

**Investigating Social Policy Relationships:  
A critical analysis of understandings of First Nation family violence**

**by:**

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## Abstract

A grounded theory approach is used to explore how family violence is understood by First Nations and the federal government. Through a case study analysis, this study also seeks to determine whether understandings of family violence influence federal policy. The findings reveal that First Nation and federal government representatives share a similar understanding of the consequences of family violence but differ on how other important dimensions of the problem are defined. Barriers within the funding and policy development processes appear to prevent full and active participation of all First Nation communities. Working in partnership with First Nations to identify ways these barriers could be overcome could be a significant step in improving outcomes of family violence prevention initiatives. This study contributes to the literature on Aboriginal family violence and provides insight into the relationship between the federal government and First Nations in the context of addressing family violence on reserve.

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## CHAPTER ONE FAMILY VIOLENCE IN FIRST NATION COMMUNITIES

### 1.0 Introduction

Violence within the family is arguably one of the most critical issues facing First Nations in Canada. In the past two decades, this issue has been studied by a plethora of academics and researchers who have documented the consequences of family violence for women, children and communities. Community-based family violence prevention initiatives developed by First Nations are funded by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) through the Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP) in order to raise awareness of this problem in communities. Yet, despite the increased attention to this issue in recent years and First Nations efforts, no significant advances have been made with respect to reducing the incidence of family violence in First Nation communities.

A possible explanation for this is that First Nations and the federal government understand the problem of family violence on reserve differently. Ideally, there should be a common understanding of family violence in First Nation communities so that policies that are developed to address the problem are relevant to the reality or lived experiences of First Nations. Exploring understandings of family violence is important since solutions to social problems are determined by how a problem is defined and understood. A discrepancy in understandings between First Nations and the federal government will indicate that both groups are not unified in their approach to addressing the problem of family violence, which will likely result in ineffective solutions.

This research explores understandings of family violence in First Nation communities and whether these understandings influence family violence prevention policy and programming. An

examination of federally funded family violence prevention projects provides an opportunity to explore how the policy relationship between First Nations and the federal government plays out in practice. Interviews were conducted by the researcher with federal staff of the FVPP and representatives of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). The interviews reveal divergent understandings between First Nations and the federal government on many important dimensions of family violence in First Nation communities and the existence of potential barriers within the federal policy and funding processes. The significance of this is confirmed by a case study of a family violence prevention toolkit developed by First Nations and funded through the FVPP. The identification of these barriers is important as they raise issues of equity and equality among marginalized groups in their dealings with the federal government in comparison with other Canadians.

A case study of the FVPP-funded toolkit also provides insight into the policy relationship between First Nations and the federal government. A First Nation understanding of the problem of family violence should be reflected in family violence prevention policy in order to be effective since policy dictates the parameters and funding of initiatives. A disconnect in the policy relationship in addition to the underlying barriers within the federal processes themselves may help explain why there have been minimal improvements in preventing family violence on reserve. The role of the funding and policy processes with respect to family violence prevention on reserve, therefore, is an important aspect of this research.

In exploring the problem of family violence in First Nation communities, several issues presented a challenge to this study and need to be stated upfront. The first issue involves the state of the literature on family violence as it relates to First Nations in Canada. Although family

violence is a prominent area of social research, few studies have focused on the problem specifically in First Nation communities. Data collected on the scope and incidence of family violence in First Nation communities is often aggregated with the data collected on other Aboriginal groups (Métis, and Inuit). Canadian statistics rarely profile each cultural group separately. Therefore, while this research focuses exclusively on First Nations on reserve, the term 'Aboriginal' will be used as appropriate when referring to the literature. In addition, the term 'Aboriginal' will also be used as appropriate when referencing information and research findings of the NWAC study participants, since NWAC is a national organization representing First Nations and Métis in Canada.

A related issue involves the extent of empirical studies on family violence that have been devoted to First Nations in Canada. A review of the literature revealed that there are no known Canadian-based studies which have investigated understandings of family violence from the perspectives of First Nations compared to the federal government. Research in this area has focused on Aboriginal populations outside of Canada (i.e Australia) but only from a community perspective. A government perspective of the problem of family violence has not been empirically investigated. This research provides information on understandings of family violence in a Canadian context and begins to fill an existing gap in the literature on family violence in First Nation communities.

The remainder of this chapter explores the problem of family violence in First Nation communities in more detail, including an overview of the latest findings of studies in this area. The following sections situate the present study within the existing literature and current understanding of the problem of family violence.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Family violence is a major health and social issue pervading all sectors of society and in every country of the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that between 15% and 71% of women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual assault from an intimate partner (WHO, 2005). In Canada, national statistics indicate that one-quarter of all women have been abused by their current or former martial partner (Canadian Public Health Association, 1994). In 1997, the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) formally recognized violence as a public health issue.

The problem of family violence is especially acute in First Nation communities. Despite comprising 3.8% of the total population, Aboriginal peoples in Canada are overrepresented as victims of violence (Johnson, 2006). According to Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (GSS) (2001), Aboriginal women are three times more likely than their non Aboriginal counterparts to report having experienced violence by a current or former spouse. As these data suggest, "It is an exception rather than the rule to know of an Aboriginal woman who has not experienced some form of family violence throughout her life" (The Canadian Council on Social Development and the Native Women's Association of Canada, 1991:25). There are also reports that suggest Aboriginal women in Canada are more likely than non Aboriginal women to experience severe violence. According to spousal homicide statistics, Aboriginal women are eight times more likely than non Aboriginal women to be killed by their partner (Trainor & Mihorean, 2001).

Family violence is also perceived to be a major health and social problem among

Aboriginal women themselves. Despite the prevalence of other health concerns, such as diabetes, substance abuse and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (Martens et al., 2002), a study by the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health (2002) reported that Aboriginal women in Manitoba and Saskatchewan ranked family violence as their most important health concern. This is consistent with findings from studies based on other Aboriginal populations. In Western Australia for instance, 22.6% of Indigenous women perceived family violence as a problem in their community (Office of Women's Policy, 2005).

One theory that accounts for the significantly higher prevalence of family violence in Aboriginal society is colonization (Brownridge, 2009). As described by Justice Canada in a review of criminal victimization,

Colonization is the outcome of a process of colonialism, whereby Europeans assumed superiority over Aboriginal peoples and denied any competing sovereign claims to land and government because Aboriginal peoples were non-Christian and largely non-agricultural. This project of colonization involved the need to "civilize" Aboriginal peoples. This included attempts to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into European lifestyles through force if necessary."<sup>1</sup>

The Indian Act<sup>2</sup>, residential schools, and land alienation processes were all designed to eliminate Aboriginal ways. As a result, Aboriginal communities lost control over their families and cultures to the residential school system (Armitage, 1995) and the child welfare system.

Colonization theory argues that the problems Aboriginal people face, including family violence, have their roots in Aboriginal peoples' historical experiences (Brownridge, 2009).

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1 [http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2006/rr06\\_vic1/p3.html](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2006/rr06_vic1/p3.html)

2 "Canadian federal legislation, first passed in 1876, and amended several times since. It sets out certain federal government obligations and regulates the management of Indian reserve lands, Indian moneys and other resources". <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/tln-eng.asp>

These past experiences help explain the problem as it exists today. For instance, Duran et al. (1998:100) maintain that “the pain and suffering inflicted on Indian people several generations ago can contribute to the suffering that occurs today”. Similarly, Bopp et al. (2003:11) argue that “there is a direct relationship between the historical experiences of Aboriginal peoples and the current patterns of violence and abuse in Aboriginal communities”.

Support for colonization theory is provided by a study by Brownridge (2003) which involved an empirical analysis of male partner violence against Aboriginal women in Canada. The study shows a higher prevalence of violence by their partner compared to non Aboriginal women. In comparing Aboriginal women to non Aboriginal women, Brownridge found that risk markers operate in the same manner for both groups, but Aboriginal women possess a greater representation of known risk markers. In other words, social issues identified for women generally are present for Aboriginal women, but they tend to be magnified. This study also shows that although established risk markers are helpful for understanding violence against Aboriginal women, differences between Aboriginal women and non Aboriginal women on risk markers do not account for Aboriginal women’s significantly higher prevalence of violence.

The historical trauma that was exacted on Aboriginal peoples during colonization was passed down from one generation to the next. As many as five generations have been subjected to “an oppressive policy of assimilation” (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2003). This intergenerational effect appears to be a distinguishing characteristic of family violence among Aboriginal Peoples. Consistent with this idea, research in Australia found that family violence is intertwined with a collection of interconnected community problems and issues that are rooted in cultural displacement, such as loss of self-esteem, shame and grief, undermining of culture,

disruption to and weakening of family structures, intergenerational transmission of violence, hopelessness and despair, unemployment and poverty, anger and frustration, alcohol and drug misuse, gambling, boredom, dispossession, and racism (Taylor et al., 2004).

In Canada, few studies have made explicit links between family violence and colonization. However, the main authority on family violence affecting Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), argues that the experience of colonization is a significant aspect of family violence in First Nation communities. While recognizing power imbalances among intimates as an underlying feature of violence within families, the Commission identifies three unique features of family violence in Aboriginal communities that distinguish it from violence in non Aboriginal communities. First, family violence is a broad issue that affects whole communities, not just individuals. Second, government interventions, which displaced Aboriginal peoples from their homes and communities, have undermined family functioning. Third, a racist social environment in which Aboriginal people live fosters and sustains violence (RCAP, 1996:54-56).

This perspective on family violence is consistent with the views of Aboriginal organizations and scholars. For instance, a report published by the Clearing House on Family Violence defines family violence in an Aboriginal context as:

“a consequence of colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural genocide, the learned negative, cumulative, multi-generational actions, values, beliefs, attitudes and behavioural patterns practiced by one or more people that weaken or destroy the harmony and well-being of an aboriginal individual, family, extended family, community or nationhood (The Aboriginal Family Healing Joint Steering Committee, 1993:10 ).

According to the Canadian Council on Social Development and the Native Women’s Association

of Canada (1991:2), family violence is not an individual or family matter, rather, it is an issue that affects all Aboriginal people:

“The nature of family violence transcends cultural boundaries. Its affliction is indiscriminate...But family violence in aboriginal society also has its own unique dimensions. It is not simply Aboriginal women who have been rendered powerless - it is Aboriginal society”.

In an early report on the issue, *Breaking Free*, the Ontario Native Women’s Association (1992:40) provides a societal explanation for the high rate of family violence in Aboriginal communities:

“Aboriginal people in general have been isolated, confined, stigmatised and impoverished ....with no outlet for societal pressure, the family has become the immediate place to release overwhelming frustration and to reassert power”.

The unique history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada calls for a more holistic understanding of the problem of family violence that is consistent with the reality of Aboriginal peoples’ experiences. Scholars and researchers on Aboriginal culture and peoples have criticized the use of mainstream understandings to explain family violence in First Nation communities. They argue that research often does not adequately take into account the issues of race, class, culture, and history that are central to an understanding of Aboriginal family violence. For instance, in her submission to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Zellerer (1993:20) stated,

“[O]ne of the biggest gaps in the literature on violence against women is that race, culture and class are not incorporated fully into analyses, nor is there an appreciation of the historical contexts of Aboriginal women’s experience”

Similarly, as asserted by Razack (1994:911) “continuing colonization and the devastating impact of past domination are the contexts in which Aboriginal family violence must be

examined”. And more recently, researchers such as Sousan Abadian (1999), acknowledge the historical role played by colonization in the life circumstances of First Nations. As aptly summarized by Bopp et al., (2003:9), Abadian argues that

“the social and political violence inflicted upon Aboriginal people by the state and the churches through the residential school system not only created the patterns of violence communities are now experiencing but also introduced the family and community to behaviors that are impeding collective recovery”.

More recent research following the RCAP’s study of family violence undertaken by Lane Jr. et al. (2003), Castellano (2006) and Chartrand and McKay (2006), have further investigated the link between violent behavior and the collective histories of violence of Aboriginal offenders and provide support for the RCAPs findings. Chartrand and McKay (2006) concludes that

“Explanations for such high rates of victimization are varied but the predominate view links high victimization to the overall impact of colonization and the resultant collective and individual “trauma” and its impacts that flow from cultural disruption”.

Similarly, Lane Jr. et al (2003) assert that,

“this body of research, theories and models all point to the same general conclusion – family violence and abuse in Aboriginal communities has its roots, at least in part, in historical trauma and in the social realities created by those historical processes”.

The unique experience of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, therefore, helps to explain the disproportionate likelihood of violence in First Nation communities and contributes to our understanding of this phenomenon as it relates to First Nations. However, it must be recognized that family violence is not experienced in the same way by all First Nations or that the scope, nature, and extent of the problem within First Nation communities are not necessarily similar across the country. While a common history binds First Nations as a group, their individual and community experiences are varied and dependent upon many factors that are not accounted for in

colonization theory alone.

Therefore, while colonization theory helps to explain the unusually high prevalence of family violence in Aboriginal communities, it does not explain why some Aboriginal women experience violence from their partners while others do not, nor does it account for other factors that may influence family violence. Colonization theory does not tell the whole story – it is merely one chapter, albeit, a significant one. It does, however, set the stage for further study towards a more comprehensive theory that can provide insight about the phenomenon of family violence.

## 1.2 Exploring the Issue of Family Violence: A Review of the Literature

Although the problem is centuries old, the study of family violence is relatively recent. Original studies on family violence focused on wife-battering, however, it quickly expanded to include physical violence against children and more recently, child sexual abuse (Ouellette & Wuttunee, 2002). It is now widely recognized that violence against individuals within families takes many forms, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect, psychological/emotional abuse (or mental abuse), and financial abuse (National Clearing House on Family Violence, 1996; World Health Organization, 2002).

The bulk of research on family violence in Aboriginal communities prior to 2000 concentrates on examining community perspectives of family violence and efforts made by Aboriginal communities in addressing the problem. As summarized by Proulx and Perrault, (2000), these studies focus on Aboriginal women's experiences with family violence, their experience with the Justice system, and alternative treatment options for offenders based on a

holistic community approach. A needs assessment conducted by Durst, MacDonald and Parsons (1999) on the problem of family violence in Conne River Newfoundland revealed that residents were knowledgeable about the types of family violence occurring in the community as well as the various sources of support and help that were available. The authors conclude that the findings suggest a need for increased supports for women with families in crisis involving a holistic network of community-based supports from existing agencies.

More recent studies focus on women's experience with domestic violence (Rivers, 2005), and justice for domestic violence and family violence from indigenous and non indigenous Australian women's perspectives (Nancarrow, 2006). Australian researchers conducted a case study on a healing model that was developed by a Canadian Aboriginal community (Hollow Water, MB) for the management of sexual abuse (Cripps & McGlade, 2008).

More specific to the current research are studies that focus on family violence programs, understandings of family violence, and the intersection of government policies and understandings of Aboriginal family violence. In studying these issues, case studies and/or interviews are often the methods of choice. Brown and Languedoc (2004) investigated essential program components of an Aboriginal family violence program in Canada. The authors conclude that program components should be based on traditional teachings, should create awareness of personal and family dynamics and change, and should educate about family violence. The authors also identify a need for consistent program funding.

Lehrner and Allen (2008) report on their case study on the domestic violence movement in the United States based on an analysis of advocates' narratives about the domestic violence phenomenon. The analysis sheds light on the current status of the movement as a social change

movement attempting to promote alternative understandings of domestic violence as a social, rather than an individual, problem. The findings provide some evidence that the domestic violence movement has become de-politicized. Another American-based study (Berns, 2007) explores differences between victims' and non victims' understanding of domestic violence, however, the participants of this study are non Aboriginal. An Australian-based study by Gordon, Hallahan and Henry (2002) examine the government response to family violence and child abuse complaints in Aboriginal communities.

The only other study that examines family violence within a policy context is another Australian study by Vincent and Eveline (2008). The authors used a document analysis of a major public inquiry into government agency responses to family and domestic violence in Indigenous communities and conducted an analysis of a policy development process in a department responsible for coordinating human service agencies, services and funding of community-sector family and domestic violence projects. The case studies reveal that both Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal women can “disappear” from the concerns that family and domestic policy purports to solve. To support their argument, the authors show how the policy terminology of both ‘domestic’ violence and ‘family’ violence can render gender and racism invisible.

While family violence in First Nation communities is recognized as a serious social problem requiring urgent attention, critical gaps remain in our understanding of this problem. Such gaps may hamper the development of more effective interventions. This study aims to add to the current literature on family violence by examining understandings of First Nation family violence from a First Nation and federal government perspective. The focus of this research is to identify important factors that, taken together, increase our understanding of this problem as it

relates to First Nation communities, thus setting the stage for further study in this area.

### 1.3 Purpose and Objectives

This research has two objectives. The first objective is to investigate understandings of family violence on reserve from two perspectives: First Nations (as recipients of funding) and federal government (as funder). The primary research question that guides this research is: *How is family violence in First Nation communities understood by First Nations and the federal government?* Answering this question will be accomplished through a comparative analysis of interview findings involving federal staff of the FVPP and representatives of NWAC which reveal how family violence is understood.

The second objective is to explore whether understandings of family violence influence family violence prevention policy and programming. This objective will be accomplished through a detailed case study of the FVPP's policy and an initiative funded through this program - a family violence prevention toolkit. The main objective of the case study is to set out how the policy relationship between First Nations and the federal government plays out in practice. Analyses of both the interviews and the toolkit will highlight the consequences of any discrepancy in understandings of family violence between First Nations and the federal government.

These research objectives are important because they highlight critical areas in the study of family violence that have been previously ignored. These objectives also provide important insights into the existing relationship between First Nations and the federal government. The goal of this study, then, is to improve our understanding of a critical social problem in First Nation communities through an investigation of understandings of family violence from a First Nation

and federal government perspective. The intent of this research is to use this enhanced understanding to improve the current policy relationship between First Nations and the federal government.

#### 1.4 Contributions

This study is important as it fills a void in the literature on family violence, and has significant implications for researchers, policy makers, social programs, Aboriginal peoples, and for sociology. In terms of research contributions, this study advances our understanding of family violence from a First Nations and government perspective, in which little is known, and provides a foundation for future research in this area. The study also provides a theoretical model that identifies factors relating to First Nation family violence, providing a comprehensive picture of the problem in the Canadian context. From a practical perspective, knowledge arising from this research can be used to improve programs designed for First Nations to address family violence. The identification of systemic barriers within the policy and program development processes can serve as a focal point to direct program reform efforts and provides possible directions for future violence prevention programming.

This research has implications for policy makers in government. Insights about the federal policy and funding processes for family violence initiatives developed by and for First Nations can help inform future policy decisions and contribute to a more effective policy relationship between First Nations and the federal government.

For sociology, the exploration of family violence in First Nation communities serves to reveal the position of First Nations, and more specifically, First Nation women, in relation to other

Canadians regarding the government's response to a major social problem. This research reveals the extent to which Canadian values of equality, equity, and social inclusion are entrenched in the government's policy development process, and specifically, whether these ideals direct decisions affecting marginalized groups, such as First Nations. The study further serves to examine the government's position on citizen engagement, and challenge the government's responsiveness to social problems affecting First Nations in terms of the positioning and consequential treatment of this population group through modern day federal policies and programming.

