in childhood and continued through adolescence. Even though she reported the violence to the "justice" system, her parents were told that "...the criminal justice system was not an appropriate venue for a child and that it would be more traumatizing for me." Another young woman shared a horrific abduction and rape by several men where after she felt treated like a suspect rather than a victim by police:

When I got help the police came and I felt as though I was a suspect rather than a victim. I remember being interrogated at a time when I should have been consoled. I felt angry that they were almost blaming me and every word I said was scrutinized... (R. 143, Q. 6).

Fear, alongside threats of death and harm to self and others, is also a factor in the silencing and not feeling comfortable to disclose abuse. Others sought justice as adults, often with fear of death. One respondent shared that she finally reported violence, by her partner, who beat her with a weapon: "I had to obtain a restraining order while the case went through the courts. He received a mild punishment of community service" (R. 80, Q. 6). One respondent described that even when violence was witnessed by an OPP officer in a bar, he "said it's our fault for Métis metis (Indigenous) that it happened" (R. 85, Q. 6). As one respondent described the feeling as "...this threat of fear" (R. 12, Q. 6). Many of the respondents shared that they feared they would die: "I feared he was going to kill me" (R. 34, Q. 8).

This response of blame, indifference and racism is echoed in the response of educators to another respondent's racist abuse in school: "I was repeatedly physically and verbally bullied while

attending colonial-based grade school and called fat squaw and beached orca. When I asked for assistance from teachers I was told, "Don't tattle tale." I was suicidal by the 4th grade. Mother spoke to the school principal and nothing was done to stop the abuse" (R. 89, Q. 6).

This statement reveals a lived theory about violence and patriarchy, but also a powerful testimony to the truth of the silencing in a colonial rape culture. One young woman describes her own process of shame and silencing after a rape at age 18: "...for a long time I had blamed myself for the incident that I shouldn't have accepted the ride home, that I should have fought harder, that I accepted the drinks and was flirty... etc... looking back now I should have reported it. It was enough for me to have said no repeatedly" (R. 219, Q. 6).

Some Métis women scholars have written about their understanding of the Cree term "*Kiyam*," meaning "never mind, leave it alone" (Cardinal & LeClaire, 1998, Houle, 1996) as being used to silence stories of sexual abuse. This erasure and silencing of violence and sexual assault experiences is normalized in response to gendered-colonialism and rape culture. It also implies that for an individual to share the story of violence and/or sexual assault, breaks with established colonial patriarchal community norms. Many of the stories shared in the *Sashing our Warriors* surveys were detailed and sensory in nature, indicating a strong violence/trauma narrative, and were likely previously undisclosed. As one respondent described, "There is a long story of sexual abuse on my fathers' side as well that no one really talks about" (R. 156, Q. 8, emphasis added). Others did disclose their abuse by a family member to another family member or trusted adult and were blamed: "When I did, I was told it was my fault and I wasn't allowed to tell anyone... to this day I still haven't seeked proper help in fear of the backlash my family will put me through" (R. 213, Q. 6). Another example, a young woman disclosed sexual violence to her adoptive mother who did not believe her: "[S]he said I was probably lying or was asking for it" (R. 264, Q. 6). Several respondents described not reporting, as "I thought it wouldn't matter" (R. 77, Q. 6).

Another factor impacting sharing is the feeling of shame: "...out of shame I never told anyone until a few years ago" (R. 23, Q. 6). "I experienced sexual abuse from a family friend but never spoke of it to anyone due to the great shame I felt about myself after" (R. 176. Q. 6). Another

respondent echoes this:

[N]ot only was I sexually assaulted, I was then shamed by people in our group of friends who did not believe me and decided to take his word over mine. I believe I was not taken seriously because I was a female. People chose his side over mine solely because he is a man and because that is the way our society is set up to react to accusations of violence (R. 82, Q. 6 emphasis added).

There is a strong resonance throughout all the stories shared that no one has ever asked about the stories, that there is a reason no one is telling, no one is asking, no one wants to hear. As one respondent said, "I choose not to share at this time" (R. 78, Q. 8). Decolonizing rape culture is also about decolonizing consent. Disclosure and testimony is a process of choice. It is important to remember that choosing to not share is not the same as not ever being asked, of being silenced, or not being included in spaces where you could choose to share and disclose.

3.6

RACISM

"BUT THAT IS ANOTHER STORY": MÉTIS-SPECIFIC RACISM, LATERAL VIOLENCE

The *Sashing Our Warriors* survey did not specifically ask about racism or lateral violence, yet the survey participants disclosed many instances of this type of lateral violence, and Métis-specific racism is another lifelong theme present in the narratives. Many of the testimonies reveal experiences of deep racism alongside sexual, physical and emotional violence experienced. The narratives further reveal how sexism, ageism, racism, and caring status came together in the violence. One example that captures this shared experience, is "I have experienced physical, sexual & emotional violence within my family. I grew up in the catholic school system where racism, physical and emotional abuse were part of my daily life from kindergarten to grade eight. Daily the nuns and teacher had something to say about Indians." (R. 159, Q. 6). Another respondent names experiences of racism, alongside the sexual and physical violence throughout her life - and her statement reveals the sometimes-invisible nature of racism as violence, "I am not sure if racism counts as violence, but I've been called racial slurs (R. 39, Q. 6). Other participants shared about lateral violence and racism from other Indigenous women. One participant shared: "I have been told directly to my face, by a First Nations woman who is a complete stranger, that the only time she would ever lift a gun would be towards a Métis" (R. 286, Q. 6).

