

There is much work to do in order to undue the harm done to Aboriginal peoples and the harm done to all marginalized persons as a result of colonization in Canada

Aboriginal people continue to experience many present barriers to formal education including distance, poverty and lack of cultural welcoming in mainstream schools. Aboriginal people in Canada experience a vicious cycle whereby “low socioeconomic status promotes low educational achievement, which in turn results in low socioeconomic status.”¹ Many Aboriginal youth in Northern Ontario must leave home to attend secondary school. “First Nations youth commit suicide about five to six times more often than non-Aboriginal youth [and]... suicide rates for Inuit youth are among the highest in the world, at 11 times the national average”.² Nearly half of children under 14 in foster care in Canada are Aboriginal children, in numbers now surpassing those removed to residential schools. As Cindy Blackstock the executive director of the First Nations and Family Caring Society (FNFCS) has stated, “As a social worker, I see the impacts on First Nations children of the federal government’s damaging, dangerous, discriminatory approach ... This is about children being placed in vulnerable, unsafe and harmful situations that can hurt them, their families and all Canadians,”³ Canada’s 2001 census shows that “the median income of all persons indicating Aboriginal identity is 61% of the median income for all Canadians.”⁴

Aboriginal People are significantly overrepresented in Canada’s criminal justice system.⁵ The incarceration of Black Canadians and Aboriginal women is on the rise.⁶

“There are numerous other indicators of the reality of racial discrimination in Canada. Racialized persons experience disproportionate poverty, over-representation in the prison population, under-representation in the middle and upper layers of political, administrative, economic and media institutions and barriers to accessing employment, housing and health care to name just a few.”⁷

Homelessness in Canada is increasing as more people struggle with poverty. Homeless population is overly represented by greater incidences of mental illness, and disability, Aboriginal people and youth, wherein “25-40% of homeless youth are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual”.⁸ A recent report by Egale on youth suicide prevention outlines;

“LGBTQ youth are at significantly greater risk of suicide than their heterosexual and cisgender peers: 33% of LGB youth have attempted suicide in comparison to 7% of youth in general, and 47% of trans youth have thought about suicide in the past year alone.”⁹

¹ Mendelson M, Aboriginal Peoples and Postsecondary Education in Canada: <http://www.caledoninst.org/publications/pdf/595eng.pdf>

² First Nations & Inuit Health (2013), Health Canada <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/promotion/mental/index-eng.php>

³ The Canadian Press. (2014, October 20). Closing arguments begin in case of feds paying less for aboriginal kids in care. Canada: CBC News | Aboriginal <http://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/closing-arguments-begin-in-case-of-feds-paying-less-for-aboriginal-kids-in-care-1.2806055>

⁴ OHRC (2005), Policy and Guidelines on Racism and Racial Discrimination, http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Policy_and_guidelines_on_racism_and_racial_discrimination.pdf

⁵ The incarceration rate for Aboriginal adults in Canada is estimated to be 10 times higher than the incarceration rate of non-Aboriginal adults. <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/oth-aut/oth-aut20121022info-eng.aspx>

⁶ “Visible minorities, Aboriginal people and women are entering federal penitentiaries in greater numbers than ever before. Twenty-one percent of the inmate population is of Aboriginal descent and 9% of inmates are Black Canadians. Incarceration rates for these two groups far exceed their representation rates in Canadian society at large. In the last five years, the number of federally incarcerated women has increased by almost 40% while the number of Aboriginal women has increased by over 80% in the last decade.” Sapers H, Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator 2011-2012: <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/annrpt/annrpt20112012-eng.aspx>

⁷ Sapers H, Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator 2011-2012: <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/annrpt/annrpt20112012-eng.aspx>

⁸ Gaetz, S, Donaldson, J, Richter, T, & Gulliver, T (2013), The State of Homelessness in Canada: <http://www.homelesshub.ca/ResourceFiles/SOHC2103.pdf>

⁹ Egale Canada Human Rights Trust (2013), Report on Outcomes and Recommendations from the first national Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two Spirit, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth Suicide Prevention Summit. Toronto: <http://egale.ca/all/press-release-ymps-recommendations/>

Part of undoing the harm is to also keep in mind that the facts alone are not the whole story. The picture of those harmed is often used as a stereotype to represent all members of that group. Situating the outcomes of colonialism with the people who were impacted instead of working to dismantle the structural causes tends to push the responsibility further into the realm of the personal, towards the people and communities who are impacted, rather than toward the broader society. The outcomes of colonization are held and maintained by the structures that benefitted.