



Study shows link between continued abuse of aboriginal women, residential schools



Cedar Project participant Christina Tom, who – despite being HIV positive – considers herself ‘one of the lucky ones,’ is seen at the Kamloops, B.C., pow wow grounds on Wednesday.

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schools. (B.C. had 22 of them, the most of any Canadian province.)

The Cedar Project interviewed 259 women, ages 14 to 30, several times over seven years. The report says they were "nearly 10 times more likely to be sexually assaulted later in life if they had a history of childhood sexual abuse." It said the women were also at a high risk if at least one of their parents had spent time at a residential school.

Until the late 20th century, native children were taken from their families and placed in residential schools, where many were beaten and sexually abused. At least 3,000 children died at the schools. Some survivors suffering from the effects of the abuse became abusers themselves.

Of the 259 women recruited from Vancouver and Prince George, B.C., all used drugs, 28 per cent reported that they were sexually assaulted during the seven-year period, and 41 per cent of that group were assaulted more than once.

Researchers from the University of British Columbia's School of Population and Public Health and the Centre for Health Evaluation and Outcome Sciences tabulated the information.

"Our mothers, wives, sisters, nieces – they have been demeaned and dehumanized," said Chief Wayne Christian, a Splatshin First Nation leader and project investigator. "The importance of the data is that people may see the numbers, but these are human beings."

The women in the study were recruited through health-care providers and street contacts and were interviewed every six months. Christina Tom was one of the participants, who was an alcoholic when she began the survey. During the seven year, she fought for her sobriety and to find a stable relationship and has become a spokesperson for other aboriginal women. Despite being HIV positive, Ms. Tom considers herself "one of the lucky ones."



Mr. Kennedy said he is confident a centre structured around aboriginal culture and spiritual beliefs would help keep abused kids from following in their parents' footsteps.

"We have a clear picture now of the cycle of abuse and the violence that it leads to," Mr. Kennedy said. "Now we're learning how to deal with it."

Chief Christian said he supports the idea of a CAC. He said that as a 10-year-old, he knew what it was like to be sexually, physically and emotionally abused. At 12, he said, he and his 10 brothers and sisters were apprehended by Child Welfare officials and put in foster homes. At 13, he was suicidal, as was his younger brother, who used Chief Christian's gun to end his life.

He said an advocacy centre could be the salvation of those with nowhere else to turn. The next step is applying for government funding.

Two months ago, Federal Minister of Health Rona Ambrose announced a 10-year, \$100-million investment to "prevent, detect and combat family violence and child abuse."

With a report from Matthew McClearn

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