Aboriginal Women in Canada:
Strategic Research Directions
for
Policy Development

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In May 1997, Status of Women Canada sought to undertake a review of the literature on current and emerging policy issues as they affect, and are of concern to, Canadian Aboriginal women. The results of this work are contained in this document. Included is an annotated bibliography of relevant material published over the last 10 years (i.e., 1986 to 1997), along with an in-depth literature review and synthesis. These in turn serve as the basis for:

∗   the identification of those areas in greatest need of further research and documentation; and

∗   the development of an integrated policy agenda in which Aboriginal women's role as key change agents is highlighted, documented and supported.

Findings

Although their numbers are relatively small in an absolute sense, Aboriginal women constitute a vibrant and highly diverse segment of Canada's population, who share a common legacy of marginalization and oppression. The Canadian state, Canadian society in general and the Aboriginal male leadership have paid scant attention to their particular needs and concerns. Given concrete expression in a wide range of social, demographic and economic indicators, this marginalization has in the last 10 to 15 years garnered increasing attention within the country's policy and research communities. A growing literature focused on the exploration of Aboriginal women's lives and cultural contexts has provided a means of addressing the myriad challenges which they face during the course of their day-to-day lives.

Significantly, these efforts have led to the publication of a number of incisive and highly original studies on particular facets of Aboriginal women's lives. Most notably, work focuses on their involvement in economic development initiatives, political participation and leadership activities, and the "political economy of everyday life." However, it must be acknowledged that this literature is also characterized by several serious flaws.

∗   *Limited set of issues addressed*: Despite the heterogeneous nature of the problems and challenges facing Canadian Aboriginal women, the literature continues to be dominated by an extremely limited range of issues, specifically matters touching on health and healing, violence and abuse, and the criminal justice system.

∗   *Some groups of Aboriginal women ignored*: At the same time as Inuit women and registered Indian women living on-reserve attract substantial research attention, others, including Métis women, non-status Indian women and Aboriginal women with disabilities, remain seriously underrepresented within the existing research literature.

∗   *Narrow focus*: Although much of the work undertaken on Aboriginal women makes some reference to the complex and multi-faceted nature of most, if not all, of the

problems currently facing this population, little effort is made to follow up with analyses which transcend the narrow boundaries of the problem at hand. That is to say, there is a widespread tendency in the literature to eschew holistic approaches in favour of ones which consider only one policy field at a time.

∗ ***Singular, negative orientation***: With surprisingly few exceptions, work dealing with Aboriginal women has tended to be highly problem-focused, and it has pathologized these women's agency and realities. This in turn has allowed little room for an understanding of the real complexities at work, and has provided little insight into the strategies that work.

As a means of addressing these flaws, along with the gaps which exist in the literature in a more general sense, a number of specific recommendations for research and policy development have been developed.

i. That the health status of Métis women be given priority, through the collection of baseline health data, along with the identification of the most pressing program and policy needs of this population.

i. That research related to Aboriginal women's health through the life-course be funded as a basis for the development of health programs and policies directed specifically toward Aboriginal girls and female elders.

i. That research attention be devoted to the problems facing Aboriginal women with disabilities, so programs will enhance their quality of life through improved service delivery and sensitized home communities.

i. That the barriers to Aboriginal women's educational endeavours be researched, and that appropriate policies and programs be put into place that would make their educational experience more relevant to their life goals and contexts.

i. That priority be given to Aboriginal women's rural-urban migration patterns and the differential experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis female migrants.

i. That longitudinal studies be designed to monitor the workplace equity and anti-harassment measures which are of key concern to working Aboriginal women.

i. That a comprehensive, national study be undertaken to explore how Aboriginal women's economic development activities affect their families and communities.

i. That violence and abuse directed specifically toward elderly Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women with disabilities be studied.

i. That priority be given to the task of developing "family violence" programs which are specifically oriented toward Aboriginal elders and women with disabilities.

i. That long-term research focus on the evaluation of existing Aboriginal "family violence" educational initiatives and treatment programs.

i.   That national research be undertaken to examine the responsiveness of the criminal justice system to issues of "family violence," in order to bring about corrective action and to facilitate the dissemination of information about innovative "family violence" programs.

i.   That funds be allocated to continue monitoring and evaluating responses to the recommendations of the *Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Canada, 1990b) and other inquiries pertaining to the criminal justice system and its treatment of Aboriginal women.

i.   That research explore the role Aboriginal women traditionally held in the administration of justice in Aboriginal societies in order to provide a context for Aboriginal women's place within emerging Aboriginal justice systems.

i.   That national research examine the experiences of Métis, Inuit and First Nations women with "family violence," sexual abuse and criminal activity.

i.   That research explore whether Aboriginal women involved in community politics and economic development activities provide positive role models for Aboriginal girls, and give other women in the community the incentive to seek political office or start their own business ventures.

i.   That funds be allocated to research local Aboriginal women's organizations and their role in galvanizing community development initiatives or community-centred political activities.

i.   That research be undertaken to examine the role community contexts play in encouraging and facilitating Aboriginal women's representation within communities' principal administrative and executive bodies.

i.   That research focus on self-government consultation with Inuit and Métis women, in particular, and Aboriginal women, in general.

i.   That additional research be conducted on the likely impacts of all facets of self-government on all Aboriginal women, including the administration of justice and the transfer of control over health services delivery.

i.   That research be undertaken to examine the policies of other national governments on matters related to Indigenous women and how these might bear upon policy development in Canada.

i.   That comparative studies of Indigenous women in Canada and elsewhere be undertaken as a foundation for international bridge building and collaboration among the various Indigenous women's organizations.

Conclusion

In light of these findings and the more general observation that Aboriginal women continue to be underrepresented or ignored within the policy literature on Aboriginal peoples, there is clearly substantial scope for corrective action. This is particularly the case in relation to the development of a policy research agenda that is truly responsive to the interests and priorities of Aboriginal women themselves. Expressed as a series of recommendations, an agenda for action is outlined below.

1. Given the truncated and/or narrow focus of much of the policy-oriented literature on Aboriginal women, it is recommended that holism in research be fostered. Projects and programs would then give explicit consideration to the interplay of all relevant policy fields within their analyses.

1. Given that past research has often focused on issues which are of questionable significance to many or most Aboriginal women during the course of their daily lives, it is recommended that a remedial consultative mechanism be put in place. This would ensure that the priorities of researchers and policy makers accurately reflect those of Aboriginal women themselves.

1. As a means of critiquing and/or lending credibility to the findings of research already undertaken with Aboriginal women, it is recommended that projects which seek to document the needs and assets of such women be funded. The use of scientifically credible methodologies would allow for this.

1. Given that the literature on Canadian Aboriginal women is dominated by case studies and snapshot surveys, it is recommended that priority be given to the development and implementation of longitudinal studies. Tracking key indicators pertaining to Aboriginal women over time is a research imperative.

1. As a means of correcting long-standing problems in the distribution and availability of research findings pertaining to Canadian Aboriginal women, it is recommended that mechanisms be devised and implemented which facilitate the collection and dissemination of such research on a country-wide scale. The creation of a national data base of research activities by or about Aboriginal women would accommodate this.

1. Given the salience of the household and the community as key sites of action in Aboriginal women's daily struggle to secure the economic and social well-being of their families, it is recommended that research contributing to policy makers' understanding of these contexts be funded. Policies and programs which support Aboriginal women as individuals would necessarily follow.

1. As a means of counterbalancing the traditional disregard shown by researchers and policy makers for the real differences which exist among and within different groups of Aboriginal women, it is recommended that in-depth and sustained attention be focused on the documentation of the particular problems and challenges facing (*inter alia*) the girl child, Aboriginal women with disabilities, Métis women, lesbian and elderly Aboriginal women, and urban Aboriginal women.

Given that relevant government structures seek to eliminate the attitudes and conditions which have contributed to Aboriginal women's marginalization from civil society, it is recommended that means of facilitating and supporting such women's integration be identified. In this way, their decision-making capacity, in all relevant political structures, from the level of the household to that of the international arena, would be cultivated, encouraged and disciplined.

INTRODUCTION

Contradiction is a state of being with which Canadian Aboriginal womeni are all too familiar. In

> The purpose of this document is two-fold. It includes:
>
> ∗ a 10-year retrospective analysis of the policy-oriented literature on Aboriginal women, highlighting those areas in greatest need of further research and documentation; and
>
> ∗ an integrated policy agenda in which Aboriginal women's role as key change agents moves them beyond their homes and communities.

their daily lives, they are often found in such roles as community leader, head of household, transmitter of traditional knowledge and entrepreneur. However, despite their undeniable contributions to the social reproduction of their families and communities, they are often, as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has put it, "excluded — from their home communities, from decision-making, and from having a say in their future and their children's future" (Canada, 1996a: 95). While the roots of this contradictory position can be traced to the structural determination of colonialism and patriarchy, the legacy of this marginalization continues to thrive to this day, in the form of poverty, ill-health, sexual and physical abuse, and the silencing of Aboriginal women's voices in debates over self-government, land claims and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.*

In short, at a time when fundamental decisions are being made with respect to the political, economic and social changes of Aboriginal people and their communities, it is quite simply unacceptable not to take advantage of the wisdom and experience of Aboriginal women, who often understand the needs and capacities of their communities better than anyone else. Yet, despite some indication that the Canadian government is slowly awakening to this fact, as attested to by the not inconsiderable attention paid to Aboriginal women within the recent Royal Commission report, in many areas there continues to be a shocking disregard for their views and interests. In turn, this is aggravated by an often severe lack of information concerning their day-to-day lives and the impact of their activities on their families and communities.

This situation is not likely to change in a truly fundamental fashion until the country's policy makers and political leaders have before them detailed and well-supported data pertaining to the lives of Aboriginal women. Therefore, this document seeks to contribute to this project through two principal means. In the first instance, a 10-year retrospective analysis of the policy-oriented literature on Aboriginal women has been undertaken, with particular emphasis placed on the task of uncovering key gaps and silences. Second, the development of an integrated policy agenda in which Aboriginal women's role as key agents of change in their homes and beyond is documented, highlighted and supported.