Many of the stories also reveal the continued reverberation of the residential school genocide and racism through the use of "savage" and the need to wash or clean this away, as well as the specific nature of dehumanization of themselves or their female relations because they are Métis. One example is, "My Uncle... (he would) put my aunt down for following our culture, he'd tell her we were dirty people because of our native roots" (R. 136, Q. 8).

Emotional abuse, racism, and hate were named in most of the testimonies alongside the other violence from home, intersectional violence was also experienced in schools, employment and public spaces. For example: "Many times in high school I was targeted with sexualized and racialized bullying. Called names such as slut, dirty squaw, etc. As an adult, I was sexualized and racialized" (R. 104, Q. 6).

Just like the latter quote from a respondent, many of the narratives clearly identified the interlocking of racialized and gendered violence as revealed in respondents' descriptions of violence by both white men and Métis men. In the words

of one of the respondents "essential enslavement of my Métis grandmother by her white husband" (R. 26, Q. 8). Another said, "Ongoing verbal and emotional abuse towards my mother (a Métis woman) by her partner (a white male)" (R. 41, Q. 8). "I saw it with my father who was white against my mother, she is Métis" (R. 55, Q. 8). Another said, "My father was non-Native. He did not understand what my mother had survived, and why she was such a shut—down person… There were some elements of goodness in those relationships, but there were at least equal parts emotional, sexual, and financial abuse "(R. 9, Q. 8).

The Métis-specific sexualized and racist violence is also repetitive, intergenerational, with many offenders and many victims impacted in each statement. For example, one respondent describes that her abuser also then abused her cousins 20 years later. "By the same white guy (as me) 20 years later to his granddaughters… my little cousins" (R. 69, Q. 8).

One Métis youth, adopted to white parents, described horrific abuse, racism at home, school and in the community. "There are many more incidents like this in my life, and I wonder what other Métis have suffered, worse than I have, I am sure. It's no picnic being native/metis and growing up on the prairies. That is why I will never go back there even for a visit" (R. 264, Q. 6). The violence also results in Métis family shame about Métis identity. As one respondent said: "Being Métis was hidden from our family because my grandpa was ashamed of grandma having the lineage in her family. Grandpa was very abusive emotionally to grandma in the home." (R. 228, Q. 6).

Many narratives describe the lifelong impacts of the school system experiences of racism and hatred, for example, "one other teacher who was a nun and told stories of how the natives were stupid, lazy, etc. I gave up on school… being told you could not play with someone because you were a dirty Indian. I heard that a lot. No wonder I have trouble making friends" (R. 264, Q. 6).

Even for those who were not certain they experienced Métis-specific racism; it was evident that survey respondents attempted to contextualize their experiences through their Métis identity. "My experience is disturbing so I'll keep it light here. Not sure how much of the violence I witnessed and experienced was because I was Métis if any at all" (R. 115, Q. 8). Another respondent described impacts including disconnection from home and community, "There are many more incidents like this in my life, and I wonder what

other Métis have suffered, worse than I have, I am sure. It's no picnic being native/metis and growing up on the prairies. That is why I will never go back there even for a visit (R. 264, Q. 6).

Another narrative reveals some survival strategies Métis women used across a lifetime dealing with all the themes that this report highlights - and points to areas for further research with respect to lateral violence. The respondent describes an urge to flee home at a very young age because of violence—including fearing for her life, "when I was 13, I ran away and was homeless for about a year. I experienced sexual violence many times—…. once I got my life in order, I made sure never to let that happen to me again. While I've experienced verbal racist abuse and inappropriate sexual comments since then, I have been able to keep myself and family safe since my teenage years. However, I have experienced lateral violence—but that is another story (R. 30, Q. 6).

3.7

TRAUMA

"I DON'T THINK I EVER SAW HER SMILE": LIFELONG IMPACTS OF TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE

Similar to the testimony from the women who survived residential school, where Métis women described the ongoing impacts of the violence they witnessed as girls, the stories from the survey respondents indicate that their experiences of violence still impact them today. As one respondent of the *Sashing Our Warriors* survey said "I'd rather not at this time, as my experiences just exhausted me to speak and think about it right now. Thank you for your understanding!!" (Respondent 1, Question 8). Another respondent's response reveals a deeply lived understanding of consent, power and disclosure. She writes, "I chose not to speak about these incidents because they affected others. I don't feel these incidents are completely my stories, and don't feel comfortable sharing" (R. 50, Q.8). Another echoed this, "I choose not to share at this time" (R. 78, Q. 8).

Many of the respondents linked the violence of childhood with survival strategies that often led to greater violence. One woman, whose story is short but powerful, links a trajectory of sexual abuse in childhood to survival sex on the streets where she stated she "experienced violence daily. Lost a friend to Robert Pickton" (R. 88, Q. 6). She ends her story with the assertion that she is now safe "currently in a safer relationship, safer friends, safer workplace, no more need for public transit" (R. 38, Q. 6). Another respondent also suggested the impacts of violence and the freedom from violence sometimes is only found in the death of an offender.

