

Violence and Healing

**Data on family violence and healing
among the Innuat of Uashat mak Mani-Utenam**

**By
Danielle Descant**

with assistance from

**Monique Bacon
Rosalie Fontaine
Louise Rock
Annette Vollant
Doris Fontaine
Louisa St-Onge
Napoléon Michel
Jean-Marie Grégoire**

**and the participants in the
healing circles of summer 1993**

September 1993

This study was fully funded by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	iv
<u>1. Description of Communities</u>	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Facts and Figures.....	3
1.3 The Healing Process.....	3
2. <u>Description of Study</u>	10
2.1 Objectives.....	10
2.2 Methodology.....	10
2.2.1 Action Research.....	10
2.2.2 The Focus Group.....	12
2.2.3 Recruiting Facilitators.....	12
2.2.4 Recruiting Participants.....	13
2.2.5 Group Facilitation.....	14
2.2.6 Selection of Topics.....	15
2.2.7 Taping the Sessions.....	15
2.2.8 Analysis of Results.....	15
2.3 Description of Topics.....	16
<u>3. Analysis of Results</u>	30
3.1 Forms of Violence.....	30
3.1.1 Women's Circles.....	30
3.1.2 Men's Circles.....	38
3.2 Causes.....	43
3.2.1 Women's Circles.....	43
3.2.2 Men's Circles.....	48

3.3	Consequences.....	55
3.3.1	Women's Circles	55
3.3.2	Men's Circles	59
3.4	Solutions.....	65
3.4.1	Women's Solutions.....	68
3.4.2	Men's Solutions.....	77
4.	<u>Evaluation of Circle Healing Process</u>	80
4.1	Women's Circles.....	82
4.2	Men's Circles.....	85
5.	<u>Recommendations and Points for Discussion</u>	87
6.	<u>Conclusions</u>	93
7.	<u>After the summer of 1993 ..Follow-up notes</u>	
8.	<u>Bibliography</u>	94

Acknowledgements

The Violence and Healing project was made possible by a grant from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the support of the men and women of the Innu communities of Uashat and Mani-Utenam. It is thanks to these men and women, to their voices and their hearts, that the hands were joined and the circle was formed. We thank them wholeheartedly.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the facilitators of the healing circles: Doris Fontaine, Louisa St-Onge, Monique Bacon, Rosalie Fontaine, Louise Rock, Annette Vollant, Napoléon Michel and Jean-Marie Grégoire. They helped us develop the study and undertook to organize the meetings, record the testimony, and transcribe it. Their perseverance, unflagging good humour and excellent translation work were of invaluable assistance.

A special thank-you to Philomène Jourdain, who patiently deciphered the handwritten notes and typed the final text.

It is with deep sadness that we pay tribute to Desneiges Vollant of Mani-Utenam, who passed away in February 1988. She was the first to encourage us to leave the beaten path of governmental health and education policies and turn instead to community action and the resources which dwell within the spirit of the Innu nation.

The author

Introduction

For many years, a blanket of silence has lain over the subject of family violence in aboriginal communities. This silence has been maintained by men and women alike: the violence around us always happens to "someone else" C until the pain becomes too great. The men and women who took part in this study chose to speak out, both to heal themselves and to offer others a way out.

They do not seek to impose their point of view; nor do they purport to offer miracle solutions. But while respecting the path of change take by each victim of violence and each perpetrator of violence, they insist on the need to break the silence and break free of fear. They do this by meeting in a circle and gradually learning to communicate. This paper renders an account of their progress over the course of one summer.

Readers seeking statistics, logical proofs and academic analyses will be disappointed. This report consists of progress notes which extract the key messages from the comments of all group members.

It is our hope that this paper will become a working tool for all those who wish to carry on the work begun in the summer of 1993.

Summary of the Violence and Healing study

The research project took place in the summer of 1993 and involved 30 participants from the communities of Uashat and Mani-Utenam, Aboriginal reserves of the Innu Nation on Quebec's North Shore.

The aim of the study was twofold: collect basic data on violence in these communities and assess participation in a healing circle as a means of raising awareness of family violence. The study represented a community research/action initiative.

Participants were grouped into four healing circles C three women's, one men's C with about eight people per circle. They met eight times to explore themes dealing with violence and the search for solutions.

The data, collected in the form of first-person accounts, revealed various forms of violence inflicted upon women and men during their childhood and adult years. It should be pointed out that the participants spoke at great length about violence inflicted by both women and men on their children. Children are as much the victims of the victim (mother) as they are of the abuser (father).

The participants cited fear and silence as elements perpetuating violence within the family. The fear is nurtured by the fact that the victims live with their abusers, who are almost always members of the immediate family. The participants reported that other causes of violence include the loss of their identity and of the values associated with Aboriginal culture. It seems that once their ancestors moved into the reserves, they no longer were able to hand down these values. The circles also brought out the fact that the loss of spirituality in people's day-to-day lives contributes to a sense of fear, purposelessness and despondency.

Solutions proposed by both the women and men included breaking the silence, seeking help, taking preventive measures and using the justice system in cases of sexual assault and some types of physical violence. The women insisted on the need to incorporate traditional methods in the healing process in cases of violence and to emphasize the essential nature of a spiritual approach to healing.

Participation in the meetings generated raised awareness of the forms of violence and acted as a catalyst in bringing latent violence to the surface. A number of the women stated that their participation enabled them to regain self-respect through the respect and acceptance shown them in the healing circle. The men said they learned to look around them, understand the consequences of their behaviour, realize how useless it is to try to control everything and accept the idea of laying bare their heart rather than their resentment.

The authors of the research felt that the process could be duplicated in other Aboriginal communities, especially those without direct access to professional services dealing with family violence. Since the facilitators are women and men chosen from the community, they do not require lengthy training so much as the desire to break the silence, find solutions and help others on the road to self-healing. The study concluded with an invitation to healing circle participants to continue the healing process by breaking free of the violence, opinions, fears and silence of others and to take full control of their own lives by listening to their hearts.

Points for discussion were offered to readers interested in furthering the process of examining violence in Aboriginal communities and in introducing new types of services for victims and abusers. The following recommendations were addressed to the Commissioners of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples:

Recommendations to the Commissioners

Legal system:

- keep pressing the legal community to take into account Aboriginal values and opinions concerning the administration of justice;
- set up forums outside the courtroom where judges, lawyers, prosecutors and Aboriginal representatives C not just band council officials but also elders, victims of violence and ex-abusers C can meet and exchange ideas;
- consider healing circles as a useful alternative for providing follow-up and support to victims of violence and their families.

Health and social services:

- make improved mental health the first objective when it comes to delivering services;
- agree to incorporate spiritual, moral and cultural values into the therapeutic process in the communities;
- develop a participatory method of social intervention in order to promote awareness and, more important, concrete action;
- promote a family approach and group intervention in the communities;
- integrate healing circles with prevention measures in the areas of violence, sexual abuse and suicide;
- provide helping professionals and health care workers with basic training on how to facilitate healing circles, what transpires during them and how to set them up.

Aboriginal governments:

- offer support and encouragement to maintain healing circles for young people and adults alike;
- promote the integration of spiritual, moral and cultural values in the delivery of services by demonstrating themselves how these values have been integrated within Aboriginal governments;
- make their position clear on the need for enforcement of justice in cases of family violence and sexual abuse;
- set up healing circles inside band-run schools in order to more effectively prevent violence and other social problems.

Several other local recommendations could be issued, but without knowing the extent to

which they could be generalized, we prefer that the Commissioners refer to the "points for discussion" section at the end of the study. These points are more general in scope and can bring to the decision-making process a consideration of the cultural and social features of the various nations and communities.

1. Description of Communities

1.1 Background

There are approximately 10,000 Innuat. They live in 12 communities scattered across the Quebec-Labrador peninsula, two located in Labrador, in the province of Newfoundland, and the other ten in Quebec's North Shore region, past Lac St-Jean. The following is the list of communities:

Sheshatshit, Labrador
Davis Inlet, Labrador
Pekuashipit
Natashquan
La Romaine
Mingan
Mani-Utenam
Uashat
Schefferville
Betsiamites
Les Escoumins
Pointe-Bleue

The creation of these aboriginal reserves is of recent date. Most received their status after the 1950s; the Uashat reserve was established in 1925 and the Mani-Utenam reserve in 1950.

The Innuat of Quebec speak French as a second language. They are geographically isolated and have not maintained social or trading ties with other nations in Canada, at least since the conquest began. Only in the last decade, with the advent of improved communications and the expansion of aboriginal organizations, have the Innuat begun to interact with other nations. Even so, language remains a major obstacle, for very few of them speak English. The communities in Labrador can more easily communicate with other nations in the country as they speak English as a second language; on the other hand, they are more geographically isolated.

The Innu nation has developed independently and has barely been influenced by

prevailing aboriginal ideological currents in the U.S. and Canada. The American Indian Movement (A.I.M.)), which jolted the mind-set of so many aboriginals in the 1970s, had no impact here.

The main outside influence here has been Quebec culture, through television, French-language radio and schooling, which is provided in large part by Quebecers. At the same time, the federal government's legislative and administrative systems have contributed, through the Department of Indian Affairs' local administration, to casting the structure of life in the same mould as on other reserves across Canada.

The communities in which this study was conducted C Uashat and Mani-Utenam C are governed by a single political structure, the Innu-Takuaikan band council (1 chief and 9 councillors).

Recently, a number of issues have rocked the communities. The band council's positions have met with opposition and in October 1992, the majority of voters in Mani-Utenam voted to split off and create a new band. The main causes of dissatisfaction were related to the centralization of administrative decision-making at Uashat rather than Mani-Utenam. The polarization of opinion over the construction of a hydroelectric dam also contributed to the worsening of the social climate; at Mani-Utenam, most people were opposed to the megaproject planned for their land, while the band council's position was more ambiguous.

While these political and ideological differences have had serious short-term effects (arrests, imprisonment, civil disobedience, etc.), they are too recent to have affected family and social structures in the two communities. In our analysis of the study's results, there are no comparative tables for data on Uashat and Mani-Utenam, since the problem of family violence is essentially the same in both communities.

1.2 Facts and Figures

The two communities have a combined population of approximately 2,500 status Indians. There are approximately equal numbers of men and women (48% men, 51.6% women); children under 14 make up one third of the population.

With the recent construction of new housing units, the average number of residents per dwelling is now 5.21. Drinking water, sewage and garbage collection infrastructures are in place. The communities also have their own schools and health facilities.

Each of the communities has a Catholic church, a small grocery store and a meeting hall. There is a community radio station and a transport service to take residents to the Sept-Îles hospital or other health facilities.

With respect to economic conditions, a large proportion of families live on welfare; only 1/5 of residents earn a salary. The band council is the largest employer. Very few people still go into the bush to hunt and trap. In 1991, approximately 200 people earned extra income from this type of work.

1.3 The Healing Process

It is clear that growing awareness among the Innu of the terrible consequences of family violence has followed closely upon a growing national awareness of violence against women. New family law provisions in the Quebec Civil Code and amendments to the Criminal Code concerning conjugal violence are gradually starting to seep into family relationships. Court actions for assault are increasingly common, as are individual consultations by both the victims and perpetrators of violence.

However, the Uashat and Mani-Utenam communities have been taking more concrete action against family violence since 1985, due primarily to the influence of social services. Sensitized to women's issues and partly freed from the provincial administrative straightjacket when the band took over social services, community workers have been able to lay the practical foundations for family violence prevention. This was no easy task, for as one participant in the study commented, family violence is a taboo subject even though it affects every family.

In 1990, the Tipinuaikan centre, a shelter for battered women, opened to serve both communities, becoming the first such shelter on a reserve in Quebec. At the time, the Association des femmes autochtones du Québec expressed reservations about locating the centre within the reserve, fearing for the safety of its residents. But here, people were already advocating an independent response rather than "exporting our problems." Family violence was perceived as an

internal social problem which called for a home-grown solution. But training for family violence counsellors remained a problem, for the programs available in Quebec generally emphasized the "feminist" approach, which may be well-suited to North American culture but was certainly not designed for aboriginal families living on a reserve.

Family violence is a social phenomenon. It affects the father, the mother, the children, the grandparents, the entire family. Aboriginal communities are close-knit. In our villages, the houses almost touch and the walls have ears. And everything is known; people find out about everything.

Individual intervention with battered women and placement of the children in foster care has little impact on the family dynamic. No matter how much the cycle of violence is explained and the need for protection is made clear, no matter how many formal notices are sent and how many times perpetrators are taken to court, the dynamic of violence continues in most families.

This observation led to the healing circles initiative. We cannot at present state with certainty whether or not the idea of healing through the circle was imported from nations to the south (the Ojibways, Mohawks, etc.). We do know, however, that the Innu tongue will often refer to the circle to describe important events. For example, describing the term "uashkapuat" (being in a circle), native speakers at La Romaine gave the following example: "ueshkat innuat uashkapipanat e mupimetau: in the old days, the Indians sat in a circle for the caribou feast."

To our knowledge, however, the idea of bringing women together into a circle for the specific purpose of furthering the physical, psychological and/or physical recovery of one or more of the group members came from the outside; it was introduced just three years ago by a woman from the Naskapi nation, who was educated in the nations to the south. This event coincided with the rediscovery of the sweat lodge in the community.

The Innuat had long known the sweat lodge, calling it by the name MITISHAN. However, the practice had entirely disappeared from our communities; this was due, first of all, to the abandonment of the traditional way of life, to the move to the reserves, and especially to the former religious ban, which had held that the MITISHAN (sweat lodge), the KUSHAPATSHIKAN (shaking tent) and the MITINIKANISHAUEU (scapulimancy) were contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

This ban still survives in the communities, not in the teachings of the local church but in popular belief. As the Innuat have little direct communication with other nations, it is difficult for them to know that the sweat is practised in identical form throughout North America, or that the double purification of body and spirit is an age-old aboriginal custom. The reappearance of the sweat also coincides with a search for spirituality among young people, which stems from the search for a new aboriginal identity by the generations born on the reserve.

To return to the healing circle and the sweat, it should be added that the first Innu women introduced to this technique subsequently continued to use it and to meet in order to seek solutions to their personal and family problems together. A number of meetings have focused on violence and sexual abuse.