To carry out these objectives, the paper has been organized in the following fashion. By way of introduction, the first section presents a broad overview of indicators pertaining to Canadian Aboriginal women, drawing chiefly on statistical data from *Aboriginal Women: A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile* (Canada, 1996b) and the *1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey* (Canada,

1993a). With this background, it is then possible to turn to the literature proper, to underscore the various policy fields in which Aboriginal women's struggle and development has been couched. The use of the term "policy field" in this context is significant.

LARGER FORCES ACTING ON ABORIGINAL WOMEN — INTERNATIONAL ARENA, NATIONAL ARENA, COMMUNITY, HOUSEHOLD, INDIVIDUAL

ABORIGINAL WOMEN ACTING ON LARGER FORCES — INDIVIDUAL, HOUSEHOLD, COMMUNITY, NATIONAL ARENA, INTERNATIONAL ARENA
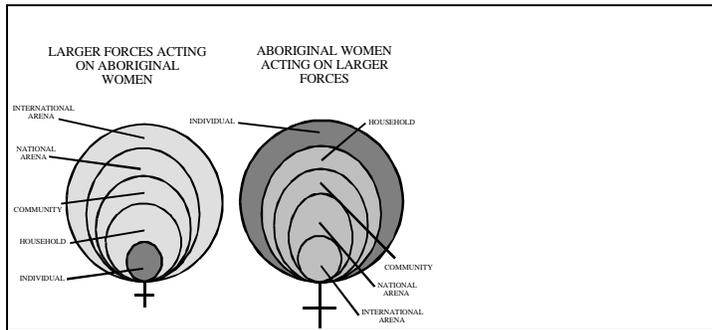
Not only is there widespread evidence in the literature to suggest that research which focuses on one field to the detriment of all others is routinely planned and carried out, there also appears to be little real awareness of the possibility that interventions meant to resolve a problem in one area may serve only to exacerbate problems in another. The present analysis counters such short-sightedness, along with the equally pernicious tendency to downplay or negate Aboriginal women's agency. It endeavours to highlight the artificiality of the barriers separating each policy field from all others, and to expose the degree to which Aboriginal women are actively struggling to change the conditions of their existence. Through action and activism, they transcend place and any simple categorization, e.g., by household or community. In this way, the framework depicted in Figure 1 provides a useful means of organizing the discussion in Part II and it also brings to the fore the two-way nature of the relationship between Aboriginal women and each of the five policy fields. That is to say, not only are Aboriginal women acted on by forces unfolding elsewhere, but they, in turn, act on these five policy fields, shaping events and generating particular outcomes in the process.

Finally, it should be noted that even though an effort was made to include work pertaining to *all* Aboriginal women, whether old or young, Inuit or Métis, status or non-status, on-reserve or off-reserve, in fact this was not possible. This was due to the simple reality that far more has been written about some groups than about others. This imbalance is the product of any number of factors, ranging from the relative accessibility of particular populations, to the political priorities of research funders. Notably, this does not alter the underlying fact that sound policy decisions cannot be made in an information vacuum.

## PART I: TOWARD A PROFILE OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Introduction

In this section, the current life situations of Canadian Aboriginal women are introduced through a statistically based overview of such indicators as their age distribution, health status, educational attainment and employment characteristics. Notwithstanding the need to provide this context, it is acknowledged that the exclusive use of quantitative data brings with it certain biases. Most notably, this approach tends to generate a bloodless account that obscures the adversities many Aboriginal women face. By the same token, it allows for a concise comparison between Aboriginal women's life chances and those of Canadian women in general, as well as the nature of differences *among* Aboriginal women themselves. This latter point is particularly significant, given the degree to which policy work in the past has tended to treat Aboriginal women as a single monolithic entity, with no regard for their social, economic and cultural distinctiveness. Not surprisingly, this homogenization has led to the recommendation and implementation of policies which, while appropriate to status Indian women living off-reserve, have no relevance whatsoever for Inuit women or Indian women living on-reserve. While it is precisely for this reason that particular attention is placed on Aboriginal women's distinctiveness in the following discussion, effective research practices call for the disaggregation of each sub-population of Aboriginal women, to permit a more nuanced understanding of their similarities and differences.

As is noted in the general introduction, the principal data source for this review is a report prepared by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), entitled *Aboriginal Women: A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile* (Canada, 1996b). Moreover, although an effort was made to include a sufficiently broad range of data in this report, there is clearly much information which is *not* provided. Mostly because of the unavailability of information specific to Aboriginal women, a number of key areas, including (*inter alia*) mammogram and pap smear practices, health-oriented preventive practices, leisure time physical activity, rates of underemployment, absence from work, maternity benefits and patterns of union membership are not covered here. Obviously, if sound policy decisions concerning Aboriginal women's health or involvement in economic activities are to be made in the future, reliable longitudinal data must be available for all relevant program and policy areas, in all policy fields.

Demographic, Health and Social Indicators

In 1991, there were 522,460 Aboriginal women living in Canada, out of a total Aboriginal population of 1,016,340.ii As Figure 2 suggests, of these roughly half-million Aboriginal women, fully 50% were status Indians; 41% non-status, 6.2% Métis and 2.8% Inuit. Among female status Indians, 57% reported living on-reserve, while the remainder lived in a variety of settings off- reserve. In this regard it should be noted that the on-reserve female population was far more sedentary in the year prior to 1991 than their off-reserve counterparts (with 15.8% of the former being transient, as compared to 35.9% of the latter). While neither Inuit nor Métis

Status off-reserve 21.5%   Status on-reserve 28.5%

Métis 6.2%

Inuit 2.8%

Non-status 41.0%

women had as high a mobility rate as Indian women living off-reserve (22.7% and 29.8% respectively), they were nonetheless significantly more likely to have moved in the year prior to 1991 than the Canadian female population in general (of whom only 15.8% were transient) (Canada, 1996b). Turning to the matter of age distribution, it becomes immediately apparent that Aboriginal women are far more concentrated in the youngest age cohorts than is the case among Canadian women at large, with over one third of the total (34.3%) aged 14 years or younger (see Figure 3). Underlying this fact, Aboriginal women tend to have significantly larger families, with almost 6% of them reporting having seven or more children, as contrasted with 2.7% for non-Aboriginal Canadian women. Obviously, this has far-reaching implications for policy making in such areas as health and child care, as well as for the availability and provision of services directed toward pregnant women. Moreover, this is an especially salient point for Inuit women, of whom 38.4% are 14 years of age or younger.
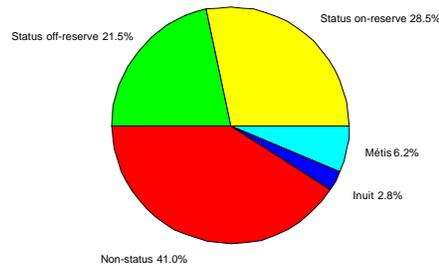
However, highlighting the relative youthfulness of Aboriginal women compared with Canadian women in general, should not be taken to mean that the issues and challenges facing older Aboriginal women can be safely ignored. As a recent report by the Native Women's Association of Canada (1997: 19) makes clear, the "number of aboriginal people over the age of 65 is increasing. In 1951 they accounted for 2.2% of the total aboriginal population compared to 4.8% in 1991.... This segment of the aboriginal population is growing three times faster than other age groups and is estimated that the number of status Indians over 65 will grow by 1.4% between 1991-2001."
As the relatively large proportion of Aboriginal women in the 65+ cohort in

■ Non-Aboriginal   □ Aboriginal
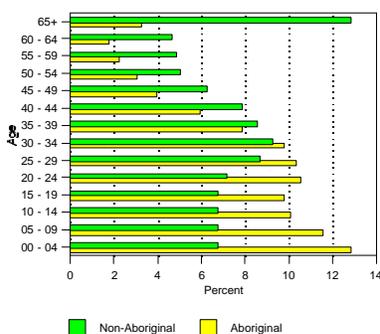
Figure 3 makes clear, a growing life expectancy among Aboriginal peoples is the principal cause of this latter trend, with Métis and non-status Indian women tending to live on average 77.4 years by 1991. As Figure 4 suggests, this remains significantly higher than the life expectancy of either

Inuit or registered Indian women, or for Métis or non-status men. While the difference between women and men can be explained through both biological and societal factors, and mirrors a similar discrepancy observed in Canada more generally, no such explanation can account for the substantial differences in life expectancy among different groups of Aboriginal women. Rather, one must look instead to the various environmental, social, economic and political realities which contribute to the comparatively poor health status of Aboriginal people residing in the far North and in many reserve communities. Furthermore, it must also be acknowledged that, regardless of the gains made in life expectancy by *all* Aboriginal peoples over the course of the last several decades, Aboriginal women (and men) continue to die considerably younger than their non- Aboriginal counterparts (non-Aboriginal women's life expectancy at birth rose to 81 years in 1991). Undoubtedly, this is a reflection of the structural inequalities still present throughout Canadian society.

In this regard, it is useful to consider two issues which further demonstrate the extent to which Aboriginal women remain a highly marginalized segment of the Canadian population. In the first instance, the female mortality rate due to violence was far higher among status Indian womeniii for the years 1989 to 1993 than it was for Canadian women in general, with a rate of 84 for the former group as compared with 30 for the latter. As McBride and Bobet (1990) argued, the high incidence of violent death among status Indian women is, to a significant degree, due to the extremely high rates of suicide among these women, particularly in the 15 to 24 age cohort. Running parallel to this high rate of mortality is a similarly high morbidity rate, with Aboriginal women significantly more likely to suffer from a range of diseases and with worse prognoses than is the case among non-Aboriginal women. For example, in 1991 Aboriginal women accounted for 20% of all female cases of tuberculosis (either new or re-activated) in Canada, despite the fact that they constituted only 4% of all Canadian women (Canada, 1995a).