Most, if not all, respondents described the physical health impacts of the violence including severe physical and sexual abuse resulting in multiple broken bones, jaws, unwanted pregnancies, suicide attempts, fractured ribs, nerve damage. The physical results and surgery from the injuries were severe. This testimony and many others reveal that interactions with the healthcare system, in particular front line responders, are pivotal and important in the testimonies, because health care providers are often the first witnesses to the physical impacts of the violence. One example is of the severe physical abuse and dehumanization that she and her siblings experienced at the hands of their father, noting that it stopped as they got older. "...My Mom cried but she didn't do anything, scars for life" remained (R. 109, Q. 8).

The mental health impacts are clearly delineated throughout the survey responses. Many shared that they have suffered from depression, "suffering from PTSD" "extreme anxiety and

PTSD" and other emotional wounds. One survivor described how her rape by her father still impacts her today, even though upon disclosure to her mom as a teenager, they left him, "...but I was left to deal with the nightmares on my own...still have emotional wounds not healed" (R. 160, Q. 6).

Others shared that they kept the abuse they witnessed silent for years—finally breaking the silence as adults or sharing with mothers, or sisters. As one respondent described the impacts on Métis joy and happiness: "My mother went through a horrible marriage when I was about 5-10 years old. I don't think I ever saw her smile."

3.8

HEALING

"I HAVE PERSEVERED! YOU HAVE NOT TAKEN MY PRIDE!" RESISTANCE & HEALING

she is
the healing
not the hurt

she is
the knowing
not unknown
—River Woman, Katherena Vermette

3.8.1 "They were known to be fighters" Stories of Resistance and Survival

Halfbreeds [are] quick-tempered—quick to fight, but quick to forgive and forget" (Campbell, 1973, p. 25). *Halfbreeds* are "noisy, boisterous, and gay" (Campbell, 1973, p. 111). Although not directly asked about their coping and resistance strategies, like the testimony of survivors of residential school, the survey participants wove stories of resistance, survival and healing alongside their testimonies of violence. As one respondent shared about the Métis specific violence she experienced, alongside discrimination because she is female at work revealing a deeply intersectional understanding of violence—its intergenerational nature and its combining of gender with racism: "Yes just being Métis I have been physically emotionally sexually spiritually abused. Raped, beaten like my mother. assault on my whole being. Even now I have not been chosen in job positions because I am female...So the road I walk is always changing abuse makes you adaptable stronger and keep moving on (R. 75, Q. 6).

Moving on, or running away, is a consistent strategy of resistance and survival present in the narratives from residential school through to the *Sashing our Warriors* respondents. "Both Métis grandmothers ran away from home at 14 to escape abuse from their fathers, and Residential and Day School" (R. 26, Q.8). Some describe moving to a different province to escape abusive families or partners. This survival strategy of mobility is an example of resistance for survival—with short term gains (protection from abuse) but long-term consequences as it results in the removal from community and culture. A respondent described leaving home when she was 11 after her childhood years of witnessing her mothers abuse and experiencing it herself "I left one day when I was 11 and I haven't gone back to his side of the family:" (R 219, Q. 8). This story reveals not only the harm of witnessing violence, never seeing her mother smile and the direct threat to her own physical survival. But the story also reveals survival strategies and healing,

through the assistance of a *lady*, running away, and then later, the theorizing and naming violence to understand.

For many Métis girls running away to the street was a resistance strategy of survival, although the streets brought more violence. As one respondent shared: "My biological family became too abusive that by 14, family became the street—my street sisters and brothers daily were violently abused in all the ways as was I" (R. 44, Q. 8). Another survivor described the extreme violence she and her sister, as well as her mother, experienced at the hands of her father. She further reveals that survival is found in leaving—running. "We would leave the house when we were older! To wait until he sobered up!" (R. 35, Q. 8). This testimony reveals the impact age has on vulnerability as it relates to survival for Métis girls. Many run away when old enough to leave.

Similar to running away, many Métis women and girls describe how relationships were both exit strategies, as well as sites of harm and violence. One survivor of intergenerational violence in the *Sashing our Warriors* survey describes the survival of her mother—in being "shut-down" and in relationships necessary due to the financial abuse of her father. The interlocking of financial survival with relationships and violence is present in many stories.

Several respondent's stories describe using ingenuity, intelligence, and the power of support networks in order to get out of bad situations. Sometimes the source of support may have come from the State, even though there are many narratives of the justice system failing. Survival in many cases comes down to choice and to agency, and whatever form of support a person can turn to when they are in need. Cultivating an acknowledgement of the living reality of what choice and agency may look like in each situation for each individual, even when the ability to exercise that choice and agency is limited, is essential to honouring the choices people have to make in order to survive in moments—whether that is turning to informal networks or relying on agents of the state. (Hunt, 2015). One respondent remembered feeling as though she was going to be killed by her abusive partner. She secretly called 911 "I called 911 and just let them listen. He soon took the phone away and the police got there soon enough to take him away" (R. 71, Q. 6). This narrative reflects strength and ingenuity. It also illustrates the important role of the justice system in providing safety from violence. Too

many narratives describe the failure of the state—child welfare or justice—to provide safety especially in childhood. So, it is integral to hear stories like this and others: "thankfully I was able to escape the situation and received help from the RCMP" (R. 68, Q. 6).