The sweat is now led by Innu men and women, and a number of elders have come to confirm that it was in common use before the creation of the reserves, especially after the long portages required for travel through the forest. This recognition by some of the elders in the community helped to demystify the sweat.

The new interest in ancient healing practices was also nourished by other events, including visits to nations to the south by a number of community members who wanted to expand their knowledge of the field. In addition, "Flying on your own" personal growth sessions, facilitated by an Ojibway therapist, helped to deepen the commitment to mutual assistance through the regular practice of the growth circle.

As increasing numbers of men and women in the community were attesting to the benefit they had received from participation in a self-help group (healing circle), it was thought that as many Innu women as possible should be given the opportunity to get together and break the taboo on violence and sexual abuse. The upshot was the regional conference of Innu women held in Uashat in February 1993. Close to 300 women from the 12 communities in Quebec and Labrador met for three days to speak of their personal and family experiences and gain strength and hope. For many, it was a first-time event. A special evening session was held on family violence. The supporting video used in this study was filmed at that session, which was a momentous event for the women who took part in it. They sat in a circle and experienced the beginning of the healing process; they broke the silence. They experienced a flow of energy amongst each other and left

with a feeling of well-being.

This study, conducted in the summer of 1993, therefore continued a process which had begun some years earlier among the families in the community. Conducting a study on the subject was one more step in a direction which has been largely unexplored by official health and social service agencies: self-healing and the medicine of the circle.

Raising awareness of violence: some mileposts

To explain this project's role within the program to fight family violence and sexual abuse, we must review some recent history.

Summer 1985	During a community workshop, helping professionals calculate that there is violence in one household out of three in the community, most often against the wife; the beginning of the consciousness-raising process among women.
Summer 1987	A sweat lodge workshop led by a Mani-Utenam elder; attempt to revive links with traditional Innu medicine.
June 1988	Federal government announces Family Violence Initiative.
April 1989	General assembly and petition by 400 residents of Uashat and Mani-Utenam calling for a regional centre for battered women on the Sept-Iles reserve.
September 1989	Conference on Innu social services at Lac Delage, Quebec takes a position on violence against women.
October 1989	Construction starts on centre for battered women at Uashat.
Summer 1990	Six family violence counsellors are trained; intensive six-month course.

November 1990	Tipinuaikan centre, a regional shelter for battered women, opens at Uashat.
March 1991	Violence and sexual abuse awareness week.
Summer 1991	Sweat lodge revived on a regular basis with the participation of about one hundred people, mostly women.
October 1991	A program to fight family violence is developed for elementary school by a school social worker. Target group: grade 4.
March 1992	Second violence and sexual abuse awareness-raising campaign. Radio open line. Personal accounts by women. First project under federal Family Violence Initiative. Counsellor training and second awareness week.
Spring 1992	Major study of women's conditions and problems by the Conseil Attikamek-Montagnais (C.A.M.).
Summer 1992	First sweat lodges organized by community members.
Winter 1993	Regional conference of Innu women. Workshop on violence and sexual abuse.
Winter 1993	Creation of self-help circles open to men and women.

2. Description of Study

2.1 Objectives

The general objectives of this study were to collect baseline data on violence in the communities of Uashat and Mani-Utenam, and to assess the effect of a healing circle on men and women in terms of raising awareness and fighting family violence.

Specifically, the study asked participants to try to answer the following questions:

- A. What types of violence do we experience?
- B. What are the causes and consequences of this violence?
- C. Can we find ways and means of restoring harmony?
- D. Can cultural values serve as the basis for developing a family violence prevention program?
- E. Can the healing circle's participatory method give people who are experiencing violence new attitudes and capabilities?

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Action Research

This study was born of a compromise between the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' requirements and our own approach to research in aboriginal communities. The Commission wanted baseline data on different forms of violence in aboriginal communities and information on the solutions favoured by the communities in question. Although we had already conducted studies in our two communities, the findings were disregarded; they were not taken into account in the formulation of social policy and political decisions. But the most distressing thing, from our point of view, was that these studies — both our own and those conducted by outside experts — were of little benefit to the people most concerned, the subjects of the study. This led us to the idea of setting up an action research project. As this type of study does not have a defined methodology, it was possible to draw up flexible interview guides related to the problems and experiences of the actors/researchers. Action research thus becomes a strategy for research, intervention and education, at the same time.

In their text on research methodology, Mayer and Ouellet describe the main characteristics of action research in the following terms:

1)It is a collective process which comprises at once a research strategy and an action strategy.

In the case of this study, this has meant developing a thematic interview guide and applying it in sessions spread out over a period of time, in order to allow the awareness-raising process to take root.

2)The researchers and actors are no longer in a subject/object relationship, but rather one of cooperation and collaboration.

The facilitators were consulted throughout the process and adjustments were made as the study progressed.

3)It focuses on a problematic concrete situation, approached within the context of real social relationships and linked to action aimed at social change.

Family violence is a daily concern in our communities and has been the object of a process of change for several years.

4)It aims to improve our knowledge of the conditions and results of the tested action so as to identify successes which could be repeated elsewhere.

We believe this was indeed the goal of the mandate we received from the Commission.

5)It demands an intellectual and emotional commitment from each participant; it demands openness to criticism and questioning; each participant must be prepared to have his or her ideas, practices and interpersonal relationships evaluated on the basis of the action research project's progress.

On this point, refer to Section 3 (Evaluation of Participants) to assess participant involvement and the changes in their interpersonal relationships.

2.2.2 The Focus Group

The focus group was the main technique we used to conduct action research in our communities. While this approach is most popular in sales and marketing and is less commonly used for qualitative purposes, we selected it because the self-help circle already met the main criteria for a focus group:

A qualitative social research method which consists of recruiting a representative number of 6 to 12-member groups meeting uniform criteria, sparking an open discussion based on an interview guide which defines the subjects of the study, and producing a summary/analysis of the discussion which identifies the key messages expressed by the participants and the points of agreement and disagreement among the groups in the sample (Simard, 1989:9-10).

2.2.3 Recruiting Facilitators

The eight facilitators were selected on the basis of their personal life experiences and their familiarity with healing circles. Both the men and the women who served as facilitators had experienced physical, psychological, sexual or economic violence, either as victims or as perpetrators, and had gone through various types of therapy (most often AA) in order to restore balance to their lives.

Six of the facilitators were women. All had previous experience working with battered women, either in a shelter or in a traditional healing circle. In addition to their life experience, they had experience as help providers at the community level.

The two male facilitators had never worked in a healing circle before but had a good knowledge of the social problematic and of the rehabilitation process, being acknowledged ex-abusers themselves. They also had experience as help providers.

The study facilitators are not perceived in the community as "therapists" in the usual sense of the term C i.e. they do not hold university degrees in recognized specialties. However, there is no doubt that they are "natural helpers," by which we mean people who are open to others, are ready and willing to help and serve, and are often asked to do so.

The facilitators were personally recruited by the study coordinator, who had 18 years of experience in community work in the locality and already knew them. A professional psychologist, she had worked in various fields, both in education and social service. In the mid-70s, she became interested in the lifestyle of Innu women; she began listening to their needs and working to create structures to meet those needs.

2.2.4 Recruiting Participants

Since 1985, there has been extensive discussion of violence against women in our communities. Our consultations and our experience as a therapist with women in both communities have led us to the conviction that no woman has escaped unscathed: every woman in the community has suffered some form of violence in her family, in a relationship, or in her immediate social environment, either as a child, as an adolescent, or as an adult.

Based on this observation, the facilitators recruited participants at random from among the women in the community. The facilitators were however asked to make sure the group was representative in terms of age, ranging from 18 to 40 and over.

Male participants were recruited on the basis of the same general criterion, and not because they were known to be abusers or labelled as "violent".

The decision to form four focus groups was based on the budget available for the study. It would have been possible to form a dozen groups (from the population of approximately 500 adult women) but, given the homogeneity of the social fabric in our community, a four group limit appeared acceptable for the purposes of the study.

We decided to form groups of eight participants each. Generally accepted standards for focus groups place the number between six and 12 people per group (Simard, 1989).

2.2.5 Group Facilitation

From the very first contact, the facilitator would explain to the participant the nature of the project, the topics that would be dealt with and the talking circle format. If the person

accepted, the facilitator would determine the person's availability to ensure that time constraints, daycare arrangements or other problems would not prevent the person from taking part.

Group facilitation was in keeping with the specific dynamic of the healing circle, at least as it is practised in our community. Each member of the group takes the floor in turn, without being questioned and without any direct dialogue with other group members while the speaker has the floor. The facilitator can request a clarification, but not question or interrupt. The participant can speak for as long as she wishes. Each group member may speak several times before the group decides that the session is ended.

A session lasts two or three hours (usually three). The facilitators present the topic and check with the group to make sure the translation into Innu-aimun (the Innu tongue) accurately renders the content of the French text.

The confidential and anonymous nature of the meetings is emphasized from the outset; the fact that the session is being taped and the use to which the tape will be put are explained.

2.2.6 Selection of Topics

As the study had two main objectives C to collect data on violence and on solutions, and to observe the circle healing process C a list of eight topics was drawn up, four relating to violence and four to healing. This division was also in keeping with the dynamic of the healing circle: 1) becoming aware of the problem; 2) trying to heal with the help of others. There was one session on each topic. A detailed description of the topics in the interview guide appears in Section 2.3.

The list of topics was drawn up before the study began, but the topics and the practical exercises accompanying most of them were subsequently revised in consultation with the facilitators.

2.2.7 Taping the Sessions

Each meeting was tape recorded with the consent of the group. Participants did not object to being taped as long as they were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

A number of technical problems did however arise, the biggest of which was that we did not have a tape recorder! For a time, the groups had to share a borrowed tape recorder. Another problem was that at emotional moments, group members did not always speak loudly enough, and on our poor-quality tape recorders their voices became almost inaudible; the facilitators had to listen to tapes over and over in order to decipher them.

2.2.8 Analysis of Results

We used an analytical grid (matrix) which essentially consisted of a thematic schema developed as we pored over the translations of the tapes. To begin this work, we had to wait until the sessions were over and the facilitators were available to help with the analysis.

Briefly, the data on all the topics was collected and then categorized, coded, rated and quantified. The process combined qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis based on systematic coding of results. The two types of analysis were seen as complementary.

The analysis was performed progressively on a group-by-group basis. The transcripts of the sessions were subjected to detailed examination, which served as a starting point for the process of categorization, coding and inference.

The meetings began in mid-June and ended in late August. As the final report was due in September, there was little time for content analysis and especially for evaluation of the data as such. We chose to provide the most important information here, and leave other details and comments for possible later analysis.

2.3 Description of Topics

TOPIC 1: FORMS OF VIOLENCE

A. PRESENTATION METHOD

The purpose here is to have the group explore the forms of violence it can identify, based both on group members' personal experiences and their acquaintances:

in a relationship

in the family

in the community

as a woman (or man)

as an Innu woman (or man)

You can also discuss violence which affects our environment C pollution, the political situation, etc.

You can help group members by suggesting they think back to any violence they may have experienced in the past (in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood).

Activity:Show Conférence-femme video (25 minutes)

Go around the group with the question "what did you feel while watching the video?" not "what did you think of the video?"

B. EXPLANATORY NOTES

This topic was included both to collect data on the types of violence group members had experienced and to make them aware of the different forms of violence. Family violence counsellors are now generally aware that victims of physical violence suffer other types of violence over a period of years before being hit and injured by their spouses. The victim did not perceive these acts of psychological, economic and sexual violence as violence as such, but rather attributed the behaviour to the parent's or spouse's quick-tempered nature, or to her own shortcomings or

mistakes; the victim blamed herself for the violence of others.

The following forms of violence are presented in the short supporting video:

- physical violence
(slaps, kicks, etc.)
- psychological violence
(insults, hurtful or denigrating comments, guilt trips)
- economic violence
(deprivation of necessities such as food or clothing)
- sexual violence
(lack of respect from partner, being forced to have sex)

Supporting video

This video (approximately 20 minutes in length) is a print of a video shot in February 1993 during a meeting on violence held at the Mani-Utenam gym, which was attended by about 300 aboriginal women. Two women from the community had decided to put on a short play on the different forms of violence. While pamphlets have been available for a number of years, the women either do not read them or do not understand the meaning of terms such as psychological violence and economic violence. Presenting a play in the aboriginal language makes it easier for the group to understand, and the situations are drawn directly from their own experiences, not from those of non-aboriginals.

There is a serious lack of accessible audiovisual materials for use with women in an aboriginal environment. Existing materials mostly depict white women, and aboriginal women find it difficult to identify, reducing the impact of these videos. Moreover, for French-speaking aboriginals (Innuat, Attikamek and Wendats), there are very few French translations of videos portraying aboriginals, and the videos made in French show Québécois and not aboriginals.

In short, despite its shortcomings, this brief supporting video has the merit of depicting violent situations drawn from the experience of aboriginal women, in their own language. During the presentation of the role-plays at the open women's meeting, a number of women testified to the authenticity of the scenes reenacted by the amateur actors and confirmed that this

was indeed how things happened in their own lives. The scenes had in fact been derived in one form or another from the personal experiences of the actors, who had themselves been victims of violence.

When presenting the topic "Forms of Violence," the facilitators can choose to show the video at the beginning or the end of the session, depending on the need to provide fuller explanations of the forms of violence. The facilitators can also select a video of their choice illustrating the various forms of violence.

TOPIC 2:MY EXPERIENCE

AS A VICTIM

AS A PERSON CAPABLE OF VIOLENCE

A.PRESENTATION METHOD

This is a very personal topic which demands great trust among group members and an intimate atmosphere. The purpose is to gather personal testimonials from the group.

You could first go around the group suggesting that members talk about "the violence I have witnessed, what I saw happen to other people (without naming them), and how I felt." However, participants can also choose to talk directly about their own personal experiences.

ACTIVITY:Gouache (30 minutes)

(10 min.)Ask group members to finger paint what they felt while speaking in order to release their feelings. They should express emotions, not shapes or people.

(20 min.)Hang up each member's work and ask him or her to name the emotion.

Finale: the paintings are burned in order to be rid of the emotion.

B. EXPLANATORY NOTES

My experience with violence

Topic 1 may have prompted the women to discuss their experiences as illustrations of the various forms of violence. Topic 2 asks the women to testify directly about their personal experience with violence. This is quite a painful exercise to conduct in a group; each participant suffers for the others. The facilitators are also encouraged to share their own life experiences.