Needless to say, underlying these women's relative ill health are any number of environmental and lifestyle factors. An extremely high incidence of smoking (57% of all Aboriginal women reported being current smokers in 1991) compared to that of the female population in general (for whom the rate was a far lower 30%) is only one example of how behaviour and circumstance contribute to and reinforce Aboriginal women's poor health status (Canada, 1996b).

Furthermore, a relatively large proportion of Canadian Aboriginal women reported having a long- term disability in 1991 (9.5%). While this rate varied considerably among the different
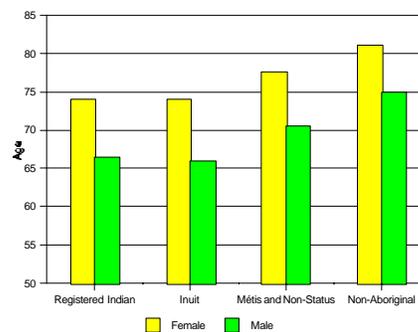
Aboriginal groups (see Figure 5), from a high of 9.8% for off-reserve status Indian women to a low of 8.9% for Inuit women, in all instances, it was higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal female population (7.4%). Aggravated by the fact that many reserve communities lack even the most basic services for people with disabilities, many are forced to leave their families and kin-based support structures for distant urban centres to access needed services (Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped, 1993).

Education, Employment and Income

Having addressed matters touching on the health and demographic characteristics of Canadian Aboriginal women, it is now necessary to provide an overview of pertinent socio- economic data. On the question of educational attainment, which correlates closely with several important measures of quality of life (e.g., income), it is clear that Aboriginal women, while generally faring worse than the non-Aboriginal female population, were nonetheless far more likely to possess either a bachelor degree or a non-university certificate or diploma in 1991 than their male counterparts (58.6% compared to 39.6%). Moreover, as is suggested in Figure 6, this latter discrepancy becomes even more stark when one considers particular sub-populations. Among the Inuit and Métis for example, the proportion of women holding a bachelor degree or other non-university certificate or diploma was 46% and 54.3% respectively, as contrasted with rates of 22.3% and 29.3% for Inuit and Métis men. Of course, it need hardly be added that these statistics would appear to support findings of significant gender role reversal within particular Aboriginal communities (Billson, 1992). Indeed, when educational attainment is broken down by age, one finds clear evidence of skills upgrading among Aboriginal women aged 25 to 44, with this group being almost twice as likely to possess a high school diploma in 1991 than those in the 45+ cohort (Canada, 1995a).

Not surprisingly, given the discussion above, Aboriginal women tend to experience lower levels of unemployment than Aboriginal men, a finding that stands in sharp contrast to the Canadian situation, for which the reverse is true (Canada, 1996b). However, despite Aboriginal women's superior educational and employment performance relative to their male counterparts, they are not experiencing low rates of unemployment in an *absolute* sense. As is made clear in DIAND's 1996 profile of Canadian Aboriginal women, only 9.9% of non-Aboriginal women were unemployed in 1991, as compared with an overall Aboriginal female rate of well over 15% (Canada, 1996b). Unfortunately, some Aboriginal women are far more likely to be unemployed than others. Status Indian women living on-reserve for example had an unemployment rate of 26.1% in 1991, which is considerably higher than that for any other group of Aboriginal women.
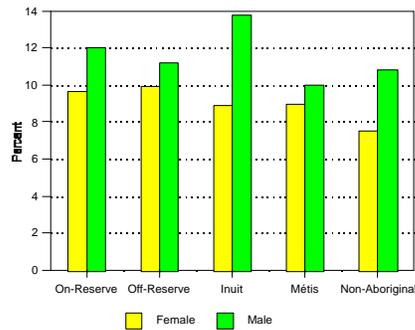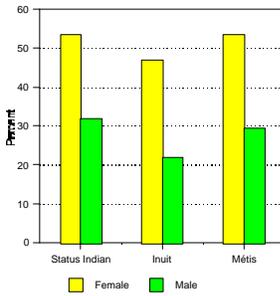
However, gainful employment alone does not guarantee financial security for Aboriginal women. The income which the job generates is also relevant in this context. In 1991, far more Aboriginal women reported an income of less than $10,000 than did their male counterparts. This situation becomes even more troubling when one considers the income levels of particular sub-populations. Among Inuit and on-reserve status Indian women, for example, 54.8% and 51.1% respectively indicated that they had earned less than $10,000 in 1991 (see Figure 7).

To understand why so many Aboriginal women are reporting low incomes, it is important to note the source of this income. In short, not only were Aboriginal women far more likely than non-Aboriginal women to report government transfer payments as their major source of income (42.2% compared with 20.8%), but they were also employed in occupations in which part-time hours and low levels of pay are common. As Figure 8 suggests, in 1991 almost 40% of all Aboriginal women in the Canadian labour force were employed in the sales and service occupational category. This level is far above the category with the second highest concentration of Aboriginal women, namely business, finance and administration, at 27.4%. However, while Inuit women were more likely to be employed in sales and service than women of any other
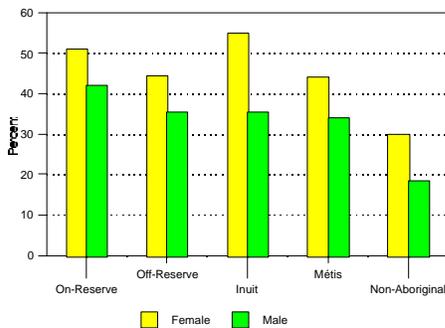
Aboriginal group, they were also far more likely to report their major source of income as coming from self-employment (4.0%) than was the case among other Aboriginal women (2.9%) or among non-Aboriginal women in general (3.4%) (Canada, 1996b).

Of course, this raises the larger issue of Aboriginal women's unpaid or non-renumerated work, which clearly plays a vital, if unacknowledged, role in securing the economic survival and development of Aboriginal families and households. Additional attention by researchers and

statisticians is required here, especially since they have long obscured the true extent of women's work activities by acknowledging primarily paid labour over all other forms of work.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, key data pertaining to Aboriginal women's lives were outlined and discussed. In doing so, an effort was made to present the material in as concise and straightforward a manner as feasible, at the risk of oversimplifying Aboriginal women's day-to-day lives. Moreover, in light of the preceding discussion, at least three points must be borne in mind. First, Canadian Aboriginal women carry out their daily activities in the face of ongoing challenges, such as racism and sexism, which are partly responsible for a range of negative health and socio-economic outcomes. Second, Aboriginal women are resilient to a degree that has allowed them to move forward and succeed, as demonstrated, for example, by their educational achievements, despite the countervailing force of multi-faceted discrimination. Finally, Aboriginal women embody differences which must neither be erased nor forgotten, if one hopes to formulate policy that is truly responsive to their needs and concerns. As the focus of this report shifts toward the current state of the policy-oriented literature on Canadian Aboriginal women, it is precisely these three points which will underpin and guide the analysis.
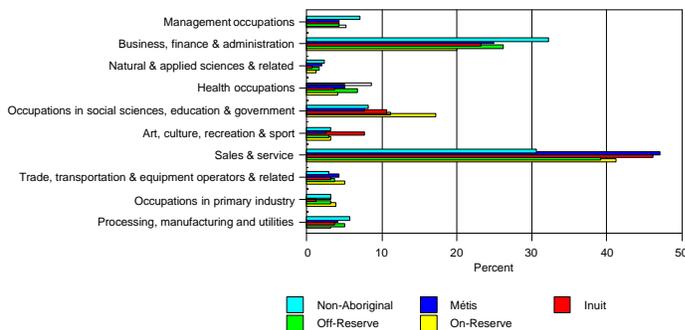
PART II: ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Among those with a stake in the issues and challenges facing Aboriginal women in Canada, it has become something of an axiom to say this is a population in which mainstream policy makers and academic researchers show very little interest. Thus, very little material has been produced which explores, in a substantive fashion, these women's lives, problems and strengths. While there is a great deal of truth in this assumption, one need only peruse the pages of major policy documents to find Aboriginal women most notably absent.iv By the same token, one might argue that in recent years this situation has improved somewhat, as Aboriginal women's organizations such as Pauktuutit and the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) have forced politicians (both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal) to sit up and take notice of their concerns, and an increasing (albeit still tiny) number of Aboriginal women have joined the ranks of Canadian academic and policy-making institutions.

One can express satisfaction at this apparently heightened sensitivity to Aboriginal women. However, such an assessment must be tempered both by the knowledge that large gaps in the literature continue to exist, and that analytical attention is too often focused on issues and processes that are tangential to the underlying causes of Aboriginal women's marginalization and oppression. In the literature review below, it is precisely these gaps and silences which are highlighted, as a necessary first step in the articulation of a more relevant policy-oriented research agenda. The discussion is organized to emphasize the various policy fields in which the concerns of Aboriginal women are framed, as well as the interrelationship between events and processes found there.

The Aboriginal Woman as an Individual

WOMAN AS AN INDIVIDUAL

In the profile of Aboriginal women undertaken in Part I, particular attention was devoted to the task of disclosing and exposing the poor health status and socio-economic marginalization of this population. The findings, while undoubtedly shocking to those unacquainted with the Canadian Aboriginal reality, come as less of a surprise to those more familiar with the particular contexts in which public policy related to Aboriginal peoples has been developed and implemented in Canada during past decades. That is to say, policy makers and academic researchers have long known the specific problems within Aboriginal communities, and have made many recommendations over the years as to how these problems might best be resolved. Leaving aside the fact that many of these recommendations were ill-conceived or ill-executed, what is most noteworthy in this early work is its near complete gender blindness. In other words, if women were considered at all, they were deemed to experience marginalization the same way as men, with the only exception being matters related to fertility and childbirth.
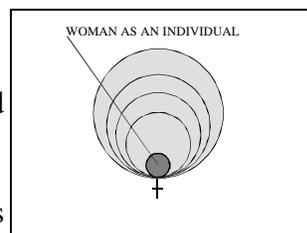
This situation improved somewhat from the mid- to late-1970s onward, because forces associated with mainstream feminism and the nascent women's movement helped to arouse some interest in the specificity of Aboriginal women's lives. It is nonetheless clear that much of the policy work undertaken in this latter regard remained highly circumscribed, concerning itself with a limited range of issues and refraining from grounding findings in wider social processes and structures.v Significantly, the thrust of the literature began to shift again in the latter half of the 1980s. The earlier concern with straightforward description and the identification of policy measures designed to address symptoms rather than causes gave way to a somewhat more critical orientation on the part of some writers and researchers. With regard to research and policy making concerned specifically with Aboriginal women as *individuals*, three areas — health, mobility and education — stand out as particularly significant, and serve as the foci for the discussion that follows.

