DEFINING AND MEASURING SAFETY AMONG FIRST NATIONS WOMEN, GIRLS, AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

FNIGC ᒋ CGIPN

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- First Nations Health Authority

- Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre

- Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations

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- Chiefs of Ontario

- Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador

- First Nations Education Initiative Incorporated

- Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq

- Dene Nation

- Council of Yukon First Nations

FNIGC would like to thank the 80 delegates from across Canada who participated in the Technical Gathering in Ottawa on November 18–19, 2023. This group included Traditional Knowledge Holders, Elders, Youth, community members, Chiefs, researchers and analysts, frontline workers (e.g., healthcare workers, addictions and wellness workers, shelter workers, and law enforcement officers), and representatives from multiple First Nations organizations. FNIGC would also like to thank Elder Claudette Commanda for conducting prayer and providing spiritual guidance.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report directly responds to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Data Strategy Working Group (DSWG) 2021 data strategy report titled *Creating New Pathways for Data* ("The Data Strategy") (2021). This two-year exploratory work sought to provide insight into the possible development of a First Nations definition of safety for First Nations women, girls, and the Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual (2SLGBTQQIA+) community as well as identify research methods, methodology, and indicators for measuring safety. Measuring safety for First Nations women, girls, and gender-diverse people from a strengths-based perspective can be a powerful resource for First Nations. Enhancing safety data can provide an important tool to influence public policy, support decision-making at all levels of government, and ultimately contribute to advancing First Nations sovereignty.

Two interrelated questions guided this project:

- How do First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people define safety?

- How can safety for First Nations women, girls, and gender-diverse people be measured?

The project took place from March 2023 to March 2025 and included four phases:

Phase I: *Literature Review*
A comprehensive literature review examined global literature on safety from an international Indigenous perspective. The literature review included academic and grey literature. Literature was included if the source provided robust discussions about Indigenous understandings of safety, human security, cultural safety, or community safety. Sources that discuss how to measure safety, human security, and community safety were also included if there was meaningful engagement with Indigenous participants. The literature review focused on definitions of safety from a strengths-based perspective.

Phase II: *Technical Gathering*
The Technical Gathering was a two-day meeting that included approximately 80 delegates who were invited in collaboration with FNIGC's regional partners. The first day focused on defining safety and the second day focused on measuring safety.

Notetakers captured these discussions, resulting in a "What We Heard Report" embedded in this report.

Phase III: *Qualitative Interviews*
Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with subject-matter experts in a range of sectors, including the justice system, healthcare, addictions and mental health, child welfare, 2SLGBTQQIA+ services, and youth advocacy. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded thematically. The thematic findings of the interviews and selected quotes are included in this report.

Phase IV: *Analysis*
The literature review, "What We Heard Report" from the Technical Gathering and the semi-structured qualitative interviews were taken together to analyze the applicability of the thematic areas and quantitative indicators identified by the DSWG in The Data Strategy. We were also open to the possibility of adding additional thematic areas and qualitative and quantitative indicators not captured by the DSWG data report. Finally, the analysis sought to identify best practices for research methods and methodological approaches and articulate a strengths-based perspective regarding how First Nations are working to promote safety in their respective communities. The findings from the analysis are described below.

KEY FINDINGS

Safety is a deeply personal experience that can differ depending on identity, geographical location, and social and political contexts. The participants told us that safety is complex. Safety can refer to a physical environment, and the experience of safety can shift depending on a wide range of non-static factors. Safety is also a feeling that is often difficult to describe in a single sentence.

This work builds on the four thematic areas identified by the MMIWG Final Report and the DSWG Data Strategy to assess their relevance for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The four thematic areas are: culture, human security, health and wellness, and justice. The qualitative interviews and Technical Gathering validated the relevance of these areas. In the analysis phase, we also identified an additional thematic area that recurred throughout the project: kinship, relationships, and First Nations identity, which participants frequently referenced as critical for a First Nations definition of safety. The DSWG data report quantitative indicators were validated as relevant for measuring First Nations safety. Since The Data Strategy did not include qualitative

indicators, we have included qualitative indicators for consideration and other quantitative indicators that may be useful for measuring safety among First Nations.

We heard from the participants that there is a need for strengths-based safety data to document the strengths and resiliency of First Nations communities and people. There was a strong interest among the participants to have improved data that blends First Nations Traditional Knowledge and Western knowledge. Blending the strengths of different forms of knowledge creation can be beneficial for a comprehensive understanding of safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals. Participants want data that is actionable and accessible to First Nations. Data focused on safety can help support the planning and development of programs and policy and can be used as a powerful advocacy tool.

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this work. First and foremost, this was an exploratory project. In total, 100 individuals participated in this exploratory research, so it is important to recognize that this report does not fully represent First Nations perspectives and that further engagement is required. Given the qualitative nature of the work and time limitations, we engaged a relatively small portion of First Nations people in this iteration of the project. FNIGC encourages future projects to engage a wider diversity of First Nations people in these critical conversations about safety, especially First Nations people who face intersecting forms of structural marginalization such as people with experiences of homelessness, who use substances, members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community, and youth. As described by the DSWG, there is currently a lack of sufficient baseline data on First Nations 2SLGBTQQIA+ to begin meaningfully assessing safety concerns among this population. While we did interview members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community and service providers working with this community, this remains an area of urgent attention in future projects assessing safety for First Nations women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this exploratory research demonstrated the value of defining and measuring safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people through a strengths-based lens. We found support for the four thematic areas identified by the National Inquiry and the suggested quantitative indicators relevant for measuring First Nations

safety. We have included an additional thematic area for consideration: relationships, kinship, and First Nations identity. The research identified numerous qualitative and quantitative indicators that could be used to begin measuring safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Due to the exploratory nature of the work, the indicators provided here are suggestions. As more work develops in this area, First Nations priorities about the indicators may shift as priorities and identification of potential trends once data starts being collected.

Improved First Nations-specific data collected by and for First Nations people can assist with systems-level advocacy. Improved data can also demonstrate the strengths of First Nations people by identifying and measuring protective factors such as connection to culture, language retention, and relationships. From a First Nations data sovereignty perspective, it is up to the discretion of each First Nation to define and measure safety for themselves. Moreover, any data collected must be actionable, meaning it benefits First Nations and First Nations people. It is our hope that other First Nations and First Nations-serving organizations build on this exploratory work.

ABOUT FNIGC

The First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) is an independent, apolitical, and technical non-profit organization committed to producing quality research and information that will contribute to improving the health and well-being of First Nations across the country. The FNIGC envisions that every First Nation will achieve data sovereignty in alignment with its distinct worldview. Established by the Assembly of First Nations' Chiefs in Assembly (Resolution #48, December 2009), the mission of the FNIGC is that, with First Nations, we assert data sovereignty and support the development of information governance and management at the community level through regional and national partnerships. FNIGC adheres to free, prior, and informed consent, respects Nation-to-Nation relationships, and recognizes the distinct customs of Nations.

In collaboration with our regional partners, FNIGC conducts unique data-gathering initiatives that enable our partners to support First Nations governments to build culturally relevant portraits of their communities. FNIGC supports First Nations communities by contributing directly to building data and statistical capacities at national, regional, and community levels, including the provision of credible and relevant information on First Nations. The FNIGC oversees data collection on First Nations reserves and in northern communities, conducts research, engages in

knowledge translation and dissemination activities, offers education and training, and promotes the advancement of the First Nations principles of OCAP®.

Our Vision and Mission are guided by our Core Strategic Objectives

1. Our approach is Community-driven and Nation-based

2. Our data are inclusive, meaningful, and relevant to First Nations

3. Our tools are effective, adaptable, and accessible

4. Our partnerships connect regions to strengthen data sovereignty

BACKGROUND

In 2019, FNIGC conducted the *Feasibility Study for Research on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Among First Nations,* which assessed key issues, relevance, and interest of First Nations to conduct or participate in GBV research. The GBV feasibility study laid the groundwork for further exploration into the safety of First Nations within Canada. Building upon this research, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) launched a call for proposals to support Indigenous-led data research projects, aiming to develop distinctions-based or identity-specific indicators and methodologies to increase knowledge around the safety of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. In response, FNIGC submitted a proposal for a multi-year project to advance knowledge and explore how safety is defined and measured among First Nations women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals.

This *What We Heard* report is rooted in a strengths-based lens, emphasizing the resilience, wisdom, and agency of First Nations communities by focusing on their strengths and cultural knowledge. It contributes to a deeper understanding of safety, security, and well-being for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, supporting the goal of ensuring that First Nations women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals are respected, and that their safety is upheld in Canada.

ABOUT DR. MANDI GRAY

Mandi Gray (PhD) is an assistant professor at Trent University in the Sociology Department, criminology program. She is a white woman who spent most of her life in Treaty 1 Territory (Winnipeg). She has called Tkaronto home since 2013. Mandi has worked in solidarity with First Nations women, girls, and gender-diverse people since 2008 in a range of roles in Ontario, Alberta, and Manitoba. Her research focuses on advancing Indigenous data sovereignty, sexual violence, and institutional responses to discrimination. She is the author of the book *Suing for Silence: Sexual Violence and Defamation Law* (UBC Press, 2024) and has published academic research in international journals including the Journal of Health Services Research & Policy, International Journal for Equity in Health, Studies in Social Justice, BMC Health Services Research, and International Journal of Indigenous Health.

TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Data – Information that can be used to increase knowledge or understanding. Data is broad and can include surveys, observations, works of art and literature, stories, and interviews.

Deficit-based research – Focuses on weaknesses, needs, and problems of an individual or community (See: First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2020)

Gender-based violence (GBV) – Defined by the United Nations as "harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power, and harmful norms. The term is primarily used to underscore the fact that structure, gender-based power differentials place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence. While women and girls suffer disproportionately from GBV, men and boys can also be targeted. The term is also sometimes used to describe targeted violence against 2SLGBTQQIA+ populations, when referencing violence related to norms of masculinity/femininity and/or gender norms" (UN Women, n.d.)

Indicators – Measurement of meeting specific aims at a community level. Indicators can be used for informing policies, monitoring impacts of programs and policies, tracking, and targeting investments, revealing issues that have been ignored, community engagement, and giving early signs of potential problems for preventive action (Fox, 2018).

Mixed methods research – Combines elements of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. An example of mixed methods research is a study that relies on interviews with key informants and a survey.