An indirect "the violence I have witnessed" approach is suggested for this topic if group members seem reluctant to speak, but this is not the approach which was used; the women spoke directly about their experiences and were helped by the other group members.

Note that the topic mentions two types of experience: a) as a victim; b) as a person capable of violence. This distinction was originally made because of the inclusion of a men's group in the project, but it had unexpected consequences; it gave the women an opportunity to speak of the violence they themselves had inflicted on their spouses and children, and the men an opportunity to discuss their experiences as both abusers and victims.

The practical exercise for Topic 2 is aimed at freeing participants of negative emotions. After speaking of their experience with violence, group members were asked to use finger paint and their hands to represent the emotions they had experienced during the violent events. They were then asked to name their emotions. At the end of the exercise, all the paintings were burned to indicate that the depicted emotion no longer dwelled within the participant, except in memory. The emotion is linked in time and space to a specific situation and must be expelled if the person wishes to free himself/herself and adopt a positive attitude. For example, if I am still inhabited by the terror I felt while being raped as a child, I will be unable to react to threats against my person in the present.

TOPIC 3:CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

A.PRESENTATION METHOD

You can go back to the forms of violence the group listed in the first session (see transcript for Topic 1). The purpose here is to investigate not so much the motivation or pretext for the violent acts as the cause.

Why does a person become violent?

Why have I been violent?

Is violence learned? How?

Note:It is very important to distinguish here between violence and anger. I can be angry with a person without striking him or her, and without making hurtful or degrading remarks.

ACTIVITY:Role play C "The bridge"

Mark a path on the ground with string or ribbon. It should be about 10 feet long and just wide enough for a person to place both feet inside.

Position two volunteers, one at either end, after explaining to them separately that each must reach the other end of the bridge any way he or she can. If they slip outside the line, they fall off the bridge and die.

A -----6 B
7-----

The purpose of this role-play is to make participants aware that physical force is the rule in many situations and that the violent impulse quickly surfaces at times of stress and tension. People rarely think of negotiating unless that attitude has been developed.

B. EXPLANATORY NOTES

CAUSES

The purpose of this topic is to let group members stand back and look at the violence suffered or inflicted by others. More than in Topic 2, participants are brought to consider the situations which have preceded violence in their experience. Many of them must go back a long way, to their childhood and often their parents' childhood, to seek the causes of violence. With rare exceptions, participants could not remember a time without violence, a time of harmony; most of them therefore pointed to their parents' violence to explain their own.

It should be noted that the phrasing of some of the questions (e.g. "Why have I been violent?") leads participants to look more to an internal causal dynamic than to external causes such as the social situation, economics or the denial of rights. We will have to wait for Topic 7, which deals with cultural factors, to see causes of this type emerge.

The purpose of the "Bridge" exercise included in this topic is to make the group aware that violence is often caused by a desire to control the other person, and this will to control leads to a contest of physical, moral or other types of strength in which the weakest or most deprived person is generally the loser. The exercise also helps make participants aware of their own attitudes in conflict situations. Some participants admit defeat in advance: "I'll kill myself right off the bat." The awareness fostered by this exercise helps the group explore the role of personal attitudes in violent situations.

TOPIC 4: CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE

AS A VICTIM

AS A PERSON WHO HAS INFLICTED VIOLENCE ON OTHERS

A. PRESENTATION METHOD

The purpose of this topic is to have the group examine the consequences of the violence group members had suffered (or inflicted):

1. in the short term (immediately after the violence)

2. in the long term (weeks, months, years after the violence)

You can also examine with the group the effect of the violence on people in the family who are not directly involved.

e.g. attitudes of children, friends, other family members.

ACTIVITIES: Role play C "A lovely afternoon"

Ask for two volunteers and separately explain the role-play to them (5 minutes):

"A": must use verbal violence and reply negatively and hurtfully to anything "B" says.

"B": must talk about the lovely afternoon she spent with her friends and try to keep "A" entertained and happy.

Ask the two volunteers what emotions they experienced during the role-play.

Go around the group and ask the other members what they felt.

The purpose of this role-play is to make the group aware of the effects of verbal violence on both parties, victim and abuser.

B. EXPLANATORY NOTES

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE

More than the first three topics, this topic leads participants to assess the role of violence in their own lives. What is the result in the **HERE** and **NOW** of all the years through which I have suffered or inflicted violence? If there are participants who have already begun a process of change to overcome the effects of violence in their lives, this topic can still help them assess their progress.

The "lovely afternoon" exercise elicited stronger reactions than we had anticipated. It should be noted that we included this exercise on an experimental basis after having discussed it with only two facilitators, both women. At first glance, we deemed the exercise appropriate for summoning up memories of the emotions felt in the wake of verbal violence inflicted by the spouse. We wanted to depict verbal violence (i.e. psychological violence) precisely because the

consequences of this type of violence are less evident in the lives of the women who are the victims of violence. It is possible that the abuser's role was not sufficiently analyzed before this exercise was presented to the group. While it was relatively easy for the victims to play the role of abuser, it was much more difficult for the abusers to play their own role. The facilitators of the men's group refused outright, saying they could not reenact a violent episode due to the emotions it would provoke among the men.

The "lovely afternoon" exercise may be valid for a group of abusers nonetheless, provided the facilitators are in control of their own emotions about the violence in their past. This exercise should be reviewed if this topic is used again in a group of violent men.

TOPIC 5:MY PROGRESS

AS A VICTIM

AS A PERSON CAPABLE OF VIOLENCE

A. PRESENTATION METHOD

The purpose of this topic is to have the group explore how each member has decided to deal with violence.

People start dealing with violence either because they can no longer live with it or because their violence has prompted others intervene.

Making progress towards healing means adopting new attitudes, becoming aware of oneself and one's own values, discovering one's fears and weaknesses, one's strengths and good points.

Making progress means gradually becoming more balanced.

ACTIVITIES:The scale

Make a scale out of a small board. Give a participant a dozen pebbles or small stones of equal size. Ask him or her to place a pebble for each of his or her negative qualities on one side of the scale, naming each pebble (e.g. laziness, impatience, fear of failure, etc.), and a pebble for

each positive quality on the other side. Observe whether the participant goes easily from negative to positive qualities. It is not easy to change.

B. EXPLANATORY NOTES

MY PROGRESS

While some of the members of the circle are still experiencing violence and dealing with daily fear, others join after having rebuilt their personal lives and relationships. The topic of progress also allows the members of the circle to share positive and creative energies. This is the first of the four sessions devoted to healing.

The scale exercise makes group members focus on the positive points in their lives while accepting their own weaknesses. Battered women tend to suffer from low self-esteem and to believe they have no particular skills or abilities. They have often been told they are worthless and they have come to believe it. The exercise seems simple at first glance, but it is not so easy to perform. In practice, in the circles, we replaced the small wooden board with the facilitator's hands, taking the pebbles symbolizing weaknesses in the left hand and the ones for strengths and good points in the right hand.

This enhanced the exercise, forcing participants to tell another person their strengths and weaknesses, which has more impact than placing the pebbles on an anonymous scale.

TOPIC 6: SOLUTIONS

A. PRESENTATION METHOD

Under Topic 5 (My Progress), we looked at the solution each member of the group had chosen for himself or herself. Here, we will consider with the group which solutions are most suitable for helping our community deal with the forms of violence from which it suffers.

Questions to spark discussion:

1. Should we make greater use of existing services such as the police, the youth protection agency,

the women's shelter? Are they effective?

2.Should a person who is a victim of physical violence within the family file a complaint?

3.Should people who sexually abuse children or adults be charged? Are there other ways of dealing with the problem?

4.Is it enough to punish the offender?

5.What solutions do you see for dealing with verbal or psychological violence?

B.EXPLANATORY NOTES

SOLUTIONS

Group members sometimes have difficulty looking beyond their personal experiences and seeing violence as a social phenomenon. As one participant commented, "people don't talk about it, because it is a taboo subject for them." However, violence does exist in most families, and the communities in which this project was conducted hold the record for reports to the provincial youth protection agency. If we refuse to view violence as a social phenomenon and to apply solutions, this is so because the problem within the family prevents communication with the outside, for victim and the abuser both tend to isolate themselves, and also because collective solutions can only be applied if educational, health, social and political authorities recognize that there is a problem.

The first four topics allow an open discussion of violence in the group and thereby prepare the group for a collective approach to the problem. The facilitator may use the questions to spark discussion if he or she wishes, but does not have to use them.

TOPIC 7:INNU CULTURE c VIOLENCE AND HEALING

A.PRESENTATION METHOD

Do my origins, my lifestyle and my values as an Innu influence my behaviour and my

attitudes towards violence?

Complementary questions:

1. Does living on a reserve have an influence on violence?

2. Are there values and customs in our own culture which could help us heal ourselves?

3. Could existing institutions (e.g. the radio station, band council, schools, police, etc.) help families and individuals adopt more positive behaviours?

4. Do you believe that a healing circle of this type is in keeping with the values of Innu culture?

5. What role can spirituality play in changing attitudes?

B. EXPLANATORY NOTES

INNU CULTURE

This is a difficult topic for the group, especially the younger members who do not feel capable of discussing their culture's values because they have lived most of their lives in the non-aboriginal system.

During the session on this topic, one of the groups visited an elder to confirm the facts. This was a happy initiative, for it enlightened the participants about the culture's values relating to respect and child-rearing. These values were then discussed and a process of consciousness-raising ensued.

If these topics are used as a general framework with other groups, it would be advisable to include a text or short video on cultural values.

TOPIC 8:THE HEALING CIRCLE

A.PRESENTATION METHOD

The purpose of this topic is to bring group members to assess their participation in the Violence and Healing project. You can use questions to clarify the practical benefits the circle has brought them in their lives and whether they have noticed changes in themselves.

Go around the group a second time to elicit recommendations on how to help the other families (children, men, women) in the community.

B.EXPLANATORY NOTES

HEALING CIRCLE

The purpose of going around the group the second time is simply to find out whether the participants think the process could benefit other people and families they know.

In small communities, news travels fast and many people felt frustrated at not being included in the project. This second question can serve to assess the real need for a second series of sessions in the community.

3. Analysis of Results

As mentioned in the section on methodology, we will present a summary/analysis of the results here, identifying the key messages sent by the participants. We have organized these messages into five categories:

- forms of violence
- causes
- consequences
- solutions

The fifth category, the participants' assessment of the healing circle process, is dealt with in Section 4.

We have chosen to present the results for men and women separately. Limitations of time prevented us from presenting comparative tables for the sexes, which would have made it easier to see common points and differences. However, the comments at the beginning of each section deal with this point.

It will also be noted that there are very few statistics, except in some compilations where we wanted to emphasize the exceptional or general nature of the data. Statistical analysis would have demanded more time and more refined analytical grids. In any event, we are sceptical about the real usefulness of statistics on family violence, at least for the perpetrators and the victims.

3.1 Forms of Violence

3.1.1 Women's Circles

The forms of violence reported by the members of the three women's circles have been organized into two major categories:

- violence suffered during childhood
- violence suffered during adulthood

We then subdivided the acts of violence into four subcategories:

- physical violence
- psychological violence (verbal and non-verbal)
- sexual violence
- economic violence

The women saw themselves from the beginning as both victims and violent people. Their accounts of their experiences with violence included both the violence they had suffered and the violence they had inflicted on their children and sometimes their husbands. Their descriptions of the violence they had suffered were generally very brief and included very few details. For example, women would generally just say "he beat me" to describe physical violence, without specifying with what or on what part of the body. We should point out that all the women had

suffered physical violence and did not see any need to provide details among themselves. The details in the following tables are incomplete, because many facts were left unstated. The forms of violence appear in the tables in order of frequency, from the most frequent to the least frequent.

TABLE 1
VIOLENCE SUFFERED DURING CHILDHOOD
<p><u>Physical violence (50%)</u></p> <p>Being beaten with a belt Being beaten with a broom Being kicked</p> <p><u>Psychological violence (70%)</u></p> <p>Having orders shouted at you regularly Hurtful remarks Derogatory nicknames Unable to sleep at night because parents are drinking and making too much noise Verbal rejection by one parent</p> <p><u>Sexual violence (40%)</u></p> <p>Fondling by an adult (grandfather, father, uncle or another adult) Sexual penetration by an adult (rape)</p>

Describing childhood sexual abuse was a very painful experience for participants. If they described these acts, it was primarily to free themselves of a suffocating weight, an internal block which they could no longer bear:

I was abused as a child and today I still feel hatred. I cannot forget it...This is the first time I have talked about it. A5-2

My first childhood memory is of the first time I was sexually abused. A2-2

As a child, I was abused to the point of rape. I have remained marked by that and I have blocks. A5-5

I was sexually abused during childhood. It started when I was six and continued until I was 12.

A5-6

We could quote participants' comments at much greater length, but they all come back to the same terrible pain of having been devastated as a child. Sexual abuse of children remains a highly taboo subject in the community. And yet 40% of the women reported having been abused and most spoke of rape C i.e. not just fondling but sexual penetration.

Physical and psychological violence were described with less pain. As will be seen, however, their impact in terms of causes and consequences is enormous, precisely because the women had accepted the violence as another value:

Violence was part of child-rearing. Those acts of violence had practically no effect on me, they were so common.

A-2

If you're talking about all types of violence, I have experienced them all without knowing it. There was violence everywhere.

A-1

I grew up thinking that being beaten meant being loved.

A.2-5

The women who spoke in these terms are between 20 and 40, so they were 10-year-olds between the 1960s and 1980s; they all belong to the generation of children born on the reserve, not in the bush. We note this fact because it seems that this "normal climate" of violence coincides with sedentation and confinement to the reserve. We will return to this point in the section on causes.

TABLE 2

VIOLENCE SUFFERED DURING ADULTHOOD

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

- Blows to the face
- Blows to the body
- Being choked
- Being shaken against a wall
- Having objects thrown at you
- Being beaten with an object (stick, belt)
- Having hair pulled

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

- Death threats
- Being threatened with a weapon (gun, knife, etc.)
- Being called names
- Being insulted in private or public
- Living in daily fear
- Being forced to serve husband at night
- Not being allowed to go out

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Being forced to have sex despite a verbal refusal
- Being raped
- Being forced into acts or positions considered humiliating

ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

- Receiving no money
- Being unable to buy clothing
- Not receiving enough money for groceries because husband drinks
- Being forced by husband to stop working
- Etc.