> At the level of the individual, three issues stand out as particularly salient within the existing literature. Documents related to **health and health care** are by far the most prominent; in comparison, questions of **education** and **mobility** lag far behind.

Discussion

Health issues

Without a doubt, Aboriginal women's health has historically garnered more attention on the part of the mainstream policy and academic communities in Canada than any other issue related to these women's lives. The Canadian government funded research on matters associated with childbearing and childbirth as early as the 1950s; this is an area which continues to receive considerable attention. For instance, among the proceedings of the Eighth International Congress on Circumpolar Health held in Whitehorse in 1990, several papers were presented which focused on the birthing and breast-feeding practices of Inuit women (Langner and Steckle, 1991; Robinson et al., 1991; Kaufert et al., 1991; Sennett and Dougherty, 1991), as well as the effects of environmental contaminants ingested by expectant mothers on their unborn children (Kosatsky and Dumont, 1991; Baikie, 1991). Moreover, while it might be argued that the tone of this latter research remains highly technocratic, and as such mirrors earlier forays by outside "experts" into Aboriginal communities, it is often considerably more critical of existing policies and structures than much of the earlier work. To take but one example, several recent studies have examined the effects of government policy on expectant and birthing Inuit mothers (O'Neil et al., 1991; Linehan, 1992; Lowell, 1995). The authors have concluded that practices such as mandatory evacuation to southern hospitals for delivery have been detrimental to the well-being of the mothers and their families, as well as being wasteful of the expertise of traditional Inuit midwives.

Indeed, within the health-related literature on Aboriginal women published over the course of the last decade or so, two salient themes recur: the social determinants of health, along with the importance of capitalizing on the knowledge already present with Aboriginal communities. Thus, in the area of HIV/AIDS, researchers are placing greater emphasis on making explicit the links between Aboriginal women's heightened risk of contracting HIV and the destructive behaviours rooted in their socio-economic marginalization. At the same time, they are advocating solutions which are at once respectful of Aboriginal women's agency, and the traditional healing practices of their communities (Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada, 1996). In similar fashion,

projects which are equally holistic in outlook have also been undertaken in relation to such problems as the high incidence of low birth weight and fetal alcohol syndrome among Aboriginal children (Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada, nd; Canada, 1995b); Aboriginal women's susceptibility to diabetes and obesity (Martin and Bell, 1991; Evers, 1991); and finally, dangerously high rates of smoking and substance abuse by Aboriginal women (Native Women's Association of Canada, 1996).

Underlying much, if not all, of the above-cited research is an implicit understanding that change is afoot in the manner in which health care is delivered to Aboriginal peoples, with the transfer of responsibility from Health Canada's Medical Services Branch to Aboriginal communities being an ongoing, albeit often rocky, process. Some fears have been expressed over the implications of health services transfers for Aboriginal women, particularly in situations where a community's decision-making structures are monopolized by a male leadership unconcerned with women's health issues (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1995). Conversely, other researchers and policy makers are expressing a heightened concern with Aboriginal women's agency, particularly in connection with the operation of health-seeking behaviours (Dion Stout, forthcoming), together with the applicability of "culturally appropriate" interventions as a means of addressing the historically poor health status of this population.

However, despite these auspicious beginnings, large gaps in the literature remain, which must be addressed if there is to be a lasting impact on the health of Aboriginal women. First of all, much of the research undertaken to date has focused on Inuit women and registered Indian women living on-reserve. Comparatively little work has been carried out in the area of Métis and off-reserve Indian women's health.vi Given that these women are among the most marginalized of all Aboriginal people, this silence is intolerable, and must be addressed through the collection of appropriate baseline data, along with the identification of policy and program measures oriented specifically toward this population. As well, there is a severe dearth of material related to Aboriginal women's health through the life-course, with the bulk of research attention directed toward infants and women of childbearing age. Only very recently has work begun to emerge which is attentive to the particular problems and issues faced by Aboriginal girls and elders (see, for example, Native Women's Association of Canada, 1996, 1997). Clearly, there are many issues that would benefit from additional research in this regard. Finally, in recent years a number of papers have explored the challenges associated with being an Aboriginal woman who is disabled, and in each case the authors have stressed the lack of attention given to this issue by researchers and policy makers (Demas, 1993; Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped, 1993). In short, there is an urgent need to find ways of addressing the almost complete lack of services for disabled individuals in many reserve communities and elsewhere, as well as a great scope for the development of programs which sensitize the wider community to issues surrounding disability, as a way of combatting the often severe discrimination which disabled Aboriginal women and men face (Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped, 1993).

Educational issues
Although few policy fields related to Aboriginal women have received more attention in recent years than matters of health and health care, this is not to say other aspects of Aboriginal women's lives have been entirely ignored. Indeed, as will become increasingly clear during the

course of the discussion below, it is often Aboriginal women themselves who have forced their concerns onto the policy agenda, whether these be in relation to community development, or the intellectual property rights of Indigenous peoples worldwide. These wider questions evoke two additional issues which pertain directly to Aboriginal women as individuals. First, as was noted in the profile section above, Aboriginal women are much more likely than Aboriginal men to possess some university education, though this is at the same time undermined by the fact that they continue to lag far behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Native Council of Canada, 1992). As the authors of DIAND's statistical overview of key indicators pertaining to Aboriginal women state, "[a]lthough the attainment of post-secondary education is rising among Canada's Aboriginal population, almost twice as many non-Aboriginal persons pursue this level of education" (Canada, 1996b: 31).

These findings, along with those of other studies carried out in previous years, have provided an impetus for research into the reasons why Aboriginal women tend to outperform Aboriginal men in this regard and, more broadly, why the educational system has proved so unwelcoming to Aboriginal people in general. Among the studies falling into the former category are papers by Billson (1992) and Medicine (1992), in which particular attention is given to the factors contributing to Aboriginal women's professionalization in recent years. These include a desire to achieve economic independence and heightened parental responsibility. In short, Aboriginal women increasingly view education as a means for them and their daughters to escape socio-economic marginalization on the one hand, and the risk or actuality of abuse at the hands of their partner on the other (Medicine, 1992). However, even as Aboriginal women become increasingly interested in pursuing a post-secondary education,vii barriers remain in place which often make it difficult for them to complete the course of study in which they have enrolled. Writers such as Cathro (1993) and LaRocque (1990) showed that Aboriginal women in university settings often face latent or overt racism and sexism, as well as an academic discourse many find profoundly alienating. Without a doubt, Cathro and LaRocque mark a significant departure from the long-held assumption that success at university is simply a function of intellectual prowess, and is to be understood as such. However, if these obstacles to Aboriginal women's educational success are to be dismantled, further documentation of the extent of their effects is needed, together with a re- alignment of Aboriginal women's educational experiences with their life goals and contexts.

Mobility issues
Along somewhat different lines, the attention of policy makers must also be directed toward questions pertaining to Aboriginal women's mobility. As several reports have made clear, including those of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada, 1996a) and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health (Canada, 1995b), a significant proportion of all Aboriginal people live in urban centres, with approximately one third residing in 11 of the largest metropolitan areas (Canada, 1995b). Moreover, much of this population consists of children under the age of 14, living with their mothers and other Aboriginal women (Canadian Institute of Child Health, 1994). However, despite wide recognition that young Aboriginal women are among the most likely to leave their home communities for urban centres, very little gender-specific research has been undertaken, with most studies focused on the experience of Aboriginal migrants in general (see for example Waldram, 1991; Nagler, 1975). As for the work dealing specifically with Aboriginal female migrants, one finds papers by Gill (1995) and Zambrowsky

(1986), along with the *Report of the National Roundtable on Aboriginal Urban Issues* (Canada, 1993b). Issues they highlight include the widely diverse reasons why women move to the city, the lack of appropriate urban-based services, the absence of personal support networks, and the profound marginalization experienced by many, which is in turn implicated in patterns of victimization and substance abuse.

These findings show Aboriginal women living in urban centres to be a population whose needs are far from well-served by existing systems of health and social services delivery. Also, very little national or in-depth data are available as to why they are moving, what their specific program needs are, and what the nature and extent of their links with their home communities are. Once again, much of the work undertaken to date has concerned itself principally, or exclusively, with First Nations people; urban-based Métis women, by contrast, have garnered almost no sustained attention by researchers and policy makers, even though a large proportion of them reside in Canada's large- and medium-sized cities.

Strategic Research Directions for Policy Development
In the discussion above, key policy issues touching on Aboriginal women as individuals have been identified and discussed. Themes of health, education and mobility raise questions regarding the relative paucity of information available on Métis and off-reserve First Nations women, and the ever-present struggle of Aboriginal women to pursue a post-secondary education or stable and satisfying employment in urban centres as ways of overcoming marginalization. Given these and other issues raised during the course of the preceding analysis, strategic directions for future research and policy development follow:

i.   That the health status of Métis women be given priority, through the collection of baseline health data, along with the identification of the most pressing program and policy needs of this population.

ii.   That research related to Aboriginal women's health through the life-course be funded as a basis for the development of health programs and policies directed specifically toward Aboriginal girls and female elders.

iii.   That research attention be devoted to the problems facing Aboriginal women with disabilities, so programs will enhance their quality of life through improved service delivery and sensitized home communities.

iv.   That the barriers to Aboriginal women's educational endeavours be researched, and that appropriate policies and programs be put into place that would make their educational experience more relevant to their life goals and contexts.

v.   That priority be given to Aboriginal women's rural-urban migration patterns and the differential experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis female migrants.

