



Missing and Stolen:

# Disappearances and Trafficking of Indigenous Peoples in Canada

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## About this Report

Thomson Reuters is committed to continuing to expand the eco-system of information, technology and subject matter expertise we offer to support efforts to identify human trafficking networks, facilitate prosecution, and help victims and survivors. We have partnered with TRSS, a Thomson Reuters subsidiary on this report to uncover unique insights into disappearances and trafficking of indigenous peoples in Canada, helping to inform efforts to tackle this human rights issue. This report is based on information found in the public domain.

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## Introduction

Juanita “Winnie” Migwans disappeared in October of 2024 while walking alongside a road in M’Chigeeng, Ontario. A member of the M’Chigeeng tribe, Migwans’ disappearance inspired a local and national effort to locate her, and as of the writing of this report, she is still missing. Speculation on those responsible focused on Toronto-based drug gangs that “are increasingly exploiting remote and vulnerable indigenous communities”.<sup>1</sup> As of March 2025, despite a new billboard campaign spreading awareness of Migwans’ disappearance, local news reported that there were “no new leads”.<sup>2</sup>

Migwans’ story is far from an outlier. The issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) in Canada occasionally surfaces in the national media with certain disappearances like Migwans, but in between media spikes remains a consistent phenomenon; albeit one that is difficult to gauge in size and scope. This is due to the geographic remoteness of many tribal lands, cultural and societal norms, victim trauma, and difficulty in data gathering and sharing. Inseparable from the problem of MMIW is the human trafficking of indigenous women and girls, and this report will look at both issues and draw the connections between the two. We seek to examine the issue of MMIW and human trafficking of indigenous women and girls through geospatial analysis of cultivated data consisting of indigenous disappearances and sex ads. These data sources allow us to gain novel and actionable insight into a problem that is well worth the difficulty in study.

## Scope of the Problem

Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Inuit, and Metis) comprise roughly five percent of Canada’s total population. Despite this low figure, the 2014 National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada found fifty-one percent of women and fifty percent of girls trafficked in Canada are Indigenous.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, seventy-five percent of Indigenous girls under the age of 18 experience sexual abuse, with fifty percent of those being under the age of 14.<sup>4</sup> The extreme overrepresentation of Indigenous women in sex trafficking as well as the prevalence of gendered violence points to a deep, systemic problem.

Studies point to a myriad of factors behind this tragedy, but a few stand out as being particularly linked to the problem. For instance, indigenous peoples in Canada are much more likely to have experienced times of unsheltered homelessness than non-Indigenous peoples.<sup>5</sup> Tenuous housing situations often go hand-in-hand with higher rates of poverty and abuse, increasing vulnerability to gendered violence and trafficking. Coupled with this is data on the

<sup>1</sup> Manitoulin Expositor, *Juanita Migwans Info Reward bumped to 1000*, <https://www.manitoulin.com/juanita-migwans-info-reward-bumped-to-100000/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, *Services and Support for Indigenous Victims and Survivors of Human Trafficking*, <https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca/services-and-support-for-indigenous-victims-and-survivors-of-human-trafficking/>.

<sup>4</sup> Anupriya Sethi, *Domestic Sex Trafficking of Aboriginal Girls in Canada: Issues and Implications*, <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/fpcfr/2019-v14-n1-fpcfr05475/1071298ar/>.

<sup>5</sup> Native Women’s Association of Canada, *Systemic Inequities and Interjurisdictional Issues in Human Trafficking and MMIWG2S+*, [https://nwac.ca/assets-documents/Issues\\_in\\_Human\\_trafficking\\_and\\_MMIWG2S.pdf](https://nwac.ca/assets-documents/Issues_in_Human_trafficking_and_MMIWG2S.pdf).

foster care system in Canada: while Indigenous children only make up roughly eight percent of the child population in Canada, Indigenous children nevertheless represent almost fifty-four percent of the foster care system.<sup>6</sup> In a major study conducted in Winnipeg and Vancouver, anywhere from fifty to eighty percent of identified victims of the sex trade were involved with child welfare services at some point in their lives.<sup>7</sup> In addition to sexual violence, Indigenous women are also at great risk of being a victim of violent crimes. Indigenous women aged fifteen and older reported three times higher rates of violence than non-indigenous women.<sup>8</sup> Relatedly, in 2023 Statistics Canada reported that indigenous women and girls were six times more likely to be murdered than other groups of people in Canada.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, the Ontario Native Women's Association found that eighty percent of indigenous girls have suffered some form of abuse; be it physical, sexual, psychological, or ritual.<sup>10</sup>

For a situation as dire as these statistics show, there remains numerous gaps in research and investigation when it comes to this issue. This is partly due to the hidden nature of these crimes, which often are difficult to detect and take place within the private confines of a home, a relationship, or underground criminal contexts. We seek to address some of these gaps through our investigation of this issue through a geospatial analysis of MMIW events and sex ads featuring Indigenous women in Canada.

