



Fast

# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

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## Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: The cost of doing nothing to prevent tragedy

**A**s the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) continues, a new study looks at the problems of reactive government policy on MMIWG in Manitoba.

The complex impacts on family members of MMIWG are examined in *Cost of Doing Nothing: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. This study is a preliminary estimate of the cost of doing nothing to prevent many Indigenous women and girls from going missing and being murdered. It gives an insight into the emotional journeys of the families left behind. It also assesses the current financial cost of dealing with this tragedy based on calculations drawn from the literature and estimates of the number of MMIWG in Manitoba.

In cooperation with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs' Families First Initiative, this study collected and analyzed the testimonies of 37 family members and friends of MMIWG in Winnipeg, the Pas, Thompson and Sagkeeng First Nation, covering a total of 14 cases. In Manitoba, the discussion of this issue is especially relevant since the province continues to have the highest percentage of Indigenous people – 16.7 percent – and a high proportion of MMIWG.

The study shows that not providing opportunities for Indigenous women to succeed in life and not helping Indigenous families to obtain justice in the case of

a horrendous wrongdoing such as murder is not only a human rights issue, but also a problem with economic consequences. The study combines qualitative analysis of families' experiences and a numerical representation of the cost of doing nothing, wherever applicable. It recognizes that due to the complexities of the tragedy of MMIWG, we cannot "sum up" the experiences of the families and communities in a number.

The analysis in *Cost of Doing Nothing* reveals that at least \$7.0 million was spent in 2014 in direct government expenditures in Manitoba for both missing and murder cases, at an average of \$330,000/ murder case in immediate expenses on police, court, funeral, counselling, etc. To put the total estimate in perspective, it is more than twice the annual \$3.5 million operating budget of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, a political advocacy body mandated through the Chiefs-in-Assembly, to devise collective and common political strategies and mechanisms for coordinated action by First Nations and their organizations.

Families of MMIWG are impacted on multiple levels: emotional, physical, financial, psychological, and social. Some practical problems like dealing with official agencies can have a profound emotional impact, which

there is an alternative.

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in turn is likely to affect physical health. Leaving work because of the physical pain and illnesses and seeking medical treatment are some of the many factors that may subsequently impact families financially. One participant shared that she and her family had spent at least \$127,000 in total over a period of five years since the loved one's passing and this did not include any search expenses, which can be huge.

Some expenses can be recovered through the *Compensation for Victims of Crime Program*. However, an applicant is not eligible for compensation if the victim, in this case a murdered woman, had a serious criminal record. This has negatively affected some families of murdered women. It is important to make sure the people who are left behind are able to get the supports they need, including compensation from the *Victims of Crime Program* without further re-traumatization and impoverishment. Furthermore, while partial coverage of costs is available for the relatives of murdered victims, very few resources are available to assist families of missing women and girls.

*Cost of Doing Nothing* documents important but commonly overlooked issues related to the tragedy of MMIWG: lack of clarity on police procedures and investigation standards, the lack of opportunities to heal through Indigenous spiritual and cultural traditions, and lack of closure for the families of missing women. The social stigmatization of loved ones who may have led "risky lifestyles" reduces public concerns for their loss and puts further psychological pressure on families. Moreover, the children of MMIWG become a responsibility for remaining family members. All of these factors impose direct and indirect financial costs on families.

Apart from the devastating effect on family members and friends left behind, the issue of MMIWG also has an adverse impact on government. As the result of this tragedy, government agencies bear the costs of administering police investigations, the costs of the judicial

system, of court proceedings, preventative measures, and the like. These costs can be substantial - \$675 million annually in Canada according to a 2009 study<sup>1</sup>.

Today we are seeing an increased and long-overdue attention to the issue of MMIWG with a number of new initiatives underway. The overriding emphasis of government policy must be to take action to reduce the cases of MMIWG, whatever its cost. There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that doing nothing to prevent this violence carries its own huge costs in both financial and human terms.

<sup>1</sup> *An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Violent Victimization in Canada, 2009 (2014)*  
by Josh Hoddenbagh, Ting Zhang and Susan McDonald

**Marina Puzyreva and John Loxley** are the co-authors of *Cost of Doing Nothing: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. The report was done in partnership with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs' Families First Initiative and funded by the Manitoba Research Alliance via the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

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References available upon request.