The Aboriginal Woman in the Household

WOMAN IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Some reference was already made to Aboriginal women's strategic importance to the daily reproduction of their families and communities, but this becomes even more apparent as attention shifts from the individual level to that of the household. Admittedly, Aboriginal women's precise positioning in this regard is often contradictory, both in pre-contact times and at present. For example, the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples points to conflicting historical evidence when it comes to the degree of status and respect accorded to women within traditional societies, with some accounts suggesting that Aboriginal women's roles were ancillary to those of men, while others alluded to the "power [these] women enjoyed in the areas of family life and marriage, politics and decision making, and the ceremonial life of the people" (Canada, 1996a: 18).
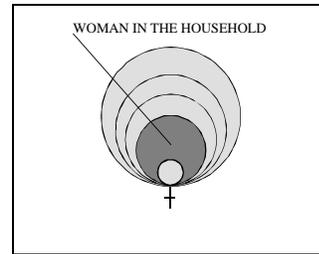
Nevertheless, this contradictory positioning has been exacerbated by the process of colonization, as the combined effects of racism and sexism served to degrade and marginalize Aboriginal women within their own communities, even as they continued to exercise considerable power over particular facets of family and community life (Canada, 1996a; Billson, 1992). It is precisely this legacy which Aboriginal women continue to live with to this day. Not only are they often expected to be able to raise their children and secure a livelihood, with little or no help from their spouse, but in many cases they are also forced to endure physical and sexual victimization at the hands of this same partner, over a period spanning years or even decades. Both of these issues will be dealt with below, when these women's relationships with their children and husbands are related to the wider structures of the community and the economy.

> At the level of the household, key issues raised in the literature include matters touching on Aboriginal women's **employment, economic development activities and the "political economy of everyday life**," along with a relatively wide range of material related to questions of **violence and abuse**.

Discussion

In listening to the voices and reading the writings of Aboriginal women, the central importance of families and family life to their own sense of identity and self-definition is emphasized time and time again. Thus, while the Inuit women responding to Pauktuutit's 1991 Arnait questionnaire repeatedly stressed the importance of women's traditional role as the head of the household (Pauktuutit, 1991), others, such as Castellano (1989: 48), emphasized that although

> Native women of today are breaking their silence to lobby for improved social conditions...[t]hey are not breaking from traditions, as some have suggested. They are women who share the same concerns as their mothers and grandmothers before them. They are actively engaged in the protection of quality of family life, [and] in wrestling necessities from a harsh environment.

Although the nature of this environment has changed in myriad ways since the arrival of the Europeans in Canada several centuries ago, at least as far as Aboriginal women are concerned, its harshness remains, particularly in matters related to the preservation of their families' economic well-being. Indeed, a sizeable literature has arisen in recent years on this issue, with work being undertaken on the tactics and strategies adopted by Aboriginal women as they

attempt to negotiate the pitfalls of the "political economy of everyday life," as well as to the particular set of barriers which obstruct their full participation in entrepreneurial and labour-force activities.

Employment, economic development and the "political economy of everyday life"
Turning first to economic matters, much of the work being carried out seeks to account for the complex interplay of forces within Aboriginal women's lives as they attempt to balance the often conflicting demands of their various roles within the household and within the community at large. Driben (1991), for example, took the accidental deaths of two middle-aged Ojibwa women as a starting point for his exploration of the pivotal role such women play in juggling the demands of a traditional lifestyle, which includes extended periods of time fishing and hunting, with the need for cash to pay bills and purchase supplies. In similar fashion, writers such as Billson (1992), Fiske (1986, 1987) and Olsen (1989) all engage in broadly complementary analyses about the creativity and the strength of spirit Inuit and First Nations women demonstrate in the face of poverty and marginalization. Their ability to turn existing structures, such as a male-dominated band council, to their advantage (Fiske, 1987), as well as their willingness to engage directly with external forces, such as animal rights activists, when the bases of their family's economic livelihood are threatened (Olsen, 1989) is now documented. However, while all the papers cited above are oriented principally toward an academic rather than a policy-oriented audience, their implications for policy making and development should be clear. In brief, Aboriginal women's contribution to the economic survival of their families is both crucial and multi-faceted, but it often involves tasks whose economic significance is not always immediately discernible to those outside the community. Preparing game for sale or taking on a part-time job in order to obtain the cash necessary to purchase ammunition for hunting are cases in point (Driben, 1991). Thus, further work is necessary to outline the scope of Aboriginal women's household-level economic activities and survival strategies, and to identify where the existing policy climate might be modified to facilitate and support the pursuit of these activities.

Along somewhat different lines, a number of researchers have examined obstacles to Aboriginal women's access to employment and financing, and the efficacy of steps taken to counteract the effects of these barriers in the area of employment equity, for example. The work produced by Pauktuutit (nd) and Economic Development for Canadian Aboriginal Women (EDCAW, 1995), as well as the contributions of writers such as Baxter (1993) and Jamieson (1989), provides ample evidence of a structural bias against Aboriginal women who wish to start their own businesses. Matters ranging from the availability of start-up capital, to the particular nature of the existing regulatory and legislative climate are revealed. However, this is not to suggest that these reports are entirely negative. While the document prepared by Pauktuutit (nd) emphasizes the economic potential of developing an Inuit fashion and clothing industry, other reports, such as that of Jamieson (1989), suggest that Aboriginal women's economic development activities may have far-reaching effects on the communities in which they are based. Still, significant problems continue to exist, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the workplace. As the report of the Steering Committee of the Aboriginal Women in the Canadian Labour Force (1993) makes clear, working Aboriginal women are dealing with sexism, racism, favouritism, dangerous working conditions and a lack of access to training opportunities and affordable child care. Notwithstanding the report's specific policy recommendations, it is clear that additional work in this area is needed. Longitudinal studies designed to gauge the success of the various equity and

anti-harassment measures, where they have been put into place, could present one way to improve the situation. At a more general level, Jamieson's recommendation that a comprehensive study be undertaken on the impact of Aboriginal women's development activities on the family and the community must be reiterated.

Violence and abuse
Given the central role played by Aboriginal women in the lives of their families, it is both ironic and tragic that so many are the victims of sexual, physical and emotional abuse at the hands of their husbands, boyfriends and male relatives. Without suggesting that spousal assault and sexual abuse only occur in Aboriginal communities — after all, a significant proportion of *all* women in Canada report being victimized in this way (Canadian Panel on Violence against Women, 1993) — it is nonetheless widely recognized that such abuse exacts a particularly devastating toll on these communities. In light of this recognition, it is not surprising that a great deal of attention has focused on this issue, with work being undertaken at the national, regional and local levels in a number of policy areas, ranging from health and social services to law enforcement and rehabilitation.

However, within this wide-ranging literature there are several themes which continue to be emphasized again and again. First, much effort has been devoted to the task of determining the extent of the problem, with research findings suggesting that anywhere from one-third (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991) to 80% (Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989) of Aboriginal women are affected. Second, considerable research has also been carried out which explores the impacts of such violence on Aboriginal women, as well as their children and communities. Some of the latter work has dealt more or less exclusively with effects which are quantifiable, such as the relationship between "family violence"viii and the incidence of depression or suicidal behaviour (Abbey et al., 1991). Others have concerned themselves with a broader set of issues, through community-wide studies which consider the effects of violence on the extended family (Frank, 1992) or through the collection of life histories from Aboriginal women who are or who have been the victims of abuse in the past (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1991; NWAC, 1997). Of course, it is but a short step from the exploration of the impacts of "family violence" to an analysis of its causes, and thus it is not surprising that all the work cited above makes at least some attempt to address both sets of issues. However, in this regard, it should be noted that there is considerable variability in emphasis. Some studies stress the importance of childhood exposure to violence and abuse as a key predisposing factor in subsequent involvement in an abusive relationship, either as a victim or a perpetrator (Rundle, 1990). Others are more holistic in their outlook, as they highlight the synergistic effects of colonization, community stress, changing gender roles and alcohol abuse, among other factors, in generating such a high incidence of "family violence" within Aboriginal households (LaRocque, 1994; Manyfingers, 1994; Zellerer, 1993).

Understandably, out of this holistic research has emerged some of the most interesting and novel proposals for tackling problems related to Aboriginal "family violence." Unfortunately, significant gaps in the literature still remain, where the needs of particular sub-populations (such as Aboriginal women who are elderly or have disabilities) continue to be largely ignored. Of course, with reference to elder abuse in particular, there is some evidence to suggest that change is afoot, with recent reports by NWAC (1997) and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

(Canada, 1996a) highlighting the extent of the problem and the need for strong measures to counteract it. Yet at the same time, this positive perception is called into question by a lack of action. Clearly, not only must policy makers devote more resources to the task of developing programs which are oriented specifically toward the needs of Aboriginal elders and people with disabilities, but further work must be carried out in order to ascertain the precise dimensions of these forms of violence.

On a cautionary note, Pasquali (1991: 586) asserted that "[m]ore studies on the magnitude of violence...are not needed. It is likely that further research would only serve to illustrate that the gap between available services and needed services is even greater than we believe it to be." What Pasquali argued *is* needed is a long-term evaluation of existing treatment programs, along with more in-depth research into ways of making criminal justice more responsive to the issue of "family violence." While acknowledging that her comments are made in the specific context of the North, one might nonetheless suggest that Pasquali's recommendations are equally applicable in the broader context of Aboriginal Canada.