Survival is also found in strategies of dissociation, burying memories and numbness and hypervigilance are apparent in many statements from the residential school to the narratives shared in the *Sashing our Warriors* survey. One of the respondents describes a strategy of hypervigilance "I have learned to avoid this (violence) from watching what type of situation/personality to avoid" (R. 5, Q. 8).

Other respondents describe coping strategies manifested on and through the bodies of Métis women and girls, including coping through eating disorders, substance misuse, sexual exploitation, sex trade work, and other body-based coping and survival strategies. Another described that after her rape as a teen "...I got into hard drugs and liquor, at the time I wasn't aware I used those as my coping strategies after being raped" (R. 77, Q. 6). One respondent shared her repeated sexual assaults by a cousin "...I sexually exploited myself to survive—I was a nobody and family was not around to help" (R. 108, Q. 6).

Speaking up, fighting, and challenging violence were also strategies. One respondent detailed hiding from a predator before she was even four years old: "I have had to literally fight my way out of abuse" (R. 99, Q. 6). This testimony not only speaks to early experiences with predators, but also a felt sense of needing to survive and fight. One respondent shared a story of witnessing violence by her father against her mother and "I remember being very small and yelling at my dad to stop hurting her, *but he wouldn't listen.*" Another described witnessing the physical abuse of her aunties as well as them coming to her mom for support and care, revealing strategies of informal networks of care that make up informal justice. Another experience is similar, describing the important role of sisterhood in survival and healing—but also at times, not enough: "My family claims a matriarchal family and the women stay together to try and help each other out of difficult situations. I had several Aunts that did not, or were not able, to get out of the situation they were in..." (R. 63, Q. 8). Another respondent also named how she witnessed them fighting for survival. "All of my Aunties were/are in abusive relationships. ...Even

though they suffered from physical, emotional, verbal and sometimes sexually abuse by their partners, they were all extremely violent. They were known to be fighters" (R. 220, Q. 8).

3.8.2 Animating Intergenerational love and healing: Surrounding violence with Métis women's love

> *As far as my life and my memory goes I love more now than I've ever loved before, because love is precious and if you lived the same kind of life that I did, it is the only thing you got to cling to" (Angie Crerar, 68, Fort Resolution, IRS, 10 years, July 2004, IRS, p. 128).*

Along with the disclosures of sexual abuse, violence and fighting for survival shared by participants in the survey each women and girl' and gender-diverse individuals' story is embedded within an intergenerational web of Métis women's resistance, love and journey towards healing. The importance of love, and reconnection, in particular Métis love in healing is found throughout the testimonies of the survivors of residential schools. Again, and again in the testimony from the Métis women who survived residential schools is the testament to love as healing, in particular the intergenerational love between a grandmother and grandchildren - and breaking the colonial harm of frozen emotions. As one residential school survivor stated,

Just lately in the past, maybe five or six years ago–now I'm strong in my affection–you know, to show it. With my brothers, sisters, my kids, and my grandkids–now I show them that I love them–it's ok to give them a hug. It's okay now because like I said, there was no affection before. I'm learning to show that in my own time" (Poitras, 2004).

This Métis residential school survivors' testimony speaks to the desire to surround our children with love and to break the cycle of violence and abuse in Métis families. "I want the kids to be loved, to hold them on the quiet nights and be there for them. To hold them, that's important for me. My grandkids, that's what I live for now, they keep me going and I love them" (40).

Similarly, although all the *Sashing our Warriors* survey respondents spoke of intergenerational abuse and strategies of fighting for survival as noted above—they also wrote about their healing journey and the steps they took to break intergenerational abuse and envision a

future without this violence. As one respondent noted, "It was evident growing up, there were many forms of abuse. We all chose relationships which mimicked our upbringing. Intergenerational abuse cycle. But I chose not to repeat that cycle and complete the Stepping Up Program for the Prevention of Domestic Violence" (R. 94, Q. 8). The story of violence and abduction shared by one survey participants also reveals the persistence, resistance, and healing found in sharing one's story and in love. "...all I wanted was my mom. They took me to a safe house...I remember shutting down after that. I wouldn't speak any words to anyone. My mother was patient with me and allowed me to heal within" (R. 143, Q. 6).

Similarly, another survey respondent shared the impact of being a part of the 60's scoop and the sexualized violence she experienced from her adoptive father - alongside the healing love found in reconnecting with her Métis heritage and art and love: "I am Métis and was adopted into a white family… (describes abuse experienced here) ...Finally I got some therapy, met a wonderful man and things changed. I found my birth mother, sister and brother. My sister and mother have passed. But I connected and found my Métis heritage and art and love… (R. 157, Q. 6).

Some respondents shared healing strategies found in Métis mothering. One respondent described her own abusive childhood and then violent marriage. She describes that when she left although they struggled financially, "we managed to do quite well— engaged in many free activities around town, ate many home-made soups and stews from sale bin veggies and slightly outdated meats, and bought our clothes from thrift shops." (R. 162 Q. 6.). She goes on to speak to the healing and breaking of intergenerational cycles of abuse. "I am proud to say that both my daughters have grown up to become incredible young women with good self-esteem, self-confidence and academic abilities. I too am feeling quite well with the help of medication and counselling" (R. 162. Q. 6).

