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Re-establishing their Lives

Issues Relating to Affordable Housing for Women and their Children Escaping Violent Relationships in Northern Manitoba

By Colin Bonnycastle, Judith Hughes, Marleny Bonnycastle, Kendra Nixon, and Allison Groening

JUNE 2019

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Accompanying Report

This report is released in conjuction with an accompanying literature review titled *Housing Needs of Indigenous Women Leaving Intimate Partner Violence in Northern Communities*. This report can be found on the CCPA-Manitoba website.

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Table of Contents

1 **The Report in Brief**

2 **Introduction**

4 **Issues of Concern**
Domestic Violence in the North
Getting to Shelter
On-Reserve Housing
Matrimonial Real Property Act/Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests Act

7 **Our Study**
The Participants
The Women's Stories

25 **The Women's Journeys**
On Reserve Housing
Matrimonial Real Property Rights
Getting to the Shelter — Transportation Costs
Second Stage/Transitional Housing

33 **Final Thoughts**

35 **References**

The Report in Brief

When approaching the needs of women and their children escaping violent relationships what is often not addressed is the need for affordable, safe housing once women leave temporary solutions such as crisis centres. In most cases, this critical aspect seems merely to be left to the individual women to manage. This research project reflects on this issue in relation to Northern Manitoba. Through our research, we explored both the geographic moves women make as they seek safety and shelter for themselves and their children and their reasons for making these transitions. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 women staying in women's shelters in Thompson and Winnipeg. The stories of their journeys point to severe issues regarding affordable, safe housing in Northern Manitoba First Nations, the growing lack of northern transportation services needed to access shelters and the often absence of formal on-reserve supports, particularly in relation to the *Matrimonial Real Property Act* and the *Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act*.

This study shows the gaps in services and supports for women and children exposed to domestic violence. It confirms the need to address housing issues and for a co-ordinated service response to reduce the vulnerability and increase the support to women and children affected by violence. Finally, it shows a need to address policies and government programs that increase the availability of houses, transportation and second-stage and transitional housing for women to stay and work on long-term solutions instead of returning to their violent environment.

Introduction

Housing affordability is a significant and growing issue across Northern Manitoba communities (FemNorthNet, 2012; TEDWG, 2012). Also, with a regional population relatively young and growing, particularly amongst First Nation communities (TEDWG, 2012), there will no doubt be further stress on an already precarious situation. One population that seems to be particularly hard hit by such conditions is women and their children leaving violent/abusive relationships.[1]

There seems to be a historical disconnect in the relationship between affordable housing and the needs of women and their children escaping violent relationships. For example, until recent changes to the Indian Act, women's rights as citizens were denied by "depriving married women of property" (Holcombe, 1983, cited in Eberts, 2017, p. 79). Current policy approaches are often limited to crisis and, in some cases, transitional housing. What is not addressed in such strategies is the need for affordable, safe housing once women leave these temporary, crisis-based services. In most cases, this critical aspect seems merely to be left to women to find for themselves. Similar omissions have been noted in community homeless plans across Canada (Yeo et al., 2015). Such decisions are made harder in Northern Manitoba by the lack of affordable rental and social housing initiatives and the current overcrowding situations found there (TEDWG, 2012).

The inadequacy of housing in Northern Manitoba has a long history. Beginning in the 1980s, the federal government began to draw down its investment in affordable housing (Suttor, 2016). The elimination of our national housing strategy "began with the gradual reduction in spending on affordable and social housing (including support for co-op housing) in the 1980s, culminating in the termination of spending on new affordable housing stock by the federal government in 1993" (Gaetz, 2010, cited in Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter, 2014, p. 25). In turn, the termination of spending caused provincial and territorial governments to offload responsibilities for afford-

1 We use both the words abuse and violence interchangeably in this report. Both expressions are used to help define a "pattern of violence — physical, psychological/emotional, sexual, economic, or social — that is intentionally inflicted on a female partner in the course of an ongoing dating, common-law, or material relationship, or after one or both partners has ended this relationship" (Momirov & Duffy, 2011, p. 31).

able housing onto municipal governments (FCM, 2011). The reduction and downloading have had particularly devastating effects on women and their children (Rude & Thompson, 2001).

Housing affordability issues have been found to be relatively high among people who live alone, female lone-parent families, and people who have experienced recent family changes (Rea, Yeun, Engeland, & Figueroa, 2008). A recent study in Thompson found that for "women who have been affected by violence, the most significant barriers to accessing supports include a lack of housing options and a lack of community resources in outlying communities" (M. Bonnycastle et al., 2015, p. 18). Anecdotal evidence from the Thompson Crisis Centre (a women's shelter) shows that women often either return to abusive partners out of necessity rather than choice, a result of not being able to secure independent housing in the North, or relocate to larger cities where they may not be prepared for such transitions (given the absence of skills, knowledge or family and childcare supports). Such transitions in search of safe housing and services have been found to create a further crisis and upheaval in the lives of women, often including the involvement of child protective services (Jones & Smith, 2011; Novac, 2007). In addition, there may be connections between transitionary life and the issues of murdered and missing Indigenous women in the province.

The purpose of this research project was to explore how the current lack of affordable housing and the absence of a co-ordinated service response affect women and their children as they escape violent relationships in Northern Manitoba. Through our research, we explored both the geographic moves women make as they seek safety and shelter for themselves and their children and their reasons for making these transitions. The current body of literature demonstrates that women who experience violence encounter significant barriers to accessing safe and appropriate housing, especially for women living in northern communities. Through this project, we sought to understand the many moves and challenges women meet when leaving violent relationships in Northern Manitoba.

The study shows the gaps in services and supports for women and children exposed to domestic violence. It confirms the need to address housing issues and for a co-ordinated service response to reduce the vulnerability and increase the support to women and children affected by violence. Finally, it shows a need to address policies and government programs that increase the availability of houses, transportation and second stage and transitional housing for women to stay and work on long-term solutions instead of returning to their violent environment.

Issues of Concern

The problems of intimate partner violence and housing insecurity are independent issues and each worthy of discussion on their own. However, for women in northern communities these issues are often co-occurring. Violence is a major contributor to women experiencing homelessness, but the threat of homelessness can be an ever-present concern in a place where access to housing is, in its own right, a challenge. Understanding the problem of intimate partner violence in the Canadian North requires, as stated by Moffitt, Fikowski, Mauricio and Mackenzie (2013), that the problem be explored in context of the "unique geographic, economic, political and cultural features" of women's experiences in these communities (p. 2). Understanding housing in the North likely requires consideration of these same factors. The affordability and availability of housing in the Canadian North is unto itself and this issue takes on greater meaning when the lack of housing options becomes a barrier to dealing with intimate partner violence. That these issues are impacted by gender makes them even more troubling.

Domestic Violence in the North

Though few studies have explored intimate partner violence in the specific northern context, those that do highlight the high prevalence of intimate partner violence in rural locations (Peek-Asa et al., 2011; Wuerch et al., 2016). In Canada, women in rural and northern locations experience more instances of physical violence, more severe physical violence and higher rates of psychological abuse, and are at greater risk for intimate partner homicide than women in urban communities (NCCAH, 2009; Peek-Asa et al., RESOLVE Alberta, 2015; Wuerch et al., 2016). There are a number of reasons for this increased rate of victimization outlined in the literature, including: the increased access to firearms, the lack of affordable transportation, lack of formal support services, lack of employment or educational opportunities, isolation, gender inequalities, the complexity of community and family dynamics, and communities' unwillingness to view domestic violence as a problem (Goudreau, 2011; NCCAH, 2009; Nixon, Bonnycastle, & Ens, 2015 as cited in Moffitt et al., 2013).

Moffitt et al. (2017) describe a culture of "violence and silence" that women in rural and northern communities experience, where vio-

lence is "accepted, minimalized, expected" as a part of family life. This culture exists alongside the belief in long-term commitment to a partner and a distrust of outside agencies perceived to be interfering in what are deemed individual family problems (Moffitt et al., 2016). Cultural and social beliefs about family dynamics, non-interference, and the role of men in the relationship and household are part of a complex system of values that often prevent women from seeking support (RESOLVE Alberta, 2015; Wuerch et al., 2016). Particularly, there are concerns about confidentiality and anonymity of service in small communities, which may contribute to women feeling uncomfortable in accessing resources because either they or their abuser is connected to the service provider. The abuser or members of their family may be in positions of power or influence and women may be discouraged from speaking out against them, as the culture in many northern communities keeps domestic violence from being talked about (Goudreau, 2011).

Getting to Shelter

Beyond the high rates of violence women in rural and northern locations face, they also face additional geographic barriers to accessing services. Wuerch et al. (2016) highlight some of the key issues with transportation in northern communities. Road conditions and even the existence of a road may be seasonal and depend on weather conditions, and access to public transportation is limited. There is no vehicular public transportation to communities where there is no road, leaving the expensive option of air travel as the only "public" transportation out of the community. Where public transit is entirely unavailable, women who do not have access to a vehicle or the finances to purchase transportation may be unable to leave a community (Wuerch et al., 2016). The timeliness of transportation is also a concern. Women residing in remote, fly-in communities may need to wait days for transportation, wait-times that are also a problem for service providers such as police and first responders (Wuerch et al., 2016; Shepherd, 2001). This raises concerns about the safety of women when they call for assistance or arrange transportation, and while they wait for it to arrive (Shepherd, 2001, Moffitt et al., 2013).

There are currently nine provincial shelters in Manitoba, of which seven are located in southern Manitoba and two in northern Manitoba (Thompson and The Pas). There are also five First Nations shelters in the northern part of the province. They are located in Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, Shamattawa First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation, Norway House Cree Nation and Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation.