Violence suffered during adulthood is almost always at the hands of the woman's partner (husband, cohabitor or boyfriend), often when he is drunk, but also and more frequently when he is sober. Violence is inflicted in the home in front of the children.

I have always been on the defensive because I have experienced so much violence. A4-3

I was afraid of him because he had started to beat me. Before we were married, he raped me. A2-6

I experience verbal, physical and economic violence. My children see their father beating me. D1-7

Today, I live in fear with my spouse. I have experienced violence with my husband. The children have seen me cry. D2-4

My husband often wanted to kill me. I lived in fear...I was so afraid that my husband would kill me in my sleep that I kept a big monkey wrench under my mattress. It got so I was afraid to sleep at night. M2-3

I have always been afraid of him [my husband] because one day he got mad, he had a gun, and he shot it. M2-1

Now, he doesn't touch me any more. On the other hand, he is destroying me psychologically. I think it hurt me less when he used to hit me. I didn't think about the blows afterwards but the words have stayed with me. He is always putting me down. A2-6

Sexual violence by the husband is often reported. Awareness of sexual violence seems however to be of more recent date, the women having unwillingly inherited the "marital duty" syndrome.

When I didn't feel like having sex, when I said no, he would harass me...so then I would do it...I cried, I didn't feel good about it, I despised myself. I thought I was abnormal and I didn't talk about it. M3-2

Sometimes, I think, "I was a prostitute, having sex with my husband when I didn't want to"...After a while, you start thinking it is unnatural, because you don't talk about it with other women. M2-3

To me, being taken by force by my spouse was like rape. A5-3

Women seem to be reconsidering their acceptance of sexual violence on the part of their spouses. They do not condemn sexual violence as strongly as other forms of violence but they are starting to question their own attitude of submission and passivity in this respect.

TABLE 3

VIOLENCE INFLICTED BY WOMEN

ON SPOUSE (20%)

- Trying to kill him with a knife
- Hitting him in the head with an object
- Making hurtful remarks
- Humiliating him in public
- Sulking for days
- Throwing his clothes out of the house
- Nagging him about money

ON CHILDREN (90%)

Physical violence

- Hitting them hard with an object
- Hitting them hard with hands
- Kicking them
- Hitting them in the face
- Forcing them to do housework

Psychological violence

- Shouting at children
- Making hurtful remarks
- Ridiculing them
- Frightening them
- Not letting them rest

Economic violence

- Spending grocery money on drink or bingo and depriving the children

While some women (20%) do use physical and psychological violence against their spouses, they do so mostly in reprisal. The women who say they are more violent than their spouses are a small minority (2%).

The study's most striking finding is the violence inflicted on children, by both men and women. The women admit they take out their frustrations on their children, and as will be seen the men inflict just as much abuse on their children. This is the most widely acknowledged fact which emerged from this study of family violence: the children are abused by the victim (the mother) as much as by the abuser (the father).

In addition to being hit or bawled out by their parents, the children often become the scapegoats for family violence and are used for protection, jeopardizing their own safety.

One day, he wanted to shoot me. I heard him load the cartridge in the rifle. I picked up my three-month-old baby and I told him, "If you want to kill me, you'll kill him too." M-43

Sometimes, to protect myself, I placed my four children around me. M-43

When my husband wanted to beat me, I used my children as a shield. Then I found a better way to protect myself, by using furniture to lock myself in the bedroom with the children. M-41

When I think of what I did to my little girl, I almost killed her. D-12

I sometimes do to my daughter the things my mother did to me; it goes to the point of tears. A-31

We drank every day. As soon as we ran out, we became aggressive and turned on the children....More than once, I caught myself spanking them and shouting at them. D-37

3.1.2 Men's Circles

It should be noted that the men's group consisted for the most part of individuals who said their violence was a thing of the past. Their ages ranged from 29 to 57. They acknowledged that they had been violent, indeed very violent. In their minds, family violence meant physical violence towards their wives. Only after a number of sessions did the various forms of violence become clear (psychological, sexual, economic).

It was the men's group that brought up racial violence (racism against aboriginals) and

political violence (the theft and pillage of Innu land by governments). These forms of violence were not discussed in the women's groups.

Only towards the third session (on the causes of violence) did the various forms of violence suffered during childhood begin to emerge. The men dealt with this topic very differently than the women; they provided few details and hardly ever spoke of the emotions they had felt.

The men did not mention extreme forms of physical violence, such as assault with an object (knife, stick, etc.) or threats with a weapon. We do not believe that this was due to any attempt to hide the facts, but rather because the guilt and remorse are still acute and that the men still have difficulty controlling the emotions generated by testimonials of this kind.

TABLE 4

VIOLENCE INFLICTED BY MEN

Physical violence

- Beating wife with fists
- Beating children
- Hitting wife with an object
- Shaking wife violently
- Throwing objects near wife
- Breaking dishes
- Breaking down the door to the house

Psychological violence

- Acting jealous and harassing wife
- Making demeaning or hurtful remarks, ridiculing the other person
- Shouting at wife and children
- Swearing at family members
- The silent treatment; expressing anger by not speaking
- Glaring at the other person
- Getting mad at children in order to hurt spouse

Economic violence

- Taking household money to go out drinking

Sexual violence

- Forcing wife to have sex when she does not want to
- Forcing spouse to assume positions she does not want to

Though the men had difficulty talking about the violence they had inflicted on others, they did nevertheless describe significant instances of such violence.

I have struck my wife the way you strike a man. I felt remorse for years. N-12

When I get mad at the kids, I lose control. N-24

I am violent at home and I am always swearing at everyone. N-25

When I speak, it is usually to wound. The kids know it. It is mostly at meal time that I argue a lot. A-21

You could say I have lived with nothing but violence. There is a lot of physical violence; it is not pretty to see. A-24

Sometimes, I know I am making my wife suffer, but I'm tired of having sex in the same way. A-54

I didn't realize I was upsetting my wife by forcing her to have sex until the day I saw her cry. A-47

When I shout at my wife, I think to myself that she is lucky I cannot touch her. A-17

TABLE 5
VIOLENCE SUFFERED BY MEN
<p><u>Psychological violence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Seeing parents fight as a child -Being insulted by wife -Being demeaned and ridiculed by wife <p><u>Racial violence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rejection by whites in the workplace -Being forced to take second place to whites in public places -Being underpaid in relation to whites <p><u>Political violence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Destruction of Innu lands -Theft of land through appropriation without authorization

The women mentioned having hit their husbands on a number of occasions. The men did not speak of this but did not deny that physical violence towards men could occur. What does affect them is psychological violence from their wives and external violence C government violence and the violence of racism.

I am still working on healing the wounds from my childhood, for I often saw my mother being beaten and insulted by my father. A-36

My wife calls me a good-for-nothing. A-12

In the store, they serve whites before me. I offends me; I leave the merchandise there. N-73

The whites do not treat us as equals. Even the band council C if it hires a white, it will pay him top dollar, but it won't do that with an Indian. N-71

The government wants to build a dam on our land. It is going to give us money for it. And in return, we're going to pay for the electricity. It is our own money that the government is going to use. N-72

3.2 Causes

3.2.1 Women's Circles

This topic prompted intense analysis of participants' experiences past and present (childhood and married life). The women tried to go back as far as possible to the origins of their fears, to try to understand why they had never been able to react to violence and why they themselves had become "violent victims."

TABLE 6
CAUSES OF VIOLENCE PERCEIVED BY WOMEN
<p><u>Past causes</u> (from childhood)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Violence between parents -Violent behaviour towards children -Learning fear -Loss of identity -Sexual abuse <p><u>Present causes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Inability to express feelings -Living on a reserve -Lack of spirituality -Lack of dialogue -Alcohol and drugs -Jealousy -Poverty -Media violence (TV) -Loss of traditional values

MEMORIES OF FEAR

Like pleasure, joy or sadness, fear is an emotion with roots in the past. This emotion occupies a large place in the women's memories, so much so that for many of them memory seems to have become Memories of Fear.

I have always seen my father beating my mother. *M-25*

*Whenever I wanted to speak, they told me to shut up. I was afraid of my family.
My adoptive father beat me; my adoptive mother mostly said
hurtful things...I am still afraid.* *M-26*

When I was little, at home, I used to wake up at night. People were drunk. I

was always expecting violence to break out. I lived in fear. A-21

I saw the violence my mother suffered. A-24

When I think of the past, I think I have always suffered violence. I have always been afraid of asserting myself. A-51

My mother told me she was often beaten by her mother (my grandmother) until she lost consciousness. She was always on her guard, even after she got married...and I can remember my mother beating my father when I was a child, I can still see the blood trickling through his hair...One day, I realized that the violence dwelled inside me, without me being aware of it. I told myself it came from the time when I was an alcoholic, but it came from very far in the past. D-34

When I was little, I was very afraid of my parents. I look at the past with my father and mother and I am disappointed that my mother never did anything to get out of the situation....Today, I live in fear with my husband. D-24

Living in fear and learning to cope with sexual abuse, hurtful remarks and physical cruelty means learning to keep silent for self-protection.

The shroud of secrecy surrounding childhood violence is now perceived by the women as one of the main causes of present-day abuse and violence. The following example illustrates how silence fosters the repetition of violence. It involves four generations of women, all still alive: the great grandmother, 70, the grandmother, 40, the mother 20, and the daughter, 5. The women of the first three generations were all sexually abused during childhood. Fear prevented them from speaking of it to anyone until one day, the grandmother experienced an awakening and decided to tell all in order to protect her grandchildren. Here is what she said:

I told my mother I had been abused. She was very surprised because she told me she had also been abused by an old man. So my mother, I and my daughters were all abused. My mother was afraid to talk about it. If she had told me about it, maybe I would not have been abused and I would have been able to talk to my daughters.

It was only after therapy that I was able to talk to my daughters about it and I learned that they had been abused during their placement in foster homes...

I talked to my 5-year-old granddaughter about it. She said, "Don't worry. My

mother has told me about it and I will be careful."

M-63

The fear is kept alive not only by silence but also by the fact that the victims and the abusers continue to live in close proximity. The abuser is almost always a close relative such as a grandfather, father, uncle or brother. The "reserves" are by definition closed villages where it is impossible to go to the police without the whole community being affected. Not blowing the whistle on the abuser either within the family or without perpetuates the violence. Often, the same abuser will attack the girls in his family through two generations.

I was abused by my grandfather. He touched my private parts. It went as far as rape....I do not want to make my daughter go through that.

A-55

The man who abused me is dead and it's a good thing. I think of people whose abusers are still walking around here; it must be very difficult.

M-63

A member of my family abused me when I was little, and when I see him I am filled with hatred for him. I am still afraid; I don't go out except to go the convenience store when I need something. Another member of my family abused me. I am still afraid he will come to my house. I still think of what he did to me. Maybe that is why I am aggressive.

D-25

I was sexually abused by a relative. He threatened me to keep me from telling. He was not the only one who did that to me; others did too. That is why I have always wanted to leave the reserve, so I wouldn't have to meet the men who abused me.

A-26

When the women examine their behaviour as adults, many find that they are still filled with fear and that it is not easy for them to progress towards personal balance and growth. They say they are afraid to talk to their spouses, just as they were afraid to talk about it with their mothers when they were children. This fear makes dialogue with the husband very difficult; his desire for control intensifies the woman's sense of powerlessness.

Alcohol and drugs are not directly related to violence. The women see addiction as a consequence of violence.

I started taking them at the age of 13. In that state, I was able to bear the things I had been through.

26

Alcohol and drugs are seen as intensifiers of violence, especially violence against children.

The women also recognize that the climate of family violence made it impossible to inculcate the values of self-respect and respect for others. They grew up in self-hatred, unable to express love or tenderness.

Before, I was unable to say "I love you," even to my children. I have never heard my mother say "I love you." I learned to hide my feelings and emotions.

M-25

Among the other causes of family violence reported by the women are loss of identity and loss of aboriginal cultural values. As the parents had abandoned the ancestral way of life and settled on the reserves in the 1950s, they could not continue passing the traditional values down to their children.

It was also during the 1950s that a boarding school was built for Innu children on the North Shore and the white educational system replaced the Innu system. And it was at this time that alcoholism began to ravage the community, nourished by inaction, poverty and frustration.

My parents did not teach me my culture and I feel lost. I am still searching for myself, and at this point it hurts.

A-75

In my opinion, that is where my violence comes from, when I started to lose my identity as an Innu woman.

A-73

An Innu woman who denies her culture will strive in vain to become well.

A-79

Today, we live on a reserve. We have abandoned the values of our ancestors. I think a rage formed in our hearts when we lost our identity and our spirituality.

M-71

The cause of my violence is the loss of my identity. I have become very aggressive, accusing the white system of destroying my culture and my language.

A-83

The women's groups also disclosed how the loss of spirituality in their daily lives had contributed to sustaining their fear and discontent. We shall return to this in the discussion of solutions (Section 3.5).

3.2.2 Men's Circles

As in the women's circles, the search for causes led painfully back to childhood in the men's groups. Table 7 presents the causes identified by the men, in order of frequency.

TABLE 7

CAUSES OF VIOLENCE PERCEIVED BY MEN

Past causes

- Violence between parents
- Violent behaviour towards children
- Favouritism towards one child over another
- White racism at school

Present causes

- Desire for control (88%)
- Jealousy
- Money
- Anger building up inside until it explodes
- Lack of communication
- Use of father to inculcate respect for authority
- Lack of awareness of violence
- Lack of self-confidence
- Loss of traditional values
- Fear of rejection
- Revenge
- Alcohol

A LEGACY OF VIOLENCE

Violence is perceived by the men as an established fact. Being violent has become a WAY TO BE and a WAY OF LIFE.

All the men reported that they had learned to be violent at a very young age, either by growing up with parents who were themselves violent and inflicted violence on their children, or by picking up violence from the larger society (fighting with whites at school). The men do not blame alcohol as such for their violence, although they do say they are more violent under the

effect of alcohol and drugs. They clearly indicated that violence in words and deeds was something they had learned. As shall be seen, this realization would have an impact on how they saw the handing down of this painful legacy (see section on consequences).