Strategic Research Directions for Policy Development
Having highlighted household-level issues as they touch on Aboriginal women in the areas of economic development, the "political economy of everyday life" and "family violence," the following issues for strategic policy consideration and research are presented.

vi.   That longitudinal studies be designed to monitor the workplace equity and anti-harassment measures which are of key concern to working Aboriginal women.

vii.   That a comprehensive, national study be undertaken to explore how Aboriginal women's economic development activities affect their families and communities.

viii.   That violence and abuse directed specifically toward elderly Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women with disabilities be studied.

ix.   That priority be given to the task of developing "family violence" programs which are specifically oriented toward Aboriginal elders and women with disabilities.

x.   That long-term research focus on the evaluation of existing Aboriginal "family violence" educational initiatives and treatment programs.

xi.   That national research be undertaken to examine the responsiveness of the criminal justice system to issues of "family violence," in order to bring about corrective action and to facilitate the dissemination of information about innovative "family violence" programs.

The Aboriginal Woman in the Community

WOMAN IN THE COMMUNITY

As was previously stressed, questions of "family violence" and economic development cannot be divorced from their wider community contexts. To gain a full understanding of these complex and fluid contexts, analyses must include particular individuals or groups of individuals, and the structural forces which condition and shape their actions and reactions. To offer one prime example, spousal assault is a phenomenon which would appear to involve only two people, namely a perpetrator (typically a man) and a victim (usually a woman). In reality, its web of causes and effects stretches far wider, ranging from the children whose lives are traumatized by its occurrence, to community members in general, whose views and perceptions play a crucial role in allowing the degradation of women to continue unabated.
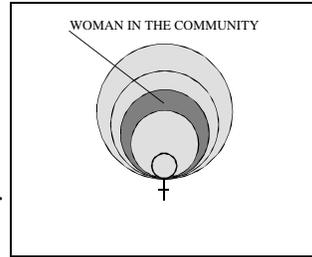
For Aboriginal women, the effects of this latter process have been doubly pernicious. Not only has it resulted in marginalization within their own communities, at the hands of a predominantly male leadership that has internalized the sexism of the dominant society, but also in their victimization, as Aboriginal people, by state agencies and institutions which continue to be marred by the legacy of a colonial past. While acknowledging that the relationship of Aboriginal women with the communities in which they live would lend itself to analysis on any number of fronts, much of the attention within the existing policy literature has focused on just two principal questions: Aboriginal women's treatment at the hands of the criminal justice system, and the nature and extent of their involvement within community politics. These two issues are elaborated on in the discussion below, along with a number of recent events that lend a salience that would have been unimaginable only a decade ago.

Within the context of the community, the most salient issues in the literature are those concerned with the **administration of justice**, and Aboriginal women's **political participation and leadership activities**.

Discussion

Justice issues
Although Aboriginal people have long been discriminated against within the Canadian criminal justice system, it is only recently that the country's mainstream public policy community has been forced to acknowledge the extent to which Aboriginal women, in particular, have been ill-served by this system. The immediacy of debates over the relationship between Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal forms of justice in the context of self-government negotiations, and shocking revelations concerning conditions at the Prison for Women,ix Corrections Canada's principal facility for the incarceration of female offenders, have served to focus the minds of bureaucrats and politicians, at both the federal and provincial levels, on the nature and extent of this problem.

Several major inquiries have followed on the heels of this new found concern, with their findings encapsulated in such documents as *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Canada, 1990b), the *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community* (Sugar and Fox, 1990) and, at a sub-national level, papers such as the *Report of the Task Force on the Criminal Justice System and Its Impact upon the Indian and Metis Peoples of*

Alberta (Cawsey et al., 1991) and *Inuit Women and Justice* (Pauktuutit, 1996). However, even though there is considerable diversity in the substantive foci of these various documents, all share a broadly unified understanding of the causes of Aboriginal women's overrepresentation among the female inmate population. In sum, blame is attributed to the destructive impact of colonialist and neo-colonialist state policies; to the incompatibility of dominant conceptions of justice in the face of more holistic and rehabilitative Aboriginal justice traditions; and to the antipathy which many Aboriginal people feel toward a criminal justice system they perceive to be working against, rather than for, them. As Hamilton and Sinclair (cited in Monture-Okanee, 1992: 16) put it:

> [F]or Aboriginal people, the essential problem is that the Canadian system of justice is an imposed and foreign system. In order for society to accept a justice system as part of its life and its community, it must see the system and experience it as being a positive influence working for that society. Aboriginal people do not.

While one might argue that the above issues are of equal relevance to Aboriginal men and women, for the latter group they are further exacerbated by widespread androcentrism, which has rendered the criminal justice system unresponsive to the needs of female offenders, in general, and Aborigi- nal female offenders, in particular. How is this so? On the one hand, unnecessarily restrictive operating procedures, typically developed with a male offender in mind, impose constraints on Aboriginal women inmates which are not needed nor appropriate given the cultural contexts from which many of them come. On the other hand, the small number of facilities available for the housing of female offenders in Canada has resulted in a situation whereby Aboriginal women serving federal time (and, to a lesser extent, provincial time) are incarcerated hundreds or thou- sands of kilometres away from their children and families, with little opportunity for regular visits or contact. Moreover, when these practices are combined with a general insensitivity by the justice system to Aboriginal traditions and healing practices, the result is a deep-seated alienation and anger, with little scope for rehabilitation (Sugar, 1989; Sugar and Fox, 1989; Palumbo and Palumbo, 1992).

In the face of these findings, researchers and policy makers have advanced a number of recommendations. These range from the need for more culturally appropriate programming, to the feasibility of developing an Aboriginal women's healing lodge, a facility envisioned to provide female offenders with an environment that is truly supportive of the healing process (Canada, 1990b; Monture-Okanee, 1992). About five years after these recommendations were initially made, their implementation is well under way, yet significant questions remain unaddressed, most notably the degree to which there has been real improvement in Aboriginal women's treatment at the hands of the criminal justice system. Certainly, there is an ongoing need for monitoring and evaluating the various measures taken in response to *Creating Choices* (Canada, 1990b) and the other commissions of inquiry. Furthermore, issues pertaining to the impact of self-government on the delivery of justice in Aboriginal communities, as well as the role Aboriginal women traditionally held in the administration of justice in Aboriginal societies need further study (Canada, 1990b). Finally, there remains considerable room to pursue research which examines, on a national basis, the varied experience of Métis, Inuit and First Nations women, the relationship between "family violence," sexual abuse and criminal activity, for, as Monture-Okanee (1992: 73) argued, "[u]nderstanding the impact of our histories of abuse should provide a fuller understanding of the causation of Aboriginal women's crime."

Political participation and leadership activities
Of course, in this context it can be argued that, regardless of how much research is undertaken into the causes of Aboriginal women's victimization by the justice system, real improvement is unlikely until Aboriginal women possess the political power necessary to force the pace and direction of change. While the national dimension of this issue is to be discussed in the following section, there is growing evidence to suggest that Aboriginal women's struggle to obtain equitable representation within the administrative structures of their communities is achieving results, both within Aboriginal communities themselves and in the eyes of outside researchers and policy makers (Stevenson, 1992).

Within the academic community in particular, considerable attention has been devoted to the task of exploring the range of strategies and tactics Aboriginal women have adopted in their pursuit of power and resources at the community level. The work of researchers like Fiske (1990, 1995), Fajber (1996), Langford (1994) and Langille (1994) emphasizes the importance of local women's associations in providing a focus for action. On the other hand, they describe the mobilization of "tradition" to serve Aboriginal women's current efforts in renegotiating the terms of the sexual division of power within their communities' political and administrative structures. As for research that is more explicitly oriented toward questions of policy and policy development, attention has been largely restricted to issues surrounding Aboriginal women's involvement in economic development initiatives. This literature has dealt chiefly with the problems Aboriginal women face in gaining access to such resources as credit and knowledgeable advice. In contrast, the implications of Aboriginal women's development activities for providing positive role models for Aboriginal girls, or for facilitating subsequent attempts by other women to start their own business ventures in the community have received mostly cursory attention in the literature.

There is clearly a great deal of scope for carrying out research on these unresolved issues, as well as the factors underlying Aboriginal women's relatively low level of involvement in community political affairs. Although Fiske's (1990) research put forward voluntary associations as key catalysts for political activity, additional work is needed to ascertain whether this claim can be generalized, as well as the implications it holds for policy formulation and implementation. Along similar lines, attention must also be given to the role communities play in oppressing or supporting Aboriginal women's political activities through, for example, a nation-wide study which builds on the findings of Miller (1992). His comparative analysis of the extent of female electoral success in Aboriginal communities in British Columbia and Washington state is instructive.

Strategic Research Directions for Policy Development
Significant heterogeneity marks the literature discussed in this section. Nonetheless, the reports cited are unified by a common concern with Aboriginal women's relationship with existing community structures, whether these refer to the machinery of the criminal justice system, or to the local, Aboriginal decision-making bodies (e.g., band councils) which have come to be associated over the years with the protection of male privilege and the domination of Aboriginal women. In both cases, the status quo is unacceptable, and must be challenged through the pursuit of policies and research which actively acknowledge the wrongs committed against Aboriginal

women in the past, and which strive to improve these women's position in the future. Research directions arising from the work addressed above include the following:

xii.   That funds be allocated to continue monitoring and evaluating responses to the recommendations of the *Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Canada, 1990) and other inquiries pertaining to the criminal justice system and its treatment of Aboriginal women.

xiii.   That research explore the role Aboriginal women traditionally held in the administration of justice in Aboriginal societies in order to provide a context for Aboriginal women's place within emerging Aboriginal justice systems.

xiv.   That national research examine the experiences of Métis, Inuit and First Nations women with "family violence," sexual abuse and criminal activity.

xv.   That research explore whether Aboriginal women involved in community politics and economic development activities provide positive role models for Aboriginal girls, and give other women in the community the incentive to seek political office or start their own business ventures.

xvi.   That funds be allocated to research local Aboriginal women's organizations and their role in galvanizing community development initiatives or community-centred political activities.

xvii.   That research be undertaken to examine the role community contexts play in encouraging and facilitating Aboriginal women's representation within communities' principal administrative and executive bodies.