Another respondent's story similarly reveals the persistence, and love of Métis mothers in providing for their children, in this case, raising three children under five alone and experiencing the sexist and racist nature of gaining employment and access to education as a path to healing in her journey. She cites the help of her mom, and the act of leaving an abusive relationship as key. "It was a struggle so with the help from my mom I went to college 2 years nursing had lots of intuition

energy did well right next to single women white no kids … just made me stronger. Used to call me *Halfbreed*… (R. 42, Q. 8). Despite her mother's support in gaining access to education and speaking to the liberation education provided, she also described the specific financial barriers and racism she faced as a Métis person without educational funding.

Many stories tell of healing found in a mother's patient love, others in traditional healing. One story tells of her middle daughter begging her to leave an abusive relationship of 13 years. And through seeking healing and through therapy her children were able to recognize that their home life was violent and abusive. With their support and encouragement, alongside the mental health support she was receiving, she was able to see it too. "After 5 years of therapy and finding who I am I asked my children for their forgiveness, as I was just as much to blame for the emotional turmoil they experienced" (R. 152, Q. 6).

Others also share the importance of counselling as well as the assistance of Elders. "I've sought out counselling and the help of an elder who recognized the pain within me and helped me to forgive those who hurt me and realize that it wasn't my fault" (R. 70, Q. 6). Similarly, another respondent describes healing as an adult after the horrific childhood sexual assault—a lifetime of rape: "I didn't respect my body nor myself until I began the healing journey with a native healer" (R. 149, Q. 6). She credits traditional healing as changing her life forever and that she is now also a healer. "I'm still on my healing journey… lol… as it never really ends. However I had no idea how beautiful life could be on this side of the fence… "Light"…Thank you Creator, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Grandmothers, Grandfathers, Angels and my Guides I am now the Healer—inspiring through my stories and channeling God's healing energy through my hands. Hiy Hiy (R. 149, Q. 6).

Writing to share their story is also an important resistance and healing practice—one shared by several *Sashing our Warriors* participants. "I would need to write a book to share my personal experiences with violence" (R. 182, Q. 6). Perhaps this speaks to why so many Métis women and girls shared their stories for this survey—the strength and healing gained from writing about one's experience. As one respondent wrote, "I am currently writing a book about my story" (R. 9, Q. 6). Another survivor details horrific violence, including almost dying at the hands of men in her life: "I am still here today as a strong woman who also sees the need to help our men who are abusers to change the way they see women and to regain a sense of respect for themselves and others—why do I do this—because I have a son who is an amazing man who is kind and generous…I use my story to heal" (R. 106, Q. 6).

Other participants ended their story with an assertion of pride, perseverance and the healing of shame:

> *I know I am not the only person this happened too. This is still a reality that is hard to face, but if this story will help anyone else, I will share. I share knowing that I was definitely young and stupid, but I was a victim none the less and I have learnt to be strong and be proud of who I am! I have persevered! You have not taken my pride! (R. 143, Q. 6).*

4

Transformative Justice for Métis peoples, especially children, youth, women, girls, gender-diverse, families and Elders, cannot be achieved within the apparatus of colonial state policy or legal system.

4.0

RECOMMENDATIONS

CENTERING MÉTIS WOMEN & GIRLS' EXPERIENCES: RECOMMENDATIONS: MÉTIS-SPECIFIC TRANSFORMATIONAL JUSTICE

1. Institute Culturally Safe and Métis-Specific Violence-Informed Programming for Women, Girls, and Gender-Diverse Individuals

Métis feminist analysis of colonial violence considers trauma to be in response to the interlocking of colonial systems experienced at the individual and collective level. This definition resists Western medical model definitions of trauma that locate trauma and violence within individual bodies that are pathologized and in need of saving (Clark, 2016) and even justify removal of children from mothers based on diagnosis of trauma (Million, 2014; Clark, 2016). Violence and trauma are instead part of historic and ongoing Métis-specific racism and sexualized violence in systems such as child welfare, education, justice and the resultant policies, programs and practices that have disrupted Métis kinship networks, connections to land and to community, and care networks to support healing. It is important that program design and delivery does not contribute to the further colonial regulation and domination of "healing" and instead centres Métis women' and girls' healing approaches—within both urban and rural spaces—and that recognize the diversity of genders, age, geography, ability and other factors that impact healing. As one of the Métis Elders who shared her testimony of residential schools asserts, healing narratives can recreate the colonial structures, priests and psychiatrists are the same. "Many of us will not go in for the healing because it's not what they want. It's not what we want. We know what we want. All these healing foundations, all these workshops they are putting on, and the money being spent is wrong. I don't want anybody to tell me how I'm going to heal or bring me a psychiatrist or bring me a priest. Who put me here to begin with?" (Poitras, 2004).

It is critical to ensure that resources, counselling and other supports are offered in a culturally appropriate way and include Métis-specific healing resources such as access to Métis women's, girls' and gender-diverse individuals' rites of passage ceremonies, groups, and access to medicines, and healers.