### 1.5 Overview of Thesis

This thesis is organized in seven chapters. Chapter two introduces the research approach for the study and describes the methods utilized to conduct the specific aspects of the study. The chapter begins with an overview of the research framework with subsequent sections describing each aspect of this framework. This is followed by a description of the data analyses performed. A detailed description of the coding procedures utilized illustrates how the data were organized and analyzed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief discussion of techniques used to increase reliability and validity for this study.

Chapter three briefly discusses the policy development process in Canada within the context of social programming for First Nations. This discussion serves to help frame the policy relationship between First Nations and the federal government with respect to their efforts to address the problem of family violence on reserve. An important objective of this chapter is to discuss how the government and the public connect on social policy issues and how the viewpoints of ordinary citizens, including marginalized groups such as First Nations, are

incorporated into policy decisions.

Chapter four presents understandings of family violence in First Nation communities according to two perspectives: First Nations and the federal government. These findings are based on an analysis of group and individual interviews with representatives of the NWAC and federal staff of the FVPP.

Chapter five provides a comparative analysis of First Nation and federal government perspectives of First Nation family violence derived from the findings presented in chapter four. The first section of this chapter provides a high level analysis of both perspectives of family violence which highlights a similarity in the different aspects or dimensions of family violence considered important by the two groups. The remaining sections of this chapter explores contrasts in the two perspectives along the identified dimensions of family violence.

Chapter six presents an instrumental case study of the FVPP policy and NWAC toolkit initiative to investigate how the policy relationship between First Nations and the federal government plays out in practice. A critical analysis of the toolkit provides additional insight into a First Nations understanding of family violence within First Nation communities.

The final chapter provides concluding thoughts about this research and recommendations for future work in this area.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

### 2.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the research approach for this study, including the methods utilized to conduct the specific aspects of the study. The chapter begins with an overview of the research framework with subsequent sections describing each aspect of this framework. This is followed by a description of the data analyses performed, which is part of the data analytic framework. A detailed description of the coding procedures utilized illustrates how the data were organized and analyzed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief discussion of techniques used to increase reliability and validity for this study.

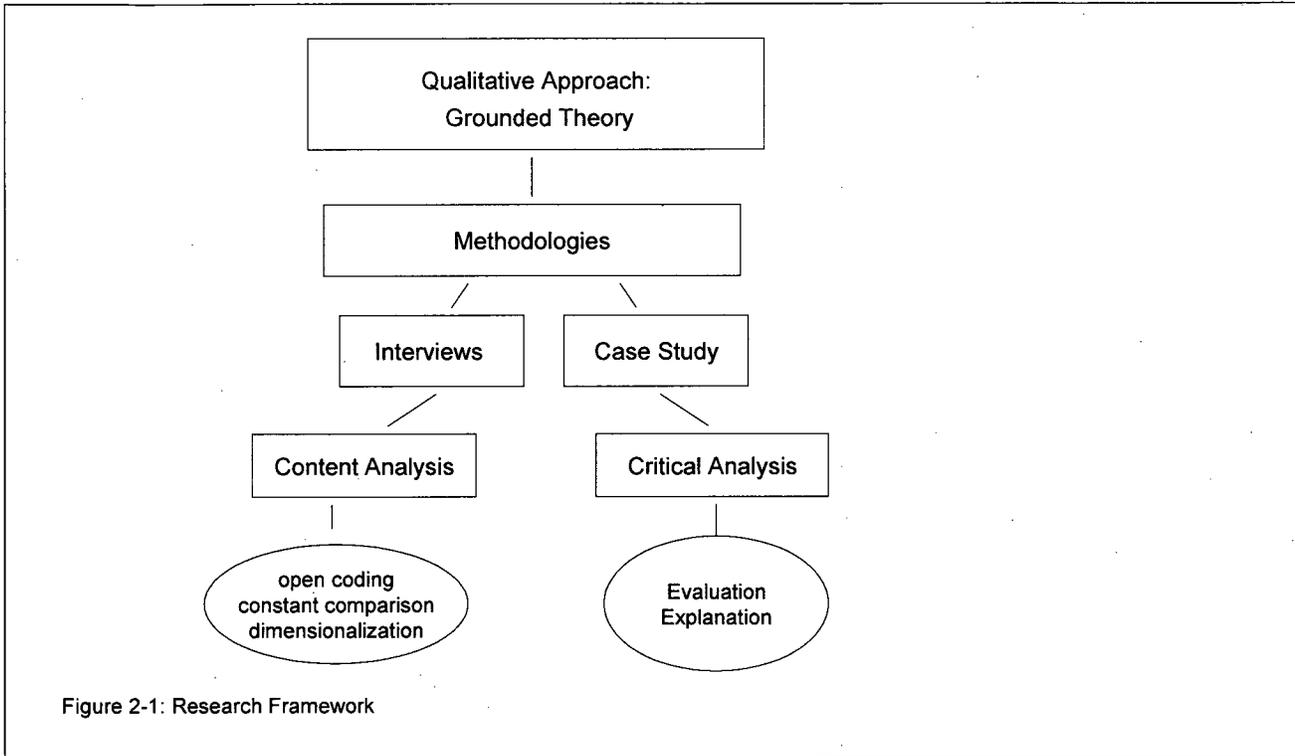
### 2.1 Research Framework

This research uses a grounded theory approach to investigate understandings of family violence in First Nation communities. Two qualitative methodologies were used: interviewing and case study. First, interviews were conducted by the researcher with two groups about their understanding of First Nation family violence: federal government staff of the Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP) and representatives of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). The interviewing yielded two perspectives of family violence in First Nation communities.

Second, a family violence initiative funded by the federal government was the focus of a text-based instrumental case study. Specifically, an information and action toolkit developed by the NWAC in conjunction with provincial Aboriginal groups and First Nation individuals, and a

federal policy for the FVPP were analyzed. The purpose of the case study is twofold: 1) to verify whether the toolkit is reflective of a First Nations understanding of family violence; and 2) to explore the influence of policy on family violence prevention initiatives. Thus, a case study was an opportunity to see the interplay of federal family violence prevention policy with community-based solutions and to examine the extent to which First Nation understandings are represented in information that is intended for their use.

The interviews were analyzed by the researcher using the basic principles of content analysis. This included procedures such as open coding, constant comparison, and dimensionalization. For the case study, a detailed critical analysis was undertaken on the toolkit and the federal policy. Critical analysis is interpretive assessment. It involves the writer's reflection on and evaluation of a text. The purpose of undertaking a critical analysis is to review and explain. Figure 2-1 illustrates the research framework utilized in this study. The remaining chapter describes in detail each of these steps.



## 2.2 Research Approach: Grounded Theory

A grounded theory approach was used to conceptualize understandings of family violence in First Nation communities from two perspectives: First Nations and the federal government. A grounded theory approach is an appropriate choice because the researcher did not begin this study with a preconceived theory in mind. Rather, a theory is intended to emerge from the data collected for this specific study. The theory that emerges will be closely tied to people's experience and can be used to provide insight, enhance understanding, and provide meaningful options for action (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory, then, is derived from data, systematically gathered, and analyzed throughout the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Based on the grounded theory of Strauss and Glaser (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990), the main goal of grounded theory

research is to construct theories in order to understand phenomena. As described by Fischer, Miller, and Sidney (2007), grounded theory uses a process of analytic induction to examine cases in detail and in which theory is continually built from the bottom up, based on observations of particular data.

The strength of grounded theory is that it provides tools for analyzing processes and these tools “hold much potential for studying social justice issues” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:508). Another strength of grounded theory is that it draws on both critical thinking and creativity to develop abstract ideas about the meanings of the research participants actions and worlds (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Based on an interplay between the researcher and data, the researcher can provide an abstract interpretation of empirical relationships and offer potential implications of the analyses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

## 2.3 Methods

### 2.3.1 Expert Interviewing

Semi-structured interviewing was chosen as the main method to learn about understandings of First Nation family violence. Semi-structured interviewing involves direct interaction between the researcher and a respondent or group. It differs from the traditional structured interviewing in several important ways. First, while the researcher uses a formal structured instrument or protocol as a guide for the interview, the order of questions is not strictly followed. Second, the interviewer is free to move the conversation in any direction of interest that may come up. As such, semi-structured interviewing is particularly useful for exploring a topic broadly and to explore areas of interest in depth. Because there is a predetermined set of

questions asked of all respondents, it is easy to analyze semi-structured interview data, especially when synthesizing across respondents, and it allows the researcher to make comparisons across interviews.

Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which to understand an individual or group perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It is a technique for acquiring information that is used so extensively today, that it is often said that we live in an “interview society” (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 1993). As Denzin and Lincoln (2003:62) suggest, “qualitative researchers are realizing that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results”.

Expert interviewing is used to explore a specific subject that requires knowledge from key informants who play a critical role in defining problems. Such experts may have been involved in the development of initiatives or strategies related to the subject. Advantages of using expert interviewing include: fast access to a new or unknown field, quick way to obtain specific information on a specialized topic, less time consuming compared to some other interviewing techniques (i.e focus groups), and experts are often motivated to cooperate and share information.<sup>3</sup> The interviewer’s own knowledge in the area of social programming on reserve (through employment at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)) provided appropriate background knowledge for the interviews.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ies.be/files/060313%20Interviews\\_VanAudenhove.pdf](http://www.ies.be/files/060313%20Interviews_VanAudenhove.pdf)

## Sample Selection

Face to face interviews were conducted by the researcher with experts from the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and federal employees of INAC's Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP). These two groups were chosen because, through their affiliation with their respective organizations, it was believed that they adequately represent a First Nations perspective and a federal government perspective, respectively. The NWAC is a national native women's organization "founded on the collective goal to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations and Métis women within First Nation, Métis and Canadian societies".<sup>4</sup> It is an aggregate of thirteen native women's organizations from across Canada and was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1974. The FVPP is one component of INAC's priority for women, children and families. The program provides operational funding for on-reserve shelters and supports community-based prevention projects on reserve.<sup>5</sup> More detailed information about the FVPP is provided in chapter 5.

The intent of the interviews was to learn about understandings of family violence in First Nation communities from two perspectives: First Nations and federal government. The NWAC was selected for this study because they had been recently (within the last 3 years) successful in receiving funding from INAC's FVPP for a family violence prevention initiative. Interview respondents were selected based on their affiliation (i.e. employment) with the NWAC and the FVPP. This type of sampling is referred to as a relevance sample, which is defined by the

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4 <http://www.nwac-hq.org/en/nwacstructure.html>

5 <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/mr/is/fvpp-eng.asp>

analytical problem at hand. Relevance sampling is also called purposive sampling (Krippendorff, 2004).

The first interview for the study was conducted by the researcher with regional staff of the FVPP. An email was sent to all regional managers and program analysts of the FVPP, including the national manager in Ottawa, inviting them to participate in the study. An information letter describing the study was sent as an attachment. Four regional staff members (one male, three female) from four different regions (Atlantic, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia) agreed to take part in the study. For convenience, the interview was scheduled around a previously scheduled national meeting of the FVPP in which all regional staff planned to attend. The group interview took place in Vancouver, BC on March 26, 2008 and lasted approximately two hours. A separate individual interview was held on May 2, 2008 in Ottawa with the national manager. This interview lasted approximately one hour.

A third interview was conducted by the researcher with key informants of the NWAC. A letter was sent to the Executive Director of NWAC inviting staff members to participate in an interview. An information letter describing the purpose of the study was also provided. The study's researcher was contacted by the Project Coordinator for the Youth Violence Prevention Toolkit who indicated that she, along with two other female staff members, would participate in the study. The staff members work in the area of, or set standards with respect to, family violence prevention programming for First Nations. A group interview was held at the NWAC Ottawa office on September 11, 2008 and lasted 1.5 hours. All three interviews were audio-taped with a digital recording device and then manually transcribed by the researcher.

A semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix 1) with open-ended questions was used to

guide the group and individual interviews. Nine main research questions about family violence in First Nation communities were used for all three interviews. The questionnaire also included secondary questions that were specific to either NWAC or the FVPP. These secondary questions provided a context for each perspective. While all questions were asked of the participants, the exact ordering of the questions was not always followed. The order of the questions was determined mainly by the synergy of the group and the interactive ideas that emerged from the discussion. In many cases, the structured questions generated discussion on related issues and thus, other questions were asked by the researcher for the purpose of clarification. At the conclusion of the interviews, respondents were given the opportunity to add anything that was not previously mentioned. In each interview session, respondents made additional comments that helped to illustrate their understanding of First Nation family violence.

#### Data Analysis: Content Analysis

Content analysis was applied to the transcribed interviews. A definition of content analysis that captures the technique used in this study is that by Holsti (1969:14) which is, “Any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages”. Also relevant is Weber’s description (1985: 9): “A research methodology that utilizes a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. These inferences are about the senders, the message itself, or the audience of the message”. As both these definitions state, content analysis allows for the construction of indicators which represent the worldviews, values, attitudes, opinions, prejudices and stereotypes of those who construct messages.

With respect to Weber’s definition, this study focuses on the sender of messages (ie. to

extract the worldview of family violence of the sender). In interpretive content analysis, the focus is generally on the formation of theory from the observation of messages and the coding of those messages. It involves theoretical sampling, analytical categories, cumulative comparative analysis, and formation of types or conceptual categories.

Interview and focus group data are often subjected to content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Berrelson, 1952). In open-ended interviews, participants are allowed to speak freely and in their own terms. Therefore, an open-coding technique would allow for an unrestricted exploration of the interviewees' conceptions manifest in the transcribed conversations, enhancing the quality of the data. As a research technique, "content analysis provides new insights, increases a researcher's understanding of particular phenomena, or informs practical actions" (Krippendorff, 2004:18).

Interpretive content analysis allows for flexibility in coding text that traditional content analysis lacks and is more suitable as a method for latent content analysis. Traditional content analysis is generally used for quantifying connotative interpretations, or in other words, counting interpretations of content (Ahuvia, 2001). With qualitative interpretive content analysis, the coding of text is more holistic compared with traditional content analysis. For instance, while only a part of text may be the focus, such as a headline, the whole text would be considered in the interpretation of the part that is being coded. They are not treated in isolation from the rest of the text.

The findings derived from a content analysis are a combination of description and analysis that uses concepts derived from the data that emerge through the application of a grounded theory approach. The analysis usually results in the identification of recurrent patterns occurring in the

data in the form of categories or themes which are derived from the coding process. Coding is a process for both categorizing qualitative data and for describing the implications and details of these categories. Initially one does open coding, considering the data in minute detail while developing some initial categories. Later, one moves to more selective coding where one systematically codes with respect to a core concept.

Two analytic procedures are basic to the coding process: making of comparisons and asking of questions. These procedures help to give concepts their precision and specificity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The first step in analysis is conceptualization. This is a type of labelling that involves breaking down an observation, a sentence, a paragraph, and giving each discrete incident, idea, or event a name. This is done by asking questions of the data, such as, What is this? What does it represent? The incidents are constantly compared and similar phenomena are grouped together and given the same name.

The aim of research is to make some logical conclusion(s) (end product) which is connected to, or derived from, the data. This is done by making inferences, a process that result from both analysis and interpretation of the data. Analysis is manipulating data or the “breaking down of a complex whole into its constituent parts” (Spiggle, 1994:496). In interpretation, the researcher asks questions of the data to discern its meaning, or grasps the sense of it. In other words, interpretation is used to make sense of experience and behavior, or understanding some phenomenon in its own terms, grasping its essence. Unlike analysis, the process of interpretation does not engage a set of operations or coding rules. As described by Spiggle (1994:497), “interpretation occurs as a gestalt shift and represents a synthetic, holistic and illuminating grasp of meaning, as in deciphering a code”.

The interview data were subjected to three levels of coding: open coding, categorization, and dimensionalization. First, the data were read to identify high level concepts including their properties and dimensions, known as open coding. *Open coding* is an analytical process in which a first reading of the data identifies high level concepts and their properties and dimensions are discovered (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As described by Strauss and Corbin (1990:62) in earlier works on grounded theory, in open coding, the researcher is involved in:

“naming and categorizing phenomena through close examination of data...During open coding, the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data. Through this process, one’s own and others’ assumptions about phenomena are questioned or explored, leading to new discoveries”.

During open coding, the data are broken down into discrete parts, examined, and compared for similarities and differences. This is referred to as the constant comparative method (Glaser and Straus, 1967). Questions were asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data. Through this process, the researcher’s own and others’ assumptions about phenomena were questioned and explored. Comparison explores differences and similarities across incidents within the data currently collected and provides guidelines for collecting additional data (Spiggle, 1994).

Systematic comparisons employ the principles of logic in making inferences from data. Comparisons begin in the initial stages of analysis as one categorizes and abstracts the data. While categorizing, the investigator notes general similarities in the specific empirical instances in the data and labels them as representing the same category. Initially, this process occurs somewhat implicitly and unsystematically, while one explores the data. As analysis proceeds, the

investigator may conduct comparisons in a systematic and methodical way.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) pioneered the constant comparative method as an analytical procedure in which the analyst explicitly compares each incident in the data with other incidents appearing to belong to the same category, exploring their similarities and differences. As analysis continues and the categories develop, the investigator compares incidents in the data with the appropriate emerging category, not with other incidents.

Second, the concepts that were identified through the open coding process were classified or grouped into categories. *Categorization* is the process of identifying patterns in data (Spiggle, 1994). It involves classifying or grouping concepts (units of data) during the coding process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). During categorization, patterns in the data were revealed. The phenomenon represented by a category was given a name that is more abstract than the concepts grouped under it. The essence of categorization is identifying a chunk or unit of data as belonging to, representing, or being an example of some more general phenomenon. Categories were then grouped into fewer, more general conceptual classes. Abstract constructs encompass a number of more concrete instances found in the data that share certain common features.

Finally, properties of categories and constructs were identified according to their attributes or characteristics. *Dimensionalization* involves identifying properties of categories and constructs. Once a category has been defined, the researcher may explore its attributes or characteristics along continua or dimensions (Spiggle, 1994). Dimensionalization was useful in informing an interpretation of the data to extract a First Nations and federal understanding of family violence. Multiple coders were not used in this study. The researcher, alone, applied the

coding technique to the transcribed interviews. While the use of multiple coders is recommended, the literature suggests that a single coder is sufficient (Ahuvia, 2001).

### 2.3.2 Instrumental Case Study

A text-based instrumental case study was the second method utilized in this study. A case study is a holistic, in-depth investigation of something (Fischer, Miller & Sidney, 2007). It is not so much a methodology than it is a choice of what is to be studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Case studies are used to analyze the actual experiences of an organization around a specific issue or topic, allowing for a complete understanding of its complexity, or to examine the process by which an intervention or policy has been implemented (Majchrzak, 1984). There is no single way to conduct a case study, and for any given study, the “general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible” (Punch, 1998:150). Most simply, the purpose of undertaking a case study is to further our understanding of an issue (Stake, 2000).

Based on the resulting analysis of the interviews, it was determined that a case study was required in order to understand, in a practical sense, the policy relationship between First Nations and the federal government. Since the policy process can be complex, illustrating how it works in practice can increase our understanding of this process and provide additional insight about the influence of policy on solutions/approaches to family violence. To do this, the FVPP policy was examined along with the NWAC Youth Council Family Violence Prevention Toolkit.

