



THE TAKEN

Prime target: How serial killers prey on indigenous women



Indigenous women are roughly seven times more likely than non-indigenous women to be victims of serial homicide, according to a compiled international dataset of serial killings.

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This story is part of an ongoing Globe and Mail investigation into the hundreds of missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada

Indigenous women in Canada are roughly seven times more likely than non-indigenous women to die at the hands of serial killers, according to a Globe and Mail

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and **THE GLOBE AND MAIL** it found at least 18 aboriginal females were victims of convicted serial killers in 1980.

The majority of those women were slain in or near cities, and most were killed by non-indigenous men. The cases were prosecuted in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, with the cities of Vancouver, Prince George, Saskatoon and Winnipeg most commonly listed as the woman's last place of residence. Eight serial killers, who were convicted in a total of 25 homicides, were responsible for the women's deaths.

Aboriginal women are being killed and disappearing across the country at an alarming rate. The RCMP have said 70 per cent of the indigenous women slain in Canada meet their fate at the hands of an indigenous person. In a report earlier this year, the federal force stated that indigenous women knew the offender in all solved homicides over the previous two years. It also emphasized the "strong nexus to family violence."

But that is not the whole story.



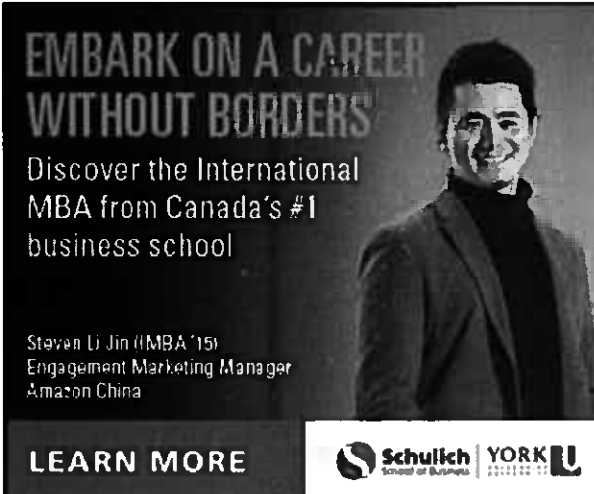
MISSING AND MURDERED

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"so late," he would leave a message, according to police transcripts obtained by The **THE GLOBE AND MAIL** Ms. Sinclair introduced him to Ms. Letandre, who disappeared weeks later. She was considered missing for nearly seven years, until Mr. Andretti struck again and confessed to both murders.

Indigenous leaders have long called for a national inquiry into violence against aboriginal women and girls, citing the need to examine historic and modern issues such as colonization, residential schools, the child-welfare system, poverty, drug abuse, street sex work, inadequate housing and racism. Proponents also want to shine a light on the way police handle unsolved homicide and missing-person cases involving indigenous women. The former Conservative government dismissed calls for a national inquiry, with one then-cabinet minister attributing the violence to a lack of respect among indigenous men for indigenous women on reserves. The new Liberal government, meanwhile, has committed to launching an inquiry by the summer.

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An unprecedented 2014 RCMP report found 1,181 aboriginal females were killed or went missing across the country between 1980 and 2012. In an update last year, the Mounties said there were 32 additional homicides of indigenous women in 2013 and 2014 in RCMP jurisdictions. RCMP spokesman Sergeant Harold Pfeleiderer said in an e-mail that the force did not conduct an analysis of serial homicide data for the **Get full access to globeandmail.com** Just \$1.99 PER WEEK for the first 24 weeks.

Indigenous women in Canada are roughly seven times more likely than non-indigenous women to be slain by serial killers, a new analysis has found.



About one-fifth of Canada's known female serial-homicide victims since 1980 were indigenous, according to a Globe analysis of convictions in an American researcher's international database; just 4 per cent of the overall Canadian female population is indigenous. The newspaper is also compiling and vetting its own database of homicide and long-term missing-person cases that involve indigenous women, building on data collected by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and Ottawa-based researcher Maryanne Pearce. Through this ongoing work, The Globe has determined that at least 18 indigenous women were slain by convicted serial killers since 1980.

If the scope is broadened to include cases with a probable suspect (those tied to Robert Pickton through stayed charges or DNA found on his farm, for example), then the number rises to about 35. And if the scope is further expanded to include speculative cases, for which court proceedings are pending or police have said a serial killer may be at work (along stretches of certain B.C. highways and in the Edmonton area, for instance), the number rises dramatically, to about 77.

Dawn Lavell-Harvard, the president of NWAC, said that while family violence is part of the problem, vulnerable indigenous women are being "targeted" in urban centres by killers confident they will get away with it. "We need to expose the truth, so we can be effective in dealing with reality," she said. "We can't be basing our responses on urban myths or stereotypes." She said she would like to see the federal government create national legislation that mandates certain basic police standards relating to missing-person investigations.