On-Reserve Housing

Indigenous women face unique barriers when leaving abusive relationships, and securing housing is one of these additional challenges. Housing is a problem for Indigenous peoples, both on- and off-reserves. However, the "quality, safety and affordability" of on-reserve housing is a growing issue as the demand for housing increases faster than construction can meet either the need for renovations or the need for new housing (Gaetz et al., 2014, p. 34). On reserve, the minimal priority given to First Nations housing becomes clear, as issues manifest in the lack of plumbing and electricity, poor insulation, mold, substandard construction and lack of repairs (Belanger et al., 2012). Patrick (2014) connects these tangible housing needs to financial challenges faced by many Indigenous households, noting that one-third of on-reserve households who were living in unacceptable housing did not have sufficient income to access better options. The combined effects of substandard housing, lack of financial resources and general shortage of housing units contribute to overcrowding and to families moving off reserve (Belanger et al., 2012).

Matrimonial Real Property Act/Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests Act

The lack of housing available in most reserve communities also has a gendered dynamic. In the past, women trying to secure their own housing were limited by the lack of legal guidance regarding marital real property on reserve (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2003). Under the *Indian Act*, provincial and territorial laws regarding marital property do not apply on reserve land, leaving women in an unclear position regarding their rights to housing. Moreover, until recently the *Indian Act* did not have specific provisions on the issue ((Kelm & Smith, 2018; Joseph, 2018; NWAC, 2007).

> A woman leaving an abusive marriage usually could not get her own reserve residence. Unless they could move in with another on-reserve family member, she and her children would have to leave the reserve, another instance of exile and family fragmentation being caused by the *Indian Act*. (Eberts, 2017, p.84)

The *Matrimonial Real Property Act* (MRPA) and *Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act* (FHRMIRA) came into effect around 2013–14. They replaced archaic parts of the *Indian Act*. The MRPA applies to all common-law or married couples that live on the reserve where at least one partner is a member of the First Nations Band (NWAC, 2015; CEMRP, 2015). In other words, it refers to a house or land that a couple occupies or benefits from when they are/were in a common-law relationship or are/were married. Adding to the MRPA, the FHRMIRA is a law that provides rights and protections to individuals living on reserve regarding the family home during a relationship, and in the event of a relationship breakdown or death of a spouse or common-law partner (Fiser & Pendakur, 2018). Under these legislations, each First Nation can create their own Matrimonial Real Property Law, but until they do, the two acts apply. A key concern here with this new legislation is the lack of provisions needed to provide women with legal recourse for interim possession of an on-reserve home. For example, a woman may be able to get a restraining order against an abusive partner but is not able to get exclusive possession of the marital home unless they were already the sole person on the certificate of possession (Patrick, 2014).

Our Study

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 women staying in women's shelters in Thompson and Winnipeg. In the interviews, women provided demographic data and information about their most recent intimate partner relationship and were asked a series of in-depth questions relating to four predetermined areas: meaning of home, past experiences, present situation, and future dreams. These four prominent areas followed the medicine wheel created by Cyndy Baskin (2007), as illustrated in figure 2 below. Of the 14 women, 10 were from Thompson and four were from Winnipeg. The interviews varied in length from 18 minutes to 52 minutes and were conducted in women's shelters in Thompson and Winnipeg. The women received an honorarium of $25 in appreciation of their participation.

Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and entered into a qualitative computer analysis program (NVivo 11) by a research assistant. The four themes of the interview questions (meaning of home, past experiences, current situation, and future dreams) guided the initial coding of the interview content. Additional preliminary codes and categories were identified by reading each of the transcripts (i.e., first level coding). Data placed into each of these broad codes were then reviewed to identify themes within the large coding categories. The codes and categories were constantly compared and developed through a fluid and circular process whereby incidents were compared to each category and previous incidents (Keddy, Sims, & Noerager-Stern, 1996), thereby further developing relationships and themes in the data. Finally, the larger research team reviewed the coding to identify additional important codes, themes, and relationships, and this analysis is presented here according to the four broader themes: the meaning of home, past experiences, current situation, and future dreams. To ensure participant anonymity, participant's names are replaced with a number and the location of the interview. Additional analysis is included about the journey of participants and resources in their communities. Communities, some demographics, travel, and resources are included with the use of GIS mapping.

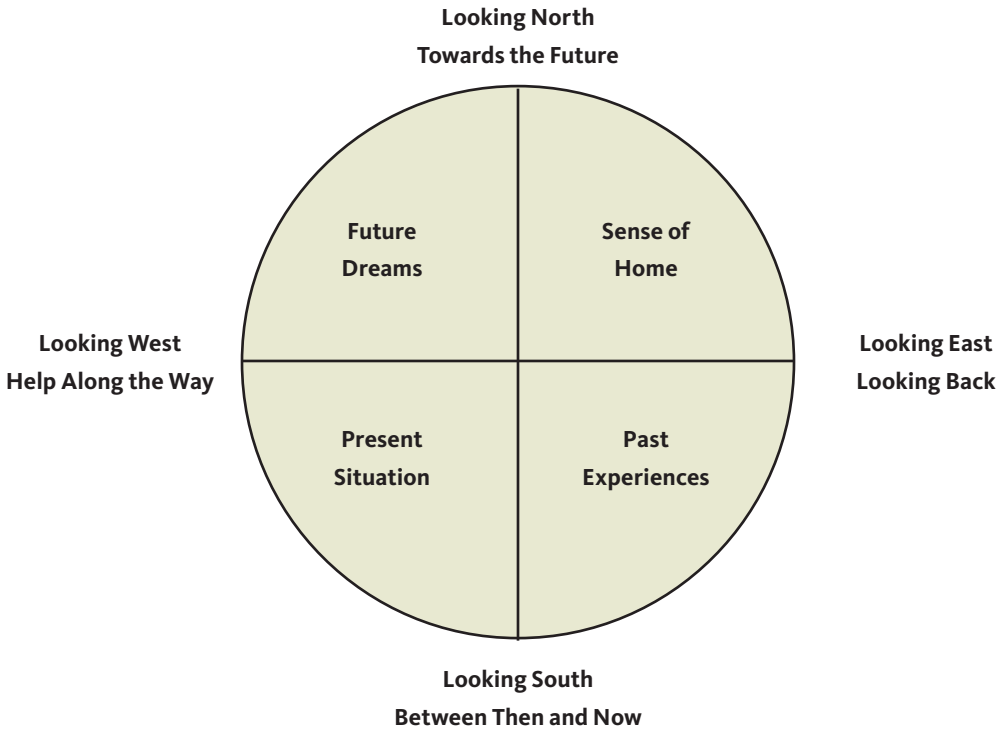
The Participants

The 14 participants range in age between 21 years and 43 years, with an average age of 28

FIGURE 1 **Travel Distance from Communities to Thompson or Winnipeg**

years. Of the participants, 13 self-identified as being First Nations (93%) and whose community of origin was one of 10 Northern Manitoba First Nations communities. All participants had children, ranging from one child to eight children, with an average number being three children. Their children's age ranged from under one year (four children) to over 16 years of age or over (six children). Twenty-three children accompanied their mother to the shelter,

FIGURE 2 Medicine Wheel Research



and three of the participants were pregnant at the time of the interview.

There was a broad range of education experience amongst the participants: seven stated they had less than a high school diploma, another three had completed high school, two had some post-secondary, and two had completed a university degree. Though most (12) of the women had worked in the past, half of the participants had under one year of experience; five indicated that they were currently employed in full-time work, with the rest stating that they were unemployed at the time of the interview. All 14 women reported income below $15,000/year (6 under $5,000/year, three between $5,000–$9,999, and five between $10,000 and $14,999), putting them all well below current low-income measures for Canadian families.

Six participants describe the abusive partner as their common-law husband, three as an ex-boyfriend, two as their married partner, two as a boyfriend, and one noted their partner as "other", perhaps signifying a casual or dating relationship. The length of time that they had been with the abuser ranged from two years or less (one woman) to 11 or more years (3 women). Half of the women indicated that they had been in the relationship between 5 to 8 years.

Figures 1 illustrate what communities the women came from and the distances they had to travel to Thompson or Winnipeg shelters. More than one woman came from some of the communities listed.

The Women's Stories

Following the structure of the interviews, the analysis of the stories of the women used the medicine wheel created by Cyndy Baskin (2007), which includes four prominent areas: meaning

of home, past experiences, present situation, and future dreams (figure 2). The medicine wheel methodology acted as a metaphor for analysis. For example, each of the four main areas speak to a particular season in these women's lives. Each season gives a particular focus to the analysis.

Sense of Home

The first set of interview questions asked the women to reflect on what the word 'home' means to them and what communities and experiences are connected to their idea of being home. The main themes that emerged from the interviews revealed that these women described 'home' as more than just 'four walls and a roof,' connecting the notion of 'home' in terms of family, community, culture, and safety.

Home is where your family is

The importance of family was connected to the idea of home throughout the responses to our first set of interview questions. Two of the interview participants talked about their positive childhood memories of home. Both felt well taken care of by their family and felt safe with the adults who cared for them. Eleven participants connected their idea of home to being with their family, as a participant in Thompson stated:

> "Home to me means, to have your own place, with your family. To be safe. Just to, I don't know, just to have your family around I guess, to have your own place, your own space." (Thompson 6)

Having a sense of autonomy was also part of the definition of home. One woman spoke of never having "my own house to call home, [because I have] always lived with others" (Thompson 1). Another participant highlighted that her relationships with family and community members were an important aspect of her meaning of home, particularly in the community she was from, as having positive relationships was important to her work role. The idea of home as being a place to spend with family was not always based on participants' own past experiences, but their future hopes, as stated by one participant:

> A picture of a home? I wish it was safe, and I don't really know what a home is, so. Well, I want to be in a home where it's safe and I'm not scared. And for a good place for my kids, where I can just be a parent instead of being scared every day. That's the kind of home that I want. (Thompson 5)

For another participant, the meaning of home was an ideal that had been lost due to the impact that violence had on her children: "It doesn't really feel like home anymore since I left. Doesn't feel like home because of what I was going through, and my kids too, what they were seeing" (Winnipeg 11).