The FVPP policy provides the foundation for the program’s structure and authorities. The program’s terms and conditions outline funding and eligibility criteria and determine eligibility for how decisions about funding family violence prevention initiatives are made. The toolkit was

developed by the NWAC from funding received through the FVPP, in collaboration with provincial Aboriginal groups and First Nation community members. In 2006, a total of three proposals were received at INAC headquarters requesting funding for family violence prevention initiatives. The NWAC was one of two proposals which were accepted for funding in 2006.

The toolkit developed by NWAC was selected for the case study because it exemplifies a more recent successful application of policy in the development of family violence prevention initiatives. The NWAC toolkit in particular is thought to be representative of a First Nations viewpoint, since it was developed with provincial Aboriginal groups and First Nation individuals of all ages. As such, it would allow for a useful comparison with the group interview that was conducted with NWAC representatives. Such a comparison would allow for verification of the First Nations understanding of family violence that was derived from the interview session.

The toolkit content contains information about family violence in 24 fact sheets, 'tools', and pamphlets, all of which are presented in an organized fashion in a colorful foldout package. The toolkit is organized in sections according to different types of violence. In addition to information specific to family violence prevention, the toolkit contains a facilitator guide which provides instructions on how to use the toolkit and deliver workshops. An evaluation form and a CD containing all toolkit materials are also included. Outcomes of various workshops and gatherings held across Canada with First Nations of all age groups contributed to the development of the toolkit's content.

The NWAC Youth Council toolkit is not typical in the sense that it does not exemplify a typical community-based project. Funding for this project was provided from INAC directly from headquarters rather than from the regional allocation (that must be shared among 8 regions). The

toolkit project was also funded by Status of Women Canada as well as a number of other partner organizations. Thus, the NWAC Youth Council toolkit is an example of an awareness project that can be developed given sufficient funds and resources (i.e. capacity of people involved in the project). The toolkit does not represent the norm of other prevention projects funded through the FVPP, and in this sense, may provide insight as an exceptional case.

As Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster (2000) put it, “Case studies can be used to test hypotheses, particularly to examine a single exception that shows the hypothesis to be false”. The focus, then, is to learn about an unusual case that is of interest in its own right. The researcher’s interpretation comes from learning about the issue of the case (Miller & Salkind, 2002). The outcome of a case study is a report of, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit, the “lessons learned” from the case. A critical analysis of the toolkit and federal policy documents was undertaken to provide an unobtrusive assessment of the issue at hand.

The case study conducted in this research can be described as an instrumental case study, to use Stake’s term (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A case study is termed ‘instrumental’ if the particular case is examined for the purpose of providing insight into an issue (Silverman, 2005; Stake in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As Stake (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 445) explains,

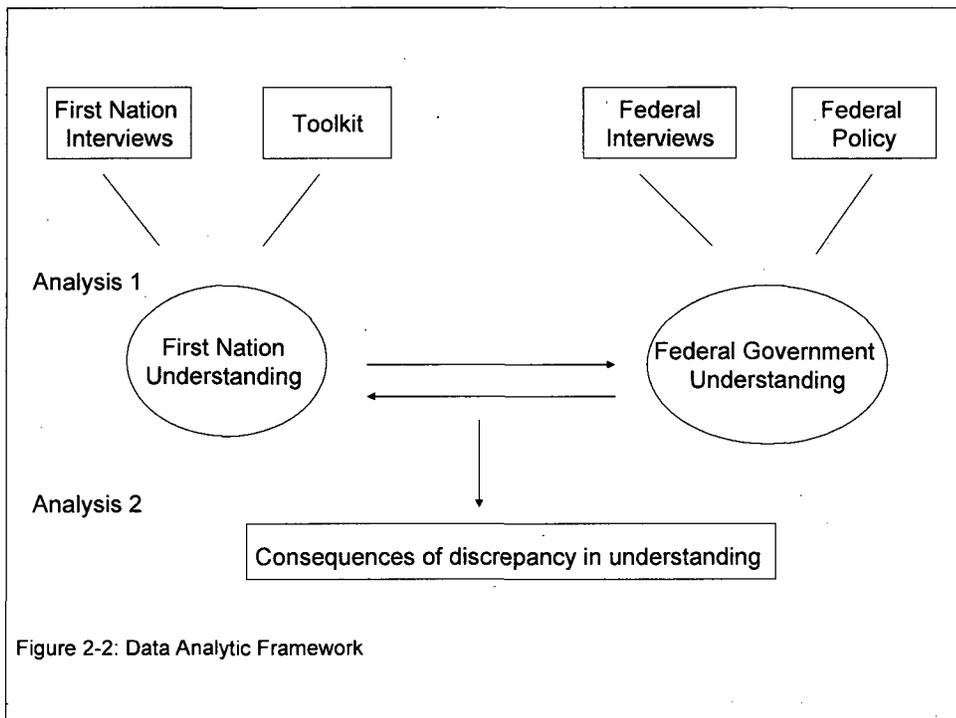
“The case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else. The case is still looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized and its ordinary activities detailed, but all because this helps us pursue the external interest. The case may be seen as typical of other cases or not”.

## 2.4 Data Analytic Framework

Two levels of analysis were used in this study to accomplish the research objectives. The first analysis involved exploring understandings of family violence in First Nation communities

from a First Nations and federal government perspective. A content analysis of the interviews and a critical analysis of the toolkit helped to achieve this objective. The results of the analysis of the toolkit were then compared with the First Nation group interview to confirm whether the toolkit was reflective of a First Nations understanding.

A second level of analysis involved determining whether there is any discrepancy in understandings of family violence in First Nation communities between the federal government and First Nations. This was done by comparing the federal interviews with the First Nation interview. An analysis of the federal FVPP policy and the toolkit will also provide insight into discrepancies with respect to the policy relationship. Figure 2-2 below provides a visual schematic of the data analytic framework used in this study.



## 2.5 Reliability and Validity

Several strategies were employed in this study to ensure the highest possible quality and reliability. While some strategies were addressed in the study's design, others are applied to data collection and during interpretation of data (Krefting, 1991). First, the study used a mixed methodology. The use of multiple methods helps to ensure that the requirements of content validity are met (Neuendorf, 2002). The goal of combining qualitative methods is to use each method so that it contributes something unique to the researchers understanding of the phenomenon under study (Morgan, 1997).

Second, during interviewing, questions were asked of study participants when required to to achieve clarity of responses. The main questions were stated in different ways by the investigator to ensure understanding of the questions by participants. This procedure helped to achieve validity. In qualitative research, validity generally refers to whether the findings of the study represent the lived experiences of the participants (Hammersley, 1990). In addition, during analysis, the data were subjected to constant comparative analysis to determine consistency and accuracy across participants within each group.

As Weber (1990:15) explains, "a content analysis variable is valid to the extent to which it measures the construct the investigator intends to measure". Specific to content analysis, the issue of validity centers on the validity of the classification scheme and the validity of the interpretation relating content variables to their causes or consequences. To assert that a category or variable is valid it to assert that there is a correspondence between the category and the abstract concept that it represents.

Third, during coding of interview data, the original transcribed interview data was

reviewed with questions in mind, such as, “*What are they saying about family violence?*”; “*How do they define or describe it?*” . Pieces of text that answer or provide insight into these questions were highlighted. These “highlighted excerpts” form the basis of the units of analysis for the data, essentially what would be focused on for developing categories. The original transcript was read several times to ensure that none of the relevant text was inadvertently left out, and to confirm the rigorousness of the findings.

Finally, a comparative analysis technique was used in this study to determine an accurate understanding of family violence by combining different ways of looking at the findings (Silverman, 2005). For example, in addition to the NWAC group interview, a critical analysis was conducted on the First Nation toolkit to verify the First Nation understanding. Similarly, an examination of federal policy documents of the FVPP was compared to the federal interview to discern whether a similar understanding of family violence could be obtained.

In summary, two methodologies were used to achieve the study’s objectives. A number of open-ended questions about family violence were used to generate a discussion about how family violence is understood from a First Nations perspective and a federal government perspective. The digitally recorded interviews of both groups were transcribed and then analyzed separately according to an open coding technique. This technique generated several lower level categories which were then compared for similarities and differences, resulting in fewer higher level categories. These final categories indicate different aspects of the problem of family violence.

An instrumental case study on the FVPP and the NWAC toolkit was done to enhance our understanding of the issue of family violence and is used to supplement findings derived from the expert interviews. The case study also provides insight into the policy relationship between First

Nations and the federal government. A brief overview of policy development in Canada is presented in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE: POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA

### 3.0 Introduction

The federal government's involvement in the issue of family violence in First Nation communities began in the late 1970s in response to a growing demand for services on reserve. Historically, the Government of Canada has provided social support services on reserves as a matter of social policy, not legislation. Federal obligations under section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867* gives the federal government primary, but not exclusive, responsibility for “Indians and lands reserved for the Indians”. As a result, the federal government is responsible for the delivery of provincial-like services, including social programs, such as the Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP). The first federally funded shelters for abused women were constructed under the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) Non-profit Housing Program in 1978 (FVPP National Program Manual, 2005).

This chapter briefly discusses the policy development process in Canada within the context of social programming for First Nations. Given the role of the federal government in family violence prevention and its special relationship with First Nations, a brief overview of the federal government's approach to policy development is presented. This discussion serves to help frame the policy relationship between First Nations and the federal government with respect to their efforts to address the problem of family violence on reserve. An important objective will be to discuss how the government and the public connect on social policy issues, and more specifically, how the viewpoints of ordinary citizens, including marginalized groups such as First Nations, are incorporated into policy decisions.

### 3.1 Policy Development

Policy decisions focus on issues of great importance to citizens and society in general, such as protecting the environment, the quality and safety of food and water, healthy child development, air quality, reduced poverty, economic competitiveness, employment, educational attainment, housing, literacy, and crime (Torjman, 2005). A policy is a decision made by government that provides guidance for addressing public problems or concerns. The formulation of policy involves:

“the identification and analysis of a range of actions that respond to these concerns. Each possible solution is assessed against a number of factors, such as probable effectiveness, potential cost, resources required for implementation, political context and community support” (Torjman, 2005:4).

Social policy involves decisions that deal with issues related to human health, safety and well-being (Flynn, 1992). Drawing on Pal’s (1954:2) definition, Westhues (2006:8) defines social policy, as

“a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address an issue that deals with human health, safety or well-being...Policy decisions at the international and government levels reflect the values acceptable to the dominant stakeholders at the time the policy decision is taken”.

Warf Higgins, et al.(2006) suggest an addition to this definition: “This course of action represents the choices made by policy makers, which are largely determined by their values and ideologies”, to highlight the important aspect of choice involved in the policy making process, which is primarily based on the values and ideals of the decision makers. In this way, as Goldenberg (2006) suggests, decision making tends to be more of an art than a science.

Common steps in the policy development process include: 1) problem identification and definition (within a narrow context); 2) agreement on goals (i.e. values, criteria, principles);

3) identifying options; 4) choosing the desired option; 5) implementing the policy; and 6) evaluating the new policy (Westhues, 2006). Policy development is essentially a decision made by government which is deemed to be in the public interest. It involves the selection of choices about the most appropriate means to a desired end, considering a range of options and the potential impact of each.

Decisions are meant to be based on a rational and analytical process, and often take into account the views of experts in a particular field (e.g. think tanks) as well as available scientific evidence. The process does not consider intuitive knowledge or the experience of the people affected by the policy or program. While decisions made by government are intended to ensure the well-being of its citizens, the ruling party is also concerned about getting re-elected. Thus, a key influence throughout the policy process is whether action (or inaction) on the policy idea threatens the ruling party's chances of getting re-elected (Cardinal, 1969). If the party in power can win the next election without doing anything, it is likely no action will be taken. In order to ensure that voters can support the initiatives proposed by government (to enhance their chances of being re-elected), proposed initiatives must be reflective of the perceptions, values and ideals of the majority of Canadians, such as equality, equity, and human dignity. Government initiatives must also be politically feasible and efficient (Weimer & Vining, 2005). Marginalized citizens do not often play a role in this scenario, especially if their viewpoints or values are radically different from the mainstream (i.e. majority).

There are mainly three major groups involved in the policy process: politicians, bureaucrats (public servants), and interest groups (lobbyists) (Saulis, in Westhues, 2006). The particular influence of each group differs at various times, depending on the group's composition,

and the information and insights available to outsiders studying the process (Wharf & McKenzie, 1998). The Cabinet, which is made up of ministers, is the most important group that determines priorities upon which policies are developed (Van Loon & Whittington, 1987). Each Cabinet Minister oversees a department of public servants whose focus is on specific policies and programs (and/or laws and regulations). The official basis for Cabinet decision-making is a Memorandum to Cabinet (MC).<sup>6</sup> An MC is usually developed by the staff (public servants) of the sponsoring minister along with the department responsible for its implementation.

In summary, the policy making process in Canada is essentially a closed system in which the key power holders of the political party system debate issues of public interest, which are usually consistent with the agenda of the ruling party, and develop initiatives that increase their chances of getting re-elected. Given that decisions are most often made by politicians in isolation of the general public, it is safe to say that the perceptions or perspectives of First Nations are not likely to figure into this process. Therefore, it follows, then, that the policies and programs that affect First Nations often do not take into consideration a First Nations worldview or perspective of a particular issue.

### 3.2 Citizen Participation

In Canada, there is little opportunity for citizens to participate in the policy making process. Traditionally, the views and interests of citizens are facilitated directly through voting, in which citizens elect representatives to look after their interests (representative democracy) and indirectly by political parties and interests groups (Laforest & Phillips, in Orsini and Smith, 2007).

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

At the present time, opportunity to engage in political discussions is limited mostly to politicians and senior civil servants (Wharf Higgins et al., in Westhues, 2006). Exceptions to this are voluntary groups and Royal Commissions, a process in which governments invite citizens to participate in their work. However, participation is normally restricted to professionals and other individuals of the upper-middle class (Wharf Higgins, et al., in Westhues, 2006).

There is even less opportunity for marginalized groups to participate in policy development. Historically, First Nations were not consulted in the development of policies that directly affect them (Weaver, 1990). This situation was thought to change when during the federal election of 1968 Trudeau announced his intention to open up the policy process to the public and “make Government more accessible to people, to give our citizens a sense of full participation in the affairs of Government” (Weaver, 1981). The connection between citizen participation and Indian policy was attempted in the late 1960’s when the government decided to convene consultation meetings across the country with First Nations to discuss revisions to the Indian Act, dating back to 1876.<sup>7</sup>

Statements made by Ministers to First Nation participants during meetings held between July 1968 and May 1969 raised expectations about the nature of the new policy, including the amount of influence First Nations would have in the policy process itself (Weaver, 1981). Despite these good intentions, First Nations were excluded from participating in proceedings that produced the White Paper. A press release after the White Paper’s release noted that the new Indian Policy has been unilaterally devised by the government without First Nation involvement

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<sup>7</sup> There were also Parliamentary committee hearings on Indian policy in the 1950's; the Hawthorn Report was also instrumental in explaining the reaction to the White paper of 1969.

or negotiation, with the result that “we do not feel we took part in any decision-making process (Weaver, 1981). Aside from not including First Nations in the discussions, the White Paper failed to “offer reasonable methods for coping with the problems Indians were experiencing. The policy was a response to values within the policy-making arena, not to the basic problems facing Indians” (Cardinal, 1969:197).

Additionally, it appears that the lack of acknowledgement of history in policy decisions was another major problem in the government’s approach during the development of a new Indian Policy (White Paper, 1969). Trudeau’s views on the minimal importance of history in the development of policies had profound implications for Indian policy (Weaver, 1981) and created long lasting tensions between the federal government and First Nations. The ultimate failure to include First Nations in the new Indian policy exemplifies a closed system of policy development. The situation has improved little since the 1960’s. The White Paper debacle highlights the need to better understand how social problems are defined by those who are most affected, such as First Nations, and how these understandings are in turn perceived by policy makers.

As a direct response to the White Paper, the Indian Brotherhood was formed in 1969 to represent First Nations’ interests in Canada. Its transformation into the Assembly of First Nations in 1976 became a lobbying voice for reserve chiefs to talk to the federal government and address First Nation concerns (Cardinal, 1969). Political organization meant that, for the first time, First Nation concerns could be heard, and as some would argue, no longer be ignored (Cardinal, 1969). Since that time, a number of Aboriginal organizations have been established to represent the interests of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada. These include the Assembly of First Nations at the national level, as well as regional organizations, Metis National Council, and Inuit

Tapiirit Kanatami. Because of the unique concerns of Aboriginal women, women's organizations have also been established, such as the Native Women's Association of Canada, and Pauktuutit (the Inuit women's organization), among others.

Consultation with First Nations is now required by law to ensure that Aboriginal or treaty rights are protected. This 'duty to consult' stems from Section 35 of *The Constitution Act, 1982*, which recognizes and affirms the existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of Aboriginal people of Canada.<sup>8</sup> 'Duty to consult' refers to the requirement (based on rulings of the Supreme Court of Canada and many lower courts) of all levels of government and private companies to consult with Aboriginal people whenever Crown decisions or actions have the potential to adversely affect Aboriginal or treaty rights.<sup>9</sup> Consultation with Aboriginal people can also be required in the case of government decisions that affect public lands and waters where Aboriginal peoples have interests. Although the duty to consult is mandated by the courts, based on legislation and common law, it has yet to be determined what this means in practice. Nevertheless, Canadian governments are required by law to consult First Nations when considering implementing an initiative that may affect their Aboriginal or treaty rights.

The federal government does not regard social programming as an Aboriginal or treaty right and therefore does not uphold a duty to consult with respect to the development of social policies and programs that affect First Nations. However, despite this, it can be argued that the government has shown to be open to alternative understandings to social problems in the design and implementation of solutions. For instance, the federal government has embraced notions such

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.blakes.com/english/view\\_disc.asp?ID=106](http://www.blakes.com/english/view_disc.asp?ID=106)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

as, “restorative”, “healing”, and “holistic”, and have applied them to a variety of settings, such as justice, health, corrections, etc. (Stewart, Huntley, & Blaney, 2001; Blagg, in Strang and Braithwaite, 2002).

In addition, more and more First Nations have become involved in the management and provision of social programming on reserve. Examples can be seen in health transfer policies, child welfare, restorative justice and correctional initiatives, and community based education movements (Wharf Higgins et al., in Westhues, 2006). Despite this progress, however, First Nations are not consistently included in the design of programs, setting of standards or modes of delivery, and policies governing the programs (Saulis, in Westhues, 2006). In lieu of Aboriginal inclusiveness in policy development, government officials have adopted a “culturally relevant” principle when designing programs and policies that affect Aboriginal people in an attempt to meet their cultural needs. However, First Nation critics, such as Mac Saulis (in Westhues, 2006), argue that this falls short of a holistic approach that is central to an Aboriginal worldview.