In August, Canada's latest known serial killer, a non-indigenous man named Traigo Andretti, was convicted of murder for the second time. Both of his victims – Myrna Letandre in Manitoba and Jennifer McPherson in B.C. – were indigenous. He found Ms. Letandre through her sister, Lorna Sinclair, whom he met in an unusual way. Ms. Sinclair had signed up for a free voicemail service that allows people who do not have a phone, and are seeking work, to receive messages from prospective employers. Mr. Andretti explored the service by dialling random extensions and, if a woman

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The serial killings of Ms. Letandre, Ms. McPherson and the 16 other indigenous women provide a window into the broader tragedy of violence against indigenous women in Canada. On Tuesday, The Globe is launching The Taken, a multimedia project that traces the lives of five of the women – Ms. Letandre, Cynthia Maas, Sereena Abotsway, Shelley Napope and Carolyn Sinclair – and explores the factors contributing to their vulnerability. These include difficulty transitioning to life in the city, the child-welfare system and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Their stories also examine the families' interactions with police and the justice system.

The RCMP do not have their own definition of serial homicide, but rather use a definition of "serial murder" crafted by experts convened by the FBI in 2005: "The unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s), in separate events." The Globe used the FBI's definition to define serial homicide, and included manslaughter because it is a form of unlawful killing.

Sgt. Pfleiderer said the RCMP were focusing their "prevention and intervention efforts on family violence and youth empowerment in order to reduce and eliminate violence against indigenous women." He added that federal funding has been dedicated to programs aimed at addressing family violence in "vulnerable indigenous communities." Last year, the RCMP told The Globe they had homed in on 10 communities, six of which are in Saskatchewan, two in Manitoba, and one each in B.C. and the Northwest Territories.

In April, The Globe filed an access-to-information request for the RCMP's list of 10 communities. The force at first said it could not locate the list, which The Globe did not accept. The request was reopened and, in July, the Mounties responded that the "records located" qualified for an Access to Information Act exemption pertaining to law enforcement. The Globe has filed an appeal. Also in April, the newspaper requested the RCMP's list of indigenous female homicide victims, but the force required an extension and has yet to provide the names.

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Given the lack of comprehensive Canadian data related to serial homicide, The Globe looked to the work of American researcher Mike Aamodt, who has compiled an international dataset of serial killings. An analysis of the Canadian convictions he has listed showed that indigenous women are roughly seven times more likely than non-indigenous women to be victims of serial homicide. "Aboriginal women are certainly overrepresented among the victims of Canadian serial killers," said Enzo Yaksic, who collaborates with Dr. Aamodt and has studied serial homicide for more than a decade.

The extent of that overrepresentation shocked the sister of Cynthia Maas, who was slain in 2010 by B.C. serial killer Cody Legebokoff (he filed an appeal earlier this year of four first-degree murder convictions). "It's very scary," Judy Maas said. "It's especially scary for my daughters, my granddaughters and all the young people coming down the road. ... I'm just thinking about the implications of that – the impact."

Vulnerable targets

When it comes to the 18 serial-homicide cases compiled and confirmed by The Globe, many of the women, ranging in age from 13 to 41, were killed in or near cities. The majority were First Nations, while at least two were Métis. Many of the women were either known or believed to have been engaged in sex work, though it is unclear, in several instances, whether that was true around the time of the killing. "It's a low-risk

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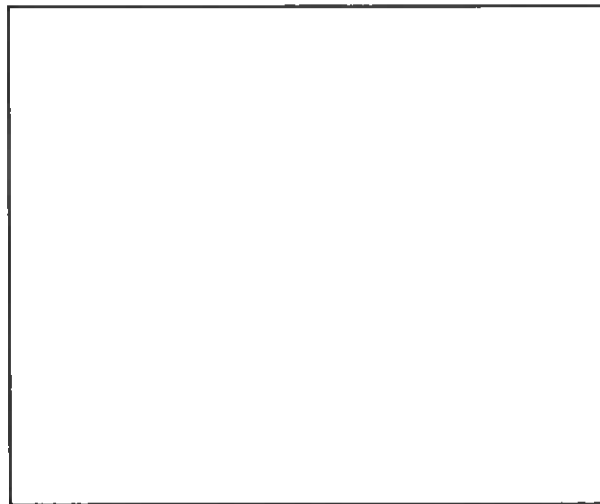
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way **THE GLOBE AND MAIL** "at a victim," said Mark Safarik, a retired special agent who worked in the FBI's behavioural analysis unit as a criminal profiler. He added that serial killers tend to select targets who meet two primary criteria: availability and vulnerability.

In further analyzing the 18 cases, there were also findings related to the eight killers, five of whom are non-indigenous. In the cases of Mr. Andretti, Winnipeg's Shawn Lamb and Saskatoon's John Crawford, every one of their known victims – a total of eight – was indigenous. The relationship between the victim and her killer was not always known or clear. While the death of Ms. McPherson might well be classified by some as "family violence," since she was Mr. Andretti's wife at the time of her death, he was already a killer by the time they wed. There were also instances in which the perpetrator was believed to be a stranger.

"By stating that the problem is rooted in family violence, the police are deflecting attention away from the broader problem of stranger victimizations because they cannot get a handle on it," Mr. Yaksic said.

