

The Multi-Generational Impact of Canadian Residential Schools

Chika OSHIMA

The effects of residential schools on aboriginal people is a controversial issue that has been discussed for decades in Canada. Residential schools are educational facilities that were run by the government and Catholic Church from the 1870s to the 1990s to educate indigenous children ("At least 3,000 died in residential schools"). These schools took children away from their families and hometowns, and did not allow them to speak in their native language but only in English or French in an effort to assimilate them. Although it may have helped some Indigenous children who suffered extreme hunger and poverty, many survivors have reported violence in the schools. In 2007, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, made a formal apology to Indigenous residential schools survivors. This was promoted by the establishment of Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada which was a demand of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in 2007. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was created as the result of court cases between residential school survivors and federal government in which \$1.9 billion in compensa-

tion had been paid to survivors. Its role is to find what truly happened in residential schools, what situations students suffered, and what survivors and students' off-spring are suffering in current society through their reports. The commission is also responsible for providing and supporting events of the TRC, informing and preserving their report in two Canadian official languages and Aboriginal languages, giving an access to their documents, and supporting commemoration. The organization brought a positive step towards to revealing Canada's dark history.

This essay focuses on the violent impact of residential schools, especially on female residential school attendees and their female off-spring. Many aboriginal women today look back at this dark moment and discuss it with other former residential school attendees because it is an important part of the healing process. For example, The Cedar Project analyzed the relationship between intergenerational trauma and residential schools for the first time in Canada. They succeeded in revealing that aboriginal women are more likely to be victims of multigenerational trauma through the seven-year-survey. ("Study shows line between continued abuse of aboriginal women, residential schools") This essay will offer a critical examination of issues related to residential schools with a focus on the relationship between residential schools and the violence suffered by First Nations women.

As a multicultural country, Canada has various tribes of First Nations who were the original inhabitants of Canada and people

who have European ancestors. In the 1500s, Europeans sailed to North America started trading liquor, tools and other items for fur and fish that Indigenous people hunted, and that was the beginning of Europeans settlement in Canada. The Canadian government, which was born through the confederation of provinces on the 1st of July in 1876, took responsibility to lead the country. The newly formed Canadian government attempted to assume control over the Indigenous lands through treaties and attempted to assimilate the Indigenous people through various government policies. ("A history of residential schools in Canada") While Assimilation affected traditional indigenous ways of life, like hunting, European settlement also resulted in the disappearance of wildlife, such as buffalos (Barman, Herbert and McCaskill, 5).

Up to 1850, before residential schools became more common in Canada, young aboriginals used to study at White schools to upgrade their position in future society as their parents' wish. The parents expected those White schools to educate their children enough to be helpful to their families and communities. Penny Petrone, a Canadian writer, mentioned, "not only did various individuals and bands request the establishment of schools, but many young Indians became educated in the schools of the dominant society without losing contact with their own culture" (Barman, Herbert and McCaskill, 5). However, the issue of Canadian education was changing in the mid-19th century. In the middle 19th century, Canada was propelling the equal educational opportunity to every child from every social status, not

only Indigenous youth, but also the large number of white children who had not attended schools. A consideration of the priority of educating Aboriginal children became an important topic, even though the government had aimed to complete assimilation and promoted schools establishments on reserve. (Barman, Herbert and McCaskill, p6)

The first residential school started in New France after 1880. It was originally promoted by Catholic churches and the Canadian government to urge indigenous children to live like white Canadians and to assimilate into the dominant society. One of the reasons the government started to run the residential schools is the federal government valued the U.S. Protestant idea that Indigenous children were better able to be civilized and educated without any access to their family, culture and languages (Barman, Herbert and McCaskill 6, Boarding Schools). In the early period, churches and the government adopted a "Half day system" that offered students classes in the morning and activities like farming, woodworking, and other vocational training such as domestic working in the afternoon. This system had been used from 1890s. However, it finished around the 1950s, because the government wanted to run the schools more cheaply rather than to teach children how to make their own living. As a result, a new system appeared from the 1950s when Canadian society had more wealth and funding for the residential schools. The schools allowed children to watch short dramas, to have holidays at home, also all the classes were eliminated on weekends following the Christian habit. Life in residential schools

must seem harsh to people today for its very strict regulations were like an army during wartime. Indigenous children who were taken away from their parents could not speak in their own languages but rather, were forced to speak English, or French in Quebec, though they had never learned those languages. Moreover, all the activities were divided by gender, and schools never let students meet their siblings at schools. Those children could go back to their home once in 10 months, but some never could because of the distance or diseases they got at schools, such as tuberculosis or influenza. Under the strict rule of residential schools, violence from nuns, which was given as "punishment," hurt children physically and mentally. ("Residential Schools")

Today, many stories of violence at residential schools have been proven to be facts by survivors and their families. Residential schools existed as places for indigenous children to become civilized like white modernized men, even though they experienced horrible punishment and were experimented on. Today it has been revealed that about 3,000 to 6,000 children died in residential schools because of disease, malnutrition, natural disaster and suicide by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The main illnesses in schools were tuberculosis and flu in the 1910s. The cause of those epidemics were dormitories. The schools put many students into the same room, and those dorms were not tidy enough facilities to avoid an epidemic of disease ("At least 3,000 died in residential schools"). Some of them died on the way home while they were escaping from residential

schools. On January 1st 1937, four boys were discovered in a frozen pond. They tried to run away from the Lejac residential school in B.C., however, failed to complete the escape without winter cloths or socks in -30 degrees weather ("At least 4,000 aboriginal children died in residential schools, commission finds").