Saulis argues that a critical aspect of a holistic perspective allows for the acknowledgement of the spiritual, as spirituality is a resource that many people draw on in dealing with troubles. The programs that are created by government to help First Nations deal with social problems often do not acknowledge the spiritual dimension. This is problematic in that the problem for which a program or measure attempts to address is understood through a mainstream lens, thereby reducing its potential to be effective and relevant for the population it is intended to serve. Applying a mainstream paradigm of social well-being and its resulting programming to the First Nation population is considered by some scholars as dysfunctional (ibid) and hinders the expression of an Aboriginal worldview.

Saulis suggests that one way to apply an Aboriginal worldview to policy development is to use the philosophy of The Circle (four aspects of humans: mental, physical, emotional, spiritual). Perhaps the most significant aspect of this perspective is the idea that we are all connected: no one is unaffected by the plight and experience of others. This differs dramatically from the mainstream paradigm which is more individualistic in its approach. Additionally, the holistic approach considers the reality of First Nation peoples, including their history, which can provide certain insights about the problems they face today. As the literature on Aboriginal family violence asserts, the history of individuals, both as a collective and individual personal biographies, has an impact on the development and expression of social problems.

In a holistic approach, solutions to social ills are determined communally, that is, in consultation with all members of the community, since problems affect everyone. For the views and interests of First Nations to be expressed to government for input into policy decisions, citizen engagement (deliberative democracy) would, arguably, be ineffective. Experience has shown that the method of engaging citizens often results in an outpouring of raw emotion in response to critical policy issues, which ends up having no real impact on shaping public policy (Laforest & Phillips, in Orsini and Smith, 2007). Furthermore, individual consultation to this extent would be time-consuming and expensive.

Engagement with national Aboriginal organizations, it can be argued, may be a more efficient and effective way to tap into community viewpoints. These organizations, after all, have been created specifically to deal with the federal government on behalf of all Aboriginal groups. However, a primary challenge for the federal government with respect to policy development has been to liaise with national Aboriginal organizations and to involve First Nations in meaningful

ways in policy decisions that affect them.

In summary, political representation is the centre of the Canadian democratic system in which a diversity of views and opinions are heard and fed into the policy process. Policy development in Canada is essentially a closed system that is managed by a few elite insiders. Despite the efforts in the recent past to transform the role of the public in policy development from political representation to citizen engagement, it seems that we lie somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. Citizen engagement continues to be a challenge. Experience shows that group representation works more effectively than individual participation.

Since the creation of Aboriginal organizations, there is now an organized political avenue by which Aboriginal (e.g. First Nation) concerns may be known. The task for Aboriginal organizations, then, is to be heard and their viewpoints understood. The task for the federal government is to actively engage Aboriginal organizations in discussions, hear these viewpoints, and allow these alternative understandings to shape public policy and programs that affect them. This would be an important and necessary step in ensuring cultural relevance. First Nations engagement in policy decisions would also help to avoid a pan-Indian approach to social problems. Chapter four presents two perspectives of family violence that, on the surface (i.e. conceptual level) appear similar. In reality, these understandings are dramatically different, as is demonstrated in chapter five. This lends support for the need to actively engage First Nations in policies that will affect them.

## CHAPTER FOUR UNDERSTANDINGS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents understandings of family violence in First Nation communities according to two perspectives: First Nations and the federal government. First Nation understandings are based on a group interview with representatives of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), and understandings from a federal government perspective are based on group and individual interviews with federal staff of the Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP) of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). The chapter, is therefore, organized according to these two perspectives. Findings from interviews with NWAC are presented first, followed by the collective findings from interviews with federal staff of the FVPP.

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and then analyzed using an open coding technique (previously described). The data elements that seemed to provide insight or information about the issue of family violence was highlighted. These highlighted data elements were categorized according to themes. Lower level categories were grouped according to similar features or properties which resulted in fewer higher level categories. These final categories were given a name by the researcher that served to reasonably represent the properties of that category. These names are: attributes, antecedents, residuum, resolution, and impediments. Thus, the final categories are defined according to the researcher's interpretation of these constituent elements, which is based on both narratives and context. Table 4-1 lists the categories with their definitions.

Table 4-1 Final Categories and their Definitions

<b>Category Name</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Attributes</b>	Denotes what family violence is and/or who it affects. It involves behavioral and verbal characteristics, as well as the targets of violence, which distinguishes the term ‘family violence’ from other commonly used terms (e.g. domestic abuse).
<b>Antecedents</b>	Defined as the causes and/or contributors of family violence in First Nation communities. It describes how the problem of family violence has evolved over time, including how the problem has perpetuated to the point where it is today.
<b>Residuum</b>	Is defined as the residual effects of family violence. It speaks to the consequences of family violence and what it ultimately means for First Nation women, children and communities.
<b>Resolution</b>	Represents an act or course of action that can be applied to the problem. It is what could or should be done to address or resolve the problem of family violence within First Nation communities.
<b>Impediments</b>	Is related to the category ‘resolution’. Impediments speaks to the restrictions, constraints, or hindrances that prevent or challenge an act or course of action that may help resolve or address the problem of family violence in First Nation communities.

The following two sections describe how each group talked about family violence and therefore, represents two perspectives of First Nation family violence. For each section, the context of the information is organized according to the five categories that resulted from the analysis. Each category represents different aspects of family violence in First Nation communities and helps generate an overall understanding of the problem. Numbers or letters have been assigned to each participant for readability and to keep a sense of each individual’s views.

For the First Nation perspective, the letter ‘R’ indicates ‘respondent’. A number was assigned to the participants according to when they spoke in the interview.<sup>10</sup> For instance, R(1) spoke first, R(2) spoke second, and so on. For the federal government perspective, the letter ‘R’ in addition to a letter was assigned to each respondent. The ‘R’ indicates “region” and the letter corresponds to the first letter of the region (province) the participant represents (where the program is delivered). For instance, R(B) represents ‘British Columbia’, R(A) represents ‘Atlantic’, R(S) represents ‘Saskatchewan’, and R(Q) represents ‘Quebec’. R(N) represents the responses/views from the national manager of the program (based in Ottawa).

Quotes are provided from each respondent to give meaning to each category and to bring the narrative to life (i.e. give it substance). Taken together, these five categories delineate how the problem of family violence in First Nation communities is constructed by representatives of NWAC and the FVPP, therefore, representing an understanding of family violence from a particular perspective.

#### 4.1 First Nation Perspective of First Nations Family Violence

##### **Attributes**

From a First Nation’s perspective, *attributes* denotes both what family violence is and who it affects. The “what” refers to the different types of violence that constitute violence within families. The “who” refers to who is affected by family violence.

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<sup>10</sup> In a group interview, a question is posed and participants respond in no particular order or sequence. Questions are not directed at any one participant in particular.

*What it is*

The informants spoke of family violence as constituting several different forms of violence that take place within the family, including physical violence, psychological violence, emotional, and lateral violence. This broad definition of family violence is expressed by all participants.

Physical violence is recognized as a main feature of family violence, however, emotional or psychological violence is viewed as being on par with the physical expression of anger. R(1) talked about the hidden effects of family violence:

“Bruises often go away but the psychological violence is not something that goes away. It impacts your future relationships, the relationships with your children. It’s more equally perpetuated I think”.

R(2) indicated that emotional / psychological violence can be just as damaging and as prevalent as physical violence:

“There is a high rate of suicides within First Nation communities, so psychological, emotional violence is not something you can measure, how you diagnose it, it’s not as visible but it’s there”.

Another type of violence that is perceived to be prevalent in communities was lateral violence. The participants defined ‘lateral’ violence as violence that is directed towards other First Nations within communities. As R(1) explains, this type of violence is synonymous with bullying:

“Bullying is lateral violence, and in essence it’s Aboriginal against Aboriginal, and it’s something that comes out. The oppressed become the oppressors basically”.

This type of violence can be insidious as explained by R(2):

“Well, like gossiping within the workplace, within the community, there’s cyber bullying, that kind of, like it’s really damaging to people’s reputations”.

Lateral violence includes another dimension that goes beyond bullying. It appears to contain an undertone of racism, as explained by R(1):

“Lateral violence occurs because of the legislation, and it’s directly related to identity. Bill C-31 Section 6 of the Indian Act defines us, and basically we’re depending on an outside party to define our Indian-ness or our Aboriginality. It’s very prevalent for women, because women are in particular I think more impacted on imposed identities than men”.

#### *Who it affects*

The second part of this construct involves who is affected by family violence. All participants were in agreement that women and children are most affected and are the primary targets of familial abuse in First Nation communities, as expressed by R(1) and R(2) respectively:

“I don’t think you can separate violence against women from family violence, because clearly its women and children. Everybody partakes, everybody has a role to play in it.”

“Who’s most affected?” It’s the children and when those children become adults, their children become affected too.

Respondents also spoke about the terminology itself which helps to define and clarify what family violence is. According to the participants, the term ‘family violence’ appears to more accurately represent violence within the family in First Nation communities, as indicated by comments made by R(1):

“I like that you used the term family violence as opposed to domestic violence because violence that occurs within the family or violence against women is clearly a family issue; it’s not just focused on one person. And then from an Aboriginal perspective, when you’re

looking at healing and dealing with family violence, everybody has to go through their healing processes... So anyways, I like the terminology that you're sticking with in this [study]”.

Participants viewed family violence as synonymous with violence against women, signifying the important role women play within the family in First Nation communities. As R(1) explained:

“Violence that occurs within the family or violence against women is clearly a family issue. Violence against women is family violence”.

### **Antecedents**

According to respondents, family violence in First Nation communities today is seen to be the result of racist political policies and legislation that are directly linked to wider historical events, namely colonization. Environmental and social factors also are perceived to play a role in family violence in First Nation communities. Respondents maintain that the problem of family violence can be attributed primarily to the government's assimilation policy. The main objective of this policy, with assistance from missionaries, was to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into “the lower fringes of mainstream society”.<sup>11</sup> One of the principle modes of assimilation into Canadian society was through the education system. Beginning in 1920, attendance at residential schools was compulsory for all First Nation children aged 7 to 15 years, and by 1931, there were 80 residential schools operating in Canada.<sup>12</sup> It has been widely acknowledged that the residential school system has had a profound impact on First Nation individuals, families, and communities.

R(1) specifically mentioned the impact forced attendance at residential schools had on a

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.afn.ca/residentialschools/history.html>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

person's ability to develop coping skills that normally would be taught within the family structure.

According to this respondent, the absence of adequate coping skills is linked to family violence, as the following suggests:

“And different people are impacted differently, depending on your coping skills. You weren't raised with good coping skills and the whole residential schools build into there, a lot of people weren't parented well and they don't know how to cope and it leads to them lashing out physically and emotionally”.

R(2) mentioned the intergenerational effects of the residential school system. Children who didn't go to residential schools but were parented by adults that went as children were also affected:

“And then there's Aboriginal people who didn't go to residential schools but they come from the same families so that syndrome, the residential school syndrome is still impacting on the Aboriginal people who didn't go but they still lack the parenting skills because that's all they knew”.

Participants mentioned the role that legislation played in family violence. According to R(1), the Indian Act (1876) perpetuates racism and continues to dictate the lives of First Nations today.

This respondent commented on how the Indian Act changed First Nation governance structures:

“Prior to the Indian Act, we had governance structures that were quite different. The Chief and Council system was imposed. Again, they are imposing our identities and our social and political structures”.

The Indian Act imposed legal restrictions on the lives of First Nations. R(1) spoke specifically about the discriminatory section in the Indian Act which denied Indian women recognition who married men who were not recognized as Indians under the Act. This

respondent mentioned the social exclusion First Nation women experienced as a result of imposed identities:

“When you think of it from an Aboriginal perspective, you’re looking at social exclusion as a determinant of health and how social exclusion perpetuated, it’s through things like lateral violence, through racism, systemic racism, which is the legislation and imposed identities”.

One of the major effects of the legislation of Indian peoples has been changes in women’s roles in communities. As explained by R(1):

“The majority of women are living off reserve now, and what’s caused that is legislation and identities that have been imposed. There has been a direct attack on women’s roles in the community, women as family anchors”.

In addition to changes in women’s roles, respondents also talked about changes in men’s roles, which came about mostly as a result of environmental changes that have occurred over the years and that have contributed to the problem of family violence:

“From a traditional perspective, you can make those linkages much clearer: lack of access to our lands, lack of access to resources, jobs. Men’s roles have changed. From a perpetrator’s perspective, men are used to being the breadwinners, bringing home the moose and the fish, but if you look at the contaminants in the environment, there isn’t going to be as many moose as there were 50 to 100 years ago and they can’t feed their families, so their going to be frustrated and turn on each other”. I truly believe that First Nation communities know what their root causes are and those are their concerns: the continuing shrinkage of traditional territory”.

### **Residuum**

The most talked about consequence of family violence from a First Nation perspective that was mentioned by participants is the normalization of violence in communities. Normalization refers to the tendency to accept violence within families as a normal part of family life, due to its

prevalence in communities. This suggests that family violence has an insidious nature and can undermine the perception of it as a problem.

Respondents talked about family violence being prevalent in communities to the extent that it appears as if it is a normal part of family and community life, as R(3) explains:

“It’s always been like that, a normal way of being. I’ve seen it all around. We need to send the message that this is not normal or acceptable”.

As R(2) mentioned, this is the reason why family violence prevention initiatives are so important in communities:

“It’s awareness. Because of that cycle of abuse, some people don’t know any different. They don’t know what a healthy relationship is compared to what they’re doing...unless it’s pointed out or put in a different way”.

Respondents also talked about the insidious nature of family violence, which affects not only families but whole communities. R(2) specifically mentioned other social issues that are interconnected with family violence:

“You think about housing, you think about education. Just in general, about their well-being and the regional impacts. That cycle is still there”.

## **Resolution**

The respondents mentioned that, although family violence continues to be a major problem in First Nation communities, they have seen some changes that indicate hope for the future. R(2) mentioned increased youth involvement in politics and woman taking on leadership roles in communities that have made a positive impact on the problem of family violence:

“I think we have a new wave of youth that are coming up and more women leadership, women getting involved in politics in their communities. So I think it’s changing.

In addition to these changes, R(1) mentioned how men have changed their perspective in leadership:

“There are also young male leaders that are taking a different approach to issues. They are putting policies in place and not making decisions based on their own agendas”.

Respondents also mentioned the creation of national Aboriginal organizations and the important role played by these organizations in helping to deal with social problems, particularly family violence:

“[Among] the changes that have occurred in the past decade, there’s a voice now. NWAC’s role has been that voice. It’s playing a leadership role in making sure Aboriginal women are aware of the issues. NWAC has really gone to bat and made sure there is awareness on all levels, nationally, locally. It was founded in 1974. They all came about around the same time. The AFN came about at the same time. It was the Indian Brotherhood back then”. (R1)

Respondents also shared their thoughts on what could be done to address the problem of family violence in communities. The role of the federal government was mentioned in this regard.

Respondents talked about the need for solutions to family violence to be consistent with their ways of understanding the issues. According to R(3), current approaches do not consider an Aboriginal worldview:

“It doesn’t take into consideration a holistic approach”.

Another participant also mentioned how everyone in the family needs to get involved in solutions in order to engage the healing process.

“[Solutions] are not just focused on one person. From an Aboriginal perspective, when you’re looking at healing and dealing with family violence, everybody has to go through their healing processes”. (R1)

The lack of First Nation engagement in the development of programs and prevention initiatives was also considered to be a very important factor in addressing the problem of family violence, as mentioned by R(3):

“[Youth] are bombarded with pamphlets and programs, but they are not consulted in the process. They’re saying ‘its from mainstream and has nothing to do with me’”.

Participants spoke specifically of the role the federal government should be taking with respect to working with First Nations to find solutions to family violence in First Nation communities:

“They [federal government] need to listen and hear what we’re saying, and once they really understand our issues, then they can support whatever it is we need. (R2)

“And from a project officer’s perspective, to consult more when they design projects. I know it’s the number one complaint of youth”. (R3)

### **Impediments**

Participants identified several aspects within the government’s funding and policy processes that they perceived to be barriers in developing solutions to family violence on reserve. The most common barrier mentioned was the process for applying for federal funding for family violence prevention projects. As mentioned by R(2), it is the funding cycle itself that poses the constraint in developing projects:

“It’s bureaucracy all the different levels. We did [a review of the proposal process]. It was called ‘a year in the life of this proposal’. In three months, there were all these different levels of approvals. It took forever, and by the time the program gets running, its halfway through the year and then its ‘spend, spend, spend’. So that cycle is not good”.

R(3) mentioned the restrictive criteria that needs to be adhered to which does not take into consideration a community's capacity:

“They [communities] can't even do proposals. They're so restrictive. People don't know how to do it. You can have the greatest idea in your community, but if it doesn't fit the funding criteria, you can't do it”.

R(1) mentioned a similar issue with respect to the criteria that is used to assess funding eligibility:

“The criteria are set and [your idea] has to fit within a certain criteria to get that money. So [a community] might see an issue in a specific area, but it doesn't fit the criteria, so they have to think of something else”.

The significance of this issue is that it indicates that the policy process does not allow for variation. That is, all potential projects need to comply with the funding criteria, but also a “standard” view of a typical project, which may or may not fit a community's need or priority.

A second impediment mentioned by participants was the issue of community capacity.

R(2) talked about communities being challenged with retaining educated and skilled individuals:

“Once people get their education they leave reserve. [They may] want to come back and help [their] community, but once they get a taste of the lifestyle (off reserve), they don't want to go back. So it's challenging. They want people to go back but if it's not safe there, why would they want to go back?”

### Summary of First Nation Perspective of First Nation Family Violence

In summary, the results of a group interview with NWAC representatives about family violence reveal five distinct aspects of the problem of family violence in First Nations communities. Table 4-2 below summarizes these different dimensions of family violence, including how they are defined from a First Nations perspective.

Table 4-2: Understanding of First Nation Family Violence from a First Nation's Perspective

Attributes	Antecedents	Residuum	Resolution	Impediments
1. <i>TYPES</i> : Physical, Emotional, Psychological, Lateral violence.	Government's assimilation policy; Legislation; Environmental and social factors	Normalization of violence in communities; Other social issues	1. <i>WHAT HAS BEEN DONE</i> : Youth and women involvement in politics; Change in leadership agenda; Creation of Aboriginal organizations	Government's funding and policy processes; Capacity
2. <i>WHO IS AFFECTED</i> : Women Children			2. <i>WHAT CAN BE DONE</i> : Holistic solutions / approach; First Nation engagement; Listen to & support First Nations	

Of the five aspects of First Nations family violence, perhaps the most significant is the causes and contributors of family violence, represented by the construct: *antecedents*. This aspect of the problem gives family violence a unique dimension for First Nations that distinguishes it from how the problem exists for non Aboriginal Canadians. Another important aspect of family violence for this group is *resolution*, based on the extensive list of possible solutions for addressing the problem.

Perhaps the most significant finding from a research and policy perspective is the identification of barriers in the context of finding solutions to the problem of First Nation family violence. According to this group, the Government's funding and policy processes were seen as a barrier to finding and implementing possible solutions to the problem. According to

the respondents, the constraints inherent in federal processes make it difficult for all First Nations to participate in the competitive process for federal resources for prevention projects. Related to this issue is the government's lack of acknowledgement of a community's capacity in the funding process. This group maintained that the process itself was restrictive and that policy-makers do not consider a community's capacity to participate and compete fairly.

