



UAKN  
Urban Aboriginal  
Knowledge Network

RCU  
Réseau de connaissances des  
Autochtones en milieu urbain

## RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMARY

Atlantic Research Centre

### Name of Project:

**“Isolated Events?”: Connecting Patterns of Struggle and Vulnerability in Young Urban Aboriginal Women’s Narratives in Kijipuktuk (Halifax)**

### Research Start-up Summary and Abstract:

This project aims to draw focus to the structural and historical forces that serve to systemically disadvantage and threaten the wellbeing of urban Aboriginal women in a post-colonial society (Smith 2005; Anderson et al. 2008; Jacobs and Williams 2008). Too often, when a case of a missing or murdered Aboriginal woman comes to light, her story is passed off as an isolated event that has nothing to do with her Aboriginal identity. Still, the shockingly disproportionate number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada (Pearce 2013; AIC 2009; NWAC 2007) suggests that these tragic events are connected through these women’s shared experiences of colonialism. While each of their lives and deaths are unique, research demonstrates that they all experience the social forces at play that disenfranchise, displace, and disadvantage Aboriginal women and girls in Canadian society. These troublesome patterns of violence cause indescribable pain to the families and communities that share their histories with missing and/or murdered Aboriginal women.

Our research will connect with the human development and social cohesion themes and priorities as outlined by the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network guidelines. We intend to shed light on the culture of disconnection and denial that exists (Jiwani and Young 2006) in regard to cases of missing and/or murdered Aboriginal women by highlighting the conditions and circumstances that serve to marginalize and suppress urban Aboriginal girls and women. These situations include women who are often young and/or single mothers, are or have been in abusive relationships, or are pursuing educational or professional opportunities.

### Engagement Objectives:

This project identifies a gap in the current research. It aims to connect the stories of missing and murdered Aboriginal women to one another, which research shows are not just isolated events. In doing so, we hope to document their stories, and create a comprehensive understanding of the systemic challenges they face. We will also look at stories of women who have persevered in the face of these struggles and explore the points of resilience and strength that gave them a sense of safety and fulfillment in their lives.

Using a phenomenologically-based, narrative approach, we will question the effects that the phenomenon of missing and murdered Aboriginal women has on the self perception and sense of personal safety of Aboriginal women currently residing in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Research questions will include:

- Is there an inherent fearfulness urban Aboriginal women in Halifax experience because they identify with murdered and/or missing women, both culturally and through shared life experiences and conditions?
- If so, within this culture of fearfulness, are there avenues of educational, professional, or cultural support and development for these women to experience a more fulfilling and secure life?

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