Violence and Its Effects on Economies of Aboriginal People in Canada

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**Introduction:**

Canada is a country that is ranked higher in the human development index by the United Nations. The results are not synchronous to ground reality as the aboriginal communities constituting almost 3 to 4% of the total Canadian population ranks much lower. These lower ranks in the human development index are tied to the violence in aboriginal communities. Women in aboriginal families are subject to domestic and sexual violence. While analyzing the effects of family violence and abuse on the economic wellbeing of aboriginal people, historical development must be considered as well (Samuel, Alkire, Zavaleta, Mills, & Hammock, 2018). Historical events such as misappropriation of the land of aboriginal communities and their forcible removal from dense community areas have turned the situation into a trauma. There have been various acts introduced to improve the situation but the results are not satisfactory. The First Nation’s act notoriously caused the deterioration of family fabric and social fabric in aboriginal families giving rise to domestic violence.

In recent years, the violence present in the lives of aboriginal people has observed an increase in attention especially due to the work being done by the Native Women’s Association. Violence in the lives of aboriginal people is the most important issue affecting their economic and social welfare structure as per the Royal Commission of aboriginal people. Aboriginal communities living in urban centers all across the country are still experiencing an increased level of violence despite two decades of programs, initiatives, and advocacy. The reason behind inefficacy of all of such initiatives and programs can be explained by vast disparities that exist between aboriginal people and rest of the population in terms of health status, educational attainment, loss of culture, systematic racism, and unequal access to resources and power (Greenwood, De Leeuw, & Lindsay, 2018). A closer look into the historical and contemporary diversity in economic activities of aboriginal people reveal that the situation has existed and still continue to exist in the context of colonization and economic marginalization. The essay describes the effects of violence on economic condition of aboriginal people in light of historical events that are necessary to understand to developing policy and programs appropriate for aboriginal communities in Canada.

**Discussion:**

Almost half of the aboriginal population in Canada is under the age of thirty-five years with women constituting 43% of the total aboriginal population. Review of literature specifically about aboriginal communities make varying claims of violence but there is a consensus of researchers that women are victimized by the violence more than their male counterparts in such communities. Statistics reveal that aboriginal people are more threated by violence in their communities as compared to the majority of non-aboriginal people as compared to spousal violence (Hart, 2016). Hence, violence in aboriginal communities is not entirely domestic, there are other factors as well that contribute to the higher level of violence. In historical perspective, the aboriginal economies were organized around activities like fishing, gathering, and hunting. Such economic activities often depend on geographical factors and seasonal variation of major food sources. These economic activities and their influencing factors contributed to the organization of aboriginal communities across the country and their settlement duration. Increase in certain resources allowed intercommunity trade among aboriginal people (Paradies, 2016). Intercommunity trade helped in the resolution of disputes up to some extent but lateral developments caused an exponential increase in violence.

A little disruption in economic activities initiated during the initial presence of Europeans such as the formalization of fur trade impacted many aboriginal communities as compared to other differential activities. Initial conflicts aroused in communities when hunting territories and trapping pursuits shifted from subsistence to market requirements. Exposure to external markets also created a sense of race among local aboriginal communities and they started turning into violent groups instead of peaceful market forces (Kuokkanen, 2015). Contact with European markets and settlers dependence on formal economy soon turned into their claims on aboriginal land and resources. The situation worsens over time giving rise to domestic violence and extremism. Due to the advancements in settlers economy, the decline in fur trade many aboriginal communities found themselves vulnerable to severe economic crisis. They found themselves economically disrupted and their participation in labor markets was marginalized (Reading & Greenwood, 2015). The impact of violence created due to the European settlement and disruption in economic activities of aboriginal people continues even today.