## 4.2 Federal Perspective of First Nations Family Violence

### Attributes

For the federal group, *attributes* refers specifically to the targets of violence and does not necessarily include characteristics or types of abuse. The individuals who are eligible to receive funding for family violence initiatives (protection and prevention services) through the FVPP varies from region to region and can depend on factors such as the involvement of Aboriginal organizations and provincial legislation.<sup>13</sup>

In Quebec region, family violence is seen from a holistic perspective in that FVPP funding is directed to victims of familial abuse (i.e. women and children), but also perpetrators of violence (i.e. men), as explained by R(Q):

“For Quebec region, the NWAC are very involved in the shelters, so for them, they speak about women and children, plus, when we speak to Band Council, they want us to also include men, give some assistance to the men who are violent. So the money that we give for prevention addresses both issues. We give assistance to secure women but we also give money to help the men change their violent behavior. If we don't give services to the men who are very violent, it just goes around and around, so we have to address that [aspect] also”.

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13 INAC's authorities for social programs, including the FVPP, state that eligibility for federal funding is based on provincial legislation and requirements. This is part of the principle of provincial comparability upon which eligibility is based.

The national program authorities define family violence broadly which allow regions the flexibility to adjust the criteria of the program, within its defined parameters, to the specific needs of communities within that region. As explained by R(Q):

“We have the flexibility at the local level. There are certain requirements they have to follow so each band can decide their own project to meet their specific needs.”

Other participants agreed with this interpretation of the program’s broad view of family violence. Therefore, in other regions, family violence is targeted toward women and children, and male perpetrators. As explained by R(S):

“In Saskatchewan too, our prevention projects are for both men and women, and our four shelter directors frequently say that they would like to provide programming to men. It is definitely a First Nation’s inclusionary definition of family violence prevention program, but our Treasury Board authorities really only speak of family violence in terms of family violence. I don’t think they identify women or men.”

From a federal perspective, the issue of family violence is broader than abuse towards women and children. It is abuse of any type within the family context, as explained by R(A):

“If you look at the definition in the program overview, it talks about family violence in a very generic way, because it includes spousal abuse, abuse of children, youth, elderly, and mentally and physically disabled persons.”

Since the FVPP operates within a defined budget, regions target program funding to the Band’s or community’s identified priorities. For Saskatchewan, gang violence is an issue that has been identified as a priority to the same degree as violence against women and children, as indicated by R(S):

“In Saskatchewan, I’d say violence against women and children is tied with gang violence. The First Nation communities are consistently telling us at regional gatherings that they are very concerned about the prevalence of gangs on reserve.”

For the Atlantic and BC regions, program funding is targeted towards youths, as stated by R(A) and R(B) respectively:

“Most of our prevention programming dollars goes to prevention projects that are geared towards teens.”

“In BC, the emphasis is on youth at risk, self-destructive behaviors. There are a lot of suicides and crack use that is unfortunately enhancing the violence in families.”

In contrast, the issue in communities in Quebec region is primarily elder abuse, in addition to violence against women and children, as stated by R(Q):

“In Quebec region, we’re seeing more and more elder abuse. You have adult children who were abused, in some situations, by the parents as children who are now abusing their abusers.”

### **Antecedents**

For this group, the problem of family violence in First Nation communities is seen to be rooted in the government’s assimilation policy. The residential school system was specifically mentioned as the main mechanism for this policy’s implementation. All participants spoke about the effects the residential school experience had on First Nation families, which is seen to be a major factor in the incidence of family violence in communities today. According to R(N), the problem of family violence is worse for First Nations because of their experience with the residential school system which created dysfunction for families:

“Family violence is a complex issue that happens everywhere. I think it’s compounded in First Nation communities because of the impact the residential schools had and how it contributed to family breakdown”.

From a macro perspective, residential schools also served to “kill the Indian in the child”, therefore annihilating Aboriginal culture and traditions, as articulated by R(Q):

“First Nations ... lost their culture, their spirituality and they had to leave their communities to receive education. And when they came back to the reserves to live with their parents, it was very difficult”.

The result of the lost connection to ones culture created a disconnection with others including ones community:

“Although people talk about community, people within communities are very disconnected from each other and that is directly a result of the residential school experience. People were parented institutionally. They were not encouraged even within the schools to be a part of a community, so that contributes to the despair, the lack of hope”. R(A)

This participant goes on to explain how the residential school experience is related to the problem of family violence in communities today:

“The sociological term that is coming to mind is anomie. You are very isolated within the group, and when you have no connection to your family, your neighbors, to your community, the people you are supposed to be spiritually and culturally connected with, you have no investment and none of the normal boundaries around behavior, because those boundaries have been torn down. So if parents are missing all of that, there is no one there to teach the next generation”. R(A)

Participants also talked about the effects of the residential schools on individuals who attended. R(N) spoke specifically about how the rules of the schools affected familial ties:

“These are influential years in a person’s life and then all of the different rules, like not being allowed to talk to your sister. Right away, there’s this whole gender thing that boys grew up not knowing how to communicate with girls and vice versa. Then not being able to speak your own language also damaged their self-esteem”.

This situation was not much better for the parents left behind. Children would be separated from their families and their communities for several months and sometimes years, and parents

turned to substances to deal with the pain of being separated from their children, as R(N) points out:

“The stress of worrying about your child; the lack of hope that may exist in the community for anything to change for the better. Then throw in drug and alcohol abuse to compensate or to cope; it adds fuel to the fire”.

R(A) described the connection between the experience of residential schools and other social conditions:

“People grew up not feeling good about themselves because they were taught not to feel good about themselves. Add to that displacement from communities, overcrowded housing, poverty because of lack of employment opportunities, and you’ve got a volcano”.

### **Residuum**

The consequences of family violence for First Nations from a federal perspective are the normalization of violence in communities and other social problems. The most commonly cited consequence of family violence by the federal group was the normalization of violence in communities.

Normalization refers to the tendency to accept violence within families as a normal part of family life, due to its prevalence in communities. As R(A) indicates, family violence is insidious in communities:

“I think violence as a whole is very normalized in First Nation communities, right across the board. You can have an increased awareness of it, but my experience at the community level has been that you can have awareness with all the professionals in the community, many of whom are community residents, but the problem is so normalized that awareness does not have an impact. It’s accepted at a level that is highly dissimilar to the acceptable level in mainstream.”

For R(S), the prevalence of family violence tends to undermine people’s perception of it as a problem:

“[First Nations] are crippled and not able to identify it (family violence) as a big issue and devote human and financial resources to it. Communities themselves were not necessarily identifying this as a need for themselves”.

Another major consequence of family violence for First Nation families is child placements. Ironically, the displacement of families that was originally created by the residential school system plays out in modern day through the child welfare system, as articulated by R(Q):

“First Nations...have a lot of child placements (in the welfare system) so for them, there is a lot of neglect on reserve. Sometimes, we have to place children off reserve so we continue to break families apart”.

Participants talked about the effects family violence has on health and well-being:

“Family violence is a very complex issue that would have an impact on a person’s health and social well-being. And certainly, the statistics and anecdotal evidence is overwhelmingly clear that in First Nation communities it’s a major problem”. R(N)

According to R(A), family violence impacts on other social problems, exacerbating the problem for individuals and communities as a whole:

“[Family violence] is a huge impediment to the social development of the community. It has an enormous impact. It’s generational, it’s cyclical, it affects a lot of other social and health indicators. You can’t hold down a job if your life is in chaos.”

The interconnection of other social problem with family violence was mentioned by other participants:

“It’s so pervasive, it’s almost like a monkey’s knot in the sense that you don’t know where to start unraveling it because it’s tied to all the other social and health indicators of health and wellness, you know poor housing and poverty, lack of employment, child care. There are so many things that play in on it”. R(A)

“Family violence is linked with alcohol, drugs, poor housing, lack of employment, and all those situations. When the man is drunk, the woman may be aggressive towards him, and sometimes it’s both sides.” R(Q)

This informant talked about how the problem of family violence became an issue for whole communities, not just for the individual directly affected:

“...it has an impact not just on the family but on the community because women are the mainstays of the community. Mothers are everything, and if mothers aren’t treated well, it will have a ripple effect, not just on the family and children, but the whole community”.  
R(N)

### **Resolution**

Respondents in this group talked about some of the changes that have occurred in recent years on reserve. Participants talked first about what is currently being done to address the problem of family violence on reserve.

According to these respondents, within its role, the federal government is proactive in its approach to family violence prevention and increases awareness of family violence for communities. As R(B) explained, the BC regional office tries to be proactive at preventing family violence by engaging other key individuals in the community:

“The residential school settlement has been increasing the levels of elder abuse”. One of the things we did do was contact the Public Trustee who set up community networks to increase awareness of what abuse is where it happens. So they are working proactively as the residential school settlements go out.”

Other participants talked about the government role to increase awareness of family violence and to manage the funding that is provided to First Nations through the FVPP, as articulated by R(A):

“I think the federal government’s role is stewardship of the money. Our role is to ensure that family violence continues to have a profile in terms of importance...in terms of progress. I mean, family violence was not always a social development program, somebody created that profile, so I think our role is to maintain that profile on behalf of the First Nations so that there is money allocated to prevention programming. And I think

our secondary role is good stewardship. And good stewardship involves help and support, effective prevention programming and I think it stops there”.

The participants also indicated that there is much more than can be done by both First Nations and the federal government to improve the situation in communities. The group identified ways in which the program can be more effective in addressing family violence in communities. One of the important things that the government could do that was mentioned by the group is to make horizontal linkages with other programs to maximize the effect of the FVPP:

“Maybe if it was linked with comprehensive community planning which is something that actually works. And increasing education levels “. R(B)

R(N) explained the need for a more holistic approach to the issue of family violence, which includes these linkages:

“It would be nice to see something more holistic because I think family violence is such a complex issue. I don’t think prevention projects or programs should be so strictly confined to addressing family violence. To me, prevention would be like things that would encompass other things like community development, economic development, opportunities for youth, women and men.”

R(Q) mentioned the need for INAC’s FVPP to be connected with other departments to ensure the continuum of services that falls under another department’s mandate:

“Battered women would like us to provide therapy to the men who are very violent, but we don’t have a budget for professional services. Psychological services falls under Health Canada so we have to have some link with that department.”

The participants spoke at length about what the federal government could do to help reduce the level of family violence in communities, including what the government’s role should

be in family violence prevention. R(B) talked about the government taking a more supportive role with First Nations:

“Our role is to support and listen to the First Nations, and try to respond to how they perceive the problem”.

R(Q) talked about allowing First Nations to define the program at the local level according to their specific needs. The government’s role is to support First Nations in that process:

“The objective of INAC is for First Nations to take control of their destiny, so at some point we have to facilitate that with First Nations. We need to have the flexibility in our program and at the local level to design the program [according to] their specific needs. So I think we can facilitate this process and at some point, we have to be sure that the money...it’s not a lot of money, but we have to be sure that the money is spent for its intended purpose and that is part of our job. If it is defined by us, for sure it won’t work, won’t succeed.

Providing adequate funding seems to be the main factor in allowing First Nations to eventually take full control over the program, as mentioned by R(S):

“I was thinking along the same lines, so I think the federal government’s role is to fund adequate levels to enable First Nation control of the programming and strategizing”.

In an effort to offset the lack of adequate funding, some participants mentioned the efforts some First Nations are making toward addressing the problem in their communities. For instance, some communities in Quebec are making linkages with the voluntary sector and getting involved in fundraising activities for family violence shelters:

“They may decide to go after more money from the voluntary sector. They might organize a bingo.” R(Q)

Taking actions to increase funding potential exemplifies community attempts to taking ownership of the problem. However, the extent to which communities can take ownership of the

problem is dependent upon the community's capacity to accept ownership, including the health of the community, as mentioned by the group. Participants talked about what was needed for First Nations to move beyond the problem towards healing and well-being. According to R(S), forgiveness was a key factor in a community's ability or willingness to move on:

“What does it take to move beyond? For most of us, it takes forgiveness; taking responsibility, individuals and communities”.

### **Impediments**

The federal group shared their thoughts on factors that limit or restrict their ability to adequately address the problem of family violence on reserve. One of the issues mentioned by participants was the lack of adequate federal funding devoted to the issue of family violence. For R(Q), this included lack of program funding for prevention projects, as well as funding for staff in regions to deliver the program on reserve:

“When they started this [program] there was a lot of people involved in family violence, like 10 departments and then they cut the budget from the other departments and just INAC kept the money for family violence and each band had a full time worker to do the job but the fact that Health Canada are not involved in process now we just have half the budget so it means that when you have just \$10K or \$15K per year, it is very difficult when we don't have one person just involved in the specific area, it's very difficult, so a social worker has this file and other files so it's not enough to do a good job. We also have to increase the budget for prevention. The current budget is not enough to have a good impact”.

This last point was echoed by R(S) who pointed out the imbalance between the amount of program funding and the scope of the problem:

“The pittance of money that we’re giving each community does not enable them to do comprehensive programming, so a little workshop or an awareness session two times a year doesn’t even begin to touch the pervasive problem of family violence”.

Sometimes, provincial funding is sought by First Nations to augment federal funding, and provincial rules must be adhered to in terms of how the funding may be spent. This can be an issue in some regions as provincial rules may be in conflict with the broader scope of the FVPP, as pointed out by R(B):

“The INAC regional funding is so low that there is available funding from the province that can be worked with, but the band could not use the funding for men.”

Thus, in BC, in order to access provincial funding, family violence initiatives or services cannot be provided to help male perpetrators.

The participants indicated other factors as being just as important as funding in helping to address family violence, such as a community’s ability to recognize family violence as a serious issue, as mentioned by R(S).

“INAC has a role to play in terms of funding and First Nations have a role to play as well. It’s interactive. Funding can only do so much. It can give a community the opportunity to provide programming, but it really can’t force a community to identify it as an important issue. So that is on par with funding in terms of importance of what’s needed to address the issue of family violence”.

Similarly, R(N) mentioned a community’s need to stop tolerating violence, which is linked to the normalization of violence in communities:

“Money helps with community development but community leaders and communities in general need to stop tolerating violence. I think this is taking place more so in mainstream society. People don’t accept domestic violence today the way they would have 20 years ago”.

## Summary of a Federal Government Perspective of First Nations Family Violence

In summary, an analysis of interviews with regional and national staff of the FVPP about the problem of family violence in First Nation communities revealed the significance of dimensions similar to those in the First Nation interview. However, there are important differences in how these dimensions are understood. Table 4-3 below summarizes these different aspects of family violence in First Nation communities. A discussion of similarities and differences in the perspectives of First Nations and the federal government is the subject of the next chapter.

Table 4-3: Understanding of First Nation Family Violence from a Federal Government Perspective

Attributes	Antecedents	Residuum	Resolution	Impediments
<p><i>1. PROGRAM TARGETS:</i>                      Women                      Children                      Elders                      Youth                      Disabled persons                      Male perpetrators</p>	<p>Government's assimilation policy</p>	<p>Normalization of violence in communities; Other social issues</p>	<p><i>1. WHAT IS BEING DONE:</i>                      Gov't being proactive and increasing awareness of family violence; First Nations making linkages to other sectors and Fundraising;</p>	<p>Lack of adequate funding for family violence prevention; First Nation's tolerance of family violence; Lack of capacity in communities</p>
			<p><i>2. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE:</i>                      Gov't linkages to other programs and departments; Support and listen to First Nations; First Nations taking ownership over the issue</p>	

## CHAPTER FIVE COMPARING UNDERSTANDINGS OF FIRST NATION FAMILY VIOLENCE

### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis of First Nation and federal government perspectives of First Nation family violence derived from the findings presented in chapter four. The first section provides a high level analysis of both perspectives of family violence and highlights the similarity in the different aspects (dimensions) of family violence that were mentioned by both groups. These dimensions may be used as a model for understanding the problem of First Nation family violence. The remainder of the chapter compares and contrasts the two perspectives along all five dimensions, highlighting how these understandings are similar and different.

### 5.1 A Model for Understanding the Problem of Family Violence

Table 5-1 below provides a snapshot of the two perspectives of First Nation family violence based on this study's findings according to the five categories which represent different dimensions of the problem of family violence on reserve.

Table 5-1 Comparison of Understandings of First Nation Family Violence

Attributes	Antecedents	Residuum	Resolution	Impediments
<b>Understanding of First Nation Family Violence from a First Nations Perspective</b>				
<p><i>1. TYPES:</i> Physical, Emotional Psychological, Lateral violence</p> <p><i>2. WHO IS AFFECTED:</i> Women, Children</p>	<p>Government's assimilation policy; Legislation; Environmental and social factors</p>	<p>Normalization of violence in communities; Other social issues</p>	<p><i>1. WHAT HAS BEEN DONE:</i> Youth and women involvement in politics; Change in leadership agenda; Creation of Aboriginal organizations</p> <p><i>2. WHAT CAN BE DONE:</i> Holistic solutions / approach; First Nation engagement; Listen to &amp; support First Nations</p>	<p>Government's funding and policy processes; Government's lack of acknowledgement of a community's capacity when developing funding criteria</p>
<b>Understanding of First Nations Family Violence from a Federal Government Perspective</b>				
<p><i>1. WHO IS AFFECTED:</i> Women, Children, Elders, Youth, Disabled persons, Male perpetrators</p>	<p>Government's assimilation policy</p>	<p>Normalization of violence in communities Other social issues</p>	<p><i>1. WHAT HAS BEEN DONE:</i> Government being proactive and increasing awareness of family violence; First Nations making linkages to other sectors and Fundraising</p> <p><i>2. WHAT CAN BE DONE:</i> Government linkages to other programs and departments; Support and listen to First Nations; First Nations taking ownership over the issue</p>	<p>Lack of adequate funding for family violence prevention; First Nation's tolerance of family violence; Lack of capacity in communities</p>

An initial glance of Table 5-1 ostensibly indicates that interview respondents representing a First Nation and a federal government perspective have similar understandings of First Nation family violence. The fact that both sets of views can be appropriately represented by the same

five category names suggest that both groups think about family violence along similar dimensions. In other words, the problem of family violence, according to both perspectives, consist of five main areas that are inherent to understanding the problem.

A closer examination of these dimensions, however, reveals that both groups have very different perspectives of the intricacies of family violence in First Nation communities. Thus, the nature or meaning of these dimensions differ significantly when both perspectives are compared. The only exception to this is with respect to the category: residuum. This is illustrated in Figure 5-1 below. The dimension: residuum is indicated in red to highlight a shared understanding of the consequences of family violence by both groups.