Three of the participants directly named home as a particular community, and spoke of their connection to that community. For one of these women, community was home because her children were born there and she began to raise them in that community: "I'd say [name of community] was my home, because that's where I have my kids, so that was where I felt more at home. I had a house there, children that I raised until a while ago" (Thompson 3). For the other two participants, geographic place and community provide an unchanging meaning of home: "Oh, obviously up north is always home. Like I said, I grew up there all my life and it's always going to be home there" (Winnipeg 12). For one of these women, culture and language were important to her meaning of home and leaving the home community had an impact on her sense of identity:

> My values, my beliefs are important, for my children. Just keeping my ethnicity strong by using my language, I feel like you're more in tune with getting around in the community if you're fluent in your language. Coming to Thompson is different, definitely. (Thompson 3)

Safety

Having a safe place to be with family was a common descriptor of home, especially for six of the participants. For three of these women, home was also the place where women or their children were harmed or at risk of harm and vulnerable: "A home is like, it's safe being there but at the same time it's not really that kind of safe to be out there. Cause my partner used to come around, and just walks in" (Thompson 7). One participant described a sense of nostalgia, or loss, for the feeling of home she had in her hometown, knowing that it was not presently a safe place for her and her children.

> I'll always miss my hometown and all, but that's where practically my ex-boyfriend stays. So, I should say that it's not safe right now, especially for my kids. I thought about going back, giving up, like, leave this place where I'm staying. But I think back at the times that when my ex-boyfriend used to do violence, especially in front of my kids. So, I should say that back home, it's not safe to go back. But I'll always miss it and love my hometown, and my family in it. (Thompson 2)

Another woman described her vision for a meaning of home in contrast to her abusive experiences:

> It would mean, I guess, loved ones and safety — That you're safe there, that you're not vulnerable, that you're not going to get abused, you're not going to get hurt, that you're not going to get thrown out, that you're not going to get anything — you know, safe. You don't have to worry, you're safe. (Thompson 9).

Past Experiences

Moves from their homes

For the majority of the participants, their past experience included a pattern of having moved multiple times. In both childhood and adulthood, women moved within their communities, between communities, from northern communities to urban centres like Thompson and Winnipeg, and, in some cases, later returned to their home communities. Moves within women's home communities were common, with eight participants sharing experiences of moving "a lot of places, moving house to house" (Thompson 5). A participant in Thompson described this pattern of moving dating back to childhood: "Cause, well, my mom was moving everywhere. We always moved into a different place every four years or something" (Thompson 10). Another woman, in a shelter in Winnipeg, shared that growing up in foster care meant constant moves: "I couldn't really know [how many times] because it started when I was 6 years old with CFS [Child and Family Services]" (Winnipeg 13). Another woman commented: "I had a good home while I was growing up — since I turned 16, that's when I met this first guy. He was so abusive" (Thompson 7). From there a pattern of moving around in the community began.

Though one participant reported that she liked moving around and meeting different people at the schools she attended (Thompson 10), three other women expressed negative feelings caused by the multiple moves. A participant in Thompson (1) described feeling "embarrassed" that she was known for moving from place to place. The majority of women described moving between the homes of their parents, grandparents, partners/former partners and their parents, aunties, uncles, and friends. One participant described it this way:

> Well, after that time I had moved back to my community, I was pretty much homeless. We were pretty much house hopping. We were staying with family member to family member. And that went on for about four years, until we finally got a new place. And that's the house that I just left recently. And that house just went up [was built] not too long ago. Like, we haven't even lived in there for a year. (Thompson 8)

Moves among family members were not limited to within-community moves, as these par-

ticipants moved between communities and between communities in Southern and Northern parts of Manitoba.

The main reason women moved was due to abuse from their partner or ex-partner. Conflict with other family members caused three other women to move and three more women stated that returning to a relationship was a reason for their moves. Those participants spoke of physical, verbal, and emotional abuse from their partner/ex-partner or their family and, in some cases, violence and conflict was exacerbated by substance use or the dynamics of living with their partner's family. Two of the participants described experiencing violence from both their partner and his family members:

> I moved there with my boyfriend and his mom. At the time, things were going good at first. We had our first baby, things went great there for a while. [But then] he started going violent. And he started hitting me. And then his mom started treating me wrong, like calling me down, you know. She treats me wrong when he's not there. She says a bunch of stuff to me, mean stuff. Like, she tells me, "Oh well, go move somewhere. I don't think my boy's happy with you." She says stuff like that. And she made me think. And every time she left the house and he would drink, and he would end up hitting me. (Thompson 05)

Another woman also spoke of issues encountered when living with her partner's parents as well as her own family members.

> I don't know, they would harass me. I even got into a fight with both of his sisters. But I didn't do anything but they jumped me. And then his mom hit me twice because I moved out of her place. And then I went to my dad's and then my sister moved there and then we couldn't get along so I moved back to my granny's. And then it didn't work out at my granny's. And then I moved with my mom but it didn't work out (Thompson 06).

For one woman, living with her family provided a sense of safety: "it was always safe at my mom's place. But every time we kept going back and forth, back and forth. But each time I'd go stay at my ex-boyfriend's place, that's where the violence would always begin" (Thompson 2).

Participants spoke about having to choose between housing and safety. Family violence was a significant factor in this decision. For three women, partner and family violence was something they felt they had to put up with, as they had nowhere else to live. As one woman shared: "Yeah, I had really nowhere else to turn…I just had to put [up] with my partner or stay on his good side as best as I could" (Thompson 1). In some situations, issues with a partner or ex-partner were framed in terms of needing to get away from troubles or to have one's space:

> I needed my own space, I needed my own place with my kids. And I got evicted because of my baby's dad. Cause I didn't want to take him back so he broke stuff in that apartment, and he broke my door and he tried pulling that fire alarm. (Thompson 6)

The impact that family conflict and partner violence had on children was also a consideration in the decision to move. Physical violence against the children, concerns about children witnessing violence, and providing a better quality of life for the children were some of the factors taken into consideration. As one woman explained:

> I didn't know what I was doing. I just picked up and left, kind of thing. And I ended up going back. Ended up going back and then the same thing just started happening over and over. And then, I just had enough of it. Looked at my kids and realized that they were more important.… It was basically with my partner. Because he was abusive. And I have three sons and I don't want my sons growing up thinking it's alright. So, I'm just trying to steer them in a better future for them. (Winnipeg 14).

Even in instances where participants had plans to move for the wellbeing of their children, the decisions were complex. One woman spoke about moving to seek safety and stability for her children, but recognized that the move itself would be difficult on her eldest daughter:

> … it was hard, especially on my oldest one, there. She's really crazy about her dad. I don't know, she was always crazy about her dad. When we left, I came here, I could tell my daughter, she was already lonely and really wanting to go home but I couldn't do that. I just thought, "no." Like, I just kept looking at her and telling her and asking her, "I wish that you were a little bit older so you could understand all this," I said. "But I can't take you home," I said to my daughter. "I wish you could understand. I don't want to go back there. I don't want you guys to go back there," I told her. "It's safer here," I told her, my daughter. (Thompson 2)

One woman described facing the decision to stay away from a partner when it meant parenting on her own, which was a new challenge.

> Like, no, I left him, but he's still trying to come back but I don't want it to happen like that. Cause I'm not ready for it no more. I just want to be a single mother again. But it's kind of hard though. But my dad's there to help me, though. (Thompson 7)

For some participants, the decision to leave a relationship and find a new home was not fully their choice. As one participant in Winnipeg stated, her child welfare worker gave her the ultimatum of leaving the relationship or having her kids taken away:

> She knew, so she gave me a choice. If I want to be with him, the kids would be taken away. And I didn't want that. So, I kept, how do you say it? So, I made a choice to come here, and to leave him. (Winnipeg 11).

Participants moved for other reasons related to the lack of services in their home community. Five participants had moved to pursue educational opportunities or paid employment that was not available in their home community. One woman spoke about moving for employment, or moving because a job had ended: "Work usually, yeah. I'd run out of jobs and stuff, or work would move me or something like that. Usually it's to do with work" (Thompson 9). Two participants moved for education reasons and had plans to return to their community, one with the specific goal of upgrading her education to help people in her community. Another two participants who had moved for educational reasons spoke about the positive outcomes of their moves. For a participant who made her way to Winnipeg (12), this was an outcome related to having a place to stay: "I left, to come to school. It's not that bad too, cause I had a place to go after that." Another participant had moved with her partner to pursue an educational goal. The relationship became a source of stress and then violence during her time as a student. When she did decide to leave the relationship and return to her home community, she faced new challenges, such as needing childcare and the high cost of living:

> Yeah, and then I stayed with him here. And then in the middle of my pregnancy, I moved back to [name of home community). My dad said. "Your uncle's house is open. Why don't you just come home for a while?" Like, relying on him was, my income changed too. Like, you're making good money, you got a degree. But at home, daycare, it was scarce. For my income it was $75 a day per child. And there was no — what do you call those? — incentives to help me because of my degree. So, daycare was harder. I was no longer a student, things were different. $75 a day for three of them, with my income, and my truck payment and my rent and everything. It was coming down to not having him at all. So, when my dad found that out, well, he had to find out how, but he made me come home for a while,

> so you don't have to worry about that stuff for a while. (Thompson 3)

One participant had moved back to her community, and back to her abuser, because of a probation order:

> I went to the [First Nation Women's Shelter] before in [participant's community], and then from there to Winnipeg. That was in September and October. And I had to give that all up because of my probation, so I had to come back. My probation officer was telling me "I'm sorry but you have to drop what you're doing or you will breach." So, I came home, back to the abuser. September, October, November, 'til December, where my probation ended. (Thompson 1)

Housing Availability

Housing availability was a major factor in the women's moves away from their communities, as six participants identified the absence of housing as a factor in their moves. Two women spoke of their experiences of living temporarily with family when they had no other options, with one highlighting the challenges of overcrowded housing:

> Well, my mother and my dad, they have a lot of kids and older siblings. So, it was always cramped in my mom's place. I didn't want to make them feel like we're suffocating them, me and my kids. And my ex-boyfriend, he used to stay with us. (Thompson 2)

Living with family was a choice some participants were forced to make: "Both of us were living with his parents cause there's no housing up north" (Winnipeg 13). Lack of housing options prevented seven women from leaving an abusive relationship, as described by this participant:

> Yeah, I tried finding a place here and couldn't find nothing. And so, I had no choice to go back there because I had nowhere to go around here. So, had no choice [but] to go back to my ex-boyfriend. (Thompson 6)

Similarly, another woman spoke of the early years of her relationship, during which she moved back and forth between homes and between communities,

> Well, kind of back and forth at first, the first few years. Cause my husband's from [another northern reserve], different community. And we moved back and forth cause we had problems at my parent's house and we had problems at his home, where he was. And we couldn't really settle. Then we bought a new house, that's when we settled down. A home we were lucky to share for 24 years. (Thompson 4)

Having few options for housing was a concern at all stages of the leaving process. One woman spoke of leaving shelter to return to her abusive partner, primarily to have a place to stay for herself and her unborn child:

> Yeah, I didn't even inform the shelter. I just left because I didn't know what to say, didn't want them to think I was going back for the guy because it wasn't for the guy. But I did go back to the guy, just for that place to stay. It wasn't actually for him but [for] the baby. (Thompson 1)

The complicated and often cyclical nature of moving is also evident, in that three women ended up living with family members. One participant highlighted the temporal nature of this arrangement stating, "[It's] okay for a while, then, you know, just didn't get along with family and then had to move. It wouldn't be like, a month we'd be at one place" (Thompson 4).