The myth of the Indian who is violent only under the influence of alcohol is rejected by the men as it was by the women. Violence is a part of daily life:

It is as if we have lived with nothing but violence and it is difficult to get rid of it. N-33

I have never lived a day without violence in my relationship. I always find a reason to get angry. N-34

Most subscribed to the model of the all-powerful father who must be in control of his family. Non-aboriginals often see this image of the father as part of the patriarchal model. We do not believe, however, that the image of the father which we found is simply a reproduction of the European model of the father; rather, it is an adaptation of the cultural model of the man as hunter/provider. Until about fifty years ago (the grandparents' generation), the men were almost solely responsible for the family's survival. A bad decision could mean hunger or death.

In the old days, when a group of Montagnais decided to go into the bush, there was always a person designated to act as leader of the group. He was called "AKASHK," which means arrowhead or "captain." "AKASHK" was chosen by the members of all the families on the basis of his abilities. He had to be just, equitable, dependable, for he made all the decisions. He held the group's fate in his hands. Everything depended on him.

Tshernish et al, p. 2

AKASHK's decisions generally could not be appealed and his authority went unchallenged. While the families no longer live in clans as they once did, this model of authority has been transferred to the father, but only in partial form, for the fact that AKASHK's authority was conferred upon him by the families has been lost. AKASHK was chosen; he did not receive his power by virtue of his position as father or by birth.

As this person had shown courage and tenacity, entire families would give their names to the leader to join his group.

Tshernish et al, p. 3

AKASHK's position was based on his ability to fulfil his responsibilities:

As the leader of the group, "AKASHK" had to see to the well-being of the families, overseeing the sharing of food and the division of labour, and scrutinizing the weather in order to plan the group's movements.

Tshernish et al, p. 2

This may help us understand the attitude of the men in our communities towards authority. They say that their desire for total control, to be always right and never admit their faults, is in large part responsible for their violence.

My wife did not want me to go out. I beat her quite often for this reason. N-22

I think it is also a matter of pride. We don't want to be wrong. Sometimes my wife is right, but I don't tell her. N-44

At meals, I say bring me this, bring me that. I am in control. I want people to see me as the boss. They are afraid of me. N-44

There is the same attitude towards the children:

I am the one who reprimands the children; my wife doesn't do it. She doesn't say anything to the kids, she gets the good part. The children see us as cross fathers, because the mothers have given us that role. My only contact with the children is through anger. N-11

Here again, this seems to be a family legacy:

As far back as I can remember in my childhood, my father never held me in his arms. He was always angry. N-55

They now feel uncomfortable with this image of the father but they are passing it down to their own children:

My kids are afraid of me. I think it may be my wife's fault, because she does not punish the children. N-1 (forms)

The men are distressed by their common feeling that their children are afraid of them.

They say they are tired of playing a negative role with the children and blame it on their wives. We do not believe that this is justified; rather, the wife has trouble asserting herself and dares not play a child-rearing role claimed by the father. It is however true that the women will often use "fear of the father" to control the children.

According to some studies based on the Jesuit *Rélations*, Innu women and men had equal status at the time of the conquest:

Among the early 17th century Montagnais, for whom the band was the basic economic unit, women had no economic or social duty to attend to the needs and feelings of men, and they showed no particular deference to men. The first Jesuits thus observed in Montagnais society an equality of the sexes which nettled them.

J. Mailhot 1983

Innu women are thought to have lost this equality as the Innu gradually became involved in the capitalist economy through the fur trade. I would also add that the adoption by the Innu of the values of the Catholic religion, in which the status of women is linked to their ability to give birth, relegated Innu women to the lowest rung of the ladder.

MONEY AND JEALOUSY

The most frequently-mentioned causes of violence in the men's group included arguments about money and jealousy.

While some men reported having inflicted economic violence on their families by drinking away the grocery money, in most cases arguments break out over how the money is spent.

I have no control over the money and it makes me aggressive.

N-22

This brings us back once again to the desire to be in control of the whole family, and money serves as a means of control. When the man does not have full control of the money, fights break out. In most couples, the woman does the shopping (groceries, paying the bills, buying clothes) and it is therefore up to her to watch how she spends the money. The man wants to control the money but does not do what he must to exercise control. He can only observe his own failure and blame the women, which is easy to do.

The men indicate however that, unlike non-aboriginals, they do not budget and this prevents them from carrying out their plans.

Most of the families (close to 70%) live on social assistance, which gives them an annual income of about \$12,000. That can provide material for months of argument over budget priorities. Poverty is not perceived as a cause of violence, but money is. The tradition of the elders teaches that "in the old days, we did not know money and we were happy." The men perceive money as an impingement upon their control and a symbol of social exploitation by white society.

As in white society, money is a symbol of power; lack of money is perceived to compromise the man's power. Since the woman is usually the person who must spend the money, she is held responsible for the lack of money and subjected to violence.

There was extensive discussion of jealousy in the group. Seven men out of nine saw it as the most frequent cause of arguments and violence.

It is a sickness, because I feel sick, it hurts, and I even have trouble breathing. N-55

*Jealousy is a feeling which can keep you from living and make you very violent.
You feel bad and it is very painful.* N-55

*Experiencing jealousy is very difficult; I don't eat, I don't sleep, I just drink
coffee.* N-55

*I am happy that we are talking about jealousy, even if we cannot solve all our
problems. Solving the problem of jealousy would solve much of
our problems with violence.* N-56

The men are jealous on account of their spouses and report that their spouses are also jealous. It seems to be a widespread feeling. It would be simple to attribute jealousy to a desire to control the other, to fear of losing power over the other. Without denying that this marital insecurity has its roots in the personal insecurity of each partner, it still remains that the way children are brought up must surely play a critical role:

What bothers me the most with the children is that we are showing them how to

be jealous. We pretend to pick up little brother so baby will come to us. We teach him to be jealous and we laugh about it.

N-45

Jealousy was cited by the men as one of the leading causes of family violence. It is also a cause of violence between women and is a factor in most fights between girls. The phenomenon is so widespread that it is becoming socially accepted, as if it were natural to respond to any infidelity by one's partner, real or imagined, with violence.

Lack of communication

When the men are afraid of becoming violent, they fall silent. They store up their frustrations, and their resentment of their spouse and children builds up.

For them, ANGER and VIOLENCE are synonymous. When I am angry, I am violent. They have not learned to express their anger and feelings of aggression by means other than violent words and deeds.

No one can speak without anger in our home.

N-33

When I am at home and a child gets hit, I feel anger but I do not express it. I keep it all inside. But when I get angry with the kids, I lose control.

N-22

3.3 Consequences

3.3.1 Women's Circles

Violence breeds violence and the victim becomes the abuser. Of course, the consequences include fear and the whole array of negative feelings and depressive reactions, but the women complain most bitterly of the fact that they have become violent victims.

TABLE 8
CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Living in fear -Becoming violent in turn -Taking it out on the children -Emotional and social withdrawal -Alcohol and drug abuse -Depression -Suicide -Inability to have a positive sex life -Nicotinism -Self-hatred -Low self-esteem -Embarrassment -Hospitalization

FEAR

This is the most immediate consequence of violence. The women have been carrying this fear inside them since childhood and find it very difficult to free themselves of it. Those who were still living with family violence during the study expressed a fresh and sharp fear. Those who had succeeded in eliminating violence from their daily lives still spoke of their battle with fear, for they had not fully recovered and could not assert themselves as they would have liked to do. The women spoke not only of their own fear but also that of their children; they spoke of their pain at seeing their children's suffering, which they were often powerless to relieve.

When I was little, I had many fears. Fear of standing up to my parents. Fear for my family when they were drinking. Today, I still live in fear with my spouse, because he is violent with me.

D-23

I do not say anything to my husband because I am afraid. I am afraid of him, I am afraid he will hit me. I am more afraid of him than before because recently he wanted to hit me with a stick. I am more and

more afraid.

M-31

When I see violence around me, it scares me. This fear is constant. I would like it to change. I would like to stop being afraid C afraid of being touched, afraid of being abused.

A-24

As soon as night fell, fear would come over me. I knew that soon it would be time to go to bed; the time would come when, like every evening, he would harass me and try to have sexual relations. That went on for several years.

A-22

I want to leave this place because I don't feel comfortable here. I am always afraid.

D-52

When I was pregnant, it was worse. I tried to protect myself the best I could so I would not be injured. I lived in constant fear. I hid in the closets with the children.

A-46

THE VIOLENCE OF THE VICTIM

We could write a book about the women's comments on their fear of violence. However, their remarks also point to a more disturbing consequence of violence: the victims themselves become violent. The women say they "take it out" on their children. They understand that this is a way of transferring tension from the stronger to the weaker.

Violence affects the whole family. When my husband starts on me, I continue on the kids....It is like a tornado in the family, it goes so fast.

M-11

When a person experiences violence, she does the same thing. After someone does something to you, you turn on someone who is smaller.

M-33

It was always the same thing; I took it out on my kids because I was afraid of my husband.

M-31

As a consequence of violence, I did many things to my son until he was 5. I often hit him in the face. I beat him with a stick, his eyes were swollen. It hurt me to see him like that.

A-44

When he got drunk, he would rape me when he came home. When he left, I would turn on the kids. They were the ones who paid. I beat them senseless.

A-42

When I think of what I did to my daughter, I almost killed her.

D-12

The physical and psychological violence inflicted on the children by their mothers, themselves victims of violence, goes almost unnoticed. Situations of this type are rarely if ever reported to the youth protection agency. When a battered woman seeks help outside the home, people rarely consider the fate of the children. Of course, they make sure the children are safe by taking them out of the family home and keeping them at the shelter, but they rarely worry about the mother becoming violent. Far be it from us to try to blame the victim once again, but it does seem very important C indeed of overriding importance C to treat one of the most terrible consequences of the violence, the violence inflicted on the children.

Among the other consequences reported by the women are a series of disturbed reactions ranging from insomnia, loss of appetite, and social withdrawal to depression, attempted suicide, and even attempted mariticide.

If I had the courage, I would commit suicide so he would stop making me suffer.

D-41

*Please help me. My child is so little, and I am so afraid I will commit suicide.
As soon as I feel my own anger, I lock myself in my room.*

D-22

*I have wanted to commit suicide many times, but I did not have the courage. It is
a good thing I had my children.*

M-42

*I have caused my children much suffering through violence, by trying to kill my
husband while under the influence of alcohol and drugs.*

M-44

*I was in a depression. I would wake up at night and rock myself and smoke
cigarette after cigarette.*

M-43

*Sometimes, I could have killed him and I cried. I did not feel right about it, I
hated myself.*

M-41

*There was no more respect in my life. I had succeeded in stifling my fear with
alcohol and drugs. My children saw me try to stab my husband
one day.*

M-34

We will see in the Solutions section how these women are overcoming the past and mastering their fears and feelings of aggression.

3.3.2 Men's Circles

It sometimes takes a distance of several years before one can measure the consequences of one's violent behaviour. The members of the men's group ranged in age from 29 to 57; the mean age was 40. As will be seen, it was in many cases their own children who enabled them to discover and assess the consequences of their own violence.

TABLE 9
CONSEQUENCES OF MALE VIOLENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Children afraid of father -Social isolation -Communication problems with children -No expression of affection -Children learn violence -Guilt and remorse -Self-hatred -Depression, feeling powerless to repair the damage -Fear on part of spouse -Alcohol -Prison -Desire for revenge -Fatigue

FEAR IN THE EYES OF THE CHILDREN

While some abusers are aware that their violence has a devastating effect on the people around them, they find it difficult at this stage to measure the full consequences of their actions. They do know however that they inspire fear in others.

It is the attitude of their own children which most affects them:

My children are afraid of me.

N-11

They accept the role of the parent who metes out discipline, and they blame their wives:

The children see us as cross fathers, because the mothers have given us that role.

N-11

When my wife is not happy with the kids, she calls me to reprimand them.

N-13

My wife tells me the kids are afraid of me, but she is the one who makes me play that role. When severity is needed, they call for the man.

N-12

What the men neglected to say is that they were ready and willing to accept the role of "the fear-inspiring father" with their children.

At the same time, the wife inculcates fear of the father in the children at a very early age, through her own attitude towards his violence.

Moreover, as is often the case, the father uses the children as scapegoats on whom he can take out the anger he cannot express with his wife or the outside world.

Sometimes I am angry with my wife but I turn on the kids. I have often done that.

The direct and immediate consequences of the child's fear is a breakdown in communication. The child no longer speaks to his father spontaneously; he goes to his mother if he wants something.

My children go through their mother if they want to ask me for something, and it hurts me.

When the fathers want to communicate non-violently with their children, they feel awkward.

I find it difficult to communicate with my son. When the time comes to speak to him, I feel embarrassed.

N-23

FROM FRIGHTENED BOY TO VIOLENT MAN

As the children grow up, the men become aware of another consequence of their violent behaviour: the children tend to reproduce their father's behaviour.

I say we teach our children to be violent by our actions. We set a bad example by our words....I see myself in my children.

N-4

My teenage son was going through a crisis. We had to call the police because he

had beaten his mother; he gave her a black eye. N-6

The last time one of my sons was in court, the judge warned him that if he doesn't stop beating his girlfriend, he'll wind up in jail for two years. N-6

In time, the fathers become aware that their frightened sons have turned into violent men. This realization is painful, for they do not know how to change things.

Now, we are trying to repair the damage and I find it difficult. At my age, I am still trying to find myself and I am looking for ways to help myself. N-4

BUYING LOVE

The violent men said they find it difficult to establish affectionate relationships with the people around them, partly because those people fear them and partly because they themselves had no model of an affectionate father or husband in their own lives.

When I get mad, the members of my family all withdraw to their rooms. Then I feel bad and I buy peace by trying to please everyone. I have realized that I've acquired the habit of buying peace. N-4

Now I give the kids a lot of money because I feel guilty for having wasted so much money when I was drinking. N-1

As I do not have a good relationship with the kids, I give them a lot of money. I feel like I'm buying them. N-1

The participants do not like being in the position of buying peace and affection. They are well aware that money cannot buy affection, or respect, or love. The embarrassment and remorse they feel in the wake of their violent behaviour often makes them anxious to reestablish a climate of peace. They find the tension generated by their own violence unbearable. So they have to make their children happy. They find it difficult to love themselves but they want their children to love them. As dialogue is unavailable to them, they take the easy route, money, hoping that their violence will be forgotten.