One awful truth about the residential schools that was revealed by the commission is various experiments on students' bodies. In the 1940s to 1950s, experiments related to nutrition and illnesses were forced upon students without any notification nor permission. Ian Mosby, a food historian, discovered this in 2013. The experiments were planned by the federal government and medical specialists to study health and virus students got at schools, also to examine how they could live healthy with poor facilities for other students ("Residential Schools"). In one case, a student was informed that she was ill with tuberculosis though she had not been unhealthy, and she was ordered to stay in bed and continued for six months. She was not allowed to move, like standing up or walking around, and forced to give a doctor a piece of her skin as a sample for experiments. In another case a ten year old boy who was under an experiment like hers lost his mind and committed suicide. ("Exclusive: Let me tell you about inter-generational trauma")

The impacts of residential schools affects not only the survivors of residential schools but also their children, grandchildren and offspring. Inter-generational trauma is an issue which has been discussed for decades. The negative impact and painful

memories of residential schools made the former students more likely to turn to drugs, alcohol, or suicide. Moreover, they were more likely to be abused or become an abuser. Former students were also more likely to have low-confidence and feel hopeless. Those negative or destructive behaviors derive from violence, sexual abuse and all the negative treatment that children were subjected to at the schools. Moreover, because of losing their own culture, tradition, language, self-esteem and family relationships, children could not learn how to love themselves and others, how to cope with difficulties without any temptations to drugs and alcohol, and how to bring up their children or grandchildren (Elias, 1561). This violence or low-self-control impacts the younger generations within the same communities

Mary Black's experience is one example of the inter-generational impacts in indigenous communities. She grew up in the Ojibwe tribe and is a child one of the tribe members that attended residential schools in Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. One of Black's vivid memories of childhood is a "sexual game," that she and children in the group often played together. From the age of 2, 3 or 4, she had known playing this game, and she actually remembers she had sex with a boy who she cannot remember his name nor face. This game was quite common among children in the Ojibwe community. However, she noticed that sex must not be the thing that young children know and began to think of herself as a worthless life when she had become older ("Exclusive: Let me tell you about inter-generational trauma").

In the case of Rebecca LaBillois, whose families are from a Mi'kmaq tribe, there was a multigenerational impact because of her father who used to attend a residential school. To cope with the trauma he had been struggling with, LaBillois' father drank alcohol and treated his children violently. Rebecca LaBillois remembers that all of the fourteen sons and daughters were put into a room, and driven into a corner and their father pushed their faces to a wall sometimes when he had had aggressive mood ("Still lost; Mi'kmaq teacher sees long reach of residential schools"). LaBillois' father had never known how to express his love to his children without alcohol. Rebecca LaBillois repeated his poor parenting with her own two daughters.

Another woman, Sue Caribou, who was a student of the Guy Hill institution, sued the government for her mental illness which she argues was the result of residential school in east Manitoba. "I was thrown into a cold shower every night, sometimes after being raped" ("Canada confronts its dark history of abuse in residential schools"). She explained the students were often mentally, physically and sexually abused by the school staff. From 1972, when she came to the Guy Hill, to 1979, she suffered violence and pressure of fear. Moreover, some teachers used to call her "dog", and made her eat damaged foods like an animal ("Canada confronts its dark history of abuse in residential schools").

According to reports of violence and abuse from aboriginal people, people who were attendees of residential schools and their offspring have much greater possibility to be victims of

those traumas. Brenda Elias, of the University Manitoba, revealed the huge gap in the influence between two types of indigenous people, those who were involved in residential schools' trauma and who were not, through a survey about trauma of Canada's residential schools in 2012. This study examined aboriginal people, who lived on their own reservations in the Province of Manitoba, to research the number of people who are affected by abuse, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts. From the survey, about 39% of native people on the reserve answered that they have an experience of abuse, especially, those who are female, single, attendees of the schools. Inter-generational exposure victims particularly have an abuse history. 28% of them have had suicidal thoughts. Suicidal thoughts are remarkably common among Indigenous people aged between 18 to 44, women, non-partnered models that have inter-generational trauma. Likewise, suicide attempts, which are common among 15% of Indigenous people on reserve, is strongly related to 18 to 27 years youth, women, singles and a multigenerational impact. These numbers included non-attendees. However, these percentages of suicide attempts alter when we see the ratios of those experiences among residential school attendees; 48%, almost half of the attendees, confided that they have an abuse history, and most of them are age 28 to 44. The proportion of Indigenous with suicidal thoughts was slightly lower than the entire number, 26%, while those who have had an idea of suicide tend to have been abused. Furthermore, 14% of subjects have a history of suicide attempts, and they were certainly a result of physical, sex-