Because of the lack of options, women felt forced to leave the community altogether to access resources, even to find temporary housing such as a shelter: "not even temporary shelters. They've always, they always just want to ship us out, you know, not everybody wants to leave or they can't leave" (Thompson 1). Though participants perceived having little choice in leaving their community to seek resources, for some women the journey out of the community and to a shel-

ter in an urban setting was a pathway to getting their own home: "Well actually most people are doing that today. Like, there's a lot of single ladies out there too. Like, they need their own space with their kids. Most of them come out here too, like, just to get their own place" (Winnipeg 12).

The strategies women employed to have their own safety and housing needs met, and making decisions for the well-being of their children, put some women in a challenging position. One participant shared another housing strategy that some women in her community had used:

> A lot of parents have done this, too, is that they put their children into foster care and then they leave to the city to try and find housing. And so that's another way they've been able to do it. But if it doesn't happen, they go back and then it turns into this cycle of going back and forth, back and forth, and then eventually they get the house. But a lot of women do do that. (Winnipeg 13).

The types of housing participants had lived in varied. Seven women had lived in shared accommodations with their parents, siblings, and cousins, and with their partner and their extended family, which often meant overcrowded living situations. When asked how many people might be living in the house, one woman replied: "Oh about 9 or 10, and it was only 3 rooms" (Thompson 4). Another woman commented, "Yeah. And like, our homes, in our communities are so crowded. There can be like three families or four families living in one house" (Winnipeg 12). Five of the participants had at one-time lived-in housing of their own; three women found accommodation through the Manitoba Housing Authority, two had secured their own apartments and two women had their own apartments when they moved out of their community to attend school.

Impacts of abuse

Though partner violence and problems with a partner or ex-partner were present throughout the participants' experiences, only three women directly connected the abuse to the challenges they faced. The women participants identified many other difficulties in addition to abuse, including challenges with family members, childcare, finding housing, finishing school, or finding financial self-sufficiency. One woman's abusive partner made her time in postsecondary education challenging, particularly while caring for a young child. The abusive relationship eventually took on a dimension of financial dependency as well:

> I didn't really notice a lot of what was really happening cause I was always busy in my books. I knew that what my purpose was already in town for, to finish school. But yeah, I knew how he would be now, like, financially, and he knew I depended on him a lot of times. So, he would screw up for me, on the morning of an exam he's not there and my daycare's not open, emergency stuff like that. And I knew he was with somebody. We got into a fight. It was not — like, my son was in daycare a couple of times with the incidences. I did end up in the hospital once. I was pregnant at the time, I was pregnant during school. Like, that stuff, I kept a lot at home and just kept on with the books. I'm already struggling with school and my studies but it's what made me happy. It was honouring to finish a week of school, getting up with my son, getting him to daycare. That was rewarding for me as long as I finished a week. I did that for two years with him, and on the day of my graduation he didn't show up. We split up after I was done school here for a year, but we went back together. (Thompson 3)

Two participants spoke about their experiences returning to an abusive relationship. For both women, their partner's promises of change and the women's own hopes for change contributed to their decision. However, in both cases, the violence continued. One woman's partner had been incarcerated and she returned to the relationship upon his release:

> But I thought he would change for that. Like, I thought he would change if he went to jail and thought of it in there. I thought he would think twice before doing it again. But then it got worse. He got worse when he came out. And then I stayed with him for over 5 years. I took that, well I stayed with him for 7 years and I dealed with his shit all the time. I dealed with it for 7 years, and so scared every day. And I couldn't do nothing to stick up for my kids because he would just end up beating me up. (Thompson 5)

A second woman described the same experience: "he promised things would be different. I believed it, but it just spiralled back to the same situation, the same abuse and lies" (Thompson 8).

Experiences with accessing resources

There are limited services in northern communities or, in some instances, women were not aware of the services. Often their knowledge of available services was limited to the RCMP or the nursing station. When interviewed, the women spoke mainly of getting support from family and friends, the RCMP, the Thompson Crisis Centre and very little from the bands or other services. Parents and other family members were the main supports for most of the women.

When asked about what it was like getting supports, one woman stated,

> Yeah. Well, the chief and council, I thought they were going to get things rolling on helping us, my children too, because they have a lot of authority to help us advocate. I haven't had that. I haven't heard anyone advocate for me. So, I had to leave [woman's community]. They [the band] said they were going to pay for a room at the YWCA in Thompson for a month. I thought they were going to come and mediate, and come and advocate, and help me get back on my feet. I never heard from them. I had to leave the Y … I've been on foot, I didn't know where to go. I couldn't even ask anybody, my friends. I was even thinking of hitchhiking to [another northern community] … So 11:30 I went to go use the phone at the Y, cause I knew there was free phones. Took a chance on calling here. I asked them, "I really want safety from my partner. I don't want to talk to him anymore. I'm not going to listen to anybody about mending anything with him." … They accepted me and I was here by midnight. And just coming in here and, you know, you're going to have a warm bed, that made a whole difference. That's what I was asking for, to be safe while I look after myself legally. (Thompson 3)

Another woman spoke of the help she received from a CFS worker to get from her home community to Winnipeg:

> Yeah, I finally got help. A worker, my CFS worker, she knew what was going on. Sometimes I would hide it from her, like, I was scared. So, she gave me these numbers, so I called here and they said they would keep a room for me. I told them what was happening, so they saved my room and I got to leave the next day. So, I'm here now… it was my first time, like, she probably thought, like, she never knew this was happening all along cause I was hiding it, I didn't want her to take my kids away, and stuff like that… (Winnipeg 11)

Almost all of the women (i.e., 12 out of 14) commented on their experiences with seeking assistance from informal supports. This assistance encompassed a variety of physical and emotional supports from family and friends, including advice on relationships and resources, childcare, and even temporary housing. However, as women left their communities to seek formal supports, they also moved away from these informal supports. Not all the women had the support of family or friends, and some women had family members who did not want to become involved in the situation. Four women commented on the difficulty they faced in accessing resources. Three of these

participants spoke to the challenges of accessing resources within their community, and the dynamics of a small community that could be a barrier to seeking assistance. For one woman, the absence of support from family and friends was a major barrier:

> Even if it's our marriage, I have to leave. The people were so, like, predominant about the church, leaving your husband and all that, and they frown on that. I went through all of that, too, right when I left him. I went through all that with the people. But for them, they thought they were helping me by saying, "Stay strong with your husband." (Thompson 3)

For another woman, the fear of retribution prevented her from seeking assistance:

> There is help. It's just I never charged him or anything because I didn't want to go through the process of going through court and everything, and his family coming after me. So, I just, I let myself go through all that torture for 3 years. (Winnipeg 14)

Women's experiences with seeking housing and other resources were often complicated by the rural or remote location of their home communities. Two women spoke about the feeling of being intimidated by the new community and the difficulties of coping with living in a new place. Women struggled with tasks such as obtaining a driver's license or finding a job — some had not developed the knowledge of what resources existed or how to access them. One woman described the different programs that were available to women in her community depending on their needs, but another spoke to the problem that few women are aware of the resources available to them. A third woman stated that the service providers seemed unaware of the difficulties encountered in accessing services:

> There's nothing over there for a woman to go seek help. Like, nobody offers safe places, nobody thinks like that out there, in these surrounding communities like mine. Where would you go? Like, who would you talk to? How come these people that have been sitting in these positions for a long time, like Building Healthy Communities and all those beautiful names of resources and programs, unfortunately they don't know how to direct what's out here if you're in an emergency situation like that. Because really, they don't have the first idea of where to ask, where you can go when you lose your home or when you need an actually safety place or a plan from your partner. They don't have that stuff. So, they wouldn't know where [to go]. Fortunately, some of us do know but the majority don't. (Thompson 3)

Women reported seeking support from other community-based programs, such as the nursing station, health care centre, or women's resource centres. Five participants reported child welfare involvement. Despite the fear of their children being apprehended, three of the women felt supported by their child welfare workers. One participant said that her support worker drove her to the shelter when she had no other means of transportation. One woman mentioned Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) as being a source of financial support. Another five women spoke of their experiences seeking help from law enforcement and the justice system. One woman shared that she was able to obtain a restraining order quickly, while another was turned down for a protection order because she was not perceived to be in immediate danger:

> I tried a protection order and we were turned down. I was rejected here, cause I'm here, I'm safe in the shelter and the abuser is in my reserve in school 9 to 4 kind of thing. They felt I wasn't really in danger then if he's busy and I'm here busy, too. (Thompson 1)

Eight women sought out assistance from their band. Though, for most of these women, this was

not a supportive process. One woman reported that her band wanted to hear "both sides of the story" before providing any assistance (Winnipeg 12). Band policies around eligibility for housing were brought up by three participants when discussing past experiences seeking housing. Two of them described band policies that restricted eligibility for housing to married couples, a policy that one saw as being rooted in the Christian religious beliefs held in the community:

> So, you have to get married to have your own home out there. cause they do not support like, just the staying relationship, staying living with each other, they won't accept that. Cause our, their religion out there is strong. (Winnipeg 12)

The second woman described this policy in terms of her own experience with an abusive partner:

> The only way you can get a house from there is only if you're married. So that's one of the big problems with it, and that's one of the reasons why too I left cause I don't want to get married, or get abused for a lifetime too. Like, what if that continued and we're married, what if that happens and he kills me? … So I don't want to get married just because to have a home of my own out there. And just live my life like that, I don't want that way. So, I just thought about, just packed my bags and just go too. (Winnipeg 02)

In addition to band housing policies, the band, or members of chief and council, were seen as a gatekeeper to housing and having a good relationship with the band was part of the process of obtaining band housing.