Qualitative data – Relies on data that is not quantifiable and does not rely on numerical data. Examples include interviews, artwork, observation, and stories.

Quantitative data – Relies on collecting and analyzing numerical data for descriptive purposes, to find correlations or to test hypotheses. Examples include administrative data and surveys.

Strengths-based research – Emphasize the strengths of a community or individual (See: First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2020; MMIWGS2S, 2021).

INTRODUCTION

Traditional stories tell us that First Nations women historically held leadership roles in ensuring community safety through their distribution of resources, creating social safety nets, and their connection to the land and water (MMIWG, 2019, p. 158). First Nations women, sexual minorities, and gender-diverse people continue to ensure community safety, but the legacy of colonialism has disrupted the traditional leadership roles they once occupied. Colonialism has also contributed to unsafe social and political environments for First Nations women, girls, and Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual (2SLGBTQQIA+) people. For example, the Indian Act was introduced to control First Nations people and had specific detrimental impacts on the well-being and safety of First Nations women (NWAC, n.d.a).[1] Laws and policies also resulted in the forceful dispossession of First Nations people from their traditional territories. For example, the forced removal of First Nations people from their kin systems through residential schools, the sixties scoop, and the child welfare system (Blackstock, 2007; Bombay et al., 2014; MMIWG, 2019). The violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community are abuses and violations of Indigenous human rights that include inherent, treaty, and constitutional rights, and have resulted in the denial of safety, security, and human dignity (MMIWG, 2019, p. 117).

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls (MMIWG) final report, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, states that to end violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, it is critical to address their security in all settings and regions (MMIWG, 2019, p. 503). Safety and security are influenced by social factors such as poverty, education, employment status, access to safe housing and transportation. Geography can also impact safety and perceptions of safety. It is important to explore perceptions of safety for individuals in different geographical contexts, such as urban centres, rural and remote communities, on reserve, and in the arctic, all of which have different safety concerns (Grey et al., 2016, ; Kuokkanen & Sweet, 2020; Vancouver Coastal Health, 2016). First Nations people in Canada and Indigenous Peoples globally often migrate across locations, for example, to and from their traditional lands to surrounding towns or urban centres. This migration is both voluntary and involuntary, and is related to dispossession of land, climate change, and

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[1] The Indian Act excluded women from Status registration in ways that were not applied to First Nations men. For example, a First Nations woman married to a non-First Nations man could potentially face dislocation from her traditional territory, exclusion from her community, political disenfranchisement, and poverty. There have been several legal challenges to address gender inequality in the Indian Act, but it remains an ongoing issue (NWAC, n.d.).

global markets that impact food security, employment, and education prospects, and sometimes the search for safety (Capobianco, 2009).

This report is guided by *Reclaiming Power and Place* and the accompanying data strategy authored by the Data Strategy Working Group (DSWG) *titled Creating New Pathways for Data: The 2021 National Action Plan Data Strategy* ("The Data Strategy") (MMIWG2S+, 2021). The Data Strategy builds on the four thematic clusters of safety defined in *Reclaiming Power and Place* which are: culture, health and wellness, human security, and justice.

The DSWG Data Strategy emphasizes the importance of measuring safety from a strengths-based approach that also includes protective factors. A strengths-based approach does not mean there is an exclusion of data that could identify areas of improvement or experiences of violence. Rather, a strengths-based approach strives to not focus exclusively on deficits but also seeks to identify the strengths within a community. Moving away from a deficit approach will ensure a more balanced and nuanced understanding of safety for First Nations and help to identify what strategies are working to keep people safe. It is up to each First Nation to decide what indicators are relevant to their specific social, cultural, political, historical, and geographical context.

The DSWG Data Strategy provides suggestions for possible quantitative indicators in the four thematic areas (Appendix A). The suggested quantitative indicators were intended as a starting point, with the intent to further develop and refine them. The DSWG did not provide qualitative indicators but encouraged the development of qualitative indicators to complement the quantitative data.

In response to the DSWG Data Strategy, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has suggested several qualitative measures for the four thematic areas to support improved measurement of issues related to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people (NWAC, 2023). The qualitative indicators were categorized using the DSWG Data Strategy, National Family and Survivors Circle Frameworks, and the Hague Model of Access to Justice, Cost and Quality (NWAC, 2023).

The DSWG Data Strategy provided several criteria for qualitative and quantitative indicators (MMIWG2S, 2021, p. 30–31):

- **Comparable** –The indicator allows for comparisons across groups and regions.
- **Connected to thematic clusters** – The indicator falls under one or more of the thematic clusters of the National Action Plan Data Strategy.

- **Culturally relevant** – The indicator wording and concepts reflect First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis cultures.
- **Distinctions-based (or "population specific")** – The indicator highlights results for First Nations, Inuit, or Métis people.
- **Manageable** – The final number of indicators is reasonable.

Through the current project, we sought to explore the validity and comprehensiveness of the four thematic areas for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, specifically in terms of their relevance for defining and measuring safety and potential indicators.

In the analysis stage, we were open to the possibility of additional thematic areas beyond the four identified by the DSWG. Finally, the project sought feedback on research methods and methodology to guide all stages of potential data collection and to determine how data could be used to influence positive change.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project included:

- **Further existing research**: Expand on existing research, knowledge, and dialogues about safety and human security of First Nations women, girls, and members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community. This research will advance distinctions-based definitions and indicators specific for First Nations.
- **Begin the development of a First Nations definition of safety**: Work towards establishing a definition of safety relevant to First Nations worldviews that will support the future development of distinctions-based indicators of safety.
- **Identify potential indicators and methods to measure safety among First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people**: Determine best practices and methodological approaches for measuring safety.
- **Advance data sovereignty and collaboration among First Nations across Canada**: Foster collaboration with project partners and stakeholders in alignment with the FNIGC principles of OCAP® and First Nations data sovereignty.

It is important to stress that this work is only exploratory and is not intended to provide a definitive definition of safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. It is up to each First Nation to define safety for themselves and how they wish to measure it. The intention here is to provide a foundation for these discussions that may be useful for First Nations to work from.

METHODS

This report was built on three phases of information gathering:

- A literature review of both academic and grey literature
- A two-day Technical Gathering attended by delegates from each of the FNIGC regions
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with twenty participants

The following section provides details on each of these phases.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two interrelated research questions guided the literature review:

1) How do First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people define safety?

2) How can safety for First Nations women, girls, and gender-diverse people be measured?

The literature review included literature published between 2005 and August 2023 and included Indigenous populations in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.[2] Sources were used if they provided robust discussions about Indigenous definitions of safety, human security, cultural safety, or community safety. Sources that discuss how to measure safety, human security, and community safety were also included if they included Indigenous participants. Overall, there is limited work specifically examining safety for Indigenous Peoples. Many of the sources measuring safety did not use First Nations or Indigenous-developed indicators.

TECHNICAL GATHERING

The FNIGC hosted a two-day Technical Gathering on November 15 and 16, 2023, in Ottawa, Ontario. Approximately 80 people attended the gathering. Each of the FNIGC regional partners selected individuals to attend. Most of the delegates attended in person and approximately twelve attended virtually. The Firelight Group[3] was contracted to facilitate the gathering, take notes, and prepare a *What We Heard Report*,

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[2] Literature from the United States was also reviewed but none reflected the specific search terms. To date, it appears the United States literature has focused on how to measure violence against Indigenous women and girls and legal responses.

[3] Firelight is an Indigenous-owned consulting company with experience providing community-based research, planning, and technical support services to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and organizations.

the findings of which are incorporated into this report. The FNIGC also had team members in attendance to support the event.

Melanie Jacobs-Douglas, a Curve Lake First Nation member and senior staff member with Firelight, facilitated the Technical Gathering. The gathering opened and closed with a prayer and remarks from Elder Claudette Commanda, a Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation member and a dedicated advocate for First Nations rights, history, and culture in national and international settings. Tiffany Dumount, an experienced community counselor and a Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation member, provided emotional support in English and French in a private space. Tanya Gerber, a graphic recorder, created visual representations of the discussions in real-time using visual elements such as drawings and illustrations to capture key ideas and concepts, which are included throughout the report. All the illustrations created at the gathering are included in this report.

On day one, the topic was defining safety. The day two topic was measuring safety. On both days, delegates were broken into smaller discussion groups by table, and the thematic areas of culture, health and wellness, human security, and justice guided discussions. Each table had approximately 6–8 delegates and a note taker to document the discussions. At the conclusion of each discussion period, the note taker reported the key points of the group discussion to the room.

While the Technical Gathering was focused on technical discussions about defining and measuring safety, the gathering also allowed delegates to share their personal and community experiences with enhancing safety. These unplanned discussions demonstrated the importance of creating safer spaces to discuss emerging safety issues and bring together people from across the regions to share strategies for addressing safety challenges and the community strengths. The Technical Gathering provided a space for emotional and spiritual intensity that validated the lived experiences of First Nations people. Elder Claudette Commanda provided ongoing guidance and support to ensure that it was a safe space where delegates felt empowered to initiate discussions of importance to them and develop meaningful connections with others from across the regions.

Figure 1. The Introduction to the Technical Gathering

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Mandi Gray conducted twenty semi-structured interviews between 2023–2024
(**Appendix B: Interview Guide**). The interview participants were diverse and
represented a range of professional roles, areas of expertise, geographical locations,
ages, and gender identities (**Appendix C: Interview Participants**). Areas of expertise
among the participants included: child welfare, Indigenous law and governance, social
policy, addictions, mental health, gender-based violence, 2SLGBTQQIA+ issues,
policing, and healthcare. FNIGC selected interview participants with support from
Mandi Gray.

All the interviews were in-person at the Technical Gathering or on Zoom. The interviews
took approximately one hour. All participants signed a consent form and were provided
with an honorarium to compensate them for their time and knowledge. All but one
participant consented to being identified by name in the report. The interviews were
recorded and transcribed. Two researchers coded the same five transcripts to ensure
intercoder reliability and agreed on the thematic codes of culture, health and wellness,
human security, justice, methods and methodology, and definitions of safety. After

reviewing all the transcripts and discussions with team members at the FNIGC, the researchers added the thematic area of kinship, relationships, and First Nations identity. This thematic area was developed through the larger literature review, Technical Gathering discussions, one-on-one interviews, and collaboration with FNIGC.