## Data and Analysis

Geospatial analysis of MMIW and the sex trafficking of indigenous peoples is an important method of analysis- this is because the problem is inherently geographic, with events happening at a particular time and at a particular place. When events are stacked together, we can infer distinct patterns and identify areas for further research and investigation.

For MMIW, we collected from a variety of sources data on disappearance events across Canada from 2010-Present, a period of roughly fifteen years.<sup>11</sup> While disappearances before 2010 certainly demand study and would add to this work, we wanted to examine more recent data as it would match more closely the data we collected from sex ads. Additionally, we restricted our data collection to acute events that still do not have resolution, and therefore we left out cases where an Indigenous woman disappeared but was later located safe and alive. These cases are no doubt important as they are a significant part of the statistical makeup of the problem, but in order to keep the data purely in the category of disappearances and murders, we restricted it to cases where the victim is either still missing or was found murdered. Organizations like Aboriginal Alert, which keeps an excellent database for MMIW as

<sup>6</sup> Native Women's Association of Canada, *Systemic Inequities and Interjurisdictional Issues in Human Trafficking and MMIWG2S+*, [https://nwac.ca/assets-documents/Issues\\_in\\_Human\\_trafficking\\_and\\_MMIWG2S.pdf](https://nwac.ca/assets-documents/Issues_in_Human_trafficking_and_MMIWG2S.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Victoria Sweet, *Rising Waters, Rising Threats*, <https://turtletalk.blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/sweet-rising-waters-rising-threats.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Museum for Human Rights, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQI+ People*, <https://humanrights.ca/resource-guide/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-girls-and-2slgbtqi-people>

<sup>10</sup> Anupriya Sethi, *Domestic Sex Trafficking of Aboriginal Girls in Canada: Issues and Implications*, <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/fpcf/2019-v14-n1-fpcf05475/1071298ar/>.

<sup>11</sup> These data sources include Aboriginal Alert, the Government of Canada, and the CBC.

well as missing and murdered indigenous men, tracks cases where the victim was later located alive and is an important source for that data category.

Disappearance and murder data for MMIW is not without its limitations, and it is important to recognize these before reviewing the collected data and geospatial analysis. The greatest limitation is that it is entirely dependent on regular and reliable reporting. This is an issue because cases of MMIW are historically underreported due to victim trauma, societal factors, and cases where the ethnicity of the victim is unknown. Whatever data is found, we know that there are many cases that are not reported, perhaps even a majority of the cases that occur will never be reported in some way. Additionally, the method of reporting these cases can also pose a challenge: while some disappearances will be promptly reported to local law enforcement, some may not and then will make their way to alternative outlets. The distrust of traditional law enforcement by Indigenous peoples is long documented, and disappearances may go unreported to government authorities and instead be referred to activist groups or tribal authorities. Because of this, any effort to collect data on MMIW means a canvassing of that multiple sources across differing levels of authorities and groups.

As of the writing of this report, we collected 185 cases of MMIW from 2010 to early April 2024. These cases are ones where the individual is either still missing or was found murdered, and while there are doubtless many cases that occurred outside of this group, it is nonetheless enough to complete a unique and comprehensive study. Of that group:

- 124 cases, or 67%, are cases where the victim is still missing.
- The average age of the victim was 30.
- 25% of cases occurred in Alberta and 21% of the cases occurred in Manitoba.
- Urban areas had a large amount of cases despite being distanced from tribal lands.