The need for resources in the women's home communities is apparent. Women described feeling as if no assistance was available until they were in crisis: "Like I said, there should be some kind of agency for women to leave their partner, to get them to a safer place. Instead of them getting, like, wait for them to get really beaten up, for the nursing station to send them out here" (Winnipeg 12). Having accessible resources in women's home communities would help to mitigate the challenging concerns women confront when moving from a rural to an urban setting:

> The difference of coming from a northern community to an urban setting could be more, what do you call that, being more dedicated in understanding that not all women understand what it's like to come here and have these expectations. (Thompson 3)

When it came to the assistance women received in a shelter, women described their experiences as helpful and supportive. Most women described either the supports they received in shelter or suggestions they got there for other services. Participants were asked whether they used other agencies or services (such as, their band, Manitoba Housing, landlords, child welfare, police, health care professionals, victim services, shelter counsellors, hotlines, or web pages). Their responses showed meager support from other service providers while they were in shelters in Thompson or Winnipeg. It was not clear, however, if the women had requested those supports or if they were not accessible to them.

Outside the shelter, Manitoba Housing seemed to be a key resource used. Six participants commented that they were waiting for a unit through Manitoba Housing and another two participants hoped that their current shelter status would move them up the waitlist. Sadly, housing waitlists were a key problem reported by the participants. Also, one participant reported that she was not able to apply for Manitoba Housing, having been banned from the public housing authority. She had been evicted from her previous suite after an incident where she was the victim of an assault in her home.

The need for resources does not only apply to shelters and formal resources, as the absence of housing in general contributes to women's challenges in seeking services. As one woman described, "I could say I wish they'd have shelter there, but even if they did have a go-to shelter,

what's next when there's no housing anyway" (Thompson 1). Clearly, having access to stable housing is a preventative and proactive way to ensure that women feel safe, and it can facilitate leaving an abusive relationship rather than being something provided after leaving that relationship (Ponic et al., 2011).

Present Situation

Reasons for coming to women's shelters

The primary reason women reported for entering a women's shelter was abuse by their partner. Twelve of the participants spoke of intimate partner violence as a contributing factor in entering the shelter, and this included needing safety from their partner's physical and emotional abuse, and feelings of stress due to fighting. One participant shared her experience of being isolated by her partner:

> And all I did was when I first moved there, all I did was stay in the room. He never let me out of the room because he was controlling. And his brother stayed there too, he thought I would try [to] bother his brother. He was that kind of type, the type of person that's jealous. (Thompson 5)

Another woman spoke of how harassment had led to her decision to be in the Winnipeg shelter:

> I ended up going into a women's shelter in [her community], and then I got transferred down [to Winnipeg] because he started getting the number to my cell phone and I had to change my number how many times. And then it started going through Facebook, he started contacting me so I had to block him. And then he started getting people to leave messages, so I had to deactivate my Facebook. And then I had to change my number numerous times. And then I just left. Phoned here, and I grabbed my kids and I left. I came out here and I never went back yet. And I don't want to go back, because, I don't know, that part of my life is gone. I just want to have a positive, healthy lifestyle with my kids. (Winnipeg 14)

When asked whether she had been to the Thompson Crisis Centre before, one woman responded: "Yeah, I came here before … About two years ago…" (Thompson 4). When asked if housing issues, lack of affordable housing, prevented her from leaving the relationship in the past, she responded:

> Cause I couldn't find a place here [Thompson], and I never thought of Winnipeg back then. Couldn't find a place here so I had no choice, and the kids wanted to go home. So, felt pushed to go home. (Thompson 4)

When asked about the main reason for coming to the shelter this time, she responded:

> For safety. For myself, you know. You need peace. Those arguments at the house with me and him, he's always, always mad. I'm hardly at home, back at [my community]. I'm at a friend's house from morning until evening. Cause of my husband, is always mad, and I don't need that. I got fed up. Just one morning I thought to myself, "I don't have to go through this." (Thomson 4)

At the time of the interview, the woman had been at the shelter for one week. Her plan was to arrange to move to Winnipeg.

For another participant, her current reason for being back in Thompson at the shelter was, "I wanted to get away from [her community], away from my sister. And my baby's dad but he's been following me everywhere I move. But he doesn't know I'm here cause he's in jail now" (Thompson 6).

Family conflict was also a factor for one participant, whose grandmother's alcohol use was a source of stress and made her housing unstable. Two women were concerned about their children witnessing abuse. One participant described the impact of instability as well as the abuse on her daughter:

> I'd just had enough of moving back and forth, trying to exist, coexist. Cause I can't really raise

> my daughter in that situation, where she's being accused of being bad when she's just being 2, or where she's being told that, where she's being abused because she's not acting the way they want her to act. So I just got sick of it and came to the shelter. (Winnipeg 13)

Another woman spoke of the connection between her children and her decision to leave:

> I don't know, I didn't know what I was doing, I just picked up and left, kind of thing. And I ended up going back. Ended up going back and then the same thing just started happening over and over and then, I just had enough of it. Looked at my kids and realized that they were more important. (Winnipeg 14)

Getting into shelter was not necessarily a guarantee of safety. Two participants described the steps they took to get into a shelter farther from their home community. As one woman described, "it's only a three-hour drive from [community name] to Thompson. I'm pretty sure he would just go over there. I wanted to make sure that I was far enough away, to stay away" (Winnipeg 14).

During the interviews, participants described feeling alone and not knowing what they should do next. Two women stated that they felt like burdens to parents and friends if they asked them for a place to live and that they were not supported by formal supports, notably chief and council, law enforcement, and the child welfare system. The women felt conflicted about their options and expressed feelings of having "nowhere else to go." One participant described her dilemma of wanting to stay, but also wanting to leave:

> Well, I've felt like that in my own reserve. Felt lost, didn't know what to do. That was one of the reasons I had left before, and I thought I could find what I was looking for in Winnipeg. I had tried living out there, ended up feeling the same out there and went back to [name of community]. And that was just kind of a back and forth thing. But then now I got to actually focus on my kids and I can't keep putting them through that. I want them to have a stable life and home, and I don't want to keep running around with them. (Thompson 8)

Housing

The maximum period of time women could spend in a shelter (i.e., 30 days) and the absence of available housing combined to create a major barrier to some women moving on and out of the shelter. Though one woman had been able to secure private rental housing during her stay in the shelter, four participants directly stated that the 30-day time limit imposed by the shelter protocol did not provide enough time to find a place to live. One woman commented that it was not enough time to both heal from the experience of violence and abuse and find a home. Others felt it was not enough time to take advantage of the support received from both staff and other residents of the shelter.

Though the 30-day stay limit has its challenges, the supportive environment enabled the women to begin thinking about their next steps, such as moving to another shelter, moving into a hotel, or moving in with family. The shelter was a place of safety where women could have their needs met while formulating those plans: "Yeah, I am kind of excited. It's been 30 days. I like it here, just cause we have a bed to go to and the roof over our head, there's food upstairs" (Winnipeg 12). In many of the women's circumstances, transitional housing, or second stage housing, could provide a more long-term option for them (Fotheringham, Walsh & Burrowes, 2014; Hoffart, 2015).

Means of transportation

The women's descriptions of their journeys to the shelter demonstrate that geographic location is a barrier to accessing domestic violence services (Kelly & Idehen, 2005; Peek-Asa, 2011; Wuerch et al., 2016). The cost and availability of transportation are of particular concern for

women residing in remote, fly-in communities. Three participants had paid for their own airfare, and others received assistance with the cost from a social services program or the shelter. One woman saved funds to cover the cost of airfare by hiding money from her abusive partner. She described the complex planning involved in this decision, including the hope that she would have the opportunity to take advantage of reduced flight costs that are available to those travelling to attend a funeral.

> So, I hid at my mom's place. But then, that's how much all total it cost just for one plane ticket, $400. And then I was like thinking, thinking like, "Should I leave? Should I just leave my kids?" And then I had to say goodbye to them. And then I thought something, it's so mean, I was like wishing somebody would die already cause plane seats are cheaper… (Winnipeg 12)

Two women were flown out of their community by other agencies, one by the RCMP for safety reasons and another by the nursing station to receive medical services. Three participants relied on friends and family to drive them out of their communities, although one woman talked about the absence of free rides, and that friends and family often expected to be compensated.

Accessibility and method of transportation clearly were barriers for women to find a safe place to escape from violence. The women who participated in this research were from 10 Northern Manitoba communities. Each of them has different challenges regarding accessibility to urban centres such as Thompson or Winnipeg as it varies from place to place. Some communities are only accessible by air. That was the case for three of the four women interviewed in Winnipeg. The other woman got access to the shelter by driving. Most of the women who were at the Thompson Crisis Centre were able to drive from their communities; however, two of them had to fly as this was the only transportation medium from their communities.