LONELINESS AND DEPRESSION

The violent behaviour of some men has made their relatives and neighbours gradually withdraw from their lives. They find themselves increasingly alone and it makes them suffer.

For my part, I feel that my family, my sisters and brothers, are afraid of me. N-4

Friends and relatives never visit me. They never ask me for favours. N-4

When you are violent, people don't want to see you any more and they run away from you....I started thinking about it, because I was fed up with feeling guilty and being lonely. N-6

Some of the men also said that loneliness drove them to drink and take drugs, to make it easier for them to be with other people. They recognize however that alcohol and drugs in fact intensified their violence and led to worse consequences (assault, arrest, prison).

The abusive men find it difficult to talk about their emotions, about what they feel inside. Even when they speak of their childhood and the violence they suffered, they describe the violence but rarely if ever go into the emotions they felt at the time.

On a few rare occasions, they did name the emotions they felt in the wake of violent behaviour. They would describe themselves as "tired" after being violent; they would say they were "sad" but could not cry.

I do not cry in public so people will not see me as weak. N-2

I am afraid of showing my true self. I do not understand why I react like that. I cannot cry the way I would like to cry. N-2

The facilitators of the men's circle confirm that it was difficult for the members to confront their emotions. Whenever there was a tense silence, someone would break it by cracking a joke, as if to sweep the pain under the rug. In the women's groups, the opposite occurred: if one of the participants was about to cry, the others would help her by touching her or helping her talk about her pain. The male facilitators recoiled from this example: "If someone touched us, we would all break down crying." This comment reveals one of the most flagrant consequences of

the violence, though it is rarely stated by the abusive men: they receive no affection or tenderness, being considered by others as "impossible to talk to" and "untouchable."

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE SUFFERED

This heading covers violence suffered by the violent men during adulthood. The consequences of violence suffered during childhood were not discussed, due probably to the powerful emotions the topic would have called up.

When they suffer violence from the outside and cannot react directly, the men turn on their spouses and children:

Sometimes people attack me with hurtful words, but as I cannot reply, my violence is directed at the wrong people, either my wife or my children. N-1

The violent men did not discuss at length the inner effect of the violence they had suffered. They automatically emphasized their desire for revenge.

When my wife hurts me, I hurt her back. N-2

When I was in custody, I thought a lot about revenge. N-6

Some of them noted the effect of their spouses' violence. This violence is expressed in verbal form (none of the members of the group reported being beaten by his spouse) and makes them feel debased (loss of self-esteem) and reluctant to assert themselves.

It should however be noted that incidents of family violence in which the husband has suffered violence are rarely reported. Incidents of this type do occur, but they are more often reported by the wives themselves, who admit to having been violent with their husbands.

3.4 Solutions

The second set of meetings held in the summer of 1993 dealt with the healing process. The first topic in this series of four meetings was "My progress," i.e. how group members became

aware of the violence around them and how they decided to react. The approximately 30 testimonials collected represent individual solutions which the men and women described as specific to themselves: "It's my way; it doesn't mean it's good for everyone." One of the men said his realization was prompted by repeatedly ending up in jail; that was his road. However, he does not see prison as a solution to family violence because, he said, one thinks too much of revenge while in prison.

It was difficult to elicit "solutions for others" from the participants. Group members showed great respect for the individual pace, needs and capabilities of other members. In short, they believe there are a number of solutions and all of them can be valid, for the important thing is for people to change their attitude towards themselves, to learn to respect themselves, to protect themselves, to accept themselves and to love themselves.

The women offered more detailed solutions than did the men, perhaps because they had been working on the problem for longer. At one point in the meetings of the men's circle, there was a wave of discouragement. The facilitators themselves felt at a loss: "we cannot find any solutions to our violence." It was only towards the end of the sessions, during the evaluation phase (Topic 8), that some individual approaches began to emerge.

Tables 10 and 11 show the solutions most often mentioned in the groups.

TABLE 10
SOLUTIONS c WOMEN'S CIRCLES
<p>A. Break the silence</p> <p>B. Know how to protect yourself</p> <p>C. Get help</p> <p>D. Use the justice system in cases of sexual assault</p> <p>E. Turn to spirituality</p> <p>F. Explore traditional methods</p> <p>G. Practice prevention</p> <p>H. Reestablish dialogue</p>

TABLE 11
SOLUTIONS c MEN'S CIRCLES
<p>A. Agree to talk about it</p> <p>B. Try to have a dialogue</p> <p>C. Use the justice system in cases of physical assault</p> <p>D. Use the justice system in cases of sexual assault</p> <p>E. Practice prevention</p>

As can be seen, the two groups' solutions share some common points, including:

- 1.the need to talk about it
- 2.dialogue between the spouses
- 3.prevention work with young people
- 4.using the justice system in cases of assault

Analysis of the solutions offered by the men indicates, however, that they feel quite bereft at this point, as will be seen below in the description of their solutions (Section 3.4.2).

3.4.1 Women's Solutions

A) Break the silence

All agreed that breaking the silence must be the first step, for both the victim and the abuser. But one has to have a place to speak and someone to speak to. And one has to be aware of the violence all around.

Existing health and social structures in the communities do not satisfy the first need.

Women will not take a taxi and travel kilometres to meet a social worker or enter a shelter unless they have reached the point where they fear for their lives or the lives of their children. Too often, once the storm has passed, they return to their isolation and the cycle begins again. A woman will seldom find support among her relatives or her husband's relatives. As the women themselves said, violence has become commonplace and relatives are often reluctant to get involved for fear of making things worse.

The women would like to have other women to talk to, women who would listen to them and help them speak.

Women could be educated for healing, because there are ways to heal yourself...I spent 15 years of my life being beaten and I tell my daughter not to do as I have done, because she would go crazy first. *M-63*

Workshops of this type should be held again in the future...The sessions could help other women, because it is between women that we will be able to solve our problems and find solutions. *A-81*

Listening to other women talk, we feel the need to do likewise. *A-108*

They want to break the silence so they can then start working on their own problems. They say that there is now help available for a person who wants to work on his or her problems, such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres, individual therapy, reading, meditation, etc. One has to relearn self-respect and discover one's own strengths and qualities.

B. Know how to protect yourself

The women said it is easier for them to protect themselves today than it once was. The justice system is more accessible, although not perfect. The women reported that they are forced to use the justice system to ensure their own safety. They described a variety of means such as formal demands, police reports, staying at a women's shelter. However, they were not unanimous on the effectiveness of these services.

Before, you couldn't call the police when you were beaten. The police only came when there was a murder. M-63

I saw a woman being beaten by her husband. I called the police and they said, "You're the 27th person who's called." So I said, "Well, what are you waiting for?" D-66

The police don't come fast enough. I suffered violence and they never arrested my spouse, they just took him away from the house. D-62

It would be preferable to have policewomen; maybe they would have more understanding of the fear women feel. M-62

When my daughters were abused, I took them to the doctor. I reported the abuser; I complained to the police, but I never heard anything about it. M-62

The shelter is seen as a necessary and indeed vital resource for the physical protection of battered women. Some women would like to see help extended to the entire family, including the wife batterer:

I am not saying the shelter is not good; it is good for women who have no place to go. They cannot stay there forever. There has to be communication with the husband. D-66

I have stayed at shelters several times. It has helped me a lot in terms of my fear of my husband. What I did not like was that they place all the responsibility for the violence on the husband's shoulders; it is always the man's fault. I say that in a relationship, the responsibility is 50/50. They should help us have a dialogue with the husband. D-62

C. Get help

Once a woman is prepared to break the silence, she must protect herself and hasten to seek help. It is important for her not to get discouraged if the first solution she tries does not work. She will often have to knock on many doors, try many people, try in different ways. Women must be prepared to try everything to find a way out.

I have tried many things in my life. For example, an engagement counselling session before my marriage and then addiction therapy afterwards...I had to make an effort, I had to go out. Without the help of others, I never could have done it. A-51

It takes courage and a great deal of effort before you start feeling good. In my opinion, if you want to find a way out, you can try many things because in the final analysis, you take what suits you...It is a process. Some people do not try because they are afraid of what other people will say. I have often been told it was not good for me to follow this or that movement, but I did it anyway because I found it gave me good results. A-71

Once, I was in a shelter; I stayed the weekend. Afterwards I went into therapy, but I still did not realize I was living with violence. It was only after attending information sessions on violence that I really became aware of it. M-51

I attended meetings, I did therapy, and I was in Alcoholics Anonymous [AA], because my children drank a lot. When I went to AA meetings, I came to understand many things. D-16

In the past, I had nothing to help me. Today, there are many things to defend women, but it is up to the woman to take the initiative if she wants to find a way out...They won't come and get her; she is the one who has to go out and seek help. M-63

I have experienced every form of violence...One day, I decided to go into therapy, but I relapsed for 2 years into drinking and drugs. I went into therapy again that year...I did a lot of therapy before I finally came to know myself and to accept myself for who I am. This year, I have attended a healing session, which also helped me a lot. I am still working on my problems and it is yielding good results. M-52

D. Use the justice system in cases of sexual assault

(incest, fondling, rape)

While various solutions were suggested for physical and psychological violence, group members were unanimous on the solution to sexual abuse: the perpetrator should be reported and charged.

The problem is, however, daunting: the legal system is cumbersome, aboriginal police officers often lack training in this type of investigation, and the process is long and painful for the victim. The greatest obstacle to using the justice system in cases of sexual abuse is, however, the "silence of the victims," which is strengthened by the social taboo.

When it comes to sexual abusers, we don't talk about that on the reserve. There are still many children in that situation, but as for us, we are afraid to speak. D-62

Speaking of abused children, I do not know how we could help them. It would have to be settled by the legal system. But we do not report it when we know a child is being abused. D-66

When I look at the reserve, I can say that in every house there is surely a child who is being abused or has been abused. M-63

This should be taken to court; the sexual abusers should be reported. M-64

The women would like to be able to report sexual abuse, but are afraid to do so. They are afraid of breaking up families, destroying reputations; they are afraid of reprisals by the abuser's family. It must be said that the few cases to date of victims reporting sexual abuse has confirmed to the women that going to court to prove abuse without a witness is a terrible ordeal.

It is very difficult for a teenage girl or a child to appear in court for a sexual assault case, to have to tell it all, how she felt, what he did to her, and all that in front of her assailant. A teenage girl I know found it very hard; she cried, she threw up, she trembled in front of the court. She had to appear in court several times. The second time, she did the same thing, crying, vomiting, trembling. M-63

In fact, the women see court as a second trauma, with no guarantee that the abuser will be found guilty. In the above-mentioned case of an abuser being reported and tried, the abuser was acquitted due to lack of sufficient evidence.

It did not occur to the women in the study to file police reports on the rapes and sexual abuse they had suffered during childhood (in the case of 40% of female participants), even though most of the abusers were still alive and living on the same reserve. People say the legal system must be used, but they do not budge.

E. Turn to spirituality

Participants felt that practising aboriginal and/or Christian spirituality could help a woman keep up her strength and self-control, and could help restore family harmony.

In the last two decades, the practice of Christianity has declined among young people in our communities. This is particularly true of church service (mass, evening prayers, pilgrimages, etc.). The trend is in no way unique; it can be observed throughout the Christian world. Here, it coincides with a search for aboriginal identity and a return to traditional spiritual practices.

Before their conversion to Christianity, the Innuat contemplated the sun. They believed in a sort of Sun God. They thought that a Being lived there, and during the day, when the star was shining, they prayed to the Being and asked for his blessing. They gave thanks to him for the light of the day, the food, the water, the bounty of the forests, which gave them shelter and subsistence. They gave thanks for all they saw and all they found, and for the multiplicity of animal life...So did they pray! Though they did not know how to call him, they recognized the existence of a Supreme Being and thought He lived in the sun. I do not think they were mistaken, for it is often said that the good Lord is up above, in the heavens.

It should also be noted that their religion recommends mutual aid in times of difficulty; they were to take care of orphans and assist widows. They taught them how to do all kinds of work, and if one of them could not do it, they did it for them without expecting anything in return. Only recently has the idea of wage labour entered into the minds of our people. In the old days, they helped each other without receiving anything in exchange.

André, Mathieu, Mani-Utenam, 1984

This is one of the few quotes we have been able to find from an elder of the community. Young people who are trying to return to aboriginal spirituality must go and seek it among other related groups (Algonquins, Micmacs, Ojibways), these practices having been banned since the beginning of the missions. For many women, the return to aboriginal spirituality represents a process of self-assertion.

I was raised on a reserve and that is where I came to know drinking and drugs. I grew up with that for many years. I was lost...I thank my Creator that I have experienced a spiritual awakening. I have rediscovered my own identity and my dignity as an Innu woman. Today, I am recovering my real values by seeking help and practising the spiritual rites of my ancestors. I am proud of being an Innu and of my culture and I feel good about what I am discovering about myself day by day.

M-74

Yesterday, I had a misunderstanding with a woman. I felt bad inside. I felt attacked, I was angry. I had to bite my tongue and ask my Creator for help to keep me for the moment from expressing my anger. The next day, I purified myself with my eagle feather... When I got back in the car, we talked about it like adults, without shouting. My spiritual development is helping me a great deal to improve my situation.

A-59

Speaking of spirituality, when I went to boarding school the nuns forced us to learn prayers. After I left the boarding school, I never prayed. A few years later, some women friends talked to me a great deal about God, but I could not feel the God of whom they spoke. It was only after some time, by attending aboriginal spiritual ceremonies, that I again found peace and respect for everything around me [land and people].

A-73

It is in fact the spiritual process as such, whether it be traditional aboriginal spirituality or Christian spirituality, to which the women turn as the best way to get out of the bind.

I had many fears. It was also by going to evening prayer meetings that I was freed of this fear.

D-44

I feel good when I speak to God. Before, I was always shouting at my child; I had no patience. Now, when I wake up in the morning, I surrender my aggression to Him.

D-24

When my husband and I say our morning and evening prayers, we feel better afterwards. D-37

With my sons, we pray and we give thanks to God for giving us the joy of still being together today. D-44

F. Explore traditional methods

Alternative solutions: traditional aboriginal approach

Alternative solutions include a wide variety of activities of aboriginal origin, ranging from spiritual ceremonies and purification to the cedar bath and sweat lodge. While these types of solutions have proved useful for some women, they are not yet widely known and are viewed with a certain snobbery by mental health authorities. We briefly present here the women's comments on this subject.