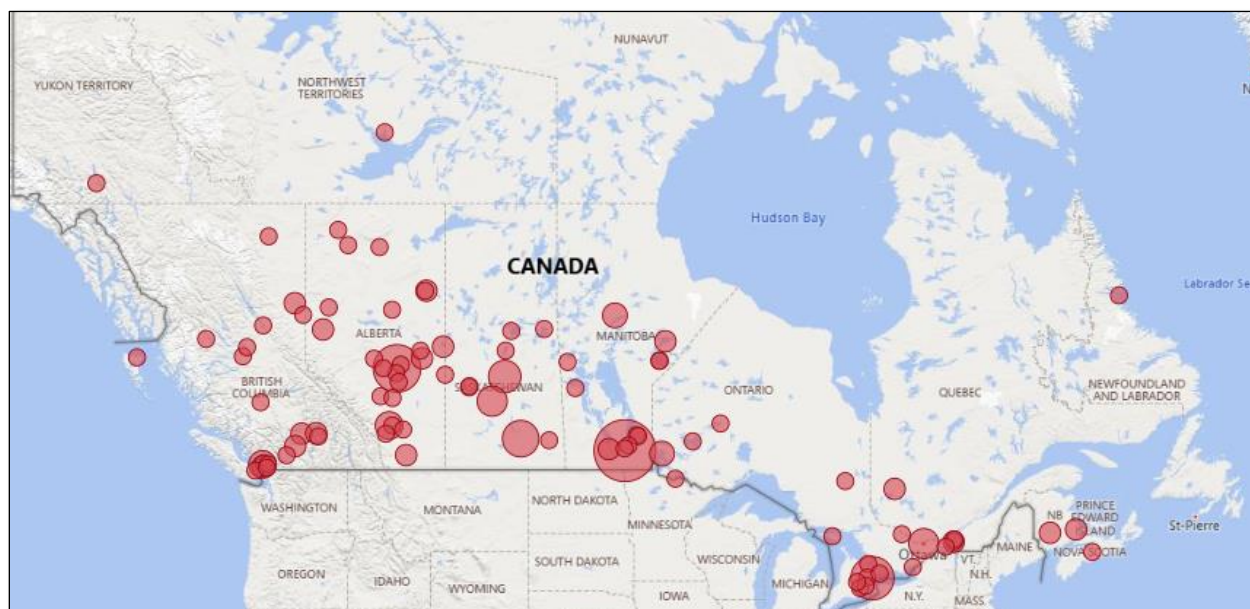
Regarding the last point, this appears to back up various studies and interviews with victim groups. In one study that surveyed victim groups, participants noted that indigenous women were more likely to experience abuse after traveling to urban areas from rural communities for reasons “unrelated to exploitation, such as for medical appointments, to begin school, or see employment opportunities”.<sup>12</sup> Another study noted that recruitment of indigenous women through the internet is a growing concern for northern indigenous communities, where victims are encouraged by to travel to urban areas for a better life.<sup>13</sup> While these studies are more focused on trafficking than MMIW, the two issues are overlapping and in many ways inseparable. To be trafficked is to disappear, and many victims of trafficking are eventually victims of other forms of abuse and eventually homicide.

Picture 1 displays the 185 disappearances from 2010–Present, with the size of the bubbles correlated to the amount of disappearances occurring within the same city. The same data visualized as a heat map can be found below in Picture Two.

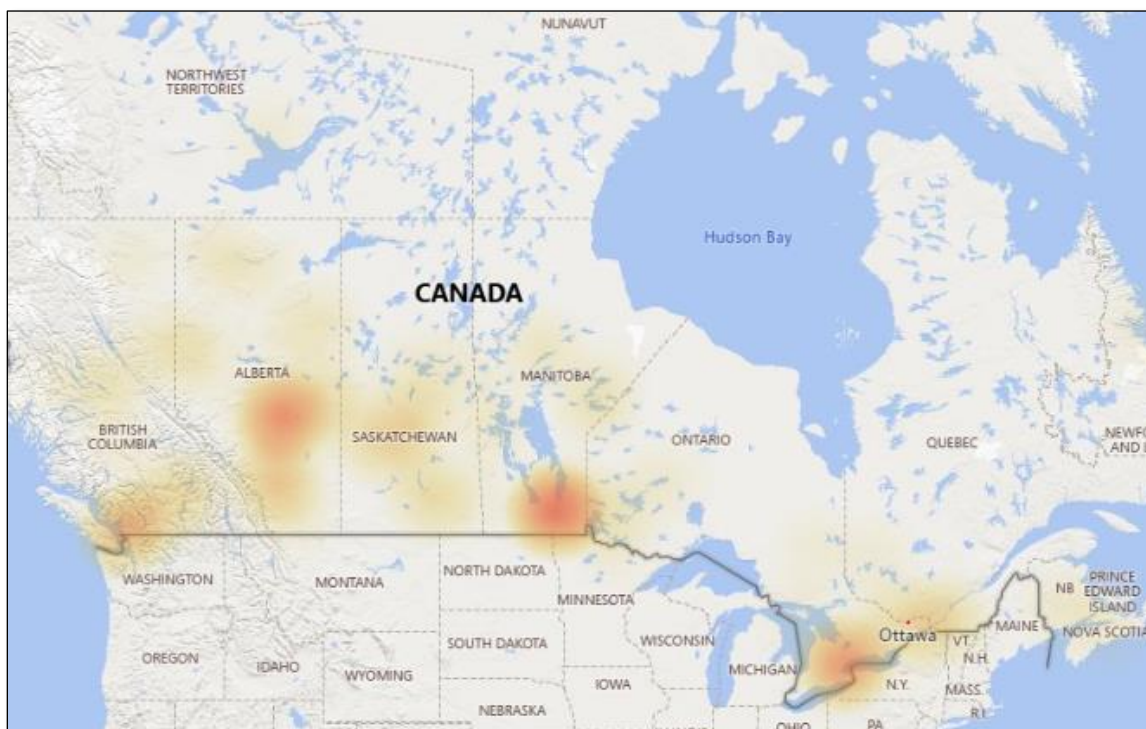
<sup>12</sup> Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, *Human Trafficking Corridors in Canada*, <https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CCTEHT-Human-Trafficking-Corridors-ENG-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Native Women’s Association of Canada, *Trafficking of Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada*, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/JUST/Brief/BR10002955/br-external/NativeWomensAssociationOfCanada-e.pdf>.

