"Stolen Sisters and Second Class Citizens": The impact of poverty on Aboriginal women in Canada.

ABSTRACT

Historically, policies such as Canada’s Indian Act and Bill C-31 have resulted in the marginalization of First Nations peoples. The Indian Act, passed in Canada in 1876, defined Indian identity and prescribed what Indianness meant. The contemporary implications of the colonialism enshrined in the Indian Act and Bill-C21 manifest themselves daily in the lives of Aboriginal people through a multitude of social, economic and political problems. There are significant differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in terms of poverty, health outcomes, and general life chances.

We view the Indian Act as part of a process of both colonial and patriarchal domination. The sexist dimensions inherent in this legislation were more severe for Aboriginal women than men and these ramifications continue to have impacts today (Tuhiiwai Smith, 2002). Aboriginal women in Canada are in a worse economic situation than either non-Aboriginal women or Aboriginal men. Aboriginal women face the highest poverty and violence rates (Green, 2000) and face multiple economic, social, and political barriers both within Aboriginal and outside Aboriginal communities. Recently, Amnesty International’s “Stolen Sisters” report (2004) documented the stories of Indigenous women and girls who have been murdered or disappeared from cities in western Canada. Their stories illustrate how the heightened threat of violence created by the social and economic marginalization of Indigenous women within Canadian society affects them. This paper will illustrate the impact that colonialism, sexism, and racism have had on Aboriginal women in Canada to make them one of the most vulnerable groups in Canada facing poverty.

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