The Aboriginal Woman in National and International Arenas

Having considered policy fields that touch on the daily lives of Aboriginal women, it is now necessary to turn from the households and communities in which these women actually live and work, to the national and international arenas in which the overall thrust of federal policy making is determined. This raises the spectre of national and international issues which are of concern to

WOMAN IN THE NATIONAL AND
INTERNATIONAL ARENAS

Canadian Aboriginal women. In recent years, they have become increasingly outspoken, with specific demands that they and their interests be adequately represented in self-government negotiations and other national-level policy deliberations. Their political power, channelled through organizations such as the Native Women's Association of Canada, Pauktuutit: Inuit Women's Association, and the Métis National Council of Women, has made a strong mark on

the Canadian political landscape and has built bridges with Indigenous women from other countries as well.

Existing literature on the national and international arenas raises the spectre of **self- government and the relevance of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*** for Aboriginal women, as well as questions of **international bridge building** with Indigenous women worldwide.

Discussion

Self-government issues

Given the apparent suddenness with which Aboriginal women emerged on the constitutional and media stage in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is easy to believe that, before this time, they were simply not part of the established political process. As understandable as such a view might be, it is also false, for, as Stevenson (1992: 14) stated, although Aboriginal women "are relatively invisible in political decision-making positions in Aboriginal organizations and First Nations governments, they have always had their own societies and organizations, and have been consistently present in a wide range of community-based and issue-specific movements."

Despite this and the high profile struggle spearheaded by Mary Two-Axe Early to regain Indian status for all those women who had lost it through marriage to a non-status man (Silman, 1987), no sustained research or policy attention was paid to the national and international activism of Aboriginal women until recently. This state of affairs has changed substantially, partly because the NWAC's 1992 court challenge regarding the constitutionality of excluding Aboriginal women from self-government negotiations (Canada, 1996a) awakened the federal government, national Aboriginal organizations and academic researchers to the power of Aboriginal women. What the women made more concrete were the dangers of not ensuring adequate negotiating space for them at the constitutional table.

These developments have forced the Assembly of First Nations (AFN, 1992) and the Government of Canada (most recently through the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples) to take particular care and effort to consult with Aboriginal women in advance of any policy-making enterprise likely to affect them significantly. Notwithstanding this, questions remain as to how genuinely committed these institutions are to the integration of Aboriginal women's views into their respective platforms. Witness, for example, the AFN Commissioners' refusal to countenance the application of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* within any self-government scenario, along with their comment that "traditional Aboriginal society has no need for feminism" (AFN, 1992: 62). Regardless, the time is past when the federal government and the Aboriginal leadership are able to enter into and conclude negotiations without giving thought to the likely implications of the issue at hand for Aboriginal women. Not inconsequential in this regard is the fact that the Native Women's Association of Canada has maintained a strong presence in self- government debates, publishing a number of works which analyse and critique various aspects of the constitutional process from an Aboriginal woman's perspective (NWAC, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1992d, 1992e).

Moreover, given the high profile of NWAC, it is not surprising that it has also attracted considerable attention from the feminist academic community. Scholars such as Vickers (1993) and Krosenbrink-Gelissen (1993a, 1993b) have undertaken in-depth studies of the Association's

activities in relation to constitutional debates, as well as its defence of Aboriginal women's rights more generally. However, it must be acknowledged that, despite the generally supportive stance adopted by Anglo-Canadian feminists vis-à-vis NWAC's constitutional position, the relationship between mainstream feminism and its Aboriginal variant is not uniformly harmonious. In particular, many Aboriginal women are uncomfortable with the liberalism of mainstream feminist organizations such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, along with the latter's tendency to downplay the real differences which exist *among* women (generated, for example, through the process of colonization). Indeed, it is precisely over issues such as these that Aboriginal women writers such as Rogers (1995) and Osennontion and Skonaganleh:rá (1989) have gone so far as to denounce the feminist project as virtually incompatible with the interests and vision of Aboriginal women.

International bridge building
Having said this, there have been instances of alliance building among Aboriginal women's groups and their non-Aboriginal counterparts. One of the most notable recent examples is the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference, where several Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal feminist organizations co-operated to ensure that the commitments embodied within the Beijing Platform for Action, and ratified by the Canadian government's official delegation, were actually adhered to once media attention had subsided (Canadian Beijing Facilitating Committee, 1996). By the same token, it should be noted that while Aboriginal women are actively pursuing links, where appropriate, with non-Aboriginal women's organizations, they are also seeking to make common cause with the Indigenous women of other countries. Again, the Beijing Conference offers one example of this latter process. The involvement of Canadian Aboriginal women in research projects exploring the life contexts of Indigenous women throughout the Americas (see for example Valdés and Gomáriz, 1995), and their participation in the 1993 International Conference for Indigenous Women of the World, held in Christchurch, New Zealand (Maori Women's Welfare League, 1993) are other examples of the international nature of Aboriginal women's causes.

Clearly, there exists a significant body of literature which addresses issues of concern to Aboriginal women at the national and international levels. Regrettably, significant gaps remain in what is otherwise high-quality work. First, whereas the relative success of NWAC in advocating on behalf of First Nations women in the ongoing self-government debate has been written about, only scant parallel documentation exists for Inuit women, and it is virtually absent for Métis women. For example, Inuit women do not figure in the literature dealing with the recent Nunavut settlement, yet they are a powerful national and northern force. In short, although both representative groups have been extremely active in defending the interests of their respective memberships, very little publicly available information is in place to attest to Métis and Inuit women's success (or lack thereof) in forcing governments and national Aboriginal organizations to take their concerns seriously. Similarly, much of the work undertaken on Aboriginal women and self-government has focused on questions of human rights and the applicability of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. As crucial as the latter questions are, additional research is required on other aspects of self-government, such as the implications for Aboriginal women of the transfer of control over health services delivery from the Medical Services Branch of Health Canada to Aboriginal communities. Finally, there is a clear need for an exploration of the common experiences of Aboriginal women in Canada and elsewhere. This

would provide a basis for action within a Canadian context (for example, by drawing on the strategies and insights developed with respect to Indigenous women in other countries), and as a foundation for international bridge building and collaboration among the various Indigenous women's organizations around the globe.

Strategic Research Directions for Policy Development

During the course of the preceding discussion, key issues pertaining to Aboriginal women's activities in national and international fora were highlighted. However, despite the sustained attention which some of the latter activities have received, particularly regarding the struggle of First Nations women to gain equitable representation within ongoing self-government negotiations, other fields of inquiry remain largely overlooked. In an effort to address this situation, the following are identified for strategic consideration:

xviii. That research focus on self-government consultation with Inuit and Métis women, in particular, and Aboriginal women, in general.

xix. That additional research be conducted on the likely impacts of all facets of self-government on all Aboriginal women, including the administration of justice and the transfer of control over health services delivery.

xx. That research be undertaken to examine the policies of other national governments on matters related to Indigenous women and how these might bear upon policy development in Canada.

xxi. That comparative studies of Indigenous women in Canada and elsewhere be undertaken as a foundation for international bridge building and collaboration among the various Indigenous women's organizations.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In this report, a wide-ranging synthesis of the literature pertaining to Canadian Aboriginal women was undertaken, in order to make recommendations regarding priority areas for future policy research and development. Obviously, this is a literature which has evolved significantly during the last 10 years. This is a function of the forcefulness with which Aboriginal women have exposed the injustices underlying their social, economic and political marginalization, together with the fresh insights a more diverse research and policy-making community brings to bear on existing problems. As welcome as this latter development may be, there is much work left to be done. Not only does the literature remain comparatively thin, but it is also not as widely distributed and available as that steeped in male discourse, whether this be on self-government or economic development.
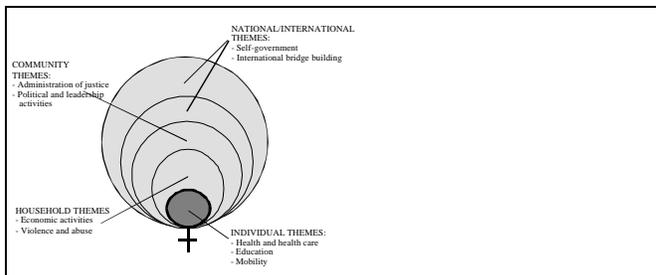
How then to proceed? In the first instance, it is clear that there are a number of specific areas in which future research efforts might usefully be directed. These areas were discussed in detail in the preceding pages, and are summarized below.

i.   That the health status of Métis women be given priority, through the collection of baseline health data, along with the identification of the most pressing program and policy needs of this population.

ii.   That research related to Aboriginal women's health through the life-course be funded as a basis for the development of health programs and policies directed specifically toward Aboriginal girls and female elders.

iii.   That research attention be devoted to the problems facing Aboriginal women with disabilities, so programs will enhance their quality of life through improved service delivery and sensitized home communities.

iv.   That the barriers to Aboriginal women's educational endeavours be researched, and that appropriate policies and programs be put into place that would make their educational experience more relevant to their life goals and contexts.

v.   That priority be given to Aboriginal women's rural-urban migration patterns and the differential experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis female migrants.

vi.   That longitudinal studies be designed to monitor the workplace equity and anti-harassment measures which are of key concern to working Aboriginal women.

vii.   That a comprehensive, national study be undertaken to explore how Aboriginal women's economic development activities affect their families and communities.

viii.   That violence and abuse directed specifically toward elderly Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women with disabilities be studied.

ix.   That priority be given to the task of developing "family violence" programs which are specifically oriented toward Aboriginal elders and women with disabilities.

x.   That long-term research focus on the evaluation of existing Aboriginal "family violence" educational initiatives and treatment programs.

xi.   That national research be undertaken to examine the responsiveness of the criminal justice system to issues of "family violence," in order to bring about corrective action, and to facilitate the dissemination of information about innovative "family violence" programs.

xii.   That funds be allocated to continue monitoring and evaluating responses to the recommendations of the *Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Canada, 1990) and other inquiries pertaining to the criminal justice system and its treatment of Aboriginal women.

xiii.   That research explore the role Aboriginal women traditionally held in the administration of justice in Aboriginal societies in order to provide a context for Aboriginal women's place within emerging Aboriginal justice systems.

xiv.   That national research examine the experiences of Métis, Inuit and First Nations women with "family violence," sexual abuse and criminal activity.

xv.   That research explore whether Aboriginal women involved in community politics and economic development activities provide positive role models for Aboriginal girls, and give other women in the community the incentive to seek political office or start their own business ventures.

xvi.   That funds be allocated to research local Aboriginal women's organizations and their role in galvanizing community development initiatives or community-centred political activities.

xvii.   That research be undertaken to examine the role community contexts play in encouraging and facilitating Aboriginal women's representation within communities' principal administrative and executive bodies.

xviii. That research focus on self-government consultation with Inuit and Métis women, in particular, and Aboriginal women, in general.

xix.   That additional research be conducted on the likely impacts of all facets of self-government on all Aboriginal women, including the administration of justice and the transfer of control over health services delivery.

xx.   That research be undertaken to examine the policies of other national governments on matters related to Indigenous women and how these might bear upon policy development in Canada.

xxi.   That comparative studies of Indigenous women in Canada and elsewhere be undertaken as a foundation for international bridge building and collaboration among the various Indigenous women's organizations.