Economic contributions made by the aboriginal people in the overall economy are multifaceted. The factors particularly include the evolutionary heritage of communities and the number of individuals having access to the wage economy. The labor force of aboriginal people contribute significantly to the overall economy of the communities but the statistics collected only include paid labor ignoring the labor for which no payment is received. Statistics presented in official documents do not include the labor efforts for which no direct payment is received such as fishing and trade of hunting material for services between the community members (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015). The economy can also benefit from mixed practices such as a person may sell a portion of hunting meat in the market and keep the rest of its portion for local trade within the community. Domestic violence created and supported by such historical heritage is not only physiological and physical but also economical. It has been observed that many victims of domestic violence skip their work due to the threats of being harmed by their enemies. People working in offices and having access to the jobs market have fear of being stabbed or killed by their rivals in a community or local residential area (Feir, 2016). An exemplary law has been approved in New Zealand to help victims of domestic violence to continue their jobs allowing them to avail paid leaves for ten days. The goal of providing the opportunity of such paid leaves is to help the victims to get legal assistance or moving houses and changing their contact details without having fear of losing their jobs.

Although such laws can help in the reduction of domestic violence and its impacts on economies of aboriginal people, the Philippines is the only other country that has introduced similar law for paid leaves for victims of domestic violence. The law was enforced in 20012 and a survey conducted in 2015 revealed that only 39% of people were aware of the law (Anaya, 2015). Rest of the population was not even aware of the existence of any such law. Canadian government following the New Zealand and Philippine model has introduced domestic paid leaves in several provinces but the law is not enforced at the national level. In other words, aboriginal people in Canada are still not on track to achieve similar economic benefits of non-aboriginal Canadians. Majority of aboriginal people in Canada often in place of traditional activities, participate in the formal labor market. It is difficult to gain an insight into accurate statistics of aboriginal people participating in the formal labor market of Canada due to inconsistencies present in data collection (Lyons et al., 2017). Surveys conducted to measure the economic impact of various factors including violence in aboriginal communities and the Canadian population in general often exclude people living in territories and in reserves. This lack of information on the exact potential of almost 4% of the population further deteriorates the quantitative research analysis.

The employment rate of aboriginal people in Canada is much lower in comparison to the non-aboriginal population in general. The unemployment rate is increasing as well as the violence is increasing between the communities. A survey conducted in 1991 that looked at the labor activity of aboriginal people aged above 15 concluded that only 43% of aboriginal people working for some sort of monetary labor (Ruddell & Thomas, 2015). At the same time, the non-aboriginal population of Canada was having a share of 61% in the monetary labor market. Another survey conducted in 2006 concluded that the employment rate of the aboriginal population despite domestic violence has increased to 61% but that is still behind the non-aboriginal population having a total of 82% dominance in labor markets of Canada (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015). In recent years various study reports revealed that domestic violence faced by women in aboriginal communities has made them more vulnerable to unemployment and forced termination as compared to the general population. The rate of employment varies greatly within different communities of aboriginal people as well. Such as the Metis community has an employment rate of 75% while the Inuit and first nation communities only have a 61% employment rate. It has also been observed that First Nation people living off the reserve have better employment rates as compared to the people living in reserve (Sengupta, Vieta, & McMurtry, 2015). Data results from labor surveys of 2009 and 2010 revealed that aboriginal people have seen a steeper increase in unemployment due to the downturn of the labor market as compared to the non-aboriginal population.

As the median income of the aboriginal groups is concerned they have considerably less income on average which is about $18,962 as compared to the median income of the general population which is about $21,498. Among aboriginal communities, First Nations people are the ones having the lowest median income as compared to all other aboriginal communities. Median income of First Nations people is about $17,007 which is the lowest among all (Rodon & Lévesque, 2015). Lower income of Inuit people living in the northern areas of Canada makes the situation even worse due to the high costs of living in northern areas of the country. There are structural constraints that lower the participation of aboriginal people in labor markets. As it is evident that some aboriginal people participate in labor activities that are not recognized by law as the formal labor market. Some people face difficulties in integrating such economic activities with the general economy of Canada leaving their potential unnoticed at large (Coté, 2016). Depending on the seasonal nature of traditional economic activities there were 14% aboriginal people employed in seasonal contract jobs as compared to 9% of the general population in 2010.