Outcomes of the decision to leave

Three participants described mixed feelings about leaving their partners and their communities. One woman stated that life without the control of her partner was confusing; another spoke of feeling lonely, but also that she felt "light" having left everything back home (Winnipeg 11). As a third participant noted, "I would say it was the best decision I made. It was hard, but I did it" (Thompson 1). Three other women described similar feelings of relief, as their partners no longer controlled them. Two women continued to be fearful of their partners even after entering the shelter. One woman stated that she avoids her ex-partner's family:

> … we're actually waiting on a transfer again. 'Cause I have family in Winnipeg and I don't have people out here but my ex does. He has a lot of family out here so I just try to stay in and avoid them. (Thompson 8)

Women spoke of the different ways their children were impacted by their decision to enter the shelter. One described the new challenges of parenting that she experienced being away from her partner:

> When I first came here, I came with my eight-month-old and my two-year-old and it was extremely difficult. Like, there was a sense of hopelessness and, like, there's a sense of doom everywhere. Because I was not used to being by myself with my two daughters. And in the shelter, you're supposed to stay in for 48 hours. And that, that was a learning. Those 48 hours were a learning experience for the three of us. So, and then when I found out we could get along, it got better. (Winnipeg 13)

Seven women spoke about their children's adjustment and the importance of having a stable living situation. At times, the shelter environment was stressful in a different way:

> My daughter, she was, with the family violence that caused us to come here was because she

> was being, she was having things thrown at her, she was being constantly yelled at. And when we came here, there was still that, there was other parents yelling at their kids … (Winnipeg 13)

Another participant was concerned over her child's confusion about "home," which made her feel the need for stable housing was even more pressing:

> Well my boy he noticed that, he was getting confused. Like, "Where's home?", he asked me. And that broke my heart. Like, I didn't know what to say to him. But now he's happy that we're here cause I told him we're going to try and get a place, our own place, either here, The Pas, or in Winnipeg. Cause I need a place, like, as soon as possible because he's going to be starting school in September. (Thompson 6)

Three women described the positive impacts the moved held for their children: they were happy in school, coping with the trauma they had experienced, and benefiting from the safe environment.

Future Dreams

Concerns

Four participants, all women in a shelter in Winnipeg, described safety after leaving the shelter as a primary concern: "Because I know it's not going to have a great lock up system like this [the security system in the shelter]. And that's something I'm going to have to get used to" (Winnipeg 14). This was a particularly prevalent concern for women who planned to reside in Winnipeg upon leaving the shelter. Coming from a rural community, the idea of living in a city the size of Winnipeg was a concern for one woman: "Yeah, I kind of worry, like, always have thoughts, like what if I lose my kids, like what if they just disappear? Just like that" (Winnipeg 11). Fear of racism was also a very present concern for women staying in Winnipeg, not just concerning safety but also regarding the environment in which their children were going to grow up. Participants described a different sort of violence and risks that they faced in an urban centre. For example, the concern that, "there's more risks to being in the city than there is in the reservation. And they don't teach you that in the reserve" (Winnipeg 13). Two women directly referenced the concern of Indigenous women going missing, as describe by this one woman:

> And, I don't know, there's kind of like a lot of racism going on too lately, like I've been hearing, with us First Nations. And that's like I'm kind of worried about my little guy to witness, as like a four-year-old, that he doesn't need to witness that. And especially one of the, especially for the Indigenous ladies that have been going missing too. That's one of the big worries, too. (Winnipeg 12)

Hopes

Having housing, or "a roof over my head" (Thompson 4), was central to the "future dreams" of 10 participants. Four women spoke about waiting for housing. One of these women commented: "I heard it's faster to get a place in Winnipeg, that's why I'm transferring there. Cause I guess here they wait like a year, or what not, to get a house" (Thompson 4). Others had more specific hopes for their accommodations. One woman shared: "I'm hoping I'll get a house, like a house out here, not like a townhouse but a house. So, my kids could have a nice place to live in" (Thompson 2). Another woman (Winnipeg 12) had hopes for a particular area of Winnipeg that she hoped to live in, wanting to avoid the downtown or "common areas" where she felt people were more likely to show up unexpected.

Housing stability was central to the women's future dreams, and aided in furthering their hopes for education, independence, self-sufficiency and, in one case, for addressing legal issues. Four participants described "settling," "staying," or having a "stable" home. Finding stability and building a future was a function of building independence:

> I didn't finish school. I've never worked. I've always been isolated, away from everybody, couldn't really do anything. I just stayed home and looked after my kids. And that's not the kind of future I want for my kids. I want to be able to get off welfare and get a job and work for them. I want to teach them about being independent and not having to rely on anybody and working hard, for a living. So I want to try and get back into school. (Thompson 8)

Another participant described the feelings of nervousness that accompanied managing on her own: "I'm kind of nervous. Tomorrow is my last day here. And I'm nervous to do things on my own, like pay rent, pay bills. Like, I never done that, so I'm just nervous about it" (Winnipeg 12). Safety was another critical aspect of the women's hopes. Four women described the safe environment they hoped to have for themselves and their children, away from their abusive partner.

Seven of the women talked about their roles as mothers and the hopes they had for their parenting. The safe and stable environment they hoped for was tied to their hopes for parenting, and two women described how being away from her partner would affect their parenting. For example:

> I want somewhere where my kids will be safe and I want somewhere that I can attend my kids to things, you know. Maybe go do stuff with them, like, be a mother. I don't want to be scared all the time. I'm even scared to go out, to take my kids outside. That's how brutal he was to me. And he would take my kids out, so that's what I want. I want my own place, and to do stuff with my kids now that I left. (Thompson 5).

Four participants talked about the various ways their life decisions would affect their educational goals and those they hold for their children, and the better life they would have because of it. As one woman explained:

> The townhouse is just a first step. But then after my kids are a little bit older, 'til they could go to daycare or to school, that's where I want to start my goals. I really want to finish my grade 12 diploma, and go to UCN [University College of the North] and finish university too. That's what I really, really want to do for my kids, so that they could look up to me. Like, they could do the same, like what I did. Especially my daughter, since she's growing up older. I really want to set a good example for them. Like, school, that's the key to the future. To better yourself … to be a better person so you won't have to worry about stuff like, you know, like, bills and all that. You can do that when you have an education, get a good job. That's what I really want to do. (Thompson 2)

Returning to home community

None of the women interviewed had real hopes of returning to their home community. For seven participants, the lack of housing was a determining factor in their plans not to return to their home community. According to one woman, "If I had a place in my community I'd stay at that other place, but there's no houses over there "(Thompson 4). As another woman expressed, any decision included a complex weighing of options regarding the availability of housing:

> Well, I wish I could get a house at home, back home. That would be easier, you know, no rent, you know. I'd be home, I'd be safe. But I also don't mind Thompson. It's three hours from home. Still safe, still somewhat close to home. And Winnipeg, I don't want to go back that way. Of course, if I had no other choices [I] probably would transfer there. I'd hate to, but you know, no choice. (Thompson 1).

Though many women expressed that they missed their community, the fact that their partner/former partner still resided in the community meant that they would not feel safe going back:

> I'll always miss my hometown and all, but that's where practically my ex-boyfriend stays so I

> should say that it's not safe right now, especially for my kids… I thought about going back, giving up, like, leave this place where I'm staying. But I think back at the times that when my ex-boyfriend used to do violence, especially in front of my kids. So, I should say that back home, it's not safe to go back. But I'll always miss it and love my hometown, and my family in it. (Thompson 2)

Even the stability of having their own housing was not sufficient to guarantee safety. One woman spoke of the dynamics of a small community as another factor in her feeling unsafe about returning home: "Yeah, I'd still need that [a protection order]. You know, up there the dynamics of everything is just so crazy. You have one family stronger than the other and it's just crazy" (Winnipeg 13).

Six of the women stated that they had no interest in returning home. Overcrowded or absence of housing in their home communities, the lack of resources, and just not liking it in the community were all reasons to not return to the home community. The desire to look to the future, and to 'move on,' was the motivation for one woman in particular. "No, I didn't really [want to go back]. I just really knew I had to start new, start fresh. Like, I don't, I don't feel any need to go back. The only thing I'm missing is just my other son." (Winnipeg 14).

The Women's Journeys

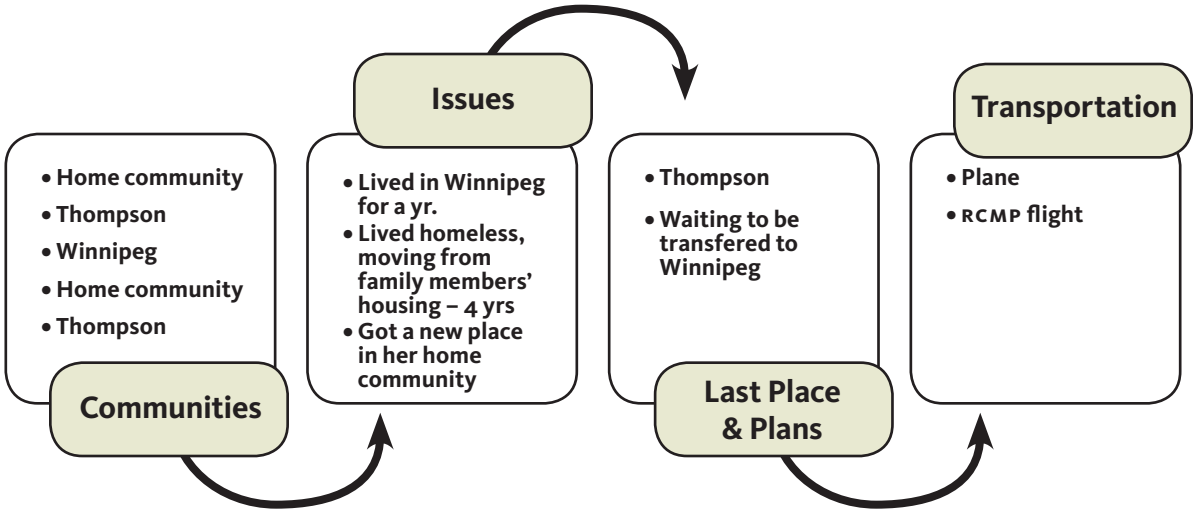
The stories of the journeys taken by the women interviewed are varied and intertwined with their meaning of home, accessibility of supports, services and resources as well as housing policies in the First Nations reserves and northern communities. Some of the women's stories involved multiple moves within their home community before entering the shelter, often involving shifting moves back and forth between family members' homes. Other stories included moves to other northern communities before entering the shelter, often the result of moving to their partner's community and, in most cases, into the home of their partner's parents. There were also stories that involved previous moves to shelters, both in the north and in Winnipeg, before returning home and eventually returning to shelter. For example, Figure 3 shows the journey of a 29-year-old woman with four children. She remembered having five moves since living with her first partner. There might be further moves as at the time of the interview she was waiting to be transferred to Winnipeg.