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Police forces and communities across Canada have long faced the reality – or the widespread, haunting speculation – of serial predation. In the 1980s, B.C.'s Clifford Olson confessed to murdering 11 children. That case helped spur the creation of a central database to find links between violent crimes across the country. Robert

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Pickett's serial killings triggered an inquiry that deemed police investigations into
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disappearances from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside between 1997 and 2002 to be "blatant failures."

Commissioner of Inquiry Wally Oppal made dozens of recommendations in 2012, but some have yet to be fully implemented, including the development of a safe-travel option for people living along the so-called Highway of Tears in Northern B.C., where women have been dying or disappearing at an alarming rate in recent decades. He said he believes police communication across jurisdictions has improved, and he commends the province for introducing new legislation that gives law enforcement greater powers to obtain personal information, including health and telephone records, related to a vulnerable missing person.

The former B.C. attorney-general believes much more needs to be done to address the social factors that lead to increased vulnerability, such as poverty, unstable housing, drug addiction and sex work. "The conditions [in the Downtown Eastside] need to be addressed in a major way because that could be a breeding ground for another serial killer [to find victims]," Mr. Oppal said.

Success breeds arrogance

Over the past several years, the RCMP have struck task forces across the country to review unsolved homicides and missing-person cases. The E-PANA task force was created a decade ago to determine if one or more serial killers was responsible for the deaths and disappearances of young women travelling along certain major highways in B.C. Two of the task force's 18 cases, dating from 1969 to 2006, are considered solved, though the RCMP have said a now-deceased American felon is suspected in two more homicides and is a person of interest in several other cases.

Mr. Andretti's conviction was the first one stemming from Manitoba's Project Devote, a joint RCMP and Winnipeg Police Service task force launched in 2012. It is investigating more than two dozen homicide and long-term missing-person cases, many of which involve indigenous women. Mr. Andretti confessed his crimes to the RCMP in B.C. and, after he pleaded guilty there in relation to Ms. McPherson's murder, he was transferred as a sentenced prisoner to Winnipeg and pleaded guilty to killing

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lives (youth home elopee)." The manual was provided to police agencies and is not

Last year, the RCMP sent a revamped national missing-persons policy to their commanding officers. It introduced two standardized documents: a 13-question risk assessment and a 10-page missing-person intake report to help ensure certain information is obtained at the outset of an investigation. The risk assessment asks "yes" or "no" questions about the person's life and potential vulnerabilities, but it does not specifically ask if the missing individual is indigenous. When it comes to homicides, the RCMP have updated their paperwork to require that investigators indicate if a victim is aboriginal – a move lauded by the federal Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

Ms. Lavell-Harvard, the head of NWAC, said The Globe's investigation into serial killing speaks to the need for a national inquiry, adding the conversation is too often framed through the lens of on-reserve violence perpetrated by indigenous men. "If you're aware that a particular group is being targeted because of vulnerabilities," she said, "then you have to do that much more to protect that vulnerable group."

With reports from Rick Cash and Renata D'Aliesio in Toronto and Kat Sieniuc in Vancouver


Do you have information that could assist in our investigation into serial killing as it relates to the broader issue of Canada's missing and murdered women? If so, please email us at the Globe's MMIW team at MMIW@globeandmail.com.

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Ms.  e. Both families said they credit the B.C. RCMP with bringing Mr. Andretti to justice.

The Crown attorney who prosecuted two Manitoba serial-killer cases – those of Mr. Andretti and Mr. Lamb, who pleaded guilty to two counts of manslaughter – said police need to devote significant resources to missing-person files because killers "trade" on the reality that priorities will inevitably shift as cases grow colder. "Just because we don't have a body does not mean that there hasn't been a [homicide]," Sheilla Leinburd said. "Success breeds arrogance in many ways. If they've gotten away with it once or twice, they'll do it a third and fourth time."

In some of the cases featured in The Taken multimedia project, the victims' loved ones told The Globe that police were initially dismissive of their concerns and did not appear to take the missing-person report seriously. In the case of Ms. McPherson, the RCMP's missing-person bulletin misstated her ethnicity as Caucasian; the family made the painful decision not to correct the record for fear that the truth would lead to public apathy – or, worse yet, a biased police response, said the woman's sister, Kim McPherson.

RCMP Superintendent Ward Lymburner, who oversees the E-PANA task force, noted that in response to the Oppal inquiry, the B.C. government recently rolled out provincial policing standards. The section on missing-person investigations says that when officers are determining the appropriate response, they must take into consideration the reality that indigenous women are more likely than non-indigenous women to be killed or go missing. It says risk may "flow from the profile of the missing person, in particular their inclusion in groups that are at an increased risk of harm, such as Aboriginal women and girls."

According to a 2013 best practices manual created by the RCMP's National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains, police forces should treat each missing-person report as legitimate, serious and urgent at the outset, stating "poor outcomes can often be traced back to not taking a report seriously at the start, and making a risk judgment too early." The manual, which The Globe obtained through an access-to-information request, says agencies "should not treat certain types of missing persons differently at the very beginning (e.g. repeat runaway, persons of particular

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