ual and mental abuse as well. Through these results, it was revealed that female indigenous people are likely to have an experience of abuse, suicide thoughts and suicide attempts more than men, and it can cause mental illness. Yet, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts are more likely to affect youth. Those who have a tendency to think of suicide, have a tendency to have experienced abuse experience, too (Elias, 2012).

The study undertaken by Brenda Elias showed that female First Nations people are more likely to experience abuse while another survey, promoted by the Cedar Project, explains that women have significantly higher risks of sexual abuse. The Cedar Project researched 259 women aged between 14 to 30 in British Columbia for seven years to analyze how common the risk of abuse is. These 259 women, who were picked up randomly from Vancouver and Prince George, B.C., have nearly ten times the risk of rape if they have similar abuse experience in their childhood, or if they have parents or grandparents who used to attend residential schools. Moreover, 28% of them were sexually assaulted during the seven years survey, and 41% of those who were abused during the seven years were raped more than once ("Study shows similarities between continued abuse of aboriginal women and residential schools").

A report by the Native Women's Association of Canada offers further evidence that female victims of residential school violence and their families are more likely to suffer various forms of crime and violence in their lives. It shows that 44% of young female and 34% of adult women in crime are native people, and a

number of them are inter-generationally related to residential schools. Fiona Meyer-Cook, who is an analyst of NWAC, said a number of those aboriginal women who are in jails grew up in an orphanage or were given to child welfare. Moreover, children of those women in prisons needed to be sent to those organizations because of incarcerations ("Residential school related to increased female incarceration"). The greater the negative the impact of residential schools, the more they tend to have a lower status in the society. This means that it is difficult to escape the violent trauma from one's memory, and it mentally invades victims' lives, so that they cannot stop repeating the same violent action on the next generation. The social status such as "Aboriginal", "women", "single", "young," also tend to increase the disadvantaged position of these victims, and sometimes makes it hard to fight the issue.

Many people face hardships because of prejudices and stereotypes connected to ethnicity, nationality, or gender. Family history and cultural experiences also have an impact of people's lives. Coping with the difficulties is tough enough with a strong voice. However, many aboriginals have taken on the challenge of changing their communities positively. In the case of Rebecca LaBillois, she found that family relationships are the most important and effective element to recover her lost love for her daughters. To take back family bonds, community pride, and self-esteem to Mi'kmaq people and herself, LaBillois found that the tribe's traditions, such as the Powwow, can be appropriate opportunities. The Powwow, which is a traditional dance of

Mi'kmaq tribes, is celebrated when families get together worked as a way to bring the community together. Mi'kmaq people express themselves in powwow dance and music, so this can bring back sensitive emotions and people would relearn how to express themselves, she thought. She took back sobriety, graduated university, and now has been working at Eel River Bar as a manager for Mi'kmaq language and culture ("Still lost; Mi'kmaq teacher sees long reach of residential schools"). She hopes to give the next generation more opportunity to spend time with families and maintain their original traditions, and support mental strength.

Recovering from the trauma of residential schools has come from indigenous communities themselves. An example of this is the 54 leaders of northern indigenous groups in British Columbia improved the situation in 2014. They founded a Child Advocacy Centre, which is a child welfare place, for coming generations in Prince George, try to decrease the number of victims. After this movement was started, Sheldon Kennedy, a NHL hockey player, contributed by establishing a CAC in Calgary, too ("Study shows links between continued abuse of aboriginal women, residential schools").

The residential schools issue is one of the most difficult and controversial issues in Canadian history. In the beginning, the schools seemed as if they would have succeeded to raise children as modernized highly educated Canadians, and actually some Indigenous parents desired to let their children go to residential schools as a means of gaining useful skills that might lead to a

career or a good job. Though the schools were expected to result in assimilation, it resulted in physical and mental violence that had an extreme and long lasting impact on the lives of First Nation's communities. This violence was the result of prejudice against indigenous people and a lack of respect for native culture. If those students were white Canadians, would nurses have abused children? They probably harmed indigenous children because they had thought children were from savage tribes and did not know how to conform to the society correctly. The schools were run as discrimination veiled as assimilation. The impact of the violence and mental anguish from residential schools can continue to affect First Nations communities and First Nations people into the future possibly for some more years or decades. Canadians will have to work with First Nations communities to continue to find suitable answers and end the cycle of violence and abuse.

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