From the stories the women shared, we found that housing instability started early on in their lives and, therefore, also in their children's lives. Diverse factors such as the lack of access to independent housing when adults and extended family dynamics are intertwined with this finding. Most of the time, the women and their children had to live with other family members and/or at the parents of their partners. Such circumstances often caused or intensified tensions between the couple as well as with other members of their families. Along with overcrowding, this is a common theme found in northern communities (Belanger et al. 2012; TEDWIG, 2012) and may lead to a continuation of the cycle of violence, not only for the women but also their children.

The women's stories also pointed to a common theme regarding the lack of formal supports within the community, which meant that they often had to rely on whatever informal supports may have been available to them. Their experiences confirm the need to increase formal on-reserve and co-ordinated supports to reduce the vulnerability for women and children exposed to domestic violence in northern Manitoba (Bonnycastle et al., 2015).

It is likely that housing instability and displacement, along with the violence, caused multiple issues in other areas, including increasing the difficulty for the women to find jobs, gain education, make future plans and become empowered

FIGURE 3 One Woman's Journey



to re-establish their lives (their independence). In similar ways, instability and displacement may also impact their children's development in relation to family stability, education and cultural identity. Despite concerns for their safety, such circumstances may lead women to return home because their children are missing their extended family, communities, culture and own environment.

On the other hand, leaving their home communities does not necessarily resolve the housing instability issue, as associated problems such as the lack of affordable housing are clearly found in the regional centres (Thompson and Winnipeg). For example, Manitoba Housing is often not available due to long waiting lists. Another issue is the limited time allowed to stay at the shelter. This time restraint can restrict the acquisition of services and the development of life skills for navigating the formal systems in order to access housing, education, employment and transportation; it can also increase women's vulnerability to future violent experiences.

All of the women shared their hopes for themselves and their children, and housing stability was central to these future dreams. But unintended mobility issues and lack of stable housing often had negative effects, both emotionally and mentally. One result was feelings of diminished possibilities in regard achieving their purposes and making life plans. On a positive note, the move to a shelter often brought with it a new sense of optimism. Some women, for instance, spoke of their hopes to pursue educational or paid employment opportunities that were not available in their home communities. Whether this optimism continued after they left the shelter is unknown.

In addition to identifying the women's challenges, we also reviewed and analyzed some policies that need to be studied or implemented in northern Manitoba communities. The following analysis focuses on four major areas that emerged during both the literature review and the interviews with the women, especially as they relate to policy and life in Northern Manitoba. It begins with what is likely the most important aspect — on reserve housing.

On Reserve Housing

Since the 1990s, growing public attention has been devoted to the critical state of housing on

First Nations in Canada (Belanger, 2016). Housing issues range from overcrowding and the growing need for more housing to safety associated with lack of infrastructure and the state of repair of existing dwellings (Hart, 2015). Monette et al. sum up the current situation this way: "Aboriginal peoples, who share a common legacy of oppression and resilience, experience some of the worst housing conditions in Canada and have an exceedingly difficult time locating affordable housing" (2009, cited in Patrick, 2014, p. 15).

The 2011 National Household Survey found that 43% of First Nations people were much more likely to live in dwellings that were in need of significant repair as compared with 7% of the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2015). Added to these calculations are the effects of a growing Indigenous population across Canada. As the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC, 2012) has noted, "Given that the First Nation population is much younger than the general Canadian population and the growth rate is double that of the Canadian rates (INAC & CMHC, 2010), the demand for suitable, affordable, and adequate housing will only increase" (p. 51).

Issues of health and poverty can be added to inadequate housing in Northern Manitoba. Canada's new poverty reduction strategy states that, "Individuals living in northern and remote communities can also experience distinct challenges that make them more at risk of living in poverty, such as increased costs of food, barriers to accessing health care and unmet housing need" (Federal Government, 2018). In addition, internal federal government documents obtained by the Canadian Broadcasting Company in 2016 state that, "Manitoba First Nations residents live in some of the most dilapidated homes in the country and it will cost $2 billion to eliminate mold and chronic overcrowding in the province alone"(CBC, 2016). Further, Campaign 2000 recently found that at 64.2% the Churchill-Kewatinook Aski riding in Northern Manitoba had the highest child poverty rate of all the 338 federal ridings in Canada (Khanna & Meisner, 2018, p. 5). Using social determinants of health, there is also a growing awareness of the link between a home and a good and healthy life, and strong and sustainable communities.

> Adequate, reliable, secure housing is a foundational building block to physical and mental health, economic security, positive relationships with oneself and others, and the realization of one's local and national citizenship. The persistence of chronic housing needs in northern communities continues to degrade all of these components of a healthy life. (Christensen, Davidson & Levac, 2012, n.p.)

Thistle (2017) succinctly argues that, "the key to understanding a healthy community, Indigenous or not, is appreciating that cultivation of the human spirit is grounded in emplaced networks of significance" (p.7). Concerning this study, it is strongly believed that this cultivation of cultural relationships involves the production of a healthy "sense of place," one that includes secure and safe housing on-reserve as both a right and a choice.

Housing is a definite issue in the daily lives of the women that we interviewed. Each spoke of the lack of housing available to them before entering the shelter. Many had been living in overcrowded homes with other family members. Some were living in the family home of their abusive partner. They also voiced their doubts about the possibility of finding safe and affordable housing if they try to move back home to their communities. Many felt that their only option at this time was to obtain housing in the community the shelter was located. This could be called the "in-migration option."

The belief regarding in-migration often emanates from the historical relation in which the proximity of regional municipalities and cities acts as an access point to services and opportunities for people in need from Northern First Nations. Underlying this historical relationship has been the failed notions of assimilation em-

bedded in federal policies and programs that encouraged First Nations people to "abandon their reserves for the cities in an effort to improve their lives through the resulting heightened access to education and employment" (Belanger, 2016, p. 466).

Though health, educational and social services are often located in urban centres in the North, their municipal governments are not always prepared to serve in-migration from First Nations. Besides demographic shifts that see more Indigenous people moving to urban areas, the lack of clarity over which of the levels of government should have jurisdiction over and responsibility for Indigenous people often makes it hard to plan and deliver services (Anderson & Strachan, 2011). Added to this, municipal policy responses often do not incorporate culturally appropriate services, leading to the criticism that they are trying to fit the Indigenous community into their own generic model of service delivery (Abele et al., 2011). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission addresses these issues in a number of their principles of reconciliation and calls to action (NCTC, 2017).

Dislocation from one's home community often leads to further dilemmas. Some of the women spoke of the challenges and barriers associated with "circular mobility," the constant movements back and forth from their home communities into urban centres to get help (Bonnycastle, Simpkins & Bonnycastle, 2016). Other women spoke of how moving away from home can result in feelings of isolation, social marginalization and detachment from culture and land. When asked at the start of the interview to speak to the "meaning of home," the women's insights are telling. Many spoke of the critical links between home, family, land, culture and well-being. These qualities may be at risk by raising their children in a new community, one that may lack the Indigenous worldview regarding the importance of families and community in raising children (Baskin et al., 2012). We also know of the strong link that is often found between abused women and homelessness (Maki, 2017; Tutty et al., 2014; Sev'er, 2002).

In response to years of chronic neglect regarding on-reserve housing issues (Belanger, 2016) and public housing in general (Silver, 2014), the Federal government recently announced dedicated new funding to support First Nation housing on-reserve as part of a National Housing Strategy that is being developed with First Nations. This funding is part of a roughly $40-billion plan to help fund the construction of more social housing, repair old units and deliver up to $2,500 a year in rent support for vulnerable families (Canada, 2017). In 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recognized housing as a human right by stating, "Housing rights are human rights, and everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to call home … one person on the streets in Canada is too many" (Tasker, 2017). This announcement fits with the United Nations' work in the area of the human rights to housing. For example, according to the United Nations, homelessness is a global human rights crisis that demands an urgent global response; it occurs when housing is treated as a commodity rather than as a human right (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Also, section 68 of the 2005 UN Special Rapporteur on Housing states:

> The widespread discrimination that women face in all aspects of housing, land and property matters, including homelessness in the context of domestic violence, calls for the specific recognition of women's right to adequate housing and their rights to security of home and person. Gender-sensitive housing policies and legislation also need to take into account that some groups of women are even more vulnerable to homelessness and other housing rights violations — victims of domestic violence, widows, women-headed households, women victims of forced evictions and indigenous women. (Kothari, 2005, p.19)

Time will tell as to whether this housing strategy will alleviate the housing crisis on Northern First Nations and bring us closer to the goal of achieving the human right to an adequate and secure home and community in which to live in peace and dignity.

Matrimonial Real Property Rights

Another policy area that relates to this study is found in recent changes to federal law. The *Matrimonial Real Property Act* (MRPA) and *Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act* (FHRMIRA) came into effect in 2013 and 2014. They replaced archaic parts of the *Indian Act* that inferred that husbands could only own property in First Nations. Under these pieces of legislation, each First Nation can create its own Matrimonial Real Property Law. However, until they do, the two acts apply. As of September, 2016, however, no First Nations in Manitoba had set up their own community-specific MRP law (Indigenous & Northern Affairs Canada, 2016).

From its beginning, the MRPA has had its critics. For example, the Ontario Women's Justice Network stated:

> There are major concerns that the new law does not offer the comprehensive solutions or supports needed to address the complexities of family disputes and issues that contribute to family violence. While the new law may offer women on reserves some legal protection, resources are not provided to First Nations' communities for policing, shelters, increased family supports, training or capacity building needed to implement the laws effectively. Non-legislative action like funding for legal aid and access to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms are also missing. (OWJN, 2014)

Given these limits, it is understandable that when asked whether they had heard of the MRPA, all the women interviewed stated that they did not know how the Act was intended to support them.