PICTURE 1: INDIGENOUS WOMEN DISAPPEARANCES FROM 2010-PRESENT



PICTURE 2: HEAT MAP OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN DISAPPEARANCES FROM 2010-PRESENT



We can glean much from these visualizations. Immediately apparent is the amount of disappearances occurring in the urban areas of Canada's Prairie provinces- Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. On one hand, this is correlated with the population demographics of Indigenous peoples in Canada- the Prairie provinces account for three of the

top four provinces in terms of indigenous population.<sup>14</sup> However, while Alberta has one of the highest proportions of indigenous peoples living off tribal reserves, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have the opposite, with over fifty percent of their populations living on reserve.<sup>15</sup>

This is important context for the three major centers of disappearances in the Prairie provinces: Winnipeg, Edmonton, and the Prince Albert-Regina-Saskatoon triangle in Saskatchewan. Winnipeg was the city with the most disappearances and its outsized presence is one of the larger takeaways from this data collection. Winnipeg has the highest proportion of indigenous peoples of any major city in Canada, but as stated above, the province of Manitoba has the highest on-reserve population of indigenous groups. While higher proportion of Indigenous population can be pointed to as a contributing factor to the data, we can also point to more robust reporting in Manitoba as a factor as well. Groups such as Morgan's Warriors and the Bear Clan Patrol are particularly active in reporting disappearances soon after they occur, and national group Aboriginal Alert is quick to amplify the reporting.<sup>16</sup> Other provinces do not appear to have similar reporting resources.

While Winnipeg was the city with the most disappearances, Edmonton was not far behind, and as we'll see later in this report, Edmonton had higher-than-expected amount of sex ads attributable to the city as well. Cities surrounding the Edmonton metropolitan area also had notable rates of disappearances as well, suggesting that while Edmonton is notable due to its amount of disappearances, the phenomenon is also present outside of the city limits as well.

Underscoring the importance of urban areas is the concentration of cases in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). While the proportion of indigenous populations is lower than that of the Prairie provinces, the GTA nonetheless has a demonstrable concentration relative to that of the rest of Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritime provinces.

Moving west on the map of MMIW from 2010–Present, there is a small yet noticeable pocket of disappearances in Northern British Columbia. These occurred by the Yellow Head Highway, known as the Highway of Tears, where scores of indigenous women have gone missing. Picture Three depicts the locations of the events in our data, and Picture Four shows a map of other historical disappearances along this highway. One study noted that Indigenous women tended to favor hitchhiking due to a lack of consistent transportation because of poverty or other societal factors.<sup>17</sup>