I have a friend [who practices traditional medicine] in whom I confided my sexual problems, that I wanted to love my husband but I had a block. She asked me if I had been abused and I told her I had. She suggested performing a ceremony in the company of other women. I agreed because I wanted to do everything I could to be at peace with myself. During the ceremony, I was washed in a bath containing cedar and salt. I relived the time when I was abused...
It helped me very much inside and with my sexuality. M-61

I was at the ceremony in which she was washed, she and another woman. I heard their sobs; they sounded like little children. It was very powerful. After the ceremony, I saw the state they were in. They were doing very well, you could see it in their faces. I see that this is a solution which can be used to help victims of sexual violence. M-62

Today, there are little children in the sweat lodge. I am proud of them and of the fact that they are experiencing that at a very young age. A-74

In healing groups such as ours, women can be greatly helped...There is self-respect and respect for others. There is much talk of peace. There is also the sweat lodge; that is another solution. M-63

G. Practice prevention

It is often after a long and difficult process of personal development that a woman

becomes aware of the need to spark changes in her family, so her children and grandchildren will not suffer as she did.

There is little or no on-going prevention dealing directly with violence and sexual abuse. What is needed is not just money but also creativity. The women are also realizing that they have a responsibility for prevention, that it is up to them to do the work with their own children.

One good solution would be to do prevention work with the children. That is what I am doing with mine. I tell them not to let anyone touch their genitals and I show them where. I think it is first and foremost up to the parents to do that. Nobody ever told me. M-62

Why shouldn't we set up projects like this one or others? In our own way, not the way of the non-aboriginal system. We should set up programs to help our children, our teenagers, and ourselves too. A-75

There should be resource people available to help the young people, because they too are trying to imitate the non-aboriginals. A-72

As mothers, we could seek solutions and do things for our children. If a child always sees his parents fighting, it is certain that he will live the same way. But if the child sees his parents trying to change, he will too. A-74

H. Reestablish dialogue

Considerable attention was paid to communication with the spouse as a solution. The women acknowledge that it is difficult, that it demands time and effort, but they are hopeful of success. Some might see this as an example of the natural tendency of many battered women to want to "save" or "change" the other person. We believe in their approach, however, because it has proven useful for many of them, provided the spouse was really motivated. They consider it unfortunate that support services for battered women do not devote more resources to helping couples establish a dialogue.

Communication is necessary not only with the husband but also with the children and teenagers. The men's circle placed particular emphasis on this solution as a remedy for the consequences of their violence.

But the women are not prepared to reestablish dialogue at any price. They say that communication is not possible in a climate of fear and that physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence must cease before there can be a true dialogue:

On a few occasions, I have tried without success to talk to my husband. He misinterpreted what I was saying. He made me feel guilty, he interrupted me, and I held back. I have always been afraid of his reactions, afraid that he wouldn't understand me. A-46

It is true that when your husband is shouting, he won't listen. But if you keep talking to him, eventually it might sink in. D-66

Since I talked to my husband, since I told him he was hurting me inside, he is much more considerate. He has not beaten me for a long time. But he doesn't seem to want to talk. I know he is hurting inside. D-61

When I think about it today, I realize you have to start communicating at the beginning of the marriage. D-63

I have learned to assert myself and I am not afraid of my husband any more, the way I was before. When I feel I need to talk to him, I ask him to listen to me without interrupting. In the past, he often silenced me by making fun of me. A-51

3.4.2 Men's Solutions

A. Agree to talk about it

When a man agrees to talk about his violence, he thereby acknowledges that he is violent. It takes courage and a desire to change things in his life. He has to believe that he can change. Some of the men in the project had already started the process, tackling their problems with alcoholism and drug addiction. Changing is within the realm of possibility.

When we wanted to solve our problems with alcohol, we went about it by meeting with other people and listening to what they had to say about getting out of the bind. That is what helped us.
Violent men could be helped in the same way. There must be someone who has found a way out! N-62

We are trying to repair the damage and we find it hard. I find it is important to listen to all of you, to listen to your problems, and to look for solutions together with you. N-49

I think it [a family meeting] would be a solution. We could tell our children about our problems and our expectations. N-49

B. Try to have a dialogue

The men speak of learning how to talk instead of shout. It seems to be difficult for them. They also speak of negotiating instead of imposing their point of view. That is also a challenge.

I do not think we know how to communicate. We do not know how to talk. My reaction is to try to communicate with my wife when I am already angry. N-41

When my wife does not understand what I mean, I raise my voice. N-44

I do not know how to talk in a way that sets people at ease. I find that here, you listen to me; maybe it is because my tone of voice is not cross. N-49

If you do not like something, you should say so. You shouldn't let it build up inside. N-49

I would like to talk at home with my wife and kids the way I talk in this group, without rage or anger. It would be a big step for me. N-28

When we have a fight, I tell my wife to talk to me. When she does, I go on fighting with her. I speak mostly to hurt her. N-22

Sometimes I go to my wife in the bedroom after a fight. I ask her to talk and she starts to cry. I find that very hard. N-23

Sometimes, I think I would like to have a dialogue with my wife, but I do not say so. I wait for her to guess what I am thinking. N-22

C. Use the justice system in cases of physical assault

The members of the men's circle admitted that, in many cases, using the justice system is, unfortunately, the only way to deal with physical assault. They do not like this solution, but

they cannot see any other in the case of serious or repeated assault.

My mother often called the police on me. I was mad at her, but now I know that is why I stopped drinking and being violent. When I was violent, I injured people and I could have killed somebody. Having to go to court all the time made me start thinking about it. N-61

It hurts me to see my son in prison, but maybe it will make him think. I know it is not his first offence. N-69

D. Use the justice system in cases of sexual assault

On the subject of sexual assault, sexual abuse of children received most of the attention. The men are reticent about the existence of the problem, but they are unequivocal about how to deal with it: the courts.

Sexual abuse was not really discussed in the men's group. There seemed to be a feeling of unease. One of the men said he was sexually abused during childhood and this was the first time he had talked about it. "I was afraid people would make fun of me."

Our own experience indicates that in the past two years Innu men have started talking about the sexual abuse they suffered during childhood, but we have encountered this in individual clinical situations; here, they were speaking before a group of a dozen individuals. In our view, however, there is no doubt that this type of abuse of young boys is still going on and continues to be shielded by the laws of violence: the law of fear and the law of silence.

In the women's circles, many emotions came to the surface when incest and sexual abuse were touched on, and the consequences were discussed at length, but in the men's circle the verdict was reached very quickly and there was practically no discussion of causes and consequences.

I know there is no one who is specially trained to help abused children. N-41

Cases of sexual abuse should be taken to the courts. N-47

It should be reported to the youth protection agency, because if he has done that to one child, he could do it to others. N-42

E. Practice prevention

Once the members of the men's circle had become aware of the consequences of their violence on the children, prevention became a prominent theme in their discussions. They began to see themselves in their sons' behaviour and to seek remedies.

I have heard an Indian say that if you plant a tree and it starts growing crooked and you do not do anything about it, it will grow up crooked. If you try to straighten it out, you can get it to grow straight. N-69

We have to make rules and teach our children responsibility. We have to start when they are young. We may not see results with the older ones, but we will with the little ones. N-62

They could put information on the radio and discuss the problems we are having with our kids...Because the biggest problem we have with our children and our wives is understanding each other. N-89

I think it would be good to meet once or twice a month so we don't slip back into the same problems. N-89

4. Evaluation of Circle Healing Process

The purpose of the meetings was to raise awareness of the forms of violence and of their causes and consequences, and to obtain the opinions of the participants, both men and women, on appropriate solutions for their communities.

We believe the consciousness-raising objectives were fully achieved, as is borne out by the comments made at the last session. The process did more than provide information; it served as a catalyst to bring latent violence into the light of day.

Some of the women had lived for decades unable to express their pain, especially pain from childhood and adolescence. They had kept silent for a long time, too long. They isolated themselves and believed themselves to be weak. In fact, the violence had sapped their strength. Their participation in the summer 1993 workshops helped them recover their self-respect through the mutual respect and acceptance they found in the healing circle.

The men learned to look at what was happening around them, to read the eyes of their children, to realize they do not need total control, to get used to the idea of acting from the depths of their hearts rather than from the depths of their rage.

The authors of this study believe that the process could be continued in our communities, varying the topics and organizing mixed sex sessions or even family sessions. It would however be preferable to first organize a second series of separate sessions for the men and women who could not be included in this project due to the limitations imposed by the research methodology. Expectations are high in the community for a second series of Violence and Healing meetings.

We also believe that the process can be exported to other aboriginal communities which do not have access to professional family violence services. As the sessions are facilitated by men and women from the community, extensive training is not required C only a desire to break the silence and help each other.

The following quotes are taken from participants' comments. We will provide only extracts in order to preserve the anonymity of the speakers.

4.1 Women's Circles

With time, I will learn how to communicate with my husband. If I had not taken this program, maybe I would have continued on in the same way. When I look at everything we have talked about, it has helped me put things into words, not to be afraid to tell the other person what I am experiencing, what I am feeling.

M-80

Today I know that you have to talk to each other to understand each other. These meetings have really helped me because I have become aware that when I shout at my kids, that is violence. About my daughter, who is always shouting, I have said to myself, "She has the gift of shouting because I have always shouted at her. I have noticed that she is very aggressive. If I work to heal myself of violence, she will automatically become gentler."

M-81

What I have noticed since we started the sessions is that violence has surged up inside me. I thought, we are talking about this to heal ourselves and find out why things are like this. Something happened on the reserve and I came to my daughter's defence.

I have gone over everything I have experienced, everything men have done to me, my father, my husband, and when they left me; I've worked a lot on this, I've cried, I've suffered. I found the meetings were good because they helped me see how much the suffering I have experienced through violence still hurts me, but that it hurts less. In all the exercises we have done, I have been able to help myself see my own development more clearly.

M-83

I find it's good, everything we have looked at. In the first session, when the video was shown, it spoke to me right away. The next day, I became aware of what I was going through and also what I was putting others through. I still do that; I do not like myself on this score, because with other people I am kind and with the kids I am different, violent. I am trying and I find it hard not to be violent; I do not like myself at all. At least I am aware that it is possible to work to change your behaviour.

M-87

Tonight at supper, my daughter said something and I felt she was being disrespectful. I asked her if she realized what she was saying. She apologized.

M-84

I am satisfied. I know more about the types of violence, I am more aware. Because of that, I quit my job; they were treating me with psychological violence.

M-82

I liked the meetings very much. They made me understand many things. I liked the meetings because they were intimate; that is what I need, I have trouble in a large group. I am more aware of violence. I would like the meetings to continue, they are really helping me.

M-88

I liked the meetings, but what I found hard was that I had trouble talking because I had relatives in the group.

M-89

I liked these meetings a lot; many things helped me understand. It helped me so much inside; I find it is important to talk to other women, to express what hurts you inside. I would also like it to continue, to have other meetings like these, because it has really helped me. For once, I too have learned a lot.

M-86

I came to this session because I had a problem to solve. This problem was having been hit and rejected. I had found that my problem came from the past, because I myself had hit my daughter. Today, I realize that it isn't everybody else's fault, but the fault of my feelings.

N-85

It helped me become aware of my attitudes. Yesterday, I was cleaning up. My daughter spilled the jam. Normally, I would have shouted at her. I talked to myself and I told myself I could wash it up.

M-90

I have noticed that since the meetings, I have been talking with women who are victims of violence. I think it has prepared me to help other women take control of their lives. I know now that a woman has much courage and strength inside; she just has to recover her self-confidence.

The topic which affected me the most was the one on the values which I had set aside long ago, the one on culture and traditions. I am convinced that there will be changes in our community if we continue and put a little more of our spiritual values into our lives.

The elders often speak to us of respect for all living things, but we fail to understand that they are trying to make us realize that lack of respect is a form of violence. That is why today I feel the need to go to the elders to recover my wisdom.

A-80

It helped me look at myself. Before, I did not talk about the violence I had suffered, nor of my own violence. I kept all that inside.

At the first meeting, I found it very hard, but I spoke anyway and as I progressed in the group, it helped me express what I felt. Afterwards, I also started paying more attention to how I speak to my children and the people around me.

I liked the meetings, but I don't think that is enough. I feel thirsty for more. I also liked the way the meetings were organized; we were able to take a topic and stick to it.

I would like the meetings to continue in the same way, dealing just with violence. I think it would be a big step if there were another session, it would be a big step for our community because in my opinion, that is the biggest problem here.

A-81

Now I know that the women who were in my group will be more open with me, because we have come to know each other. Now I see violence differently, because recently I was discussing one of the forms of violence with another woman. I am always thinking about violence; I am sensitized to violence now.

A-82

These meetings about violence have opened my eyes. I had thought I was a victim of violence; now I realize I have also inflicted violence on others. These meetings also made it possible to break the long-kept silence. Phew! I am not alone.

A-83

These meetings could help women, because listening to others they would feel the need to do likewise. Meetings of this type would be welcome in our community, because the problem is real. People do not talk about it, because it is a taboo subject for them. They are afraid others will talk about them.

A-84

Since the meetings, I have been paying more attention to violence; in the case of my daughter, to verbal violence. I notice that I am more aware of violence.

With my husband, I allow more freedom and I do not try to control him as much as before. I notice his good points a bit more.

In my opinion, the women who have the opportunity to attend these meetings could grow by opening up to this problem. Because as you open up, you discover many qualities inside yourself.

It would be best to continue the meetings once a week, and to have a good room for us. Later, after a few meetings, we would have more confidence to go and talk to other women in our communities and educate them about violence.

A-86

I am very happy I came to these meetings on violence. I am sure there are other women who would like to come to these meetings; it would help them talk about it more, because there were women at the meetings who had never talked about the problem.

A-87

When I heard the word violence, for me it meant a man beating his wife...There was violence inside me and I was not aware of it.

D-84

Today, meeting here, I feel good and I feel strong. When we break up, it affects me, as if I missed you. Let's not drop each other.

D-82

I feel good today. When we meet, it helps me a lot and it has helped me to talk about the things that hurt me.

D-87

The things people said about their experiences really helped me and I was able to share my experiences.

D-85

I am happy to see you and to see that you women all want to change your lives. I am a woman who prays a lot. I look forward to the day when women will help each other. I could give some of my time.

