



Improving Shelter Experience For Indigenous Women

StoryMap Brief



Circling Buffalo Inc.



University
of Manitoba

For more details on
the study, access our
full report here

Intimate partner violence (IPV) disproportionately impacts Indigenous women in Manitoba.

- Indigenous women experience higher rates of IPV and more severe forms of IPV, such as strangulation or intimate partner homicide.
- As a result, Indigenous women access women's shelters for support at high rates.

Barriers can make it difficult to access shelters or negatively impact experiences while staying there.

- Such as discrimination, a lack of culturally safe services, and the geographic isolation of many Indigenous communities

These barriers underscore the need to enhance shelter services to support the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous women.

To understand and improve the experiences of Indigenous women seeking help for IPV at shelters across Manitoba, RESOLVE Manitoba and Circling Buffalo Inc. developed a research study titled *Improving Shelter Experience for Indigenous Women*. This brief shares findings from the StoryMap component of the study, with the aims of a) making IPV services, policies, and research more informed of, and responsive to, geospatial barriers in the help-seeking experiences of Indigenous women; b) informing the use and application of geographic tools and approaches in IPV research.

Access the
StoryMap Here

Why Use Geographic Approaches & Tools in IPV Research?

Maps can allow us to visualize...

- The location and distribution of IPV incidents
- The location and distribution of infrastructure and resources for help-seeking
- Survivors help-seeking journeys

Which is powerful for...

- Bringing awareness to IPV and IPV supports/services
- Observing patterns and trends in IPV and IPV help-seeking
- Highlighting geographic gaps, disparities, and barriers
- Guiding the funding and allocation of future IPV services and resources
- Informing IPV service delivery, policy, and research

Summary of the StoryMap

What is it?

- A web-based tool that combines maps, narrative, and multimedia content into a digital story

Why did we create it?

- To explore and illustrate how geographic location influences the help-seeking experiences of Indigenous women in Manitoba

How did we create it?

- Using ArcGIS Online – a Geographic Information System (GIS) software for creating, analyzing, and sharing maps and geographic information

What informed and inspired its creation?

- Conversations with survivors and service providers
- Guidance from the Advisory Circle and GIS and Research Visualization Librarian
- Literature on various topics related to IPV, GIS, Indigeneity, and colonialism

What does it cover?

- Three main themes related to geographic influences and barriers to help-seeking: (1) survivors' journeys to shelter; (2) access to transportation; (3) access to IPV-related crisis supports and services
- Each theme is explored and illustrated using a combination of maps and narrative
- All themes are looked at and discussed in relation to colonialism

Sources:

Coy et al. (2011). Roads to nowhere? Mapping violence against women services. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801211398637>.
Pickover & Beck, (2021). Geospatial approaches to intimate partner violence. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9780429196584-3>.
Sheppard-Perkins et al. (2025). Exploring the use of geographic methods to understand sexual and gender-based violence: A scoping review. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 32(3), 313–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2024.2307583>

Findings

The help-seeking journeys of Indigenous survivors, particularly those from remote First Nation communities, may involve increased instances of displacement and longer, more complex and costly journeys.

A survivor may be forced to leave her community due to:

- A lack of access to culturally safe shelter services
- A lack of anonymity
- A lack of local infrastructure and resources for help-seeking

When trying to access shelter and other resources, excesses and limitations may be placed on survivors' journeys due to:

- Far proximity
- A lack of transportation and/or telecommunications infrastructure
- The impacts of wildfires and/or warming temperatures

This is tied to legacies and continuations of colonialism

- Such as climate change and spatial inequality and marginalization

Recommendations

Invest in Services and Infrastructure for Mental Health and Addictions, Telecommunications, and Transportation in First Nation Communities

Together, the maps and narrative highlight service gaps in these areas. **A lack of access to these supports and services presents challenges to travelling and staying at shelter, contributes to experiences of displacement, and threatens the safety, well-being, and livelihood of survivors and service providers.**

- Survivors accessing or residing at on-reserve shelters are often transferred to another location, typically Winnipeg, to get supports for substance use, withdrawal, or a mental health crisis.
- Inadequate transportation infrastructure makes arranging and experiencing these transfers difficult. They require considerable energy, resources, and planning on behalf of the survivor and service provider, and may cost a shelter upwards of \$3000.
- Arranging a transfer, providing other crucial shelter services, and communicating with emergency services may be impeded by insufficient phone or internet coverage. Findings from the StoryMap suggest that only three of the eight First Nation communities with women's shelters meet the standard for high-speed internet set by the Government of Canada.

View and Apply Geographic Tools and Approaches with Humility, Intention, and Awareness

We all carry our own understandings and experiences of land, place, space, and access. It is important to think about what is and is not informing these understandings and experiences and recognize that some understandings and experiences are privileged over others.

This awareness allows us to:

- Recognize potential gaps and biases in our knowledge, approach, data, and software
- Consider how they shape the way we see and create maps
- Work towards and advocate for more expansive and equitable mapping

In the creation of our StoryMap, we became aware of Western colonial biases and ableist biases.

- We could find no base map available in ArcGIS that only or predominantly features all Indigenous names for places in 'Canada'
- Some existing geospatial data sets lacked information on Indigenous owned/operated services and/or services located on reserve.
- Our StoryMap is not fully accessible to people with visual disabilities. Accessibility restrictions result from limitations in platform capabilities, time, funding, and developer knowledge/experience.

[Access the StoryMap Here](#)