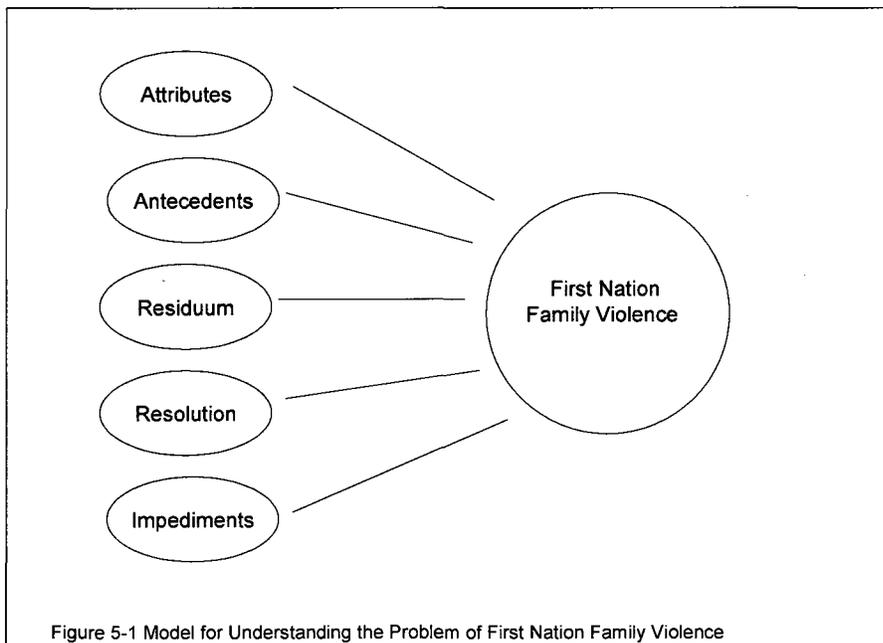
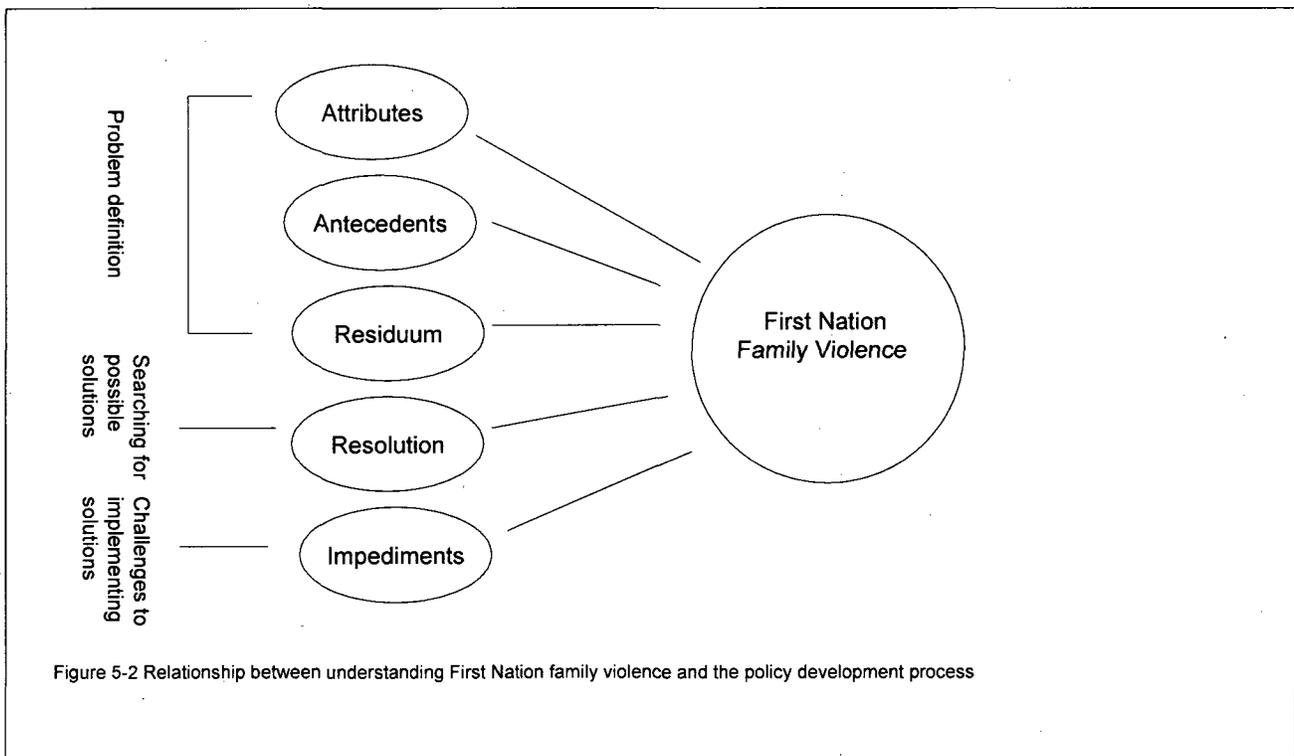


Figure 5-1 Model for Understanding the Problem of First Nation Family Violence

Taken together, the five dimensions, which may be considered a model for understanding

First Nation family violence appears to correspond to the steps involved in policy development. That is, the different aspects of First Nation family violence as understood by First Nations and the federal government are congruent with the steps involved in developing policies to address social problems. To elucidate, attributes, antecedents, and residuum are all aspects relating to the identification and definition of the problem. Resolution corresponds to the search for possible solutions, and finally, impediments relate to the challenges to implementing solutions. Figure 5-2 illustrates the relationship between understanding First Nations family violence and the policy development process.



This relationship suggests that the way family violence is understood by First Nations and the federal government is in line with how social problems in general are analyzed by policy

analysts.<sup>14</sup> While there is a relationship between understanding the problem of family violence and policy development, these processes are usually carried out in isolation of the other.

To summarize, at a very basic level both First Nations and the federal government share a similar understanding of what First Nation family violence entails (five dimensions). Understandings, however, from this point diverge significantly when the meaning and significance of each dimension is considered in more detail. The one exception to this pattern of difference is the residuum dimension, or consequences of family violence. The other four dimensions have different meanings or understandings when compared, suggesting that overall, First Nations family violence is perceived differently by First Nations and the federal government. The remaining sections of this chapter discuss these similarities and differences more closely.

## 5.2 Similarities in Understanding Family Violence in First Nation Communities

### Residuum:

<b>First Nation's Perspective</b>	<b>Federal Government Perspective</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalization of violence in communities</li> <li>• Other social issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalization of violence in communities</li> <li>• Other social issues</li> </ul>

The only dimension of family violence that is defined similarly by both the First Nations

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<sup>14</sup> Pal's (1954) description of the stages within the policy process is meant to set out a heuristic model and does not suggest that policy passes through each stage sequentially.

group and the federal group is residuum. Respondents from both groups perceive the major consequences of family violence on reserve as a normalization of violence and abuse in communities and its interconnection with other social issues. Studies confirm that family violence is a complex problem that is often found to be interconnected with a myriad of other social problems, such as unemployment, poverty, and alcoholism, which are generally higher in First Nation communities (RCAP, 1996; Statistics Canada, 1999). There is a shared understanding of the impact that family violence has on other health, social and economic indicators. It is also similarly acknowledged that the combined effect of these problems compound the issue of family violence for First Nations, which is uniquely differently from mainstream. The other dimensions of family violence are understood differently by First Nations and the federal government and are discussed separately in the next section.

5.3 Differences in Understanding Family Violence in First Nation Communities

Attributes:

<b>First Nation's Perspective</b>	<b>Federal Government Perspective</b>
<p><i>TYPES:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical</li> <li>• Emotional</li> <li>• Psychological</li> <li>• Lateral violence</li> </ul>	
<p><i>WHO IS AFFECTED:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women</li> <li>• Children</li> </ul>	<p><i>WHO IS AFFECTED:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women</li> <li>• Children</li> <li>• Elders</li> <li>• Youth</li> <li>• Disabled persons male perpetrators</li> </ul>

The First Nations group talked about family violence as consisting of types of abuse and who is affected by it. This broad perspective of family violence was not found with the federal group who only identified those who are affected by family violence. According to the findings, characteristics or types of family violence was not mentioned by the federal respondents. This suggests that the federal group did not see types of family violence as a major attribute of the problem of family violence. A possible explanation for this could be that the federal group views family violence on reserve with a programming lens, that is, within the context of the FVPP. The FVPP's authorities are flexible enough to allow for a varied interpretation of what constitutes family violence by program recipients (First Nation Bands and Tribal Councils). This feature of the program is important since the types of violence and abuse characteristic of communities may differ from region to region. The more important consideration from the federal group's perspective is who is affected (i.e. targets of the program). This is in line with eligibility requirements of the program.

With respect to who is affected, the First Nations group identifies women and children as those who are most affected by family violence. While the federal group agrees that women and children are most affected, they also include elders, youth, and the disabled as groups affected by family violence. This view is consistent with the broad perspective of the FVPP, but may also indicate an understanding that family violence affects whole families and communities, not just individuals. From a First Nations perspective, family violence is seen to be synonymous with violence against women since women are seen as central to families and communities.

This point is supported by the mention of the use of terminology during the First Nations interview. As participant R(1) noted at the beginning of the interview, the term 'family' violence

is preferred over other commonly used terms, such as ‘domestic’ violence. The use of terminology is important because studies have shown that understandings are embedded in the concepts used to describe a problem. For instance, the literature indicates that the term ‘domestic violence’ emerged in mainstream society and is based on a western understanding that emphasizes intimate relationships occurring between adult partners and separates these relationships from family and community relationships, as the following definition suggests:

“Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in a relationship and after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to control the other (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, 2001:2).

Authors have highlighted the fundamental weaknesses of the western concept of domestic violence in understanding family violence in Aboriginal communities and in devising solutions.

According to Robertson (2000:115),

“A study of violence focusing on the term domestic violence will not lead to a full consideration of, and response to, the destructive effects of colonization on Indigenous culture and social systems. The intersection of race, gender, age and power, and the disruption of the relationship between spiritual, cultural, and environmental dimensions, must be considered in order to understand violence in Indigenous communities.”

The interchangeable use of terms to describe violence in Aboriginal communities may also impede efforts to address and/or reduce the problem. Authors of an Australian study (Taylor, Cheers, Weetra, Gentle, 2004) concluded that the terms ‘domestic’ violence and ‘family’ violence which were used interchangeably in policy documents acted as a barrier to the implementation of community-based solutions. As the authors note, the term ‘domestic’ violence tends to suppress the deep understandings that many Aboriginal people and communities have of family violence,

the issues surrounding it, and its impacts (Blagg, Ray, Murray & Macarthy, 2000). The federal group did not comment on the use of terminology.

To summarize, both First Nations and the federal government understand family violence to be an issue primarily for women and children as well as an issue for communities. However, the federal group puts more emphasis on who is affected by, as opposed to what characterizes, family violence. This perspective is in line with how the FVPP is organized and delivered. In contrast, a First Nations perspective of family violence appears to be more specific in terms of who is affected, but has a broader perspective on the types of abuse that characterize family violence. Identifying types of abuse within the context of families may be an attempt to increase awareness of abusive incidents and to situate such incidents as part of a bigger social problem to be addressed by communities, as opposed to keeping it a private matter. The messaging in the NWAC Youth Council Toolkit provides support for this interpretation which is discussed in the following chapter.

Antecedents:

First Nation's Perspective	Federal Government Perspective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government's assimilation policy</li> <li>• Legislation</li> <li>• Environmental and social factors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government's assimilation policy</li> </ul>

Both the First Nations group and the federal group identified the Government's Assimilation Policy, namely, the residential school experience, as the root cause for family violence on reserve. This finding is consistent with the literature which acknowledges the unique

experiences of Aboriginal peoples in terms of historical injustices and cultural assaults experienced over centuries of colonization (Duran et al., 1998; RCAP, 1996: Health Canada, 1996; Native Women's Association of Canada, 1992). This finding lends support for colonization theory, and is particularly significant in that it is recognized by both First Nation and federal government representatives. Historical experiences, then, is a critical part of understandings of First Nation family violence. The difference on this dimension is that the First Nations group also identified legislation (i.e. Indian Act) as well as environmental and social factors as contributors to the problem of family violence. Secondary factors were not mentioned by the federal group.

The Indian Act, dating from 1876, was mentioned at length by the First Nation respondents who spoke about how the lives of First Nations in Canada are affected by this legislation, despite the movement towards self-government. According to their statements, the Indian Act is a racist document that has shaped the lives of Aboriginal people by defining their "Indian-ness", as well as their social and political structures, all which influence their day to day lives. The influence of government legislation, such as the Indian Act, has been acknowledged by many scholars on Indian affairs. As described by Kiera Ladner (2003: 49), a leading expert in the field of Indigenous politics and governance, "Through the Indian Act, Canada tells band governments what they can and cannot do with respect to everything from birth (by determining band membership) to death (validating wills)". The Indian Act or any other legislation was not mentioned by the federal group as a contributor to family violence.

Similarly, respondents in the First Nation group spoke about environmental changes, such as depletion of wild game and fish, and environmental contaminants that have changed women's and men's traditional roles within families and communities, thereby contributing to the problem

of family violence. These contributors to family violence were not mentioned by the federal group. This suggests that First Nations see the problem with respect to this dimension in a more holistic fashion compared to the federal group. The federal group views family violence on reserve within a historical context, but doesn't necessarily highlight other social or environmental factors that may contribute to the problem.

Resolution:

<b>First Nation's Perspective</b>	<b>Federal Government Perspective</b>
<p>1. <i>WHAT HAS BEEN DONE:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth and women involvement in politics</li> <li>• Change in leadership agenda</li> <li>• Creation of Aboriginal organizations</li> </ul>	<p>1. <i>WHAT HAS BEEN DONE:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government being proactive and increasing awareness of family violence</li> <li>• First Nations making linkages to other sectors</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> </ul>
<p>2. <i>WHAT CAN BE DONE:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic solutions / approach</li> <li>• First Nation engagement</li> <li>• Listen to &amp; support First Nations</li> </ul>	<p>2. <i>WHAT CAN BE DONE:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government linkages to other programs and departments</li> <li>• Support and listen to First Nations</li> <li>• First Nations taking ownership over the issue</li> </ul>

First Nations and federal representatives talked about what actions can be taken to address family violence on reserve and also what has been done or is being done to address family violence. While recognizing family violence as a significant health and social issue prevalent in many First Nation communities, both groups acknowledge changes that have occurred in recent years that have improved the handling of the problem on reserve and which may lead to a reduction in family violence in the future. The changes identified were different for both groups.

The First Nations group identified increased involvement of youth and women in the

political and social systems on reserve, change in leadership agendas, and the creation of Aboriginal organizations as positive changes. The federal group recognizes more macro level changes citing increased involvement by communities as a whole in dealing with the issue of family violence, such as actively addressing the problem through fund-raising activities and networking. The federal group attributes these positive changes to a greater awareness of the problem of family violence and its consequences for women and children as a result of government-funded initiatives and projects.

The two groups also mentioned what can be done to address family violence on reserve, and here again views differed. The only similarity with respect to this element was the mention by both groups of the need for government to listen and support First Nations. Both groups see this as a necessary part of any proposed solution. The First Nation group also spoke about the importance of having solutions that are consistent with First Nation culture and traditions, and the need for government to engage First Nations in discussions that involve finding solutions for First Nation family violence.

In contrast, the federal group saw solutions that started with First Nations taking responsibility for family violence on reserve. However, this group also acknowledged that in order for First Nations to fully take responsibility for the problem of family violence in their communities, healing has to take place. It can be argued that since First Nations family violence is understood to be rooted in historical injustices of which the federal government has played a critical role, it is necessary that Canada be a part of this healing process. The government's apology to First Nations on June 11, 2008, for the more than a century of abuse and cultural loss to former students of residential schools may be considered a positive and symbolic step towards

First Nations healing.

To summarize, solutions to family violence from a federal perspective hinge on First Nations taking responsibility for the problem and its solutions. Responsibility in this respect goes beyond increased awareness and involves taking ownership over the problem and responses to it. Federal respondents indicated that there needs to be a shift in responsibility for addressing First Nation family violence. This ideology is consistent with the viewpoint of Freire (1970:28) who challenges the oppressed to be proactive in their cause to free themselves from oppression:

“This then is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both”.

However, the federal group does acknowledge the difficulty in taking ownership over a problem that is so pervasive and interconnected with a myriad of other social problems. As noted by the First Nations group, the role of the federal government in the lives of First Nations and the fact that the Indian Act is still in effect makes any change in this situation challenging.

Impediments:

<b>First Nation’s Perspective</b>	<b>Federal Government Perspective</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Government’s funding and policy processes</li><li>• Government’s lack of acknowledge of a community’s capacity when developing funding criteria</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of adequate funding for family violence prevention</li><li>• First Nation’s tolerance of family violence</li><li>• Lack of capacity in communities</li></ul>

While impediments to possible solutions to family violence on reserve is seen by First

Nations and the federal government as an important dimension to understanding the problem of family violence, different potential barriers were identified by both groups. From a First Nations perspective, the federal government's funding and policy processes are seen as a major barrier to possible solutions to family violence. According to respondents, the constraints inherent in federal processes make it difficult for all First Nations to participate in the competitive process for federal resources for prevention projects. In addition to perceiving the process itself as restrictive, this group also mentions that policy-makers do not consider a community's capacity to participate and compete fairly when developing funding / proposal criteria.

The federal group, in contrast, identifies lack of adequate funding for family violence prevention, First Nation's tolerance of family violence, and the lack of capacity in communities as barriers to possible solutions to family violence on reserve. While lack of capacity is mentioned by the First Nation's group, it is in relation to the government's lack of recognition of a community's lack of capacity, whereas the federal group sees lack of capacity within First Nation communities as a barrier itself. The federal group also considers the federal structure (programs operating within departments with different mandates) as a barrier that inhibits programs from doing a good job. Participants in this group point out the importance of establishing linkages with other programs and breaking down the structural and administrative barriers as actions that would help First Nations address the problem of family violence.

## Summary

In summary, First Nations and federal government representatives share a similar understanding of family violence along five dimensions of the problem which provides a possible

model for understanding First Nation family violence. The intricacies of each dimension, however, were found to be significantly different for the two groups, although there is a similar understanding of the consequences of family violence for First Nations (i.e. residuum). Both groups perceive normalization of violence and abuse in communities and the interconnection to other social problems as major consequences of family violence. Both First Nation and federal government representatives mention its inter-generational, cyclical, and normative qualities. This lends further support for colonization theory, in which the effects of social disorder caused by the historical process of colonization, including the forced attendance at residential schools, continue to be seen today. This explains how children of former students, while never attended themselves, are affected through the experiences of their parents and grandparents. However, as this study shows, colonization is one part of the problem. Other aspects of First Nation family violence, as shown here, provide a fuller understanding of this social problem.

Other aspects of family violence represented by the categories: attributes, antecedents, resolution and impediments, are understood differently by First Nations and the federal government. This discrepancy in understanding could signal a potential disconnect in the policy relationship between First Nations and the federal government with respect to addressing the problem of family violence on reserve. This is important since solutions to a given social problem are dependent upon how the problem is defined. If there is a lack of agreement about how a problem is defined and understood, then solutions will not be easily forthcoming, nor be as effective as they could be. Furthermore, if barriers are present, solutions may be prevented from being fully implemented.

A potential barrier pointed out by the First Nations group was with respect to the funding and policy processes involved in family violence prevention. On a practical level, communities who may need federal funding the most may be excluded from the proposal process due to their inability to adhere to the process, raising issues of equity, access and government responsiveness. Barriers in federal processes, then, appears to exclude many First Nations from participating in solutions to a major social problem that affects them.