D-86

4.2 Men's Circles

I like the healing circle approach very much. I feel better after each meeting. I have a lot of trouble understanding and changing my behaviour, but I like being able to talk to you about it. N-82

Since our meetings, I have become aware of a number of things. I have started talking more to my teenage son. I don't want to reprimand him any more and I am ready to help him. N-81

I also liked the meetings we've had; they have helped me. I am not ready to have a dialogue with my wife yet, because when I try, she starts crying. I hope that later, we will be able to do it.

Before, I always thought I had the right solution; people had to do what I had decided.

What I have understood is that there was much violence in my family and with my children. Now I notice that my children are tending to become violent.

I have also understood that there are always solutions if you want to change your life. I know that together we can help each other. N-83

I do not understand myself yet. I find it hard to get anything into my head; maybe it is true that I am thick-headed. But I know that our meetings have helped me and I liked being able to talk about violence. N-84

It would be good to put together a journal about what we are doing together and publish it so that people will know what we have discussed. It could help others. It would also be good to use the community radio station to discuss violence and sexual abuse, and to ask people questions. I know that many other men would be interested in coming to our meetings. N-89

In my case, I am less violent. It isn't like before. One thing I've thought of was to tell my children to point it out to me when I am angry and promise them that I won't fight with them when they do that. N-87

I realize that when I am angry, I am angry at myself. When I fight with someone, I am mad at myself. N-88

I saw my mother get beaten. I've seen enough violence, I've had enough of it. Sometimes I push my wife around; I know I am the stronger.

Today, I realize that I do not want my wife to go through what my mother went through.

N-86

5. Recommendations and Points for Discussion

Recommendations

The words "recommendations" and "suggestions" seem to us to be contrary to the spirit of this action-research project, for one of the objectives was to help raise awareness of violence among participants and lead them to take action themselves. The only real recommendation we can make to participants is precisely to stop being dependent on the violence, opinions, fears and silence of others, to take full control of their own lives by listening to their hearts.

Points for Discussion

1. Does healing demand recovery of Innu identity?

We believe it does. At some point come it after therapy, in individual or group counselling, coming out of a shelter, or through individual growth one must be proud of who one is in order to be able to assert oneself; if one is an Innu woman, one must be proud of that. That is what the victims state in their comments. The negative self-image which is the legacy of violence has prevented them from adjusting to society. They reached the point where they no longer knew who they were. They sought to lose themselves in drugs, alcohol or material goods, to find a satisfying self-image by trying to be someone else.

2. Is family violence related to the creation of the reserves?

Yes, to that and to many other aspects of the oppression of one people by another. This is a thing which non-aboriginals in Canada find very difficult to understand. When they drive through our villages, they see new homes, the church, the convenience store, the school, the gym, the clinic, and they think the Innu live well and cannot see why it should be oppressive to live on a reserve! In most official publications, the terminology has been changed to eliminate the word "reserve"; they are now called "communities" or "villages." But they are still reserves. The reserves are monuments to dispossession and loss of freedom. Aboriginals can hardly forget that.

To demonstrate the connection between the reserve and violence, we must consider the consequences of changes in lifestyle, nutrition, housing and education. We must consider the impact of inaction and social assistance. We must consider the cumulative effects of racism and poverty on self-esteem. We must be aware of the fact that the grandparents were unable to hand down the traditional values (respect, equality of the sexes, mutual assistance, etc.). A number of the young women who took part in the study regretted the fact that their parents had not taught them the values of Innu culture. The parents were unable to do so, for they were confronted by a huge educational problem: how could they hand down to the children the old way of thinking, living, speaking and praying, when the new environment in which they had to live, the reserve, had no connection with the old?

We are now seeing a new interest in Innu cultural values by young people in the communities. While this process may bring the individual greater self-esteem and more harmonious family relationships and group relationships, it leads sooner or later to an awareness of the social, economic, and political situation of aboriginals and to intense frustration.

When a person returns to the traditional values and succeeds in overcoming internal violence (childhood, conjugal and family violence), he or she is likely to eventually come up against external violence (loss of land rights, administrative and political tutelage, etc.).

We do not mean to glorify the ancestral way of life, or to claim that it was free of violence. However, the violence which did exist was often related to specific situations (reactive violence), maladjusted individuals, or natural phenomena (famine, accidents, disasters, etc.). After the creation of the reserves, family violence became the norm, a way of life.

3. Are there adequate services for victims of violence in aboriginal communities?

The answer is well-known: no. Even though here, at Uashat and Mani-Utenam, we at least have a women's shelter, health and social services cannot in their existing form meet the needs of the victims, be they adults or children. The various agencies toss the ball back and forth. The most glaring shortcomings are in the following areas:

-support for families with abused children;

- accompanying victims in court;
- post-traumatic monitoring of victims;
- legal information on civil recourse;
- counselling and information for the families of abusers;
- referral of victims to services suited to their needs.

4. How should family violence prevention be approached?

There are so many things to be done and so many ways to do them that if there is no prevention at present, it is either because of ignorance or ill will by the political administrations responsible for health and social services, or because of a poverty of imagination.

We are not thinking here of popular reeducation campaigns of the "Do this" and "Don't do that" type, which is the image people have of prevention.

Effective prevention in the field of family violence must consist of concrete educational activities which lead the people who are coping with the problem to take a critical distance from their situation and to undertake collective action to transform it.

Prevention must be a consciousness-raising process. We agree with Professor Emma Larocque's suggestion, made in a report on violence in aboriginal communities already filed with the RCAP, that Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" approach¹ be adapted. This is a very useful technique for workers in the helping professions, insofar as it aims to make a population aware of its conditions of existence and of means for changing its daily circumstances. In this type of intervention, concrete target groups direct and implement the action together with the social workers.

For prevention to be effective, we must also work to change the philosophy behind the current practices of aboriginal social services.

¹Emma LaRocque, *Violence in Native Communities*, Report for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, February 1993, p. 19.

5. Are there enough helping professionals in aboriginal communities and are they adequately trained to fight family violence?

There are not enough helping professionals and they do not have enough training, although more and more of them do have a college or university degree.

But in our view, that is not the real problem. Aboriginal communities have taken over the administration of programs which were not designed by them or for them. They have docilely submitted to federal and provincial procedures, laws and regulations.

In our opinion, with or without academic training, aboriginal helping professionals should:

- reexamine their own practices
- develop an active teaching method
- be attentive to the culture
- first get involved as individuals
- get out of their offices and schedules, off the beaten path
- use a group approach rather than an individual approach
- think and discuss before taking action

6. Should the justice system be reformed to help victims of violence and abusers?

One must be deaf and blind, and of bad faith to boot, not to ask this question. We have the same attitude towards the justice system as we did towards violence: we feel powerless, fearful, bereft. Nearly half of the women in this study report having experienced incest or sexual abuse as a child. Our personal experience also indicates that many women continue to be abused as adults. Women tell us they know the problem still exists and that the abusers are still active.

The justice system is supposed to protect the victims and to make sure that perpetrators of violence and abusers are no longer a danger to society. At the risk of appearing intemperate, I would say that cars, house windows and convenience store cash registers are better served by the justice system than the bodies of aboriginal women and children.

Shortcomings are evident at every point in the process, from the time the police officer takes the complaint and the prosecutor examines it, through the woman's appearance in court and the trial, to after the verdict.

There are no simple solutions, for the system is incredibly cumbersome and slow. The stories told in the community about the experiences of the few victims who have dared to file complaints have scared off all the other victims. They would rather continue meeting their abusers every time they leave the house than go through the ordeal of court; they prefer to keep quiet. Judges, lawyers, police officers, band council and liaison officers should all ask themselves some questions.

Aboriginal political authorities have their share of the blame. For some time, they have been calling loudly for regulations and exemplary sentences for drug trafficking. Is it because they do not know that alcoholism and drug addiction are symptoms of a greater ill? Should they not be demanding better law enforcement when it comes to family violence and sexual abuse? Could it be that our political leaders have so much trouble taking a stand on family violence because, like most of their constituents, they have not yet objectified the consequences and impact of this violence in their lives and in their community?

7.Can traditional aboriginal medicine help the victims of violence and the perpetrators of violence?

The Innu people possessed complex and highly developed medical knowledge which was virtually wiped out by religious and medical bans and the abandonment of the nomadic way of life.

At present, it is precisely in the field of mental health that traditional medicine is making a comeback. In traditional medicine, the individual is inseparable from the whole of the universe, and mental and spiritual health are essential to physical healing.

Traditional medicine promotes the recovery of self-control. It is generally holistic and focused on the will. It does not treat any part separately and does not separate mind and body. It asks not for a signature on a consent form but rather for the sufferer's faith and willingness to heal. In modern medicine, the sufferer is the "patient" and the doctor is the main actor. In

traditional medicine, the sufferer is the main agent of his own healing; the healer becomes the guide and it is he who must be patient!

In this study, a number of women spoke of the succour they had received from traditional practices. We believe it is high time that all helping professionals in our communities take an interest in what is being done in this field as a complement to "modern" medicine and approaches.

6. Conclusions

In late summer, after some thirty separate meetings, we brought the four groups C the three women's circles and the men's circle C together.

To cope: to cope with fear, incest, the feeling of worthlessness; to cope with all the forms of violence, the lack of love, the pain of striking those one loves the most, wives, husbands and children; to survive because that is what one has best learned how to do.

Beyond the solitude bred by pain and violence, hands lifted up and joined together, the hands of Innu men and women, and for four hours the circle was joined again.

"...may the women forgive us for what we have done to them..."

"...let the men know that we love them..."

"...may our children grow up without being destroyed by violence..."

If crying is a way of healing, then truly we healed together on that evening. We also spoke at length telling each other that though there would still be rage in the future, we would try to express it with words and with out hearts, giving each man, each woman, each child, the love and respect handed down by our grandfathers and grandmothers, the Innuat.

NASHKUMITTAU PAPEIK^U ETASHIAK^U!

7- **After the summer of 1993 ... Follow-up notes**

The final circle in this study took place in September 1993 and the project was submitted to the Commission in October.

In terms of my personal involvement in the hearing circles, I chose to step back for a time despite the many requests I received to continue them. Both our communities were experiencing major social and political dissension, and our energies C women's and men's alike C were being spent elsewhere. Early in the spring of '94, a woman said to me: "You know, the healing circles have started up again in Uashat, once a week... the circle is open to women who want to continue healing". In June '94, one of the former facilitators for the men's circles told me they intended to resume the circles because the men needed them. He asked if new topics, such as suicide, could be added.

A mixed circle on the topic of suicide has been set up in Uashat and is planning to meet twice a month. The composition of this circle reminds me of the "violence and healing" circles, whose membership included both former and ongoing victims of violence. The "suicide and healing" circle is made up of persons who have tried to commit suicide, persons still in the grip of suicidal ideation and others who are willing to help. All have one thing in common, however: they have all, at one point or another, contemplated suicide. I have agreed to develop the topics and attendant exercises, but the participants will be the experts when it comes to their own healing and it is they who will then turn the wheel of life for their families and relatives.

In Maliotenam, the healing circles have continued but only sporadically over the last year on an as-needed basis, to cope with misfortune (separation, mourning, exhaustion and so forth). A woman will ask others to come together to help her heal, free herself from an oppressive burden or feel less alone. The circle has maintained its original vocation, which is to say it is not a coffee klatsch but a coming-together specifically designed to promote healing.

Another series of Violence and Healing circles will begin in July 1994 in Maliotenam, this one for adolescents. These circles are the brainchild of two former facilitators of the '93 women's circles. They have chosen to repeat the experiment with mixed groups of young people between the ages of 13 and 17, and have recruited two new facilitators to assist them. The training given these new facilitators will include the development of topics and exercises for the adolescent

participants.

Over the course of the year, I had the chance to talk with some of the participants in the '93 circles. All manifested a heightened awareness of the forms of violence, improved self-confidence and a desire to achieve personal well-being through sharing and exchanges with others. They also reported improved communication with their spouses and children, even though "it's not always easy", even though "we still shout at each other sometimes".

I also had to intervene on two occasions with girls who had been sexually abused. With their mothers' consent, I brought in former participants to help these mothers. In just one healing circle, they achieved results that would have taken me several meetings to produce and did a better job than I could have in ridding the mothers of their guilt feelings, helping them talk about the abuse they themselves had experienced as children and teaching them how to behave with and what to say to their daughters. I will continue to follow up on these cases and, in one of them, I have resigned myself to dealing with the appalling justice machine, but everything is more or less in place.

I would like to see the official health and social service agencies in Aboriginal communities give greater attention and respect to healing circles. This has not been the case to date, at least not in our community. I remain convinced that the circles meet needs that cannot be addressed by individual counselling and psychotherapy as practised in the Western world.

Our field has seen a certain infatuation with professionalism and diplomas. I have nothing against this *per se*, having myself graduated with a degree in psychology. What I regret, however, is that this emphasis has come at the expense of the knowledge and expertise of Aboriginal society and has, to a certain extent, denied Aboriginal people their powers of self-healing. If officials continue to act in this way, I fear that they will not only be the poorer for it but will also diminish our ability to help one another and take charge of our future.

(Notes added June 8, 1994 by author)

8. Bibliography

Tshernish, Marie et al., *Les valeurs traditionnelles*, Nutshimiu-Atusseun: August 1988.

Mailhot, José, "La glorification du mâle dans le vocabulaire cri et montagnais," *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*, Vol. XIII, No. 4.

Drapeau, Lynn, *Dictionnaire Montagnais-Français*, P.U.Q. 1991.

Comité Culturel Ulamen, *Eukun Eshi Aiamiast Ninan Ute Ulamen-Shipit*, La Romaine: 1978.

Conseil Attikamek-Montagnais, *Montagnaises de paroles; Eukuan Ume Ninan Etentamat*, Québec: C.A.M., 1992.

André, Mathieu, *Moi, Mestenapeu*, Mani-Utenam: Édition Innu, 1984.

Larocque, Emma, in *Violence in Native Communities*, Report for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, February 1993, p. 19.

Goyette, G. and Lessard, Hébert M., *La recherche-action: ses fondements et son instrumentation*, Sillery: P.U.Q., 1987.

Simard, G., *La méthode du focus group*, Laval: Mondia, 1989.

Mayer, R. and Ouellet, F., *Méthodologie de la recherche pour les intervenants sociaux*, Gaétan Morin, 1991.