One might also advance a number of process-oriented recommendations that build on the literature review above yet, at the same time, seek to go beyond it, thereby providing a basis for research and policy interventions which are forward-looking rather than backward-looking; which adopt proactive and co-active approaches rather than reactive ones; and which set out the building blocks of a new paradigm rather than settling for the rubble of the old.

First, although a relatively wide array of issues affecting the lives of Aboriginal women is addressed within the existing policy literature, the bulk of researchers and policy makers' attention (and resources) is concentrated on an extremely limited range of policy domains, with health, "family violence" and the criminal justice system being the three principal foci for research (see figure 9).

This situation is further aggravated by analyses which tend to couch issues, problems and solutions in a manner that obscures their multi-faceted and multi-dimensional nature. Thus, in the future, greater emphasis must be placed on the task of fostering holism in research, for it is only in so doing that it will become possible to make explicit the links between what is occurring at the individual level with what is happening at the level of the community or even at that of the nation.

In a similar fashion, one must also question whether the existing research priorities of policy

> **Recommendation 1**
> Given the truncated and/or narrow focus of much of the policy-oriented literature on Aboriginal women, it is recommended that holism in research be fostered. Projects and programs would then give explicit consideration to the interplay of all relevant policy fields within their analyses.

makers and project funders accurately adhere to the day-to-day realities of Aboriginal women "on the ground," or whether they are not more reflective of the political agendas of politicians, bureaucrats and other elites whose interests are far removed from the immediate concerns of Aboriginal women. For example, the literature pays considerable attention to the experiences of Aboriginal women employed in health care occupations; however, as is made evident in Figure 8, a far larger proportion of Aboriginal women are working in the retail and service sectors, with almost no attempt being made to document *their* experiences as workers in what are often highly exploitative working conditions.

Third, while some high-quality, policy-oriented research is undeniably being carried out with

Recommendation 2

Given that past research has often focused on issues which are of questionable significance to many or most Aboriginal women during the course of their daily lives, it is recommended that a remedial consultative mechanism be put in place. This would ensure that the priorities of researchers and policy makers accurately reflect those of Aboriginal women themselves.

Aboriginal women, by the same token it is clear that a great deal of work is also being undertaken which is deficient from this perspective. Yet at a time when evidence-based decision making reigns supreme, complete dependence on small sample sizes, life histories, personal narratives or other qualitative research methodologies is likely to affect the credibility of the research findings, and also the chance of decisive action. Thus, without wishing to call into question the vital importance played by qualitative research methodologies in giving voice to Aboriginal women and the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis, it is nonetheless imperative that support also be given to the pursuit of research which buttresses these women's voices with scientifically credible, quantitative data and analyses.

Fourth, there is considerable scope for improvement when it comes to doing research for and

Recommendation 3

As a means of critiquing and/or lending credibility to the findings of research already undertaken with Aboriginal women, it is recommended that projects which seek to document the needs and assets of such women be funded. The use of scientifically credible methodologies would allow for this.

with Aboriginal women. Quite simply, too much existing literature is characterized by isolated analyses which pay inadequate attention to the longitudinal dimension, and which are insufficiently reflective of what else has been written in the same subject area. So, not only is there a pressing need for longitudinal studies which track Aboriginal women's progress through the life-course, but emphasis must also be placed on the task of organizing and disseminating research material related to Aboriginal women on a national scale.

Recommendation 4

Given that the literature on Canadian Aboriginal women is dominated by case studies and snapshot surveys, it is recommended that priority be given to the development and implementation of longitudinal studies. Tracking key indicators pertaining to Aboriginal women over time is a research imperative.

Recommendation 5

As a means of correcting long-standing problems in the distribution and availability of research findings pertaining to Canadian Aboriginal women, it is recommended that mechanisms be devised and implemented which facilitate the collection and dissemination of such research on a country-wide scale. The creation of a national data base of research activities by or about Aboriginal women would accommodate this.

In a somewhat different vein, and at several different points, the literature review undertaken above emphasized that Aboriginal women are by no means passively accepting the roles ascribed to them by society at large. They are, in fact, actively shaping and reshaping their lives and those of their families through recourse to innumerable strategies and tactics, often in the face of what can only be described as daunting odds. This is a highly significant observation, for, in the final

analysis, it is not at the provincial or national level where the crucial decisions pertaining to these women's lives are being taken, but rather that of the individual and the household. Therefore, it is essential that policy makers' existing understanding of individual-, household- and community- level processes be fleshed out through the pursuit of additional research in these areas.

Recommendation 6

Given the salience of the household and the community as key sites of action in Aboriginal women's daily struggle to secure the economic and social well-being of their families, it is recommended that research contributing to policy makers' understanding of these contexts be funded. Policies and programs which support Aboriginal women as individuals would necessarily follow.

Moreover, the literature on Canadian Aboriginal women suffers from a certain lopsidedness, with particular policy areas and groups of Aboriginal women receiving far more attention than others. Although some imbalance in this regard is easily explained by researchers and policy makers' tendency to choose high profile issues, by the same token it is clear that a number of sub- populations, including Aboriginal girls, urban Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women with disabilities, Métis women and elderly Aboriginal women, are seriously underrepresented within the existing literature, regardless of their oftentimes severe marginalization. Research specific to these latter groups would provide a means of identifying their most pressing program and service needs, and it would help to build up a longitudinal profile of key socio-demographic indicators.

Recommendation 7

As a means of counterbalancing the traditional disregard shown by researchers and policy makers for the real differences which exist among and within different groups of Aboriginal women, it is recommended that in-depth and sustained attention be focused on the documentation of the particular problems and challenges facing (*inter alia*) the girl child, Aboriginal women with disabilities, Métis women, lesbian and elderly Aboriginal women, and urban Aboriginal women.

Finally, a key objective of research pertaining to Aboriginal women must be to break down the cultural and structural barriers preventing them from being full participants in public life. Future work in this area must seek to document the extent of Aboriginal women's exclusion from decision-making institutions and the implications this holds for their well-being. It must also identify means of facilitating and supporting such women's active involvement in all relevant political structures, from the household to the international arena.

Recommendation 8

Given that relevant government structures seek to eliminate the attitudes and conditions which have contributed to Aboriginal women's marginalization from civil society, it is recommended that means of facilitating and supporting such women's integration be identified. In this way, their decision-making capacity, in all relevant political structures, from the level of the household to that of the international arena, would be cultivated, encouraged and disciplined.

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ENDNOTES

1. Throughout this report, "Aboriginal women" is used to denote all women who, regardless of status, place of residence or other considerations, deem themselves to be First Nations, Métis or Inuit, either by reason of ancestry, legal status or cultural background. Following the practice of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the term "Métis" is used to denote individuals of mixed ancestry, the "descendants of Aboriginal peoples who intermarried with European fur traders and settlers" (Canada, 1997:1), while "Inuit" is used to refer to those first peoples who have "lived along the coastal edge and the islands of the Canadian far North for thousands of years" (Canada, 1997). "First Nations," by contrast, denote original peoples who occupied the balance of present-day Canadian territory. Finally, "status" or "registered" Indian refers to individuals who are recognized as members of a First Nation under the terms of the *Indian Act*.
2. These figures, along with all subsequent statistical information contained within Part I of this report (including the data used to generate figures 2 through 8) are derived from DIAND's *Aboriginal Women: A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile* (Canada, 1996b).
3. No data are available for other Aboriginal groups.
4. See for example the Liberal Party's (1993) much-touted Red Book, as well as the *1988 Report of the Cree-Naskapi Commission* (Cree-Naskapi Commission, 1988) and DIAND's *University Education and Economic Well-Being: Indian Achievements and Prospects* (Canada, 1990a).
5. Among the most notable examples of this new found concern is the Secretary of State's *Speaking Together* (Canada, 1975).
6. For the most part, work undertaken with these groups has focused on poverty-related issues and the nature of their involvement with the criminal justice system. See for example La Prairie, 1994; Zambrowsky, 1986; Pompany, 1993.
7. Of course, even here it must be acknowledged that this trend applies only to *certain* Aboriginal women; others, Métis and Inuit women in particular, are far less likely to pursue advanced studies.
8. The authors acknowledge that "family violence" is a controversial term which many in the feminist community consider to be inappropriate, given the extent to which it de- emphasizes the role of men as the principal perpetrators of such violence, whether against their spouses or their children. However, it is used in this report (surrounded by quotation marks) because it is the term which is employed most often by those writing about violence and abuse in an Aboriginal context.
9. Among other things, these conditions were implicated in the suicides of seven Aboriginal women in the Prison for Women between December 1988 and June 1992 (NWAC, 1993).