DEFINITIONS OF SAFETY: A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

The literature review includes academic and grey literature sources from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.[4] The sources were included if they provided robust discussions about Indigenous definitions of safety, human security, cultural safety, or community safety. Sources that discuss how to measure safety, human security, and community safety were also included if they included Indigenous participants. Many sources measuring safety did not use First Nations or Indigenous created indicators but were included in the literature review because this is an underdeveloped area within the literature to date. These sources are included to provide insight for future indicators to measure First Nations safety and security for women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

To date, much of the existing Canadian literature on safety from a strengths-based perspective is from a pan-Indigenous perspective that is inclusive of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. While this work is beneficial, there is limited exploration of safety specifically from a First Nations perspective. When the safety of Indigenous women is explored, it was most often in the context of intimate partner violence and focused on their immediate safety needs, such as availability of Indigenous women's shelters and culturally relevant counselling. While this research is important, it does not necessarily provide insight to the safety needs of those who do not have immediate safety needs because of intimate partner violence. Another limitation is that this small body of literature has focused on the experiences of adult women, which often excludes younger women and gender-diverse people, youth, and children.

DEFINING SAFETY

The literature discusses three interrelated conceptualizations of safety: community safety, personal safety, and human security. Community safety and human security are closely related and interconnected concepts, but they encompass different dimensions and different understandings of protection. Human security is broad, includes many factors, and is fundamental to personal and community safety.

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[4] Literature from the United States was also reviewed but none of the identified literature reflected the specific search terms. To date, it appears the United States literature has focused on how to measure violence against Indigenous women and girls and legal responses.

Personal Safety

Personal safety refers to the protection from harm and violence at an individual level. Indigenous women and girls experience personal safety much differently than their Indigenous male counterparts because of the precautions they embed into their daily decision-making to ensure their safety (Wilson et al., 2016). Personal safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people is strongly attributed to the ability to be themselves and feel safe from physical, spiritual, emotional, or psychological harm. Feelings of personal safety are also intertwined with connections to traditional land, language, traditions and strong kin relations (MMIWG, 2019; NWAC, n.d.b; Wilson et al., 2016, 2019).

Community Safety

Community safety is sometimes used interchangeably with public safety and/or crime prevention. Capobianco et. al (2009) argue that for Indigenous Peoples globally, community safety is the most suitable term because it is broad. Definitions of community safety can include recognizing the role of colonization as well as strategies, initiatives, practices, and tools developed by and with Indigenous Peoples to improve the community's well-being. Capobianco et al. (2009) propose an Indigenous-specific community safety framework that recognizes:

- The complexity of the issues related to colonization, dispossession, and assimilation, and the present-day realities facing many Indigenous Peoples across the world, including discrimination, systemic racism, inequity, and marginalization.
- The need to value and respect different knowledges (such as traditional, experiential, and interdisciplinary) that inform partnerships based on trust, recognition, and equality.
- The importance of community contributions in the co-production of safety with all community members, including the contributions of many different and interrelated community sectors (cultural, social, environment, economic, political).
- That the safety of Indigenous Peoples and the communities in which they live include measures beyond reductions in the rates of crime and victimization. Reducing crime is just one of the possible positive indicators of safety. Examples could also include school success, literacy, employment and employment opportunities, vocational skills, parenting practices, and the protection of livelihoods (p.4–5).

Human Security

The United Nations (2012) defines human security as: "The right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential." Human security recognizes the connections between peace, development, and human rights and considers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as interdependent and indivisible (as cited in MMIWG, 2019, p.502).

Reclaiming Power and Place identified human security as one of the four thematic areas that underpin the "structures and systems that sustain violence in daily encounters" (MMIWG, 2019, p. 118). The "right to security" is defined as both physical and social:

> *The broad sense of human security draws from an approach that places well-being at its very center, and that recognizes complex economic and social interactions — encounters — that work to shape security, or a lack of security in a person's life. It moves human security beyond the agenda of the state alone, and instead considers other factors or "non-traditional" threats such as poverty, disease, and the roots of issues such as the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.* (MMIWG, 2019, p. 504)

Witnesses at the MMIWG Inquiry spoke about the need for human security:

> *[F]or them, human security means the ability to live in the world without being under a constant threat of violence or harm; the ability to say goodbye to children going out with their friends, and not wonder if they will ever return; and among issues, the ability to start a family, to raise children, without worrying about their being targeted by racism and discrimination, or being apprehended unfairly* (MMIWG, 2019, p.508).

The inquiry witnesses also discussed the need for physical safety, such as the right to life, liberty, and personal safety, as well as the need for protection, social assistance, access to essential services such as housing and healthcare, access to water and food, and education (MMIWG, 2019).

A report commissioned by the Canadian government to examine how First Nations women define human security had similar findings. The final report included the perspectives of twenty First Nations women from three First Nations (Burnt Church, New Brunswick; Grassy Narrows, Ontario; and Mount Currie, British Columbia) (Dieter & Rude, 2005). For these women, "human security is intimately tied to the land, and the cultural traditions derived from fishing, hunting and gathering necessary to foster a

safe and healthy life in the future for future generations of their people" (Dieter & Rude, 2005, p. IV). The women also defined human security by adequate standards of living, environmental protection, and respect for the rights of First Nations people, as guaranteed in the Constitution, court decisions, and legislation (Dieter & Rude, 2005, p. 59). Human security ensures that First Nations people can live off the land as much as possible and have the ability to follow their cultural and spiritual practices (Dieter & Rude, 2005). One of the women interviewed for the report expanded on this:

> *My security is being able to go to the rivers and lakes to fish, to hunt if I want, to pick the berries to survive as a human being. To see the animals roaming on our land, to breathe fresh air and to drink the good water. That's my security.* (Dieter & Rude, 2005, p.59)

The existing literature demonstrates that human security encompasses diverse elements, including access to safe housing, food security, and water. Human security also involves access to essential services such as social support and healthcare. The existing literature highlights that for First Nations women, human security is also characterized by their ability to maintain traditional ways of life such as hunting and fishing, a strong connection to their traditional territories and sacred places, the ability to connect with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and participate in ceremony. The literature also identifies a number of threats to the human security of First Nations women due to climate change, the extractive industry, and natural disasters that may disrupt their ability to remain on their home territory or the ability to hunt and fish (Dieter & Rude, 2005; Kuokkanen & Sweet, 2020).

Building on the existing literature on community safety, personal safety, and human security, the current project is focused on bringing together perspectives from diverse First Nations people with a wide range of expertise from across Canada to begin developing a foundation for a definition of safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Through this process, the project aims to explore a First Nations definition of safety, how safety can be measured, and potential indicators. The present project is focused on supporting First Nations data sovereignty by providing tools and resources that First Nations can use as they work to build safe communities for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

FINDINGS

[Safety] is more than just feeling safe walking somewhere. [Safety is] the systems that we have to work with and are intertwined with and making sure those are equipped with safe people, good people, and that the goal is wellness and harmony and balance in the communities. -- Torey Solomon, Indigenous Community Response Advisor, Sexual Violence New Brunswick

Figure 1. Defining and Measuring Safety Graphic Recording

DEFINING AND MEASURING SAFETY FOR FIRST NATIONS WOMEN, GIRLS, AND 2SLGBTQQIA+

The participants often found it difficult to define safety in a single sentence. Safety is complex and relies on a wide constellation of interrelated personal, social, and political elements. **Figures 2** and **3** include some of the commonly shared words at the Technical Gathering during an initial brainstorm about defining safety from a First Nations perspective. Some of the terms included love, freedom, connection with others, self-expression, culture, and relationship with others and the environment.

Personal safety was often described as a somatic experience, a "feeling of safety" in the body that transcended language. However, what may feel safe to one person may not be safe to another even in similar circumstances due to a complexity of intersecting identities, including, but not limited to, past experiences, social class, gender identity, disability, and sexual orientation.

Personal safety is shaped by individual social location including age, gender identity, sexual orientation, health conditions, geographical location, education, and lived experiences such as substance use, housing insecurity, child welfare involvement, criminalization, and victimization. Safety is also shaped by social norms, for example, discriminatory stereotypes about First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people can contribute to unsafe situations. Safety is also influenced by political decisions related to funding and the issues that are prioritized in policy and resource allocation. Colonial policies and laws, and the intergenerational consequences, are major contributors to how First Nations women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals experience safety, or a lack thereof.

When you envision the safety of First Nations people, what does that look like?
Wordcloud Poll   225 responses   43 participants

Success   Indigenous Governance
Traditional governance   Peace   Language
Sucees   Connected
Understanding   Unified   Stability   Support
Love
Resilience   Thriving   Respect   Sovereignty   Unity
Trust   Self determination   Protection   Equality
Land based   door prizes   Unconditional love
Acceptance   Confidence
cultural resurgence   Traditions respected
community care   Not scared   UsingGiftsFreely

slido

Figure 2. Slido Poll: What Does First Nations Safety Look Like?

23

Figure 3. Slido Poll: Words or Phrases to Define Community Safety

The Technical Gathering delegates identified similar words for community safety: respect, kinship, culture, togetherness, love, harm reduction, and trust as factors of community safety for First Nations people **(Figure 4)**.

These responses speak to a larger underlying theme that safety requires a holistic understanding of well-being that involves entire communities. Gina Nagano, who attended the Technical Gathering and participated in an interview, spoke to the importance of safety as the foundation for First Nations, which requires the intertwining of traditional teachings to ensure both individual and community safety:

> *In order to move the entire community forward, we have to have safety as the foundation. ... And in order to feel safe, you've got to put all these structures in place. If you take it from an individual lens to a community lens, that's the same foundation that we put in there. … Safety is pivotal for growth, and sustainability and overall well-being. It's important that everything that we do, in every tradition, the tools that we use, required to address these challenges to heal a progressive for like their traditional teachings.*

> Gina Nagano, President & Community Safety Specialist, House of Wolf & Associates Inc.

Figure 5 includes the words that Technical Gathering delegates attributed to the concept of personal safety. Frequent responses included love, respect, freedom, relationships, and security. Taken together, the three polls suggest recurring themes

that contribute to overall safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, which require deep relationships built in love, respect, and culture.

Figure 4. Slido Poll: Words or Phrases to Define Personal Safety

It is also important to stress that how safety is experienced and defined at the individual level is fluid. How someone experiences safety may shift throughout their life due to experiences and healing. For example, some participants spoke about how their perspective of safety changed as they grew older and realized situations in their childhood and youth that they once thought of as "normal" or "safe" were unsafe or abusive situations.

