

Socio-economic status influences risk of violence against aboriginal women, study finds

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If aboriginal women had the same income and education levels as non-aboriginal women, their risk of being abused by a partner could drop by 40 per cent, according to a new study by researchers at St. Michael's Hospital.

The new study indicates that socio-economic position is a major factor influencing risks of abuse for aboriginal women.

"The unfortunate reality is that aboriginal women in Canada are almost four times more likely to experience [gender violence](#), but we wanted to know why," said Dr. Janet Smylie, a scientist at the hospital's Centre for Research on Inner City Health and one of the study's authors. "We wanted to unpack the disproportionate statistics of gender violence and [intimate partner violence](#) experienced by aboriginal women and found that taking [socio-economic status](#) into account cut the risks almost by half."

When assuming that aboriginal women had the same income and education levels as non-aboriginal women, the risk of partner abuse drops by 40 per cent from almost four times as likely to twice as likely, the study showed. Even with a dramatic improvement of socio-economic status, aboriginal women would still have twice the risk of being abused by a partner compared to non-aboriginal women, Dr. Smylie said.

Dr. Smylie and Dr. Nihaya Daoud's findings appear online in the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* today. The study used data from the 2006-07 Canadian Maternity Experiences Survey representing more than 50,000 Canadian-born women, including more than 3,000 off-reserve First Nations, Inuit and Metis mothers. Researchers collaborated with the Native Women's Association of Canada.

"Many studies have looked at the correlation between ethnicity and race as markers for poverty," said Dr. Smylie. "We found that aboriginal identity can be a marker for lower socio-economic

Aboriginal women in the study were more likely to have low incomes (37.6 per cent) and have less than a [high school education](#) (24 per cent) compared to non-aboriginal women (13.8 per cent and 6.7 per cent, respectively).

Poverty can lead to violence through financial and social stress, as well as alcohol or drug-abuse to cope with these stressors. The cost of moving or living alone can prevent aboriginal women from leaving violent situations.

To the authors' knowledge, this is the first quantitative study to examine socio-economic position as a factor explaining high rates of gender violence among aboriginal women.

"Violence against aboriginal women is more complex than elevating [socioeconomic status](#) alone," Dr. Smylie said. "Future studies and research on the subject need to focus on the effect of colonial policies, such as residential schools, on aboriginal populations."

"The colonial impacts on aboriginal gender roles, social capital and access to social services have been felt over generations. To end violence against aboriginal women there must be policy-driven initiatives to revitalize traditional values between genders within aboriginal communities," said she said.

Provided by St. Michael's Hospital

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