It is common for many survivors of violence to have experienced violence or witnessed violence as a child, youth or adult and to have had a bad/racist experience with police, the justice system and other systems they have interacted with. As Clark (2013) states, often disclosure of sexual abuse is compounded by the colonial response of the systems meant to provide care. "The violence of state neglect, combined with the

lack of belief and support on the part of individuals in the communities and networks of which she is a member, can be understood as ongoing dynamics of colonialism that compounded the sexual abuse she was speaking up against" (p. 136). The survey results revealed many examples of not being believed alongside deep processes of silence and shaming that function to deter disclosure. Thus, it is important that we consider the spaces and attend to the context of reporting violence and the relationships that are the first point of disclosure of violence. Further research is needed in this area to attend with care to these processes.

Research has shown that how a disclosure is received and dealt with after has a significant impact on the wellness of survivors over the long term. As such, we recommend that there is a need for training and education on responding to disclosures of violence in a violence-informed, survivor-centered and intersectional manner. Further, we need to ensure that coping and the resultant support or health needs are understood within an intersectional framework that considers the Métis-specifc context of colonization, racism, ongoing poverty, systemic oppression, and discrimination experienced by Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals on a daily basis.

In addition to the principles shared below we recommend that disclosure training and sexual violence programming also incorporate these four principles written by Clark (2016) as part of her work on the Sexual Assault at the University of British Columbia: Prevention, Response, Accountability Task force:

1. *Believe survivors.* It is important to honour their courage in naming and telling about the abuse. Let them know you believe them and will support them in connecting to the supports necessary.

2. *Consent, Choice & Contro*l. As sexual assault is about power and the absence of choice/consent, ensure that the survivor is aware of their choices at each stage of the support and/or reporting process, and that choices made earlier in the process can be changed and need not constrain later aspects of the process. Make sure that the survivor is assured of confidentiality at the disclosure stage and that measures are in place to ensure that information is kept confidential.

3. *Relative Safety.* When responding to a disclosure, it is important to address immediate holistic and intersectional safety needs of the survivor. This task takes precedence over all others for no other work can safely proceed if immediate

safety is not secured. A holistic approach includes physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and cultural safety, which may involve addressing housing needs, financial support, academic accommodation, access to crisis counselling, and spiritual or other supports, including Elders for Indigenous survivors.

4. *Referral and support.* The survivor will often disclose to someone they feel safe with. This person is an important link to the next step in accessing supports and advocacy. A referral made by this trusted support person, to whom the survivor chose to disclose, can assist the survivor in making linkages to appropriate supports (Clark, 2016, p. 25-26).

Some questions for service providers and front-line responders to consider:

- What ways can I/we create spaces of relative safety (physical, mental, emotional, cultural)?
- How can we/I centre Métis laws and the voices of Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals' folks in my/our programs? agency?
- How can we comprehend, honour, and validate the stories of violence Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals tell?
- What are the key areas of strength, resistance and survival to name and build support around?
- What is the role of the agency I work at within the larger Métis community context?

2. Invest in Research, Education and Prevention that is led by and centres the experiences of Métis women, girls and Gender-Diverse Individuals

Development of a sexual assault and violence prevention and education plan needs to be grounded in Métis-specific research. This plan must include a lifespan and intersectional approach adapted to the intersecting needs of Métis children, youth, women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, and families and Elders considering the diverse geographies and spaces where they live, love, and learn. (This aligns with CJ 17.2)

To address the root causes of violence against Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals it is imperative that there is the development of a sexual assault and violence prevention and education plan. This plan must include a lifespan approach adapted to the

intersecting needs of children, youth, women, girls, gender-diverse individuals, families and Elders and the diverse geographies and spaces where they live, love and learn. The education programming needs to be delivered in a way that is consistent with intersectional Indigenous feminist analyses of violence and sexual assault and the operation of power, consent and violence-informed approaches.

There is a need for research and education about violence and the development of programming models that are aligned with Métis values, paradigms and kinship networks and are grounded in strengths, resistance and survivance of Métis women, girls, gender-diverse individuals and Métis communities. One respondent's testimony reveals the importance of spaces that teach and name about violence. She describes growing up with all types of violence, including sexual abuse from the age of 5 into her teens, and violence in her marriage. "I left after a while learned about abuse from a woman's shelter, before this I really did not know or understand what abuse was all I knew was I was not happy and did not want to live this way any longer and did not want my children growing up with it" (R. 105, Q. 6).

3. Métis-specific and Intersectional Transformative Justice

Transformative justice for Métis peoples, especially children, youth, women, girls, gender-diverse individuals, families and Elders, in Canada must come from practices and policies grounded in Métis laws and legal principles of liberation, intergenerational support, and relational accountability. This involves grounding an approach to Métis intersectional transformative justice in the knowledge that colonialism and its resulting impacts are the risk factors mapped onto Métis peoples' lives as injustice. This aligns with Calls for Justice 17.3.

Transformative Justice for Métis peoples, especially children, youth, women, girls, gender-diverse, families and Elders, cannot be achieved within the apparatus of colonial state policy or legal system. The work of recovering Métis law, in theory and in practice, requires further research, historical inquiry, and working with Métis Elders and knowledge keepers to recuperate Métis ways of being and knowing from the impacts of colonialism.