Lack of adequate funding for prevention projects, pointed out by the federal group, is related to the issue of barriers within the funding and proposal processes since only few communities out of approximately 600 in Canada are successful in receiving federal funds. Those that do compete for limited funds are subject to unfamiliar processes. This means that a significant number of First Nations do not access federal funds for prevention projects, which can potentially help increase awareness of family violence in their communities, including providing information sources for those affected. Furthermore, as mentioned by one of the federal respondents, the program's budget is not in proportion to the enormity of the problem. Thus, communities must compete for scarce resources and must adhere to a system that inherently, but unintentionally, limits their chances of being successful.

Another significant aspect to this issue is that a lack of adequate program funding may force First Nation communities or organizations to access other sources of funding (e.g. provinces) which may not take into consideration a First Nations understanding of family violence. This may be problematic since provincial criteria, for instance, are established based on western understandings of family violence. As pointed out by the federal group, First Nations

who try to access provincial funding must modify their perceptions of the issue and make the project objectives fit the criteria in order to secure provincial funding. Or, as this study reveals, in some cases, certain groups (i.e. men) must be intentionally excluded from benefiting from the outcomes of the project if provincial funds are used. In these instances, First Nation projects take on a more mainstream approach which may be problematic (Saulis, in Westhues, 2006).

The findings must be viewed in light of some limitations that require discussion. First, the First Nations perspective is based on the views of representatives from one Aboriginal organization. However, as in shown in the following chapters, this perspective matches the conceptual and practical approach utilized in the development of the NWAC toolkit which is based on input from a variety of Aboriginal provincial groups and First Nation community members from all different age groups.

Second, the findings are limited to the questions that were asked. Understandings of family violence were derived from discussions that involved specific questions. The questions asked of both groups were formulated within the context of family violence prevention in First Nation communities. However, the discussion was not limited to the questions themselves and any input provided became part of the data. Future studies may focus on testing the usefulness of the model for understanding First Nation family violence in various contexts, such as policy development, program design or reform, and in developing other initiatives for family violence prevention.

## CHAPTER SIX: SOCIAL POLICY RELATIONSHIPS, AN INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY

### 6.0 Introduction

A comparative analysis of interviews with the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and federal government representatives show divergent understandings of family violence in First Nation communities. Perhaps the most significant finding from that analysis is the different views of potential barriers within the federal policy and funding processes that affect the full participation of First Nations in the development of family violence prevention initiatives. It became important, then, to verify the existence of these barriers through a more in-depth examination of the federal policy as well as an initiative that was funded through the Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP).

The purpose of this chapter is to conduct an instrumental case study of the FVPP policy and NWAC toolkit initiative to investigate how this policy relationship plays out in practice. A critical analysis of the toolkit provides additional insight into a First Nations understanding of family violence within First Nation communities. The NWAC family violence prevention toolkit was chosen as part of this analysis because it is one of the most recent initiatives funded through the FVPP (headquarters) and was developed in collaboration with provincial Aboriginal groups and included the viewpoints of many First Nations of all ages on the topic of family violence. As such, it is thought to be representative of a First Nations perspective of family violence. The next section presents the FVPP policy on family violence followed by an examination and analysis of the NWAC family violence prevention toolkit.

## 6.1 Family Violence Prevention Program Policy

The federal government provides family violence protection and prevention services on reserve as a matter of policy, not legislation. The policy for family violence prevention is described in the program's terms and conditions, which outlines the program's parameters and authority for the provision of services. According to the terms and conditions (2008:1), the intent of the program is to provide:

“First Nation women, children and families with family violence protection and prevention services, while building capacity for shelters and frontline workers addressing prevention within First Nation communities through an integrated services approach and stable family violence prevention programming”.

The FVPP consists of two main activities: protection services (shelter operations) and prevention services.

*Protection.* To protect women and children from violence in the home, the FVPP provides funding for the operation of shelters located on First Nation reserves. The program also reimburses provincially-funded shelters at per diem rates for services used by First Nation individuals who are otherwise, ordinarily resident on reserve. In 2007, approximately 265 First Nations communities were served by 35 on-reserve shelters. Each year, approximately 1,900 women and 2,300 children access those services.

*Prevention.* Prevention projects are initiatives undertaken by First Nation members that are aimed at preventing and reducing family violence in First Nation communities. Types of projects normally funded include public awareness campaigns, conferences, workshops, stress and anger management seminars, support groups, and community needs assessments. The FVPP

supports approximately 350 community-based prevention projects for First Nation women, children and families resident on-reserve. A 2005 Evaluation of the FVPP indicated that INAC has little knowledge regarding the types of prevention projects developed and/or delivered in communities.<sup>15</sup>

The objectives of the FVPP are to: (1) mitigate the risk of family violence by supporting the provision of culturally appropriate prevention programs and services; (2) reduce the likelihood of future occurrences by providing a system of ongoing support after participants leave the shelters; and (3) increase access to family violence programs for First Nations (Terms & Conditions, 2008). The anticipated results and outcomes are the provision of culturally sensitive protection from and prevention of incidents of family violence; contribution to a reduction in the incidence rate of family violence on reserve; stable and predictable funding for shelter operations; and enhanced programs and services that are culturally appropriate. An Evaluation (1994) of the FVPP projects showed that participation was high and that the activities had made an impact.

The program activities are carried out within a limited annual budget of \$29.8 million.<sup>16</sup> Of this, \$7 million is allocated to regions for prevention projects. Funding provided through this program is transferred to recipients through funding arrangements in which INAC and the recipient enter into and which outline the basis for the agreement. To receive funding from the FVPP, prevention projects must be community-based, promote a reduction in family violence, and support a more secure environment for families on reserves. Proposals must demonstrate that they meet the objectives of the program and be initiated by and involve the Aboriginal community; relate to one of

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071127085852/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/aenac.gc.ca/pr/pub/ae>

<sup>16</sup> Email from current national manager of the FVPP.

the areas described in the definition of family violence (set out in the national manual), benefit First Nation communities, and demonstrate that their managers will report back to the communities where the project takes place regarding findings, recommendations and other follow-up activities.

According to the program's terms and conditions (2008), eligible recipients are First Nations, Tribal Councils, other aggregations of First Nations approved by Chief and Council, or an authority, board, committee or other entity authorized to act on behalf of the initial recipients to provide family violence protection and prevention services.

All applicants must include documentation showing that the leadership of the community endorses the project, such as a band council or community council resolution, plus other letters of community support as appropriate. Organizations that are eligible to apply for funding for prevention and protection projects include First Nations organizations designated by Chiefs and Councils, including family violence shelters for women and children, bands, settlements, tribal councils, political or treaty organizations and child and family services agencies; or public or private organizations engaged by or on behalf of First Nations communities to administer the programs for First Nations children and families, and private firms or organizations retained as co-managers or third-party managers designated by INAC (Terms & Conditions, 2008).

As a requirement for FVPP funding, successful funding recipients must declare any and all prospective sources of funding for the program or project, inclusive of all federal, provincial or other government sources that is expected to be received, as shown by annual financial reporting. The acceptance of any proposal is always subject to the availability of program funding.

A program manual was developed in 2005 to outline the national standards for family violence prevention and protection programs for First Nation individuals ordinarily resident on

reserve. It is expected to be used as a guide for developing and operating such programs.

According to the manual, family violence is defined broadly as abuse of children, youth, spouses and elders. It includes all types of abuse, including physical assault, intimidation, mental or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, deprivation and financial exploitation. The manual explicitly states the government's viewpoint on family violence, which reveals how it understands the problem. As stated in the Family Violence Prevention Program National Manual (2005),

“Indian and Northern Affairs Canada views family violence as a social, health and criminal problem with serious consequences for individuals, families and society, and maintains that being in a state of dependency or in a relationship with a person who is in a position of trust or authority may increase a person's vulnerability to exploitation and abuse and increase the risk of abuse”.

This definition of family violence is consistent with western or mainstream (feminist) views which sees abuse as a consequence of abuse of power in relationships for certain individuals. This view offers a narrow explanation of abuse in families and does not consider the influence of societal factors external to the relationship. More important, this definition does not consider historical experiences of First Nation people or the personal biographies of individuals. While federal program representatives recognize the role played by historical events in the problem of family violence on reserve, as revealed in this study, this understanding is not transferred into policy documents, such as program manuals, that are created to serve as a guide about how the FVPP defines and addresses the problem on reserve. This shows that there is a disconnect in the process between understandings of family violence and policy development. This has potential implications for First Nation communities who rely on the FVPP to help address the problem of family violence on reserve.

This definition is also gender neutral. It can be argued that it is necessarily vague because the program is targeted primarily at families rather than specific individuals within families that are normally subjected to abuse (i.e women). This is consistent with the types of prevention projects that may be funded under the program that would benefit perpetrators of violence (i.e. stress and anger management) as well. This may be beneficial to communities in that the program is open to anyone who requires it, including male perpetrators. On the other hand, in attempting to reach all those who may need the services offered by the program, it fails to focus specifically on the main victims of family violence: women and children.

While family violence affects both men and women, statistics have consistently shown that females are predominately victims of male perpetrated violence (GSS, 1999; 2004) and women are more likely to experience more severe forms of violence resulting in physical injury (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2002). The gender imbalance is so great that some researchers have argued that family violence should be renamed “male violence” (Duffy & Momirov, 1997). The use of gender neutral terms or definitions that are vague tend to obscure the fact that women, rather than men, are more likely to be victimized. This broad scope of the FVPP may explain in part why there has been little to no improvement in a reduction in incidence of family violence on reserve in recent years.

Finally, the FVPP is managed through the cooperation of four parties: INAC headquarters; INAC regional offices; First Nations recipients (of funding); and provinces or territory (the program is not available in the NWT due to existing transfer agreements). The National Manual (2005) sets out the roles and responsibilities of each party. Of significance is that one of the roles for First Nation recipients is to “initiate, design, administer and deliver programs and services to

people ordinarily resident on reserve” (FVPP National Manual, 2005:27). This suggests that First Nations are active participants in the design of programs. However, it must be recognized that programs must be designed within the context of the program’s policy authority, and the policy on family violence prevention is not developed from a First Nations viewpoint of the problem, as this analysis shows. Therefore, it is arguably at the policy level in which First Nations should be involved since the design of programs and services at the community level are based on understandings of family violence that appear not to include a First Nations worldview.

## 6.2 Native Women’s Association of Canada Youth Council Family Violence Prevention Toolkit

In 2006-07, the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) submitted a proposal to INAC for funding for a youth-driven violence prevention project for Aboriginal girls. The proposal was approved in June 2007 and the recipient received \$97K for the project. The toolkit project involved research, youth surveys, two meetings of the Youth Council where the content of the toolkit was developed and two workshops where the toolkit content was tested with youth and community partners.

An analysis of the toolkit demonstrates how the FVPP policy (i.e. authorities, funding, and eligibility criteria) plays out in practice. Family violence prevention initiatives are developed within the parameters set out by the federal policy. The effectiveness and cultural relevance of initiatives are ultimately dependent upon whether the policy is developed consistent with a First Nations understanding and definition of the family violence problem. An examination of the toolkit will show whether the messaging is consistent with the prevailing notions of family

violence from a First Nations perspective through a comparison with the findings of the interview with the First Nation representatives. The interview also provided insight about the development of the toolkit. A critical analysis of the toolkit itself will reveal the existence of any barriers that may have been confronted by the toolkit creators.

The toolkit is organized in sections according to different types of violence, all of which are believed to be subsumed under the concept of family violence. These are: domestic violence, sexual assault, date violence, emotional / psychological violence; and bullying. In addition to these sections are facts sheets and handouts for each of the five topics and a pamphlet on a sixth topic: community action, which consists of a set of nine information pamphlets that offers suggestions about how youth may get involved in violence prevention in their communities. In addition to being an information source, the toolkit is intended to be a teaching tool. It contains a facilitator guide which provides instructions on how to use the toolkit and deliver workshops, including an evaluation form and a CD containing all toolkit materials.

The Emotional / Psychological Violence section is the largest section of the toolkit, containing comprehensive information on a broad range of emotional and psychological abuse. This type of abuse is defined by the use of descriptions of the kinds of abuse it entails, suggesting a broad understanding of this type of abuse. Of interest is the inclusion of criminal code offenses that relate to emotional and psychological violence, which is not provided in other sections. This suggests that while this type of abuse is “invisible”, it is perceived as being just as harmful as physical abuse, which is a more obvious form of abuse and has similar legal consequences for the perpetrator.

Examples of emotional and psychological abusive behavior of a perpetrator are provided

along with advice for the abused. Preventative information is also provided which suggests that responsibility for its prevention rests at the individual level. However, there is no latent suggestion of victim blaming. Responsibility is extended to the community level which is suggested by action-oriented information about what can be done to raise awareness about emotional and psychological abuse in the community. A list of specific information provided in this section is outlined below.

### *Emotional / Psychological Violence*

- criminal code provisions that apply to psychological abuse
- description of emotional battering through psychological and verbal abuse
- other types of abusive acts and behaviors (e.g. financial abuse or exploitation; spiritual abuse; sexual abuse; neglect and isolation)
- other types of abuse: Stalking / criminal harassment
- sexual harassment (workplace abuse)
- what you can do to prevent or raise awareness about psychological / emotional abuse in your community
- Fact sheet - stalking / criminal harassment - statistics; description and examples of stalking behaviors; what to do if you think you are being stalked
- Fact sheet (2) - Sexual harassment - definition; employer's responsibilities for preventing sexual harassment; instructions for employees to inform employers if they are being sexually harassed
- Targets: employees, women

The approach used for the Domestic / Relationship violence section is similar to the Emotional / Psychological violence section. Definitions for this type of abuse are provided along with examples of abusive behaviors. The terms 'domestic violence' and 'relationship violence' to describe the physical abuse that occurs between adults in an intimate or family context are commonly used in mainstream discourse. Other mainstream terms are also given to describe this type of violence between adults, such as 'intimate partner violence'; 'wife beating'; 'wife battering'; 'relationship violence'; 'domestic abuse'; 'spousal abuse'; and 'family violence'.

As in other types of abuse, there is a suggestion that this type of abuse can be prevented through awareness and knowledge. Descriptors and prompts, such as warning signs of abuse which include the behavioral characteristics and circumstances of abused women, help to characterize the abuse. Questions are provided to help the reader determine whether or not they are in an abusive relationship. The use of assessment criteria helps to situate an otherwise subjective experience in an objective context so that it can be looked at and assessed rationally. The inclusion of this type of aid suggests that the message sender(s) recognizes that abuse can sometimes appear normal for those who have experienced it over time, and especially in a context where others are known to have experienced abuse as well.

The inclusion of statistics also reveals the “normalization” of abuse in First Nation families. Statistics of domestic abuse also illustrate the severity of the problem, not only for victims but for whole communities as well. The statistics compare incidence of domestic abuse in Aboriginal communities in comparison with non Aboriginal communities, which highlight the depth of this problem for Aboriginal people. As in the previous section, quotes are given which focus on the victim. They offer an explanation as to why women stay in an abusive relationship. This appears to be done to alleviate any potential guilt of staying in an abusive relationship and to help women come to terms with why they are in the abusive situation. The objective for this appears to be to educate women on what they are experiencing and why it happens, to help move them to the next stage of awareness: doing something about it.

Also included in this section are abusive characteristics of perpetrators of abuse as described by teenagers, providing a youth perspective on domestic abuse. Again, responsibility is extended to the community level which is indicated by action-oriented information about what can

be done in the community to help alleviate and prevent this type of violence. Providing a youth perspective on domestic violence shows that the problem is not confined to the adult relationship within which abuse occurs. Young people witness abuse between parents / adults which has consequences for them as well.

The final part in this section deals with child sexual abuse. The fact sheet describes behavioral signs of sexual abuse in both older and younger children, along with the physical signs of sexual abuse in children. Finally, guidelines for responding to a child who has been sexually abused are provided. This proactive messaging suggests a responsibility for adults to be aware of the signs of child sexual abuse and to act on suspicions. The fact that this particular type of child abuse was highlighted in this section (as opposed to child physical abuse) speaks to the importance assigned to child sexual abuse by the message sender(s) over other types of child-related abuse, which is reflective of the high incidence of child sexual abuse in First Nation communities. For instance, the Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence (1999) reports that 75% of Aboriginal girls under the age of 18 have been sexually abused. Specific information in this section is provided below.

#### *Domestic / Relationship Violence*

- Fact sheet - definitions of domestic /relationship violence; statistics; examples of abuse by partner; warning signs (behavior of abused women and abusive men); early warning signs of abuse identified by youth; what to do if abuse happens to you; messages to abused; what you and your community can do to prevent or raise awareness about domestic / relationship violence.
- Fact sheet - description and signs of a healthy relationship; what you and your community can do to encourage and foster healthy relationships
- Tool (1) - Questions to determine if you are in an abusive relationship; list of behaviors (how many of these abusive things has your partner done to you?)
- Tool (2) - Relationship safety checklist
- Fact sheet - Child sexual abuse - behavioral signs of sexual abuse in older and

younger children; physical signs of sexual abuse in children; guidelines for responding to a child

- Includes physical, psychological, and emotional abuse, criminal harassment between two people in an intimate relationship, threats of violence, and child sexual abuse
- Behavior used to control, dominate, harm
- Other terms: intimate partner violence; wife beating; wife battering; relationship violence; domestic abuse; spousal abuse; and family violence
- Intimate relationship between two people regardless of marriage, co-habitation, or sexual orientation
- Use of statistics and comparisons to show the heightened problem in Aboriginal communities
- Suggestions of what can be done is culturally relevant and community-oriented
- Examples of abusive behavior and scenarios (checklist) to help determine if the reader is in an abusive relationship
- Warning signs of relationship abuse and early warning signs of domestic / relationship violence
- Women and children are targets of abuse
- Description of a healthy relationship

The remaining sections of the toolkit are not commonly viewed as being included under the rubric of family violence in the literature (with the exception of sexual assault). These are: date violence, sexual assault, and bullying. Since Aboriginal youth were involved in the development of the toolkit, it is not surprising to see these types of abuse in a family violence prevention toolkit as these types of violence are sometimes experienced by young people. In addition, the experience of children and youth witnessing violence between adults, particularly within ones' family, can influence the perpetuation of violence in society. According to psychological theories on violence, violence experienced either as a child or as an adolescent changes how that person develops and processes information. As Kracke and Hahn (in Geffner, Griffin and Lewis, 2009) summarize, studies have documented the short and long term effects of childhood exposure to violence which include a multitude of health and social problems later in life. In addition, studies show that boys who witness domestic violence are more likely to become

abusers themselves as adults.<sup>17</sup>

Other theories (e.g. social learning theory) suggest that those who experience or witness violence tend to act out this violence in their own interpersonal relationships (dating violence) or in a school environment (bullying). The inclusion of these types of violence in the violence prevention toolkit epitomizes the insidious nature of violence and its effects on everyone, not only for those experiencing the violence. The types of information contained in these sections are provided below.