Further research and action is needed regarding how the MRPA is being implemented across Canada and how it could be further expanded in ways that provide similar services and protections for those living off-reserve. Domestic violence services in the form of shelters and support services on-reserve may be one clear way forward. In addition, making information readily available to Indigenous women and service providers on how to address violence would be beneficial. One example is the manual produced by the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence:

> This manual is designed to help Indigenous women address key aspects of violence … and provide information on relevant legal protections, such as reserve matrimonial real property; family law; non-discrimination and provincial, territorial and federal human rights; employment rights; navigating the child welfare system; navigating the income assistance system; and housing rights. (NACAFV, 2017, p. 13)

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC, 2015) and the Manitoba First Nations Board for Family Violence Prevention (http://www.circlingbuffalo.ca/) have also been working to provide information on the Act.

Getting to the Shelter — Transportation Costs

The women interviewed shared the various ways that they used to get to the shelters. As shown in Figure 1, distance is a significant factor in accessing shelter services. The Provincial Government does have a policy regarding paying for the transportation costs through Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), but this process has to go through the shelter itself. In other words, the potential client must contact the shelter and have them arrange available transportation. The shelter then submits the claim for reimbursement through EIA. This can sometimes take time.

In recent years, with the shutting down of public transportation services such as bus and train services, possible transportation modes to shelters have been reduced in Northern Manitoba. For example, because of reduction in bus services, one shelter staff talked about having to arrange a taxi to drive to an isolated community, pick up the client and her children, and then return to Thompson to the shelter. The cost for the taxi was $400. Added to the loss of bus service in Northern Manitoba women may have also been effected by the closing of the Hudson Bay Railroad services for 18 months starting in May 2017. Many communities are only accessible by air, which brings high costs to this form of public transportation.

There can be many delays in travelling from remote communities, often based on weather, road conditions and flight schedules. All add to the complexity of finding a safe place for the women and their children in the communities while waiting for transportation services. Local resources such as the Nursing Station or the RCMP have helped clients with this and in making the original contact with the shelter. That said, there is a strong argument for more specific domestic violence resources to be made available in the northern communities and First Nations, in particular, that women in need have access to information and supports in arranging emergency shelter and, if required, safe and affordable travel to the women's shelter in their region.

Second Stage/Transitional Housing

At the time of the interviews for this project, Manitoba had a relatively strict policy in which shelter clients had up to 30 days at the shelter. This policy has recently been loosened to a certain extent, though nothing has been formally written in policy as of yet (C. Smook, personal communication, Jan 3, 2018). In the north, this is seen as an essential and long overdue step. For women leaving the shelter, particularly those with children, waiting lists for housing have long been an issue in regional centres in Northern Manitoba. For example, in 2017 Thompson had a private apartment vacancy rate of 1.6%, the third lowest in the province. It also had the second highest rent rate in the province (CMHC, 2017). To reflect further on this need, a review of statistics from the Thompson Crisis Centre (WISH) for the fiscal year 2017–18 shows the following:

- 101 clients who entered the shelter came from 26 Manitoba communities, 25 of which were located in Northern Manitoba.
- During this period, 4,663 bed nights were registered. Of this number, 1,587 bed nights were for adult clients, and 3,076 were for their children.

Added to this issue is the growing gap between real income and housing prices (Silver, 2014). This crisis has been going on for a long time. Almost a decade ago McKinnon and Lafreniere (2009) found that, "In a community with an increasing number of high-income transient workers and a 0% rental vacancy rate, there is considerable incentive for landlords to do whatever necessary to increase rents" (p.1). Subsidized housing is even scarcer. Of the 832 Manitoba Housing units available across the Thompson Region, only 65 (8%) are located in Thompson. Keewatin Housing Authority has an additional 144 units available to Keewatin Tribal Council members living in Thompson (TEDWG, 2012). There is minimal turnover in the current subsidized housing market in Thompson. As one participant in our study expressed, she had been to the Thompson shelter two years previously. At that time, she had put her name on the local list for Manitoba Housing. On her return to the shelter, she discovered that she was still on the waitlist. Similar problems to those in Thompson are found across the country.

> Affordable housing options, such as subsidized and social housing or second-stage housing for women leaving abuse, can be difficult to find. 30% of shelters reported that they have no

> social housing program in their region. This lack is less pronounced in major cities and more pronounced in rural areas, reserves and remote areas (78%). (CNWSTH, 2016).

A common result is that some women decide to return to an abusive partner rather than face the impossible task of finding an affordable place, while others couch-surf from friends to relatives (Scott, 2008).

Until recently, a Manitoba Housing priority housing policy was in place to help speed up the housing process for women coming out of shelter. One stated reason for altering this policy was the concern that women may be entering shelters as a shortcut to getting Manitoba Housing (MHA personal communication, 2018). A point system is now in place, whereby a number of special housing circumstances are taken into consideration. Such circumstances can include homelessness, regaining custody of children, disability, as well as domestic violence. One criticism is that this point system gives minimal emphasis (points) for women coming out of shelters. Therefore, it may be reinforcing long waiting lists for women leaving shelters, a trend seen throughout Canada. "Of the shelters Canada-wide who do have access to housing programs, 96% reported a waiting period of over one month, 68% reported a waiting period of over three months, and 36% reported a waiting period of over six months" (CNWSTH, 2016). Again, the federal National Housing Strategy may help with this issue, though history would point out that previous social housing policies have disproportionately been focused on large urban settings across Canada (Suttor, 2016). In 2018, the Provincial Government announced it has signed on to the Federal National Housing Strategy. It will be interesting to see how much of the strategy's funds will be spent in Northern Manitoba over the next number of years. Winnipeg will likely reap the vast majority of the funds to repair and refurbish social housing there. That said, there is also a definite need in the North for increased investment in social, rent-geared-to-income housing to ensure housing security for the lowest-income households who live there.

A critical area that has been discussed in Northern Manitoba for many years is the need for secondary and transitional housing. Fotheringham et al. (2014) back this discussion by illustrating that a move directly from homelessness to permanent housing may not be effective for all homeless women and that transitional housing, especially for violence survivors, remains part of the solution. Regarding Indigenous women, one reason for this is that, "education and employment conditions in many rural Aboriginal communities continue to create disadvantages for migrants to cities" (Peters, 2011, p. 8). We heard this issue in the narratives of the women we interviewed. The need for services and supports to go along with safe and affordable housing was also found in their stories. Many of the women reported having limited formal education, minimal work experience and little if any experience in living on their own.

Transitional and supported housing programs set up in the North could help with such needs, providing both real programming and social supports to women and their children (Hoffart, 2015). Making these programs family-focused and culturally appropriate for Indigenous families would also create a more inclusive environment (Waegemakers Schiff, 2007; Wendt & Baker, 2013). Along with such programs, there is a need to develop housing networks and systemic planning in the communities to tackle the policy areas being touched on here (Doberstein, 2016), including child welfare, criminal justice, health and education systems, employment and, of course, affordable housing.

Some agencies are providing transitional housing in Thompson (I.e., YWCA, Thompson Crisis Centre). Work is also being done by an inter-agency group to open a second-stage housing project in Thompson in order to fill

the gap between transitional housing and independent living. Applicants can come from any of the transition programs. Once this second-stage housing project is up and operating, the plan is to have assistance provided by the referring agency. This proposal is good news for women leaving the transitional program at the TCC; however, there are some limits. The interagency group is currently looking at an eight-apartment facility.

Final Thoughts

This is the first study to explore affordable housing and the needs of women and their children escaping violent relations in Northern Manitoba. The purpose of this research project was to examine how the current lack of affordable housing and the absence of a co-ordinated service response affect women and their children as they escape violent relationships in Northern Manitoba. Through our research, we explored both the geographic moves women make as they seek safety and shelter for themselves and their children and their reasons for making these transitions. The current body of literature demonstrates that women who experience violence encounter significant barriers to accessing safe and appropriate housing, especially for women living in northern communities. Through this project, we sought to understand the many moves and challenges women meet when leaving violent relationships in Northern Manitoba.

The stories of the 14 women interviewed show that housing instability has been a fundamental part of their lives, often starting at an early age. This finding fits with the critical state of affordable and safe housing on and off reserve in Northern Manitoba (Belanger, 2016; Hart, 2015; TEDWG, 2012). That instability only increased once they entered into a relationship. Issues of health, poverty, overcrowding and inadequate housing in the north clearly need to be addressed.

The research also found that that there is the need for a co-ordinated service response to violence against women and children. Often, in the women's stories, support came informally from family and friends. Formal supports often seemed lacking or came only when they got to shelter. Such a co-ordinated response needs to begin in the northern communities themselves, with links to regional services and supports when appropriate. This response may help to reduce the current "circular mobility" issue (Bonnycastle, Simpkins & Bonnycastle, 2016), with women moving back and forth between their home communities and urban centres to get help. Included in this co-ordinated service response is the need for further development of the MRPA and FHRMIRA at the community level. Such development requires federal financial support to be successful.

Finally, for those women who enter shelters, two issues came forth. The first is the growing lack of public transportation in the north. This pattern will severely hinder women and their children accessing crisis centres in the future. Second, there needs to be a stronger link with

the transition into affordable housing upon their exit from shelter. This issue points to a growing need for second stage and transitional housing in Northern Manitoba.

One limitation of this study is that we do not know what happened to the women we interviewed once they left the shelter. Were they successful in finding safe and affordable housing for themselves and their children? Was it in their home community or a regional centre? Was their only option to return to the situation they originally left due to violence? Clearly, further research in this area is required.

To conclude, the following is a set of recommendations that the research brought forward. We begin with what is likely the most important aspect:

- Following the Federal Government's recognition that housing is a human right, the assurance that the need for adequate, reliable and secure housing on First Nations will be met.
- In relation to the MRPA and FHRMIRA, a comprehensive increase in formal on-reserve and coordinated supports to reduce the vulnerability for women and children exposed to violence.
- Reflecting on the above, information and support be made available on reserve in arranging emergency shelter and, if needed, safe and affordable travel to the women shelter in their region.
- Increased investment in social, rent-geared-to-income housing in the North.
- Increased investment in transitional and supportive housing in the North.

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