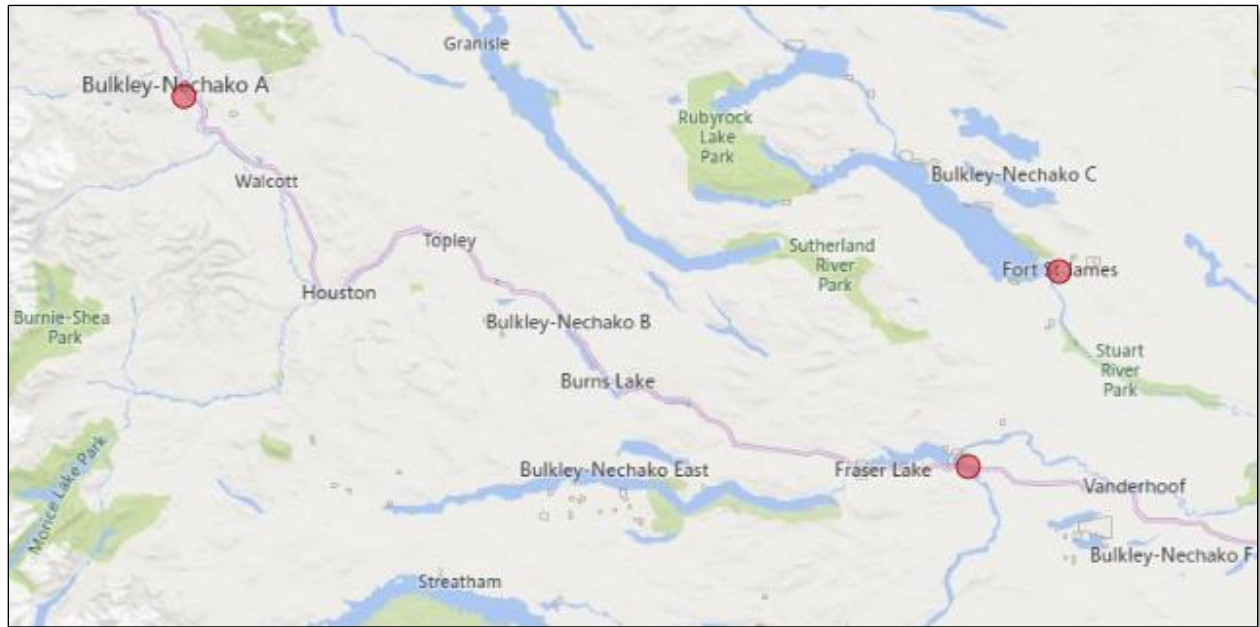
<sup>14</sup> 2021 Census of Canada, *Indigenous People*, <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/487a7294-06ac-481e-80b7-5566692a6b11/resource/257af6d4-902c-4761-8fee-3971a4480678/download/tbf-2021-census-of-canada-indigenous-people.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

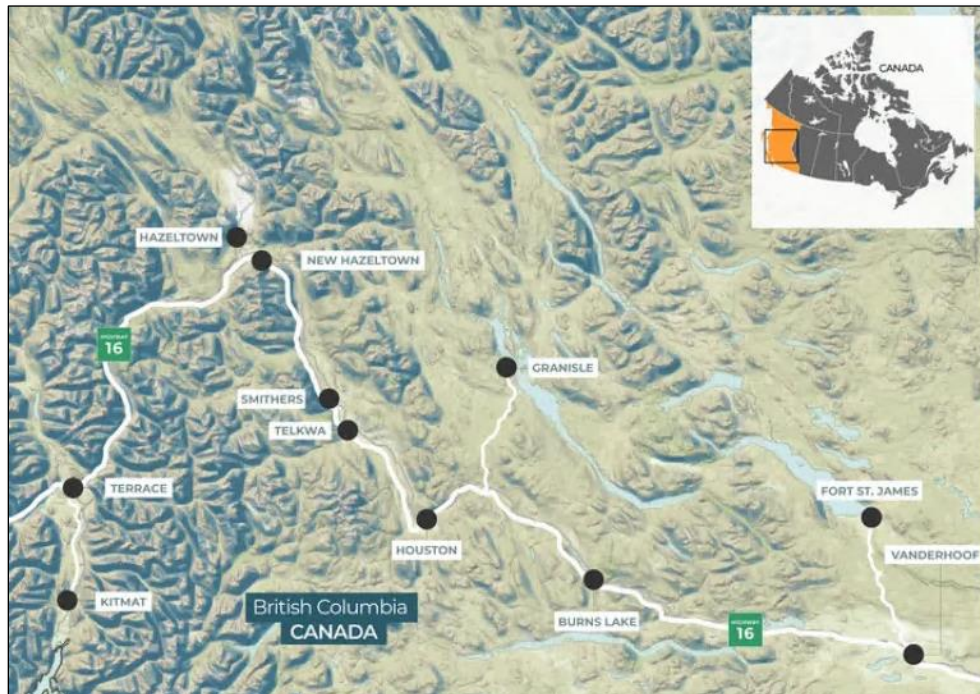
<sup>16</sup> An example