The Canadian government has taken many initiatives to help aboriginal people to build a sustainable economy. In 1989 to provide long-term employment benefits and empowerment of local communities a strategy was designed known as the Canadian aboriginal economic development strategy. The strategy was initially focused on Inuit and First Nations people to improve their economic conditions and to control violence due to the sense of isolation being developed in these communities. Providing contemporary support for economic development of aboriginal people is the responsibility of Indigenous and northern affairs Canada. A federal framework was introduced in 2009 to increase the participation of aboriginal people in Canadian economy (Furniss, 2017). The aim of the framework was to target the aboriginal communities in all parts of Canada. To make the framework effective for the well-being of aboriginal people an investment of $200 million was made in the time span of four years. Assistance for economic growth is not only provided by the government only. Many non-governmental and non-profit organizations are also helping aboriginal people to improve their economic conditions. One such example is the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business that not only provide funding for business but also provide mentorship for increased participation of people in the general economy of the country.

Although the initiatives have helped local communities to overcome their financial and economic issues the impacts, in the long run, are not as significant as the trends of economic deterioration are still on rising due to violence. With the initiatives of INAC, the interest of aboriginal people in enterprise business is increasing gradually. Almost 38% increase in self-employment has been observed in aboriginal people due to the initiatives of INAC and it is considered to be an all-time high record in employment conditions of these communities. Their businesses span a large variety of industrial sectors such as construction, agriculture, and forestry (Marshall, 2015). During the year 2010, most of the aboriginal enterprise businesses reported growth in their revenues as compared to the previous years. Business ventures owned by local communities are very helpful for the local aboriginal communities as they constitute the two-thirds majority of the workforce in such businesses.

Along with different forms of violence such as domestic violence and spousal violence many other factors affect the economies of aboriginal people in Canada such as poverty, high living costs and quality of educational autonomy. Under colonial administration aboriginal people, especially those registered with Indian status were not in control of choosing their economic destiny. Greater influence of foreign settlers on local economy and disruption of local economic activities influenced the decision making the power of aboriginal communities (Daigle, 2016). As per section 35 of Constitution act Canadian government believes that aboriginal people have an inherent right to self-government but there are unresolved complications between the federal government and self-government of aboriginal communities as of their lawmaking abilities. As of April 2015, the government has signed twenty-two self-government agreements involving a total of thirty-six aboriginal communities across Canada. As per the literacy rates are concerned in the aboriginal population almost all of the people have complete elementary school education. A great number of people have completed secondary school education with a growing number of university graduates. The results are improving over the years but the literacy status is still 23% as compared to the general literacy rate of 65%.

Despite all of the good efforts being put by the government to improve the living standards of the aboriginal communities the domestic violence is increasing both in numbers and severity of cases reported. Almost eight out of ten women are reported to be a victim of domestic violence. They are eight times more likely to be abused sexually as compared to the non-aboriginal population of Canada. As per the findings of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and overwhelming 87% of families suffered from violence with 57% cases ending in severe physical injuries. It is believed that in aboriginal communities of northern areas almost 90% of women and 40% of children are abused by their family members (Daigle, 2019). Leading factors behind such type of domestic violence and an ever-increasing percentage of incidents include poor economic conditions and low literacy rates. High rates of alcohol and substance abuse are considered to be the leading cause of domestic violence in aboriginal communities and it is evident by the above discussion that such type of violence not only deteriorate the family structure and social fabric but also destroying their local economies as well.

**Conclusion:**

Aboriginal communities constitute at least 4% of the overall Canadian population. They are suffering from severe domestic violence and poor economy inherited from historical consequences. Substance abuse and poor economic conditions have increased domestic violence in aboriginal communities. Although many initiatives have been taken by the Canadian government following New Zealand and Philippine models the efforts are not fruitful as anticipated by the authorities. Violence is a major element in the economic deterioration of these communities. No imitative or program of reforms can be successful without a deeper understanding of historical events that lead to the current situation of these communities. Domestic violence has deep roots in European settlement in their areas disturbing local economies. However, consideration of self-government agreements is gradually improving the economic condition of aboriginal communities in Canada and the overall economy of the nation as well.

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