### *Date Violence*

- Fact sheet (1) - Statistics (prevalence); what to do if you are in the situation; how to protect yourself; tips to avoid date violence; barriers and possible solutions; what to do to prevent or raise awareness about date violence in your community
- Fact sheet (2) - description of rape drugs commonly used; what to do if you think you've been drugged
- Fact sheet (3) - sexual assault evidence kit - the collection and preservation of evidence in cases of date violence

### *Sexual Assault*

- Fact sheet (1) - statistics; definitions; what to do if you have been sexually assaulted; how to protect yourself from being sexually assaulted; tips by youth; how to prevent and raise awareness of sexual assault in your community
- Fact sheet (2) - evidence collection (same as in date violence)
- Tool - True/False Quiz - how much do you know about sexual assault?

### *Bullying*

- Tips - how to respond to bullying and cyber bullying; why it occurs in communities; what you can do to prevent or raise awareness about bullying in your community.

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17 [http://www.nccpr.org/index\\_files/page0007.html](http://www.nccpr.org/index_files/page0007.html)

The final section of the toolkit is entitled Community Action. This section contains a variety of community-based resources and information about how to get involved in the community to raise awareness of, or prevent, family violence. Included in this section is information about residential schools. It describes the effects the state-sponsored residential school system had on Aboriginal culture and traditions, including family and community life. The inclusion of this information suggests that the experience of residential schools has played an important role in the expression of family violence and the extent of the problem in First Nation communities today. This gives a distinctive dimension to Aboriginal family violence in that it is understood within the context of historical, social and cultural events that are unique to First Nation people. It can be inferred from this that the intent of the message sender(s) was to explain why family violence is more prevalent among Aboriginal people compared to mainstream Canadians, highlighting the unique experience of family violence for Aboriginal peoples (i.e. First Nations).

This sociological distinction is important because it suggests that the problem of family violence in First Nation communities cannot be adequately understood using a mainstream lens, that is, based on abuse of power among intimates alone. Furthermore, interventions developed for First Nations that are based on mainstream understandings have shown to be ineffective (Lane, 2003).

The specific information contained in the *Community Action* section is provided below.

- resource guide
- Residential Schools fact sheet
- Tool - how to organize a youth walk for raising awareness about violence issues
- facilitator / presenter application
- NWAC youth council information sheet

- funding resources for violence prevention work
- proposal template for youth projects; how to approach an elder
- sample workshop abstract for a conference
- creative ideas for youth
- summary of toolkit

Overall, the information contained in the toolkit provides a broad description of family violence from various audiences: youth, adults, and elders. The information can be described as: action-based; community-oriented; instructional (what can be done); informational (educate and inform); descriptive and objective; factual (use of statistics; examples of behavior; assessment criteria); and behavioral (characteristics of behavior of both victim and perpetrator). During the group interview, the NWAC respondents provided some background about the development of the toolkit, which explains how the content for the toolkit was decided. As explained by R(3):

“The underlying theme for the toolkit was family violence against Aboriginal women. It’s not an isolated topic, it’s connected to everything, and that’s how all those other topics came up. Emotional violence was important as its own topic; bullying, seemed at first to be not connected, but it really is connected. Sexual assault, date violence came up in the initial discussion of family violence. Our funders were ok with it...we talked directly with our youth provincial representatives and pretty much the whole content came from their stories. Then as administrators, we helped them shape it into certain topics and we discussed each topic separately”.

Ironically, this perspective of family violence is more consistent with the federal government’s understanding of family violence than a First Nations understanding, as revealed in this study. The number of different types of abuse that are included in the toolkit suggests a broad definition of family violence, including types of violence common to young people, such as bullying, sexual assault, and date violence. In comparison to the interview with NWAC representatives, family violence did not include types of violence common to young people.

Conversely, a type of violence mentioned by the interview respondents, 'lateral violence', was not included in the toolkit as being part of family violence. Interview respondents indicated that lateral violence was a particular problem in First Nation communities and occurs between status (as defined by the Indian Act) and non status Indians. It appears then that the definition of family violence is highly dependent upon the perspective of the person defining it. Youth are more likely to understand family violence from their vantage point which includes peer groups, and adults are more likely to understand family violence according to the types of violence they are likely to encounter.

Other aspects of family violence are also broadly defined. According to the toolkit, all community members are affected by family violence: women, youth, children, men, and elders. Again, this is consistent with the findings of the federal interview but not the NWAC interview. Respondents of the First Nation group saw women and children as the main victims of family violence. While the audience for the toolkit was intentionally broad, mainly targeting Aboriginal girls, the understanding of family violence based on the toolkit's content is more in line with how the federal government perceives the problem, rather than how family violence is understood by First Nations.

This is problematic since family violence prevention initiatives that are targeted toward youth have the potential to be effective at increasing awareness of the problem. However, if the problem is portrayed from a mainstream or other perspective that is not indicative of their world, then the problem cannot be fully understood and addressed. In the words of one of the respondents in the NWAC interview, if information about family violence does not reflect the experiences of First Nations, youth will not see how the problem affects them. It is important then

that First Nation youth understand how family violence has become a critical social issue for communities and how it has evolved so they can put the problem in a context that makes sense and is real for them.

The definition of family violence for the NWAC representatives is consistent with NWAC's mandate, which is to:

“enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations and Métis women within First Nation and Canadian societies”; the organization's mission is to “help empower women by being involved in developing and changing legislation that affects them, and by involving them in the development and delivery of programs promoting equal opportunity for Aboriginal women”.<sup>18</sup>

It, therefore, would be more useful for family violence initiatives, developed by First Nation organizations or communities, to be in line with a First Nations perspective of the problem. The fact that the toolkit is more representative of the federal government's perspective of family violence shows that the FVPP policy is 1) based on a western perspective and not conducive to a First Nations viewpoint of the problem, and 2) lacks the flexibility to allow First Nations to develop solutions that are consistent with their understanding of the problem. Instead, the policy serves to satisfy accountability requirements for the federal government.

An analysis of the toolkit, therefore, shows that initiatives developed through the FVPP are more consistent with the program through which initiatives are funded. How then does this help First Nations address the problem of family violence in their communities? A related

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.nwac-hq.org/en/index.html>

problem concerns the process of accessing funds through the program, which is discussed in the next section.

### The Funding Process

At the end of the interview with the NWAC representatives, respondents were asked about their experience with applying for government funding through the FVPP to develop the toolkit.

Overall, the respondents expressed frustration with the funding process. The main problem, according to respondents, is the funding cycle with different levels of approvals, as described by

R(2):

“It’s bureaucracy, all the different levels [of approvals]. It took forever and by the time the program gets running, it’s halfway through the year and then it’s spend, spend, spend. So that cycle is not good”.

Participants also commented on the process more broadly. Another problem highlighted by the participants was the government’s lack of consideration for a community’s capacity to write proposals. While some communities have people who are trained and experienced with proposal writing, others do not, and therefore, may not be able to compete on an equal level with others for funding. Communities who receive funding for family violence initiatives are often those who have the capacity to write proposals and understand the process, improving their chances for receiving funding. Those communities who are less capable may be in need of government support for their own initiatives to reduce family violence but are not successful at dealing with the government process. A community’s capacity to deal with government processes, therefore, was an important factor, as indicated by (R3):

“They can’t even do proposals. They’re so restrictive. They don’t have people who know how to do it”.

Another significant concern was the criteria by which proposals are evaluated. These respondents talked about how criteria for assessing proposals can be restrictive and not inclusive of an

Aboriginal worldview, as explained by (R1) and (R3) respectively:

“The criteria for a community-based research program are set up and your proposal has to fit within the established criteria in order to become eligible for funding. So you may see an issue to work on in a specific area but it doesn’t fit the criteria, so you have to think of something else, when that issue may be most important for your community”.

“You can have the greatest idea but if it doesn’t fit the funding criteria, you can’t do it”.

This shows an awareness by First Nations that the FVPP policy is not consistent with a First Nation perspective of family violence or the FVPP program objectives.

Participants talked about what the federal government’s role should be in the funding and policy processes concerning family violence prevention initiatives. For R(2), the government needs to take more of a support role:

“The federal government’s role in family violence prevention is to listen and hear what First Nations are saying, what they say they need. They need to understand their [First Nation] issues and support what they need”.

For R(3), what is needed is increased engagement of First Nations in program design:

“From a project officer’s perspective, to consult more when they design projects. It’s the number one complaint of youth. First Nations are not consulted in the process. Programs don’t consider a holistic approach or traditions”.

The lack of involvement of First Nations is a finding consistent with the Aboriginal literature which makes frequent reference to the perception that Aboriginal women have not been invited to participate in discussions about family violence and have not been engaged as participants in the development of initiatives designed to address this issue. For instance, the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (1993) argues that Aboriginal women are particularly excluded from the research, program and policy development processes, and therefore, efforts do not take into account the concerns of Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women, the Panel contends, should be engaged in the consultation processes related to healing and social development issues, such as family violence.

Some authors have asserted that Aboriginal organizations are also to blame for not actively seeking out views from communities. For instance, La Prairie (1991, in Bopp et al. 2003:64) asserts that “national Aboriginal organizations and government have not fully acknowledged the importance of input from all segments of the community in a search for viable options for dealing with serious social problems”. Contrary to this view, this study has shown through a case study example of the violence prevention toolkit that NWAC lives up to its role of being “the voice for Aboriginal women” (as described by one interview respondent). The consultative process used by NWAC in developing the toolkit illustrates that Aboriginal organizations do actively engage First Nations people of all age groups in didactic and meaningful discussions to tap into all possible viewpoints on a social problem that touches them all. This type of engagement, however, has yet to be similarly applied by the federal government in addressing the problem of family violence in First Nation communities.

The current policy relationship between the federal government and First Nations can be

described as “participation by consultation”, where federal bureaucrats listen to the views of First Nations but do not concede any decision-making power to them (Bopp et al., 2003). Through funding agreements, First Nations manage limited federal resources within established accountability frameworks. The government continues to have primary control over program design and implementation.

A more effective approach is one that encourages the involvement of First Nations as full participants in the development of policies that affect them. Such interactive involvement, with support of government, would help ensure that any given policy or program for First Nations would be inclusive of an Aboriginal worldview, that is, consistent not only with Aboriginal culture but their understanding of the problem to be addressed. Ideally, the role of First Nations would be as decision-makers in the process as well as controllers of the implementation of a program or policy. This ideology shift has the potential to increase the level of First Nation participation in solutions to problems that affect them, and on a practical level, increase the effectiveness of social programs and initiatives to produce real change for First Nation communities.

In summary, a critical analysis of the FVPP policy and the NWAC toolkit showed that family violence prevention initiatives rigidly adhere to the dictates of federal policy. This study shows that a First Nations perspective of the problem of family violence is expressed within the parameters of the proposal (funding) criteria and policy authority, which is not consistent with a First Nation understanding of family violence. Therefore, family violence prevention initiatives and programs are not as effective as they could be in terms of reaching youth. Additionally, barriers within the federal processes themselves limit First Nation participation in family violence

prevention projects. Future studies in this area may wish to examine other types of initiatives being developed by First Nations, such as posters, newsletters, as well as content for workshops and conferences.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The results of the content analysis of interviews with First Nation and federal government representatives show that while both groups work together to address family violence in communities, they do so at cross purposes. First Nations perceive family violence in highly specific ways and see women and children as the main targets for interventions, whereas the federal government has a much broader view of the problem. More troubling is that federally funded prevention projects tend to adhere to the federal government's view of family violence rather than from a First Nations perspective. This suggests that prevention projects are not reaching their intended audience nor are they as effective as they could be.

Structural and systemic barriers within the federal organization and processes, as revealed by a case study, further inhibits the full expression of a First Nations worldview in family violence prevention initiatives. The existence of structural barriers, such as programs operating in isolation and the lack of adequate program funding, as mentioned by the federal group, shows that the current system continues to reflect the outdated role of the federal government as "guardian" over Indian affairs. The lack of engagement with First Nations in the policies that affect them and the restrictive funding process for family violence prevention projects, as mentioned by the First Nation group, ensures that prevention projects reflect a mainstream view of family violence. This apparent disconnect between the federal government and First Nations has not substantially changed since the 1960's when First Nation groups first publically showed their discontent with the federal government's efforts to include First Nations in decisions that affect them. Working in partnership with First Nations to improve this relationship would be a significant step in

improving outcomes of family violence prevention initiatives.

This research is a limited, exploratory piece of work but does begin to fill a gap in the existing family violence literature and offers possible directions for future research. This study lends support to the existing Aboriginal family violence literature and colonization theory in particular. While knowledge of the consequences of family violence is a significant part of the problem of First Nation family violence, it appears to represent one aspect of a much broader perspective of family violence. Further research that tests the applicability of the model for understanding First Nation family violence, based on five dimensions of family violence, in other First Nation groups or in other Aboriginal populations is recommended.

The identification of systemic barriers within federal processes can serve as a focal point to direct program reform efforts and may provide possible directions for future violence prevention initiatives. A more meaningful First Nation involvement in the policies and programs that affect them would enable First Nations control over the solutions to social problems which may lead to more effective outcomes. An analysis of a family violence prevention initiative reveals that First Nations have a holistic understanding of family violence, including the influence of social factors and historical events. Youth in particular appear to recognize violence among peers (e.g. bullying) as a reflection or extension of family violence which show an increased awareness among youth of the widespread impact of family violence in communities, due in part by federal initiatives that promote awareness of this problem, such as the Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP).

Increased awareness among First Nation youth may signal a change in the incidence of family violence for future generations. It seems reasonable, then, to target a significant portion of

family violence prevention initiatives toward youth to aid them in making informed decisions about their future and well-being. Although family violence continues to be a major social and health concern among First Nations, positive changes are happening now in communities that may also help to alter the course of this lethal problem over the next few decades.

Overall, the findings of this research contribute to an improved understanding of family violence and provides insight into the current relationship between the federal government and First Nations in the context of addressing family violence on reserve. Partnership with First Nations, rather than guardianship, may help bridge the gap in understandings of First Nation family violence. Active participation of First Nations in the development of family violence prevention policies and programs may help ensure that First Nation culture, traditions and viewpoints are the foundation upon which these policies and programs for First Nations are developed. This may also assist the federal government in its role to improve health outcomes, social well being, and ultimately, quality of life for First Nations people in Canada.

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## APPENDICES

**Interview Discussion Questions  
Federal Government (Family Violence Prevention Program Staff)**

***How is family violence in First Nation communities understood by federal staff of the Family Violence Prevention Program?***

Main Questions:

1. How is family violence defined by the program in your region?
2. What types of family violence is prevalent in your respective region?
3. Do you consider family violence to be a major health and social issue for First Nations?
4. What is the impact of family violence on First Nation communities, and who is most affected?
5. What are the major causes or contributors to family violence in First Nation communities?
6. What is the issue(s) of most concern facing First Nation communities concerning family violence?
7. How has the issue of family violence changed over the last decade, or has it changed at all?
8. What is the federal government's role in family violence prevention in First Nation communities?
9. What is needed to address the issue of family violence in First Nation communities?

Secondary Questions:

10. How is funding for family violence prevention projects determined? Is it determined at the national level or the regional level?
11. Is the FVPP effective? Is the program doing a good job at preventing family violence in communities in your region?
12. What more can INAC do to support First Nations?

**Interview Discussion Questions**  
**Native Women's Association of Canada**

***How is family violence in First Nation communities understood by First Nations?***

**Main Questions:**

1. How is family violence defined by the NWAC?
2. In your opinion, what type of family violence is most prevalent in First Nation communities?
3. Do you consider family violence to be a major health and social issue for First Nations?
4. What is the impact of family violence on First Nation communities and who is most affected?
5. What are the major causes or contributors to family violence in First Nation communities?
6. What is the issue(s) of most concern facing First Nation communities concerning family violence?
7. How has the issue of family violence changed over the last decade, or has it changed?
8. What is NWAC's role in family violence prevention in First Nation communities?
9. What is needed to assist First Nations address the issue of family violence in their communities?

**Secondary Questions:**

10. What initiatives has the NWAC undertaken since 2006 to increase awareness of family violence in First Nation communities?
11. Are community-initiated solutions supported by federal policy and funding?
12. What do you see as the federal government's role in family violence prevention in First Nation communities?
13. How was the content for the Healing journey toolkit decided? Who decided?

14. How do you expect the toolkit to be used by First Nations?
15. In your opinion, do you think the toolkit will be/has had an impact on attitudes about family violence and/or individual behaviour? Please explain.

### Letter of Information

Hello,

I am a student researcher at Carleton University at Ottawa studying the phenomenon of family violence in First Nation communities. This is an invitation to participate in an individual or group interview on this issue. The objective of this research study is to examine the relationship between understandings of family violence and proposed community-based solutions.

Your participation is voluntary and will not produce any direct benefit to you. The results of this study is expected to contribute to a body of knowledge on understandings of family violence in First Nation communities in which, currently, a paucity of information exists.

The interview will be audio (digitally) recorded for subsequent coding and analysis. Your name or any other identifying information will not be publicly disclosed in any form and will not appear in any publication associated with this study. As such, the data derived from the interview will be analyzed collectively and the findings will be presented in aggregate form.

The interview will be scheduled at a time and location convenient for you and is expected to last approximately one hour.

For your convenience, the list of questions that will be posed in the interview will be provided to you prior to the interview. You may decline answering any question during the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have any questions regarding this research or your participation, please contact me via email [thazelwo@connect.carleton.ca](mailto:thazelwo@connect.carleton.ca) or telephone at (613) 866-8511, or my thesis advisor Janet Siltanen, PhD, Sociology Graduate Program Coordinator, Professor of Sociology, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, at (613) 520-2600 extn 2795 or [janet\\_siltanen@carleton.ca](mailto:janet_siltanen@carleton.ca)

This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance by the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or questions regarding your involvement in this study, please contact the ethics committee chair.

The chair's information is as follows:

Prof. Antonio Gualtieri, Chair  
Carleton University Research Ethics Committee  
Carleton University  
1125 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6  
Tel: 613-520-2517 E-mail: [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

### Informed Consent Form

**Title of Research:** Deconstructing Policy Relationships: A Critical Examination of Different Understandings of Family Violence in First Nation Communities

**Purpose.** The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of family violence in First Nation communities by examining the relationship between understandings of family violence and proposed solutions. The objective of this research is to investigate whether Aboriginal understandings of family violence are considered in the development of government policy and funding criteria for prevention projects and initiatives in First Nation communities.

**Task requirements.** You will be asked to participate in an individual or group interview relating to family violence in First Nation communities.

**Duration and Locale.** The interview will last approximately one hour and take place (TBD).

**Potential Risk/ Discomfort.** Although there are no known risks in this study, the topic may be personally sensitive which may be distressing to some people. However, you may withdraw your participation at any time and you may choose not to answer any question that you feel uncomfortable in answering.

**Anonymity/ Confidentiality.** The information you provide in this study will be analyzed in aggregate form. All data are coded in such a manner that your name will not associated with them. In addition, the coded data are for the explicit use of the researcher and will be used for the present study and any associated publications.

**Right to Withdraw.** You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. You may also refrain from answering any question that you do not want to answer.

#### Signatures

I have read the above description of the research study and understand the conditions of my participation. My signature indicates that I agree to participate voluntarily in this research.

Participant's Name : \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_