4.1

PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE FUTURE EDUCATION, RESEARCH & PROGRAMMING

Building on our previous work (Clark, 2013) (Barkaskas & Hunt, 2018) to ensure principle-based work in addressing violence, we offer three key principles to guide future work in this area. We encourage collective and individual reflexive engagement with these principles as guides towards ending sexual violence against Métis women and girls. These principles are not exhaustive but in fact, we encourage adaptation and expansion as needed.

Principle 1: Address Violence against Métis Women, Girls and Gender-Diverse Individuals from the Systemic to the Personal Level

All programs, policies, and research need to situate and understand that Métis women and girls' experiences of violence and sexual assault are not individual isolated incidents but in fact are part of an ongoing sexualized and colonial violence in which everyone is implicated.

- Acknowledge the scale and severity of Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals' experiences of violence and situate this violence within contexts of settler colonialism, patriarchy, heteronormativity and other systems of oppression
- View the work to address and end sexualized violence as sacred and important work and demonstrates a commitment to ending violence for Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals
- Invest in and support research, policies, education and programming that is Metis, feminist, intersectional and violence-informed
- Commit to resisting and decolonizing rape culture in the spaces where Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals live, work, learn and love
- Understand how violence and sexual assault are cumulative and intergenerational and impacts ongoing coping mechanisms

Principle 2: Sovereignty and Self-Determination - Implement Métis Women's, Girls and Gender-Diverse Individuals Survivor-Centered Actions, Policies, and Processes

Given that sexualized violence is a constant in society—it is imperative that we work to position Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals at the centre of any efforts to address sexual

assault and violence. Being survivor-centered means that, Métis women, girls' and gender-diverse individuals intersecting realities, needs, and consent is prioritized.

- Believe Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals' stories of violence first and foremost.
- Involve Métis women and girls to design programming across diverse Métis spaces, urban, reflective of age, gender diversity.
- Localized and community solutions: Examples of this are programming such as Métis girls' groups, groups for gender-diverse individuals and Women's circles.
- Respond to disclosures with care, concern, respect, and timeliness.
- Engage in processes of ongoing consent at all stages – that allows for informed decision making by survivors at all stages.
- Create intersectional and violence informed approaches that are adaptable to the diverse needs of survivors.
- Use accessible language that is welcoming, open, and low barrier.

Principle 3: Locate Risk within Colonial Systems not within Métis Women and Girls[1]

There is a need to recognize that colonization, sexism, racism, heterosexism is structurally embedded in the systems of "care" including health care, justice, education, child welfare—directly implicated in harm and violence.

- Resist any language, programming, or research that labels, stigmatizes and/or criminalizes survivors of violence and their coping and resistance responses.
- Ensure Métis-specific trauma/violence-informed and culturally safe programming, outreach, and counselling supports.

1 Hunt, S. & Clark, N. (2016). Beyond Risk: Looking Seven Generations ahead – For Service Providers. https://www.academia.edu/31755593/BEYOND_RISK_info_sheet_for_service_providers

4.2

ACTION

AGENDA FOR ACTION: FUTURE EDUCATION, PROGRAMMING & RESEARCH

4.2.1 Limitations

As noted in our literature review the experiences of Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals are not meaningfully captured in current scholarly material or statistical information. The *Sashing our Warriors* research and the *Thanks for Listening* report are timely as it is necessary to investigate Métis women, girls' and gender-diverse individual stories and the collective experiences of violence. Over 400 Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals responded to the *Sashing our Warriors* survey and shared their intimate experiences of violence, indicating a strong desire to be heard. Each response makes it clear that stories of abuse and violence, both experienced and witnessed, have been silenced; not just by others, but by us. We also note that space needs to be created for the voices of Métis gender-diverse individuals to be heard about their experiences of violence.

It is also clear from the participant responses to the *Sashing our Warriors* survey, presented and woven through this report, that sharing our stories is integral to healing. Houle says: "We do not heal alone. This work is about honouring individual strength and gifts in order to heal. It speaks to healing that is not in isolation from identity as a Métis or in isolation from one's community. This thesis is about acknowledging the strengths of Métis women by giving voice to their stories, their dreams, and their lives" (1990, p. ii).

This quote could be used as a blueprint for mapping out programming in the future to support our Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals to heal from violence. To create an environment conducive to sharing, it is imperative that programming be Métis-specific, participant driven, strengths based, community-oriented, and violence-informed; designed with an understanding of the colonial context violence exists within. Cultural revitalization, community, and a re-focus on supporting and celebrating women, girls and gender-diverse individuals throughout their life phases and transitions, with Métis ceremony, whether that is beading, medicine gathering, community building, strengthening connections to culture, especially if disrupted by the structures of colonialism, is vital to moving forward.

The survey responses combined with the original literature review revealed that further research is necessary to explore how Métis-specific racism and lateral violence has impacted Métis women. The *Sashing our Warriors* survey

did not specifically include questions about coping mechanisms, survival, or supportive and healing measures that Métis women have used or would like to have had access to, and because respondents revealed strategies within their survey responses, a recommendation is to include this question for subsequent surveys.

4.2.2 Recommendations for Subsequent Survey

A future survey is recommended to capture increased demographic detail, which could assist with future programming. Limitations of the *Sashing our Warriors* survey are the lack of intersectional granularity of demographic data: age, geography (rural, urban), increased gender fluidity, parenting status, linking respondent gender to the stories, experiences of strengths, resistance and survival. An intersectional approach would deepen our understanding of the intersecting factors that impact violence as well as responses that included survival and resistance strategies. A recommendation for subsequent surveys would include questions that relate to experiences of seeking after-care services: emergency, hospital, health care), healing, treatment, counselling, or reasons for not seeking this care.

