

It's free to use  
Try it now!

Content Syndication Reinvented  
Power your website or blog with world-class content.  
repubHub® makes syndicated content safe and viral.



THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

October 4, 2016

## B.C. report finds indigenous girls in care more likely to face sex abuse

By KATHRYN BLAZE BAUM, MARK HUME And GLORIA GALLOWAY

*B.C. Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond finds 145 reports of sexual violence in child-welfare system disclosed between 2011 and 2014*

Indigenous girls in the B.C. child-welfare system are as much as four times more likely to be victims of sexual violence than non-indigenous girls, according to a watchdog report that describes a failing, ad hoc approach to preventing and responding to the sexual victimization of children in care.

B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth said in the review there were 145 incidents of sexual violence against 121 children and youth in care disclosed between 2011 and 2014. Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett said she was sickened by the report, telling The Globe and Mail on Tuesday that she is committed to exploring the need for national standards regarding the treatment of children in care.

The report's findings are damning: children who were apprehended amid sexual abuse at home, only to be sexually abused in care; social workers who did not report abuse to police; provincial guidelines that are not audited for compliance; foster children abusing foster children, including a case in which the teenaged perpetrator was simply shuffled to another placement; instances in which there was no evidence that social workers or health-care staff offered supports of any kind to children who had just disclosed sexual abuse; and foster fathers being the perpetrators in one-quarter of the 28 incidents that occurred in the home.

**Related: First Nations leaders in B.C. seek control over child-welfare system<sup>1</sup>**

**Read more: Nine things to know about the national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women<sup>2</sup>**

**Related: In Manitoba, hotels shelter the province's most vulnerable wards<sup>3</sup>**

"We can't just keep removing all these children [from their homes] and then placing them in an environment where, because they don't have any other natural support, they might be revictimized," Representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond said in an interview. "In essence, by being involved in the system, they may, in fact, be groomed for a lifetime of victimization."

Dr. Bennett said federal, provincial and territorial social-services ministers, as well as those responsible for children and youth, have chosen indigenous child welfare as the focus of their next meeting, slated for January. "We are

committed," she said, "to overhauling the system."

Indigenous leaders and child-welfare advocates reacted with dismay to the report – the first in Canada to delve into advocacy cases and illuminate the prevalence and nature of sexual violence against children in government care.

B.C. Grand Chief Stewart Phillip deemed the revelations "beyond frustrating" and said the child-welfare system is so broken that it is time for the Liberal provincial minister responsible for the file to resign.

Cindy Blackstock, the advocate at the centre of a landmark ruling that found Ottawa failed to provide equitable funding for child-welfare services on reserves, said the report is further proof that the "state makes for a terrible parent."

Indigenous NDP MLA Melanie Mark, the opposition spokeswoman on the issue, said the government must act quickly to address the violence if it is serious about seeking reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

And Wally Oppal, who led a provincial inquiry into police failures in investigating the disappearances of women slain by B.C. serial killer Robert Pickton, said there is a "strong correlation" between childhood sexual abuse and the wider tragedy of Canada's missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

Nearly two-thirds of the 121 victims included in the report were indigenous girls, even though they only make up, on average, a quarter of all children in care in British Columbia. Indigenous girls under 12 were four times more likely to be victimized than non-indigenous girls, while teenaged indigenous girls were twice as likely. The report, which is based on incidents that took place between 2004 and 2014, notes that children who experience sexual abuse are at an increased risk of victimization later in life.

Violence against indigenous women and girls is the subject of a recently launched national inquiry, which is expected to examine myriad factors, including child welfare, sex trafficking, systemic racism and the legacy of the Indian Residential School system, where abuse of all kinds was rampant. On Tuesday, an annual day of vigil was held across the country to honour missing and murdered indigenous women.

Gladys Radek, a prominent advocate, said she could have been one of them. Ms. Radek, 61, was sexually abused by several members of her indigenous foster family while in care in Terrace, B.C. She was just 11 years old when she first thought about hitchhiking to Vancouver along what is today known as the Highway of Tears – a stretch of road notorious for the alarming number of indigenous women who have disappeared or died violently along it in recent decades.

"What was more dangerous for me: staying at home and being raped, or hitchhiking?" Ms. Radek said. "Enough talking about it, let's do something about it."

Ms. Turpel-Lafond is recommending that the B.C. government roll out a broad strategy to tackle sexual violence against children and youth in care, including improved standards, resources and training. She is suggesting that Premier Christy Clark identify a lead minister responsible for implementing a five-year plan, and is urging the province to create a network of child and youth advocacy centres that have stable funding and bring together police, social workers and cultural supports.

B.C. Minister of Children and Family Development Stephanie Cadieux said it was "too early to say" whether the government would act on any of the recommendations. "The work in the report is important," she told reporters. "We'll review it and we'll consider it very critically to see what we could do to strengthen the system as it is."

## References

1. [www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/first-nations-leaders-in-bc-seek-control-over-child-welfare-system/article30242261](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/first-nations-leaders-in-bc-seek-control-over-child-welfare-system/article30242261)
2. [www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/nine-things-to-know-about-the-national-inquiry-into-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women/article31654434](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/nine-things-to-know-about-the-national-inquiry-into-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women/article31654434)
3. [www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/in-manitoba-hotels-shelter-the-provinces-most-vulnerable-wards/article21417658](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/in-manitoba-hotels-shelter-the-provinces-most-vulnerable-wards/article21417658)



The Globe and Mail Inc. All Rights Reserved.. Permission granted for up to 5 copies. All rights reserved.

You may forward this article or get additional permissions by typing [http://license.icopyright.net/3.8425?icx\\_id=32230796](http://license.icopyright.net/3.8425?icx_id=32230796) into any web browser. The Globe and Mail, Inc. and The Globe and Mail logos are registered trademarks of The Globe and Mail, Inc. The iCopyright logo is a registered trademark of iCopyright, Inc.