Safety at the community level is also fluid and can shift because of larger political and social changes. For example, the exclusion or lack of representation of women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ in key leadership positions in organizations and government can influence critical decisions about safety such as how funds are allocated to certain issues or what actions are prioritized by leadership. Definitions of safety also require the identification of potential threats, which are often rooted in colonialism, having profoundly disrupted First Nations knowledge systems, language, and cultural practices. Colonialism has had specific consequences for how First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people experience safety in the world. For example, the Indian Act had specific impacts on the well-being and safety of First Nations women when many were excluded from their traditional territories (NWAC, n.d.a.). New safety threats may also emerge due to climate change and natural disasters. As a result, defining and

measuring safety is not static and will require ongoing inquiry through discussions and reflections.

Interview participants and Technical Gathering delegates were asked about potential indicators that could be used to help measure safety. The DSWG has provided quantitative indicators, which we sought to validate in terms of their relevance for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people at the Technical Gathering and in the one-on-one interviews. Overall, the Technical Gathering and the interviews confirm that the DSWG-suggested quantitative indicators are a useful starting place. The participants also provided additional qualitative and quantitative indicators for measuring safety. The following sections provide an overview of each of the suggested five thematic areas for defining and measuring safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people along with potential indicators.

CULTURE

> *We can't create safety for women and girls unless we create safety for the whole of the community, and that we have to use Indigenous knowledge and culture as a foundation to inform our understanding of what safety means.* -- Dr. Carol Hopkins, Executive Director, Thunderbird Partnership Foundation

First Nations cultures are deeply intertwined with safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Cultural teachings and ceremony encourage community connection and relationships that can support healing and offer protection. Ceremony and community gatherings are tangible expressions of this collective commitment to healing and safety. For example, smudging and other ceremonies can help with spiritual grounding and offer protection. Many participants pointed to the Medicine Wheel Teachings to capture the interconnections of safety, which seeks the balancing of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual domains of life.

Cultural spaces, ceremonies, and teachings also need to be inclusive and safe for all community members. Some First Nations people do not have access to ceremony, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers because they do not experience safety in these spaces. This is particularly true for some members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community and/or people who use substances. Yet people using substances are often most in need of ceremony and teachings to ensure their safety:

> *I totally understand the want for sobriety, given the colonial context. In a situation where people are stripped of their identities, rights, and isolated, substance dependency and misuse thrive. But it's for this very reason that **folks who are***

engaging with substances actively need access to their ceremony and culture. It is not inclusive, nor is it safe for them to be banned from engaging in these spaces when they are arguably the people who need it the most.

Kai Zamora, Executive Director, JusticeTrans

Ceremony and teachings should be safe and accessible for *all* community members.

Culture is deeply interconnected to all four of the other thematic areas identified in this report: health and wellness; justice; human security; and kinship, relationships, and First Nations identity. While culture is separated for the purposes of this report, culture is embedded throughout the other thematic areas. For example, traditional laws and ceremonies can be used to achieve justice, such as sharing circles to address harms or conflicts that may have occurred. Another example is the availability of traditional medicines in the health and wellness thematic area.

Overall, First Nations values and laws are an effective mechanism to enhance safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The revitalization of First Nations cultural practices can support healing and community building. Cultural teachings, traditional languages, and ceremony should be available to all First Nations people in urban, rural, remote, and First Nations. Revitalizing traditions and language can benefit healing for individuals and the community more broadly.

Measuring Culture and Potential Indicators

Suggested culture indicators included:

- Frequency of cultural ceremonies occurring for community
- Self-reported safety and inclusivity of cultural spaces, ceremonies, and activities
- 2SLGBTQQIA+ specific cultural spaces and teachings
- Community has a gathering space for cultural events
- Opportunity for land-based learning
- Self-reported relationships with Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- Opportunity for ceremony and cultural activities for people who use substances
- Number of drums or other ceremonial items in community
- Self-reported connection to cultural practices and teachings
- Inclusion of culture in healthcare, justice, and education systems
- First Nations language retention

Figure 5. Culture & Health and Wellness Thematic Areas Graphic Recording

Figure 6 is a high-level summary of the key themes of culture and health and wellness that were identified during the Technical Gathering demonstrating the interconnection between the two thematic areas, such as the importance of incorporating culture into health and wellness services and access to ceremony to support well-being. Participating in cultural events can also foster strong relationships and sense of First Nations identity, which can facilitate safety and security.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

A First Nations perspective views health and wellness as holistic, meaning that being healthy is more than simply an absence of illness (MMIWG, 2019). First Nations well-being is also about First Nations self-determination, Indigenous data governance, and the ability of each Nation to make decisions about healthcare service delivery and programming that is specific to the needs of their members. Health and wellness include factors that contribute to community-level and individual safety. The interviews and Technical Gathering identified three subthemes of health and wellness for defining safety: Intergenerational trauma and collective healing, the social determinants of health, and culturally safe healthcare services.

Intergenerational Trauma and Collective Healing

Intergenerational and historical trauma have had a significant impact on the health and well-being of First Nations people. Many of the discussions referenced the ongoing consequences of colonialism and the need for collective healing from intergenerational trauma. Collective healing requires welcoming and supportive environments that allow people to access the health and wellness resources, programming, and supports including harm reduction services. Ensuring safe spaces for healing also allows for healthy relationships to thrive and prevent behaviours and actions that may harm others. There is a need to ensure access to sweat lodges, land-based healing, sharing circles, and traditional arts and crafts, all of which are beneficial in supporting overall well-being, strengthen community bonds and relationships, and, in turn, enhance overall safety.

Social Determinants of Health

The second subtheme is the social determinants of health. The World Health Organization defines social determinants of health as the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. Specifically, social determinants of health refer to the "conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and people's access to power, money and resources," which impact health and well-being (World Health Organization, n.d.). Social and community well-being contribute to health and wellness and community safety for First Nations:

> When I think about health, and hope for health, what does that look like for me, and it's about self-determination, having that ability to determine what our future will hold in terms of planning the programs and services that we want for the community that we envision. **It has to be education, housing, health, economic development, justice, all the pillars that measure social determinants have to be included in the conversations around safety.**
>
> - Marion Crowe, Chief Executive Officer, First Nations Health Managers Association

The social determinants of health encompass a wide array of factors, services, and community infrastructure. The social determinants of health have many similarities to the thematic area of human security, for example, access to safe and affordable housing, education, and economics.

Safe and inclusive healthcare services

Healthcare services need to be culturally safe, inclusive, and accessible for those experiencing intersecting forms of structural marginalization and social exclusion. Inclusive healthcare services also need to be trauma informed and culturally safe for First Nations people.

In summary, the three subthemes of intergenerational trauma and collective healing, the social determinants of health, and culturally safe healthcare service are useful thematic areas for measuring and defining safety through health and wellness for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

Measuring health and wellness

A recurring concern from the participants is the difficulty of measuring the health and well-being of First Nations people due to limitations in the Canadian data landscape. The existing data can be difficult for First Nations governments and First Nations healthcare organizations to access. While FNIGC and the regional partners have improved the First Nations health data ecosystem, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all First Nations have ongoing access to relevant and accurate Nation-specific health data to make evidence-based decisions for the planning and measuring of health and well-being and for promoting the safety of First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. There is a strong desire for improved health and wellness data specific to First Nations, as well as the development of indicators about mental health and wellness from a First Nations and strengths-based perspective.

There has already been substantial work published on indicators for this subtheme that could be useful for identifying relevant indicators, such as The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (FNMWCF) created by Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (2020) Several participants referenced FNMWCF as including useful indicators for measuring health and wellness for First Nations people that could also be useful for measuring safety. The social determinants of health indicators also overlap with several of the indicators for human security, such as access to housing, safe transportation options to access healthcare services, and availability of emergency services.

Indicators for health and wellness can include the availability and existence of, and distance to:

- Trauma-informed healthcare services
- Gender-affirming healthcare services

- Culturally rooted wellness practices such as sweat lodges or sharing circles

- Group or community-based healing and wellness programs, such as peer support networks or mentorship programs

- Physical wellness activities (i.e., recreation activities, gym access)

- Health and wellness services for people who are incarcerated or are reintegrating back into the community

- Harm reduction services for people who use substances

Additional indicators could also include:

- Community awareness of available services and programs for health and wellness

- Safe and accessible transportation to healthcare services (transportation is also covered in the human security thematic area)

In conclusion, the thematic area of health and wellness is rooted in three interrelated subthemes. The first is access to services and supports that can support the healing of intergenerational trauma and contribute to collective First Nations healing. Healthcare services need to be safe and inclusive for people of all gender identities, sexual orientations, and if they have a history of using substances. The social determinants of health are a helpful framework for identifying measures and indicators for measuring health and wellness as well as other tools that have already been developed for Indigenous Peoples such as the FNMWCF.

HUMAN SECURITY

Human security encompasses a wide array of factors, many of which overlap with other thematic areas. A wide array of elements contribute to human security for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people under three major pillars: community infrastructure; safety planning; and politics, law, and governance.

Community Infrastructure

Community infrastructure plays an important role in safety and security. Community infrastructure includes housing, cellphone and internet service, and public transportation, which were most frequently cited as critical barriers to ensuring safety for women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

Housing shortages and crowded housing can keep women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in unsafe situations:

When I think about these things that impact safety of First Nations people and community, housing is a massive one. And when you think about, I think it must have been at the [the FNIGC Technical Gathering] where somebody was sharing information about overcrowding in housing and how that impacts safety. And just having not enough housing within the community can impact safety.

Rebekah Ederer, Research Coordinator, Women's Initiatives, Chiefs of Ontario

One of the most cited barriers to achieving safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people is access to housing and housing conditions. The high cost of living across Canada and shortages of affordable housing can keep women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in unsafe living situations. Moreover, the availability of domestic violence shelters is key to ensuring safety for anyone fleeing a violent situation within the home.

In addition, other infrastructure limitations that were critical for ensuring safety included access to high-speed internet and cell phone service, which was necessary for people in need of support or to contact emergency services.

Communication is a big one. So having cell service, like just the feeling of having cell service is like, again, it comes back to that feeling and feeling that like the streets are lit up, or that you have somewhere to go if you are fleeing violence.

Anonymous

Safe public transportation was also critical and frequently referenced by the participants as necessary for safety. For many First Nations people, they need to travel out of their First Nation to access healthcare, lawyers, or education, which is not always safe:

*I think this transportation thing also cuts in different ways. There's both the issue of people having to use unsafe modes of transportation but there's also the issue of under investment into communities so that **people are forced to travel to access key services**. Some of the hardest stories I heard about during the [MMIWG] inquiry were people who had loved ones who had to come to the city for something … They weren't able to bring anyone with them. And then no one ever saw them or heard from them again, or [they had been murdered], some of these people were coming in for like cancer treatment or diagnosis or pregnant, prenatal care. **The transportation thing I think is super key**, and I think probably poorly understood by policy makers.*

Karine Duhamel, former Director of Research, National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Youth advocate Winter Dawn Lipscombe spoke about her own experience navigating transportation from her First Nation to the nearest city and how frequently she hears of First Nations people, often women and girls, who go missing while waiting for a ride or hitchhiking due to a lack of safe transportation options:

> *When I think about my home reserve, which is Rat Portage to Kenora, that can be about a 20 to 40 minute walk depending on where you are. But a lot of people would just hitchhike and they would count on the fact somebody's going to recognize them or be able to pick them up. And there's actually a young woman who is missing right now. She was waiting for her ride and they don't know if she made it to her destination. But that's not an uncommon story here. I wish I could say that's the first person that I know of that was waiting for a ride and they didn't make it to the destination. But the reality is I hear that at least on a monthly basis, sometimes more often than that, and sometimes it's a good story and they're located and sometimes it's not as positive. It breaks my heart all the time when I go to community and I see a bunch of people and they are walking because it is so unsafe because there is no way for them to do that safely on the side of the road or the types of people that they might run into on a physical safety standpoint.*

> Winter Dawn Lipscombe, Acting Director of Health at Grand Council Treaty #3

Access to safe and reliable transportation is a barrier to achieving safety, whether traveling within the First Nation, or from their First Nation to the nearest town or urban city centre. People may rely on potentially unsafe modes of transportation such as hitchhiking due to a lack of other options. There are also concerns for women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people going to urban centres for essential services, but not having experience navigating the city on their own or experiencing anti-Indigenous racism on public transportation, which created unsafe situations.

The participants stressed that while community infrastructure is important, safety requires much more than simply improving the physical infrastructure of a community. Improvements to physical infrastructure must also be coupled with shifting social norms, such as encouraging healthy relationships and addressing the underlying root causes that devalue First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people that contribute to unsafe social and political climates.

Safety Planning

First Nations-led community safety planning is critical. This requires a dedicated team to identify potential safety threats and plan for future events, such as natural disasters like fires or floods or public health emergencies, to ensure the community's overall safety.

The growing threat of climate change requires careful consideration and planning. Gina Nagano stressed the importance of First Nations-led planning for natural disasters because of climate change:

> *Climate change is the reality, Indigenous communities are being hit hard, whether by floods, fire, avalanches. There is a need to practice solutions regarding climate change. Climate change is not just a theory, it's a lived reality impacting our First Nation communities.*
>
> Gina Nagano, President & Community Safety Specialist, House of Wolf & Associates Inc.

Community-level safety planning needs to be prioritized, updated regularly, and communicated with community members.

Safety planning also needs to be done in response to emerging issues that may be community specific and threaten the well-being of the community, such as developing a community response to address a sudden increase in opioid-related deaths or for public health issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Politics, Law, and Government

Recognition of First Nations as sovereign Nations and strong protection of First Nations treaty, human, and constitutional rights are critical to ensuring safety and human security.

Within First Nations governments and organizations, advancing safety will require representation of First Nations women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in leadership roles in First Nations organizations and governments:

> *What we heard a lot from family members [during the MMIWG Inquiry] was one of the impediments to safety was the lack of female leadership in some of the communities, the lack of access of women or gender diverse folks to positions of authority in their communities. Their inability to access those positions meant that they could not effectively advocate for resources.*
>
> Karine Duhamel, former Director of Research, National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ should not feel excluded from politics and high-level decision-making positions in government or organizations. First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people continue to face disproportionate structural

marginalization, which requires their voices and leadership to address safety meaningfully. Improved representation will also increase the diversity of perspectives and help shape priorities that better reflect the unique needs of different populations. When populations are excluded from leadership roles or feel that their concerns are not listened to by people in leadership roles, they feel excluded from the community and that their unique safety needs are not being met.
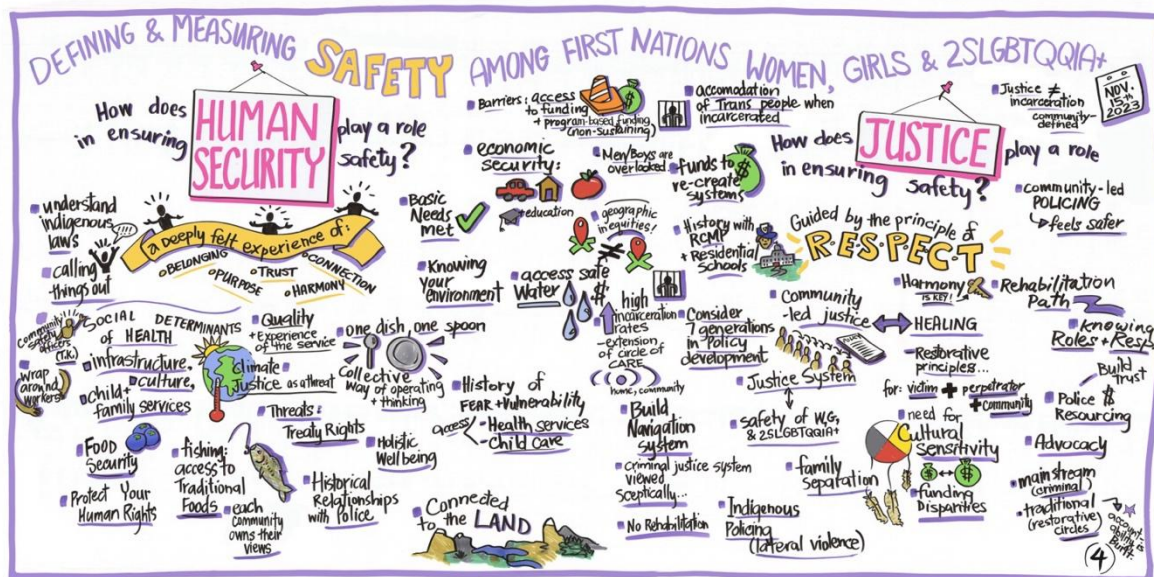
Human Security Indicators

Potential indicators for the human security thematic area included:

- Representation of women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in leadership positions in organizations and First Nations governments

- Availability of high-speed internet and reliable cell phone service

- Housing: availability, waitlist lengths, conditions, overcrowding

- Assessment of community infrastructure (i.e., adequate lighting in public areas)

- If individuals know they can call for help in an emergency (i.e., paramedics, fire services)

- Self-reported safety accessing emergency services

- If they were in trouble, they believe that someone would be able to help them

- Clear signage outlining potential threats and safety measures (i.e., tsunami zone)

- Community safety plan is available and regularly reviewed and updated

There was also interest in measuring First Nations experiences of adverse impacts of the environment, which could be due to a range of factors including pollution, climate change, and the extractive industry. Indicators could include:

- Individual experiences of adverse effects due to air or water pollution

- Individual experiences of displacement due to natural disasters (i.e., floods, forest fires)

- Infrastructure challenges at the community level due to environmental changes or natural disasters

- Impact on food security due to changes in the environment (i.e., loss of crops)

Figure 6. Human Security and Justice Thematic Areas Graphic Recording

In summary, we identified three major pillars shaping the thematic area of human security: community infrastructure; safety planning; and politics, law, and governance. Improving physical infrastructure such as road safety, public transportation options, and cellphone service were frequently identified as necessary for achieving safety. However, it is also important to stress that physical infrastructure improvements alone do not equate with safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. It is also imperative that work is done to create more space for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in leadership roles in government and organizations.

JUSTICE

Justice and relationships to the formal legal system impact safety for those who have experienced victimization and/or criminalization. Three subthemes emerged related to justice: restoring and revitalizing First Nations laws, the colonial legal system, and addressing the root causes of criminalization and victimization. **Figure 7** provides a high-level overview of the key themes pertaining to justice discussed at the Technical Gathering.

Restoring and Revitalizing First Nations Laws

Every First Nation is best positioned to decide how to incorporate traditional laws into their governance practices. First Nations laws and approaches to justice are important in promoting safety by aligning with First Nations cultural values. Participants talked about placing emphasis on certain values such as respect, harmony, and community well-being, and how these systems create environments where individuals feel supported and connected to their cultural roots, thus contributing to safety. First Nations justice systems not only place focus on those who are victimized, but also focus on the offender and broader community to address the root causes of the harm. Torey Solomon discussed the need to restore harmony and balance after harm and to improve access to restorative models of addressing harm:

> *[The need for] restoring harmony and balance in community after there's been some big disruption. Conflict is human. It happens. But that's why I love restorative justice. I'm glad that [restorative justice] is starting ... so that we're not relying on the [criminal] justice system to fix issues within community. Restoring balance and harmony, so that we feel good together in community.*
>
> Torey Solomon, Indigenous Community Engagement Coordinator
> Skiciniuwisqehs Nuci Kiniluwekemit Sexual Violence New Brunswick

The interviews and Technical Gathering delegates strongly desired non-punitive and restorative justice options to respond to harm within the community. Restorative approaches prioritize the healing of all parties involved and engage the wider community. They address the root causes of the harm, empower victims, and promote rehabilitation and reintegration.

A commitment to accountability underpins justice within First Nations communities. This allows for a shared commitment to safety. The emphasis on accountability extends beyond punitive measures to instill a sense of individual responsibility for one's actions. This approach fosters a community-driven ethos where accountability becomes a collective endeavour rather than a solitary burden. In this way, there was a strong emphasis on relying on First Nations laws to promote safety for First Nations women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

The Colonial Underpinnings of the Legal System

Many participants noted a strained relationship between First Nations people and the legal system, which hindered safety. There are ongoing concerns that First Nations people are being simultaneously over-policed and over-represented in the criminal legal system and under-policed, resulting in reports to police of gender-based and sexualized

violence not being taken seriously. We heard a lot of concerns about how police treated First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people when they experienced victimization or attempted to make formal reports. The police's lack of response was believed to have contributed to the crisis of Missing and Murdered First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Many participants noted the strained relationship with police specifically, which has resulted in a strong desire for First Nations-led policing and community safety officers. One interview participant felt the relationship with the RCMP could not be repaired, which requires the imagining of a new policing system that is rooted in First Nations laws and culture:

> *I am not hearing that, that relationships [with police are] getting better. … that relationship is not at its best. And it's definitely you know, some people are saying we need Indigenous led programs or coordination, when it comes to missing and murdered Indigenous women. There's no point in repairing the RCMP relationship. There's just so much history there. Creating a whole new system might be helpful, and culturally relevant. That comes up a lot.*

> Anonymous

Another participant shared similar sentiments about the need for community-based policing in First Nations:

> *The Community Safety Officer Program, given the historical relationship with the RCMP, the current justice methods present in our communities have proven to be very inadequate. I know. I've been one of them for 21 years. Our community safety officers play a pivotal role originated from the communities they serve; they bridge that crucial gap acting as a conduit for those struggling and guiding them on their healing paths.*

> Gina Nagano President & Community Safety Specialist
> Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation

These two interview participants stressed the importance of First Nations-led policing rooted in the community for advancing safety initiatives.

Some of the participants questioned whether justice could be achieved within the colonial legal system because reporting victimization often resulted in further victimization and trauma, creating a lack of trust in the legal system. Torey Solomon, a sexual assault advocate in the Eastern region spoke about the failures of the criminal legal system for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people:

One of the biggest things is justice, feeling like there is actually some justice to be had. Right now, there's zero faith in the justice system, and even more so when you're talking about sexual violence. ... but then people feel failed time and time again when they do actually take that step to pursue some kind of justice in their situations. And then it just leaves people feeling unsafe because it's just like that secondary wounding just happens. They opened up, they were vulnerable and asked for help in their journey to get justice for whatever harm was caused to them, and the ball was dropped.

Torey Solomon, Indigenous Community Engagement Coordinator
Skiciniuwisqehs Nuci Kiniluwekemit Sexual Violence New Brunswick

This perspective was articulated by others who similarly questioned whether justice could be achieved in a colonial legal system. This is particularly true for women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ who report gendered violence such as intimate partner violence or sexual assault and may face intersecting forms of discrimination in reporting due to their gender, sexuality, and as First Nations.

Charlotte Hunter Louttit-Kijekijk, a former lawyer from Northern Ontario, reported positive experiences with police, which were attributed to the efforts of individual Indigenous police officers who had strong relationships with the First Nations they worked in.

For a long while we had two local Indigenous people on the [police] force and really, their dedication to making inroads [with Indigenous people] did make inroads and they're lasting even though they've all passed away. The impact the [Indigenous police officers] had on the [police] force is lasting probably not forever, but I think it shows that having Indigenous people in those positions of authority does create long lasting change even past their tenure.
Charlotte Hunter Louttit-Kijekijk, Two-Spirit, former Aboriginal rights and family violence lawyer

People's relationships with local police shape their feelings about safety and their faith in the criminal legal system. While negative relationships with police can exacerbate safety concerns, there was hope that First Nations-led safety initiatives could alleviate these concerns.

Overall, the thematic area of justice was defined by an interest in restoring and revitalizing First Nations laws and justice practices, which includes restorative approaches to addressing harm and conflict. The colonial legal system has resulted in high rates of victimization and a lack of faith in the colonial criminal legal system. To

achieve safety, there is an urgent need to address the root causes of criminalization and victimization, building on the strengths of everyone in the community and collectively as First Nations.

Measuring Justice and Potential Indicators

The participants cited the importance of collecting First Nations-specific data and the need for improved access to official data held by all levels of government. Governments, police, and corrections already have datasets that could be beneficial. For measuring justice for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, the participants identified three thematic areas for potential indicators: restoring and revitalizing First Nations laws, the legal system, and the root causes of criminalization and victimization.

Restoring and revitalizing First Nations laws

- Non-First Nations police respect and enforce First Nations laws
- Availability of non-punitive justice options such as restorative justice
- Availability of healing circles or access to Elders and Knowledge Keepers for people involved in the legal system as victims and/or offenders
- Availability of victim services
- Awareness of victim services (if available)

The legal system

- Reported relationship with the police
- A First Nations police service or representation of First Nations police officers on the police
- Crime statistics (i.e., rates of victimization, types of offences, conviction rates)

The root causes of criminalization and victimization

- Youth self-report having positive mentors and role models
- Support for resolving interpersonal conflicts
- Social programming for youth and children
- Availability of trauma-informed and culturally relevant programming for mental health and substance use

RELATIONSHIPS, KINSHIP, AND FIRST NATIONS IDENTITY

A recurring theme that emerged throughout the discussions for this project involved relationships, kinship, and connection to First Nations identity. This thematic area identified four overlapping subthemes: First Nations identity, family systems, informal support networks, and social exclusion.

First Nations Identity

Relationships and kinship were often deeply entangled with First Nations identity, which is also deeply intertwined with culture but should be distinct because it involves the strength and resiliency of relationships, as well as broader community connections. Gina Nagano described the interconnection of community through relationships, which is a protective factor:

> It's about weaving a tapestry of interconnectedness with our communities. It's about forging those relationships are so strong that they act as a community's armor. By nurturing a community's unique culture, providing gatherings and shared spaces and fostering collective pride, we're crafting a safety seamlessly merges with communal warmth. Physical, secure space is important, but a community bound by trust, pride and cohesion is generally the unbreakable part.
>
> Gina Nagano, President & Community Safety Specialist
> Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation

Knowledge, connection to familial lineage, and connection to their home territory were seen as protective factors. Policies and laws have attempted to disrupt First Nations family systems. As a result, many First Nations people do not have strong ties to their Nation or know their family lineage. Restoring relationships and connection to First Nations identity can be a protective factor for those who have experienced disconnect because of colonialism.

Family Systems and Community Safety

Safety is also about strong relational bonds that begin within the home and the larger family unit, which will impact personal safety as well as the wider community, as described by the participants:

> First of all, [safety] starts at home. We have a lot of intergenerational trauma that will take years to fix. But it starts at home. So, once you feel safe growing up, then

hopefully you find a partner that grew up with a similar experience. And then you pass that on to your children. It starts at home, safe families make a safe community.

Jeff Meness, Sergeant Detective, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Police Department

Another interview participant similarly stressed the importance of safety beginning within the home, which contributes to overall safety of the community:

You'd hope that that an understanding of safety would come from your immediate environment, which are caregivers, right. But not everybody has that luck, right of understanding safety, especially if there's neglect, or there's alcohols, or any type of substance abuse in the home. I always felt like the, the main spaces to bring safety are in our kind of, you know, daycares and school programs. What have healthy relationships look like? What is healthy parenting look like, you know, teaching our children like emotional regulation, you know, what all those things that if they're not doing it early, they'll start talking about what's going on, right. Their idea of safety should start in those safe spaces. But we all know that they're not always the safest of spaces, either.

Tiffany Dumont, Addictions Counsellor and Mental Wellness Coordinator, Wanaki Center

Safe communities require resilient and healthy family systems. Ideally, safety begins in the home and will support ensuring community-level safety.

Informal Support Networks

We heard from many participants, especially youth, about the importance of informal support networks for ensuring the safety of young people. For youth, this looked like having aunties and uncles they could rely on in times of crisis or when they needed guidance. One of the youth leaders interviewed spoke about how she and her peers would rely on informal support networks including Elders and Knowledge Keepers as opposed to the police if they experienced violence, demonstrating the informal networks that develop and the distrust of the legal system to respond to harm.

I don't think any of us would really call the cops if we were experiencing violence. I think we have an [Indigenous peer group] group chat and then usually one of the helpers or one of them, [youth leaders] would reach out to them. We also have Knowledge Keepers. So there's some Knowledge Keepers in there and some Elders, we also just have like aunties and uncles, which are just like people who are past the age

35. … I don't really think they would like call the police. I think if anything, they would call like a hotline or something.

Harmony Eshkawkogan, Assembly of Seven Generations Youth Helper

Informal networks such as "whisper networks" were helpful in keeping one another safe from harmful people in community or workers in helping organizations as Harmony explained:

We have like a very huge whisper network [..] Like, a lot of men try to come to our events, our round dance and try to [meet] young girls and stuff, or are overly friendly. So that's where all the uncles and aunties know who's who, maybe another youth confided in with them. So that's how we kind of rely on our whisper network.

Harmony Eshkawkogan, Assembly of Seven Generations Youth Helper

These informal support networks are important for providing support and sharing information that can keep others safe from harmful situations.

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion was frequently cited as a barrier to achieving safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Participants noted that social exclusion was of particular concern for members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community who may experience social exclusion, which puts them in unsafe situations. The cultural thematic area also discusses exclusion of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community since 2SLGBTQQIA+ people report feeling excluded from cultural spaces, ceremonies, and teachings. Safety for 2SLGBTQQIA+ people requires that both First Nations identity as well as their sexual and gender identity are honoured and respected. There are efforts underway to create robust relationships and safe spaces for 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in First Nations, as we heard from one youth advocate:

My community just started having a small Pride Parade like a year or two ago. It's really cool that like, the next generation is like, okay, I'm going to start this even if I'm on a reserve and even if there's like a small community, but you know, there's a small group of people that like, there, they want people to know that they are there in the community.

Harmony Eshkawkogan, Assembly of Seven Generations Youth Helper

Overall, safety for First Nations 2SLGBTQQIA+ in relation to kinship, belonging, and identity is a space that requires further exploration. Future work in this area must be done in full partnership with First Nations 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members. Other populations such as those who have been criminalized, use substances, or have

experiences of homelessness may also experience varying degrees of social exclusion, which may hinder their ability to receive the support they need and impact their connection to their First Nation.

In summary, strong relationships that are healthy and resilient are critical to safety. Safety can be compromised because of social exclusion, which is often tied to discriminatory beliefs about people who use substances and stereotypes rooted in homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and racism. It is critical that social exclusion is addressed to ensure safety for all First Nations people. Relationships are deeply intertwined with familial and kinship relations, as well as First Nations identity and a connection to the wider community, which is discussed in the following section.

Measuring Relationships, Kinship, and First Nations Identity

The thematic area of relationships, kinship, and First Nations identity was identified in the data analysis stage. As a result, participants did not comment on this theme specifically when asked about measurement and indicators. Additional work will need to support the validity of the indicators suggested below. A similar study with Māori communities in New Zealand identified a similar thematic area, and this work suggested several indicators that may also be useful for measuring First Nations safety across Canada (Wilson, Jackson, and Herd, 2016). In this study, participants shared that ensuring strong relationships, especially among youth, could be useful for crime prevention and enhancing community safety (Wilson, Jackson, and Herd, 2016).

Potential indicators discussed by participants in Wilson, Jackson, and Herd (2016) include:

- Connection to family and knowing who your family is
- There is an older sibling, auntie, or cousin who can provide advice and support
- There are people they can rely on for support
- Peer support networks for youth
- Availability of programming for healthy relationships and conflict resolution skills
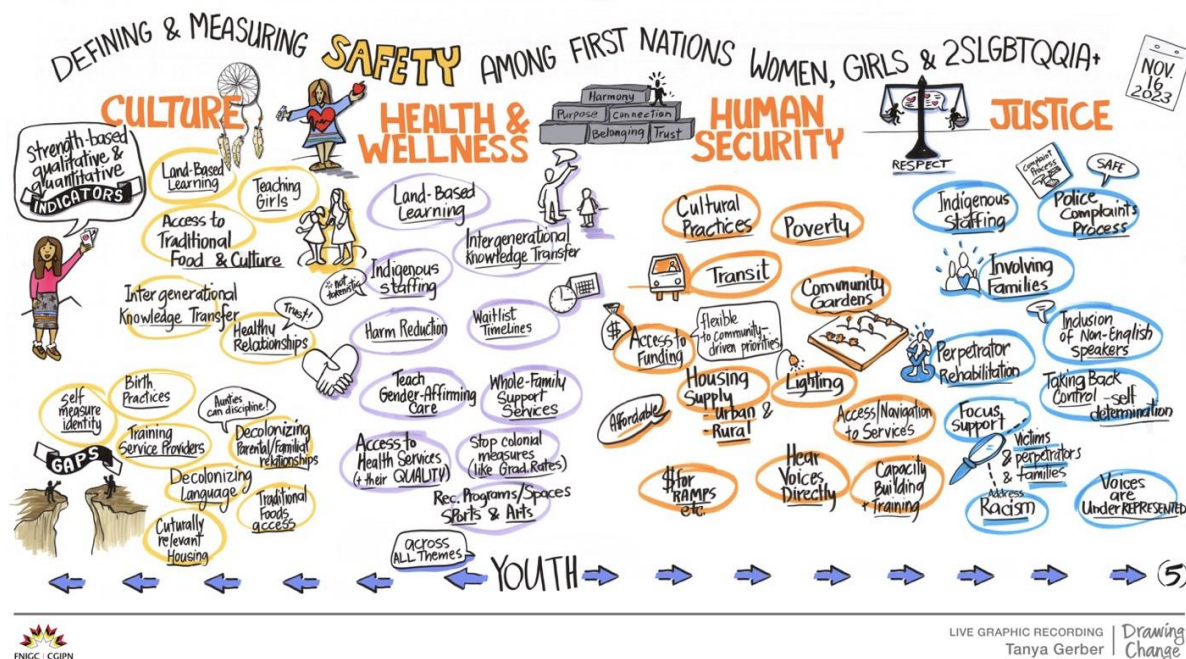
Figure 7. Indicators For the Thematic Areas Graphic Recording

SUMMARY: DEFINING SAFETY

This section provides an overview of the five thematic areas identified through the interviews and the Technical Gathering. The five thematic areas of culture; health and wellness; human security; justice; and relationships, kinship, and First Nations identity are intertwined and provide a solid foundation for defining safety for First Nations women, girls, and members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community. For each thematic area, qualitative and quantitative indicators have been suggested as a starting place. As this is an exploratory project, it is up to each First Nation to identify which indicators are meaningful to them and could result in actionable data to enhance safety. The indicators provided are not definitive and are intended to be fluid as the needs of First Nations shift. The following section explores the best methods and methodological frameworks for measuring safety for First Nations.

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

When asked about the most important research methods for measuring the safety of First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, the participants we spoke to stressed the importance of co-designing research in full collaboration with First Nations to ensure that any research questions reflected the local First Nations' context, priorities,

and needs. This could be done by adopting a Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) methodology, which ensures community inclusion throughout the research life cycle and has the explicit objective of creating knowledge that will directly benefit the community (Funnell et al., 2020; Holkup et al., 2004).

Many participants saw value in using a mixed methods approach that blended qualitative and quantitative data. Many participants saw the value in collecting quantitative data from surveys, but, overall, participants preferred qualitative data. Qualitative data from interviews, sharing circles, or focus groups are valuable because they can provide local context and nuance to any quantitative data as described by two of the interview participants:

> *The population level data has its place and its importance but … the other pieces, the environmental, the interviews, the stories are also just as important.* **I think maybe a balance of a few different methods might be a good approach.**

> Harmony Eshkawkogan, Assembly of Seven Generations Youth Helper

> **Surveys can get us so far, but only so far, right.** *One of the things that I always reflect on when I think about the [MMIWG] Inquiry is the way in which what people said — like an actual analysis of what they said, a content analysis — was really a lot more illuminating or insightful than any survey.* **It's going to be a mixed methodology situation.** *There's place for survey, particularly around identifying [the] what, which I think is helpful.*

> Karine Duhamel, former Director of Research, National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Interview participants who worked in research, leadership roles, advocacy, policy, and program development were most likely to identify a need for improved quantitative data. From their perspective, quantitative data could aid in advocating to governments for services, resources, and service planning. Quantitative data can be helpful in securing funding as it is a clear way to demonstrate need and program successes. There may also be datasets that already exist that could be useful for measuring safety, such as administrative data held by government organizations pertaining to the justice, healthcare, child welfare, and education systems and the data collected by the FNIGC and other First Nations governments and organizations.

Despite recognizing the needs and uses of quantitative data, participants emphasized the importance of incorporating First Nations worldviews and knowledge into all stages of the research. There is also a strong desire to incorporate Indigenous traditions and storytelling into the research methodology and methods. The participants provided numerous examples of how this could be done including sharing circles, craft circles,

traditional stories, and multi-directional learning between researchers and participants, allowing for the co-creation of research questions, analysis, and ongoing feedback on the findings.

There is existing work that can be used to support the incorporation of First Nations ways of knowing into future research. One recurring suggestion was the use of Etuaptmuk, also referred to as Two-Eyed Seeing, which refers to incorporating both the strengths of First Nations knowledges and ways of knowing and the strengths of Western knowledge systems (Marshall et al., 2018). The other suggestion was Ethical Space, which also provides a way for the distinct cultural and societal perspectives among Indigenous and Western societies to engage with one another (Ermine, 2007). This could be done by blending Western research methodologies with First Nations knowledge and cultural practices such as storytelling, sharing circles, and feasts. For example, one interview participant spoke about a project incorporating the Seven Grandfather Teachings into research methodology as the pillars for data collection about youth experiences of the criminal legal system. The youth were asked how they experienced each of the Seven Grandfather Teachings in relation to their experience in the criminal legal system. Overall, First Nations knowledge, culture, and teachings should be incorporated into data collection throughout the project life cycle.

Data Collection Methods

There are three distinct phases of data collection in a research project life cycle:

1) Planning for data collection

2) Data collection

3) Post-data collection

This section describes each phase and how First Nations knowledge, culture, and teachings can be integrated into each phase.

Phase: planning for data collection

Preparation and planning for data collection was regarded as foundational to ensuring that any data collection was done in a way that was ethical and in alignment with First Nations values as well as providing direct benefit to the participants and/or First Nations. The planning stage should not be rushed and requires adequate time and budgeting to ensure significant engagement to build robust partnerships and trust. **Figure 9** provides a high-level summary of the key points made by participants concerning special considerations for data collection, many of which were also reflected in the interviews.

Figure 8. Considerations For Data Collection and Actionable Data Graphic Recording

There are several recommendations for the project planning phase:

- Communicate the research objectives in plain language

- An understanding of cultural practices of the First Nation to ensure sensitivity throughout the project

- Ongoing discussions about why the project is being done, how the data will be used, and how the data will be beneficial to First Nations and First Nations people

- Advanced notice about the project through community announcements, social media, and flyers about the project

- Tailoring communications to different populations such as older adults, 2SLGBTQQIA+ community, and youth, all of whom often feel excluded from engagement efforts

- Establishing relevant and community-based informed consent protocols

- Respecting time for participants in the engagement process and in designing data collection methods

- Clear communication about the project vision and how the data will be beneficial to the community

- Develop a clear plan about how the data will be used and what data will be made available to the First Nation (i.e., raw data, final report, aggregate-level data) in partnership with the First Nation

Phase: data collection

There are several recommendations for the collection of data:

- Compensate participants for their time and knowledge

- Maintain the confidentiality of participants

- Trauma-informed data collection practices and debriefing with participants

- Diversity of recruitment methods (in person, online) and participant sampling, including demographics often excluded such as older adults, youth, people who use substances, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people

- Respect ongoing and informed consent among participants

A Technical Gathering delegate framed these recommendations about the research process through the lens of empowerment for First Nations people who are taking time and giving energy to participate in the work. It is important to allow for individual participants to be able to withdraw from data collection or remove their data if they decide they no longer wish to participate:

> *We need to empower the people who we're collecting the data from — give them the opportunity to back out at any point or take back their data.*
>
> Technical Gathering delegate

Phase: post-data collection

Following data collection and preliminary analysis, data validation and verification must be conducted to ensure the interpretation aligns with the perspectives of each First Nation. Much like the budget for the planning phases, there also needs to be ample budget for a verification process following data collection and to ensure that the data and knowledge are returned to the participants. This will also enhance the credibility of the findings and the accountability of researchers to First Nations partners and collaborators. Suggestions for data verification included sharing circles and knowledge exchange sessions.

There was also an interest in establishing long-term relationships for collecting longitudinal data. Longitudinal data is defined as "repeated observations of the same things at different points in time." Longitudinal data is collected at multiple points in time, which can take several different forms, such as trend data, which could look at

two historical periods, or cohort data, which would allow comparisons between two groups (Jargowsky & Yang, 2005). First Nations-specific longitudinal data on safety could assist with tracking changes in safety needs and identify strengths. Ongoing data collection could also allow for emerging trends to be identified and fill gaps in services as needed. It was also suggested that it could be beneficial to have a repository of different knowledge products such as datasets or reports that are created with the data collected to demonstrate how the data is being used.

Of critical importance, there is hope that improved First Nations-specific data could be useful for advocating for sustainable funding, policy changes, and holding systems accountable. Any data collected needs to be actionable, meaning that it is useful and relevant to First Nations for advancing First Nations priorities and resource allocation.

At the conclusion of the Technical Gathering, participants were asked what success would look like because of improved safety research (**Figure 10**). Recurring themes included sustainable funding, structural changes, education, action, transparency, and notably, no more Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and gender-diverse people.
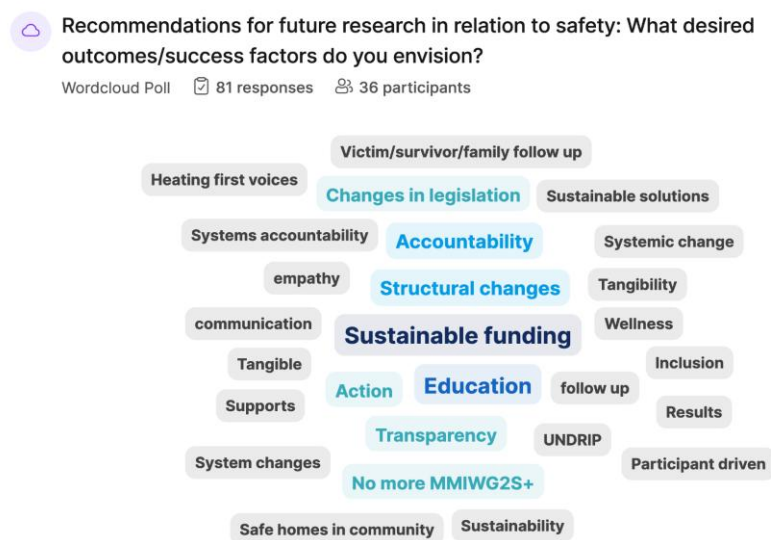
Figure 9. Slido Poll: Recommendations for Future Research On Safety

CONCLUSION

In response to the DSWG Data Strategy (2021), the FNIGC undertook a two-year exploratory project that was focused on defining and measuring safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The intention of the project was to begin imagining a First Nations definition of safety for women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people and to explore how safety could be measured from a strengths-based approach. This exploratory project demonstrated that achieving safety and security for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people is a priority. The legacy of colonization and intergenerational trauma has had significant social, legal, and political consequences that have resulted in First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ experiencing disproportionate rates of victimization and has contributed to the genocide of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Gender-Diverse peoples. Despite this, First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people have demonstrated significant resiliency and often lead movements to ensure safety across Canada and globally.

The MMIWG final report and subsequent Data Strategy Working Group relied on four thematic areas: culture, health and wellness, human security, and justice. Through a Technical Gathering and 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews, we found evidence supporting the validity of these four thematic areas for defining and measuring safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. We have also introduced an additional thematic area of relationships, kinship, and First Nations identity from the qualitative interviews and Technical Gathering discussions. This thematic area emerged because of the strong link between connection to family, community, and identity among First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+, which can be protective factors. While this thematic area is deeply interconnected with the culture thematic area, it is also distinct as it speaks to a broader notion of relationships and identity formation. Taken together, the five thematic areas are deeply interconnected and all play an important role in fostering safety. As a result, there was no singular agreed upon definition of safety, but rather participants made it clear that safety is holistic and includes a wide range of entangled elements. Moreover, safety is often a *feeling* that is fluid and influenced by a large constellation of factors rather than a static entity that can be easily defined or measured.

The literature review, Technical Gathering, and qualitative interviews also provided insight into possible indicators for measuring safety among the five identified thematic areas. There were varying perspectives on what types of data would be most helpful in measuring safety, and discussions about pre-existing data that could be useful for measuring safety, such as data collected by the justice system or Statistics Canada.

There is still much work to be done to advance First Nations data sovereignty. Improved First Nations data that are relevant and accessible to First Nations to inform safety planning, resource allocation, and policy is of critical concern.

Overall, any future research about safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people should take a strengths-based approach that does not focus solely on experiences of violence or deficits of First Nations people or communities. A strengths-based approach centres protective factors and the strengths of individuals and communities. In addition, the discussions that were had throughout the project emphasized the need for further integrating First Nations methodologies and perspectives throughout the life cycle of the data collection process, so that research is relevant to First Nations worldviews and so that diverse First Nations communities can see action and tangible benefits from participating in research about the safety of their communities.

PROJECT REFLECTIONS

Throughout the duration of the project, the FNIGC and consultants engaged in ongoing reflection about how to approach defining and measuring safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. This was an ambitious endeavour as demonstrated throughout the report due to the complexity of safety, which encompasses a wide array of factors, many of which are interconnected and difficult to separate. To date, much of the work on safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people has focused on measuring, preventing, and responding to gender-based violence. The present project did not focus on safety as merely an absence of violence but presented a more comprehensive understanding of safety from a strengths-based perspective. This does not mean that threats to safety are ignored or minimized but rather the focus of this endeavour is not solely on violence or the prevention of violence exclusively. This was done intentionally to recognize the complexity of safety and that all First Nations people deserve it. Overall, we see the value in a shift towards a strengths-based approach focusing on safety as more than an absence of violence. As this is new terrain to explore, we wanted to share some of our reflections and learnings from this project to potentially guide other First Nations, organizations, or individuals who wish to continue this work.

There is a long history of non-First Nations governments and academics using First Nations people as test subjects without their consent (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2019). As a result, a lot of what has been written about First Nations people comes from a colonial perspective that can perpetuate damaging stereotypes. Moreover, the data collected from First Nations have historically not

materially benefited First Nations or First Nations people (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2019). We noticed some hesitation about data collection or advancing research projects among some First Nations delegates at the Technical Gathering. It is critical that organizations such as the FNIGC or others who wish to embark on this type of research put time into building relationships and be transparent about the purposes of data collection. Although this project was collecting data to potentially inform future data collection, there were still valid concerns from participants about the intentions of the project and how the data, if it were to be collected, would be used. We uphold how critical building relationships is, even for projects that are First Nations led.

This project collected data on how best to collect data in the future, and we received some helpful feedback from interview participants and Technical Gathering delegates about how applied research projects like this could be framed and approached. Some participants felt that using the DSWG-suggested quantitative indicators as a framework was too restrictive and did not allow for the definitions or indicators to emerge organically. The deductive approach was used to build on the existing work and provide structure to the Technical Gathering as opposed to starting from scratch. When planning a large gathering to advance research agendas, it is always a challenge to not be overly prescriptive while also providing structure. Moreover, it was important to us to honour the labour that has already been done by the MMIWG Inquiry and the MMIWG DSWG as well as other organizations such as NWAC.

The other site of reflection for our team throughout the project was how best to incorporate First Nations methodologies into the project life cycle. Our perspectives were shaped by the delegates at the Technical Gathering and through the interviews, which captured a wide diversity of valid perspectives. Honouring a diversity of perspectives on research design and methodology can be challenging. For example, one participant at the Technical Gathering expressed that they did not see any value in a literature review or quantitative data and instead felt that the gathering should have been focused on individual experiences. Alternately, other participants valued collecting quantitative data and viewed data as a critical tool for advancing safety for First Nations women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. As a result, some of these differences in perspectives cannot be resolved in a single project. Future work on safety will require a multiplicity of approaches and projects to begin capturing the complexity of the definition of safety. Overall, we see the value in advancing work that centres the safety of First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ and hope that other First Nations, researchers, and organizations continue to advance this work in the future.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: DSWG-SUGGESTED QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

Culture	Health & Wellness
Access to traditional food	Self-rated health
Access to spirituality/ceremony	Access to health services
Connection to culture for children, youth, adults, and seniors	Perception of healthy relationships
Sense of belonging/Identity	Distance to services
Language retention and revitalization	Self-rated mental wellness
Cultural mentorship	Access to land
	Access to traditional medicines and healers
Human Security	**Justice**
Employment rate	Indigenous police forces or law enforcement connection to community
Graduation rate	Training of justice personnel
Access to education and training	Indigenous justice personnel
Access to broadband	Cases before courts/arrests
Poverty	Confidence in the system
Transportation	Restorative justice/traditional justice programs
Housing conditions	Navigator programs
Safe spaces/shelters	2SLGBTQQIA+ specific issues
Other community safety and social supports	
Food insecurity	
Access to traditional systems of protection	
Industries in communities	

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. FNIGC is currently exploring how safety is defined and measured among First Nations
women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals. What were your initial impressions when you
heard this?

2. How do you understand the term "safety"?

3. Please share your thoughts on the importance of gathering information on safety within
First Nations communities.

4. Can you identify any gaps in terms of data/knowledge that is available to researchers and communities?

5. What topics/thematic areas should be considered when examining safety within First Nations communities? (e.g., environment, health, justice, housing and homelessness, human trafficking, child welfare, violence)

6. Are there other important considerations when conceptualizing safety research among First Nations?

7. Are there any specific recruitment processes you would recommend when engaging with First Nations women, girls, and members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community?

8. Do you have any ideas about the kinds of indicators that could be used to assess safety
of First Nations women, girls, and gender-diverse people?

9. How could we measure these safety indicators? (e.g., in a survey — using a scale of 1–5, a checklist of items, open-ended responses)

10. What methods do you think would be the most appropriate to collect this information? (e.g., survey, sharing circles, random sampling, targeted sample?)

APPENDIX C: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

1. Amy Edward
2. Angela Miljour
3. Anonymous
4. Barbara Frazer
5. Carol Hopkins
6. Chanel Blouin
7. Charlotte Hunter Louttit-Kijekijk
8. Gina Nagano
9. Harmony Eshkawkogan
10. Jeff Meness
11. Jessica Lee
12. Karine Duhamel
13. Maisie Smith
14. Marion Crowe
15. Rebekah Erderer
16. Sarah Kriekle
17. Torey Solomon
18. Tiffany Dumont
19. Winter Dawn Lipscombe
20. Kai Zamora