Important next steps include investigating strengths-based strategies for healing and survival that have led to success for Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals; discovering and documenting the desires, wishes and dreams, of Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals; and developing and delivering programming that best supports and celebrates our Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals to prevent violence and support their futures. Significantly, all this work must be premised on the foundational principle of listening to Métis women and girls' truth-telling about how best to support them.

So, while this research and report is an important first step, we recommend a Phase 2 of this project to engage Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals living in British Columbia in dialogues, talking circles and interviews and in doing so centre their knowledge in any theories, research, policies and programming that flows from this research. The *Sashing our Warriors* initiative first and foremost serves Métis women and girls living in British Columbia who have experienced domestic violence and/or sexual assault. Beyond this population, the project will target both front line service providers/organizations

and policymakers to assist in enhancing their policy and programming responses to domestic violence and/or sexual assault against Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals. It is integral to creating a full picture of prevention, treatment and healing to include Métis Elder and grandmother teachings and Métis women, girls' and diverse genders in ceremony and medicine when envisioning the future promising and wise practices and future programming for Métis women and girls. Focusing on stories, truth-telling, and specific programming for women as individuals, not just solely as mothers, is integral to healing intergenerationally, but also acknowledging risks embedded in colonial systems. Care should be taken to not recreate colonial and punitive structures within Métis programming for women.

Additional studies are needed to expand on our findings and synthesis of various studies and census data regarding violence against Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals. Much of the literature, studies and syntheses, are related to the broader population of Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse, rather than separating out the Métis data. Setting out to discover experiences of Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals is clearly necessary.

5

Storytelling is the healing—these stories need to be told.

5.0

CONCLUSIONS

THANKS FOR LISTENING

Future research should include a robust examination of violence and sexual assault using a representative sample of women, girls and gender-diverse individuals who specifically identify as Métis, in BC and across Canada, to provide an accurate picture of the current trends in programming, health (including sexual health) and service use. To optimize the post sexual and other assault care provided to Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals such studies should extensively and meaningfully engage Métis specific service providers, as well as Métis survivors themselves, at all stages of the research. Given the degree of health related physical and emotional harm shared by the *Sashing our Warriors* participants—health specific research and programming is needed across the lifespan. Future research needs to centre the individual stories of Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals - as their lives in their wholeness and their resistance to violence are poorly understood, and stories of individuals can help fill some of these knowledge gaps[1]. We need programs that re-imagine what protection looks like: the multiple forms of protection from colonial policies, practices, from experiences of abuse, and that can build on the desires, dreams, strengths, joy and love of Métis women and girls.

Kim Anderson reminds us, the resurgence of Métis women and girls' ceremonies, like the berry-fasting ceremony, tells important stories of healing and persistence. "The continuation of these ceremonies demonstrates the value that some families placed on marking this life transition, in spite of pressures to abandon this practice" (2011, p. 90). In fact, the very step of completing the *Sashing Our Warriors* survey was a ceremony, an act of healing. Lee Maracle asserts that "anything that brings people closer to themselves is a ceremony. The manner in which a person seeks the self is always based on the sacred right of choice" (1988, p. 111). Similarly, Houle said in her 2004 thesis: "This call to act must be understood from survivor moccasins and indeed be acknowledged as a place on the healing journey" (p. 113).

Storytelling is the healing—these stories need to be told. Métis scholar, Nixon, describes the importance of honoring the stories told by

1 For a excellent recent example of this published since this report was written see Jones, C., Monchalin, R., bourgeois, C., & Smylie, J (2020). Kokums to the Iskwesisisak COVID-19 and Urban Metis girls and young women. Girlhood Studies, 13(3), 116-132.

women kin orally (2018) and not just defining Métis identity in the masculine language of politics and nation building. "I feel it is important to not erase the histories of gendered oppression exhibited within my matrilineal line in the name of a nationhood model" (p. 36). Nixon also offers that Métis women's arts can be animated to release the knowledge and healing love woven into each stitch. This is echoed in the poem *new years eve 2013* by Katherina Vermette: "they left instruction in our culture/ our clothing woven by the looms of my grandmothers/bone needles sewed beads into/ European florals and sharp Anishnaabe lines" (2017, pg. 67).

We have witnessed the words and experiences of the *Sashing our Warriors* survey respondents and in writing this report we amplify their voices. The incidents reported through the survey were often identified by respondents as only one or some of many they could have related. As one respondent indicated about the violence she had experienced and decided to talk about, "Those are 2 that stand out in my mind...thanks for listening" (R. 2, Q. 6). These words, "...thanks for listening" stood out to us as the most significant aspect of the survey for respondents. The Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals who responded to the survey clearly wanted to disclose their stories. We honour them and these stories through our listening and witnessing, and in writing this report. In doing so, we hope to provide insight into Métis women, girls and gender-diverse individuals' experiences of violence and the work that needs to be done to ensure they are supported in their paths to healing and that future research can help remedy the violence in our communities and our Nation. Maarsii to all the respondents for sharing their stories—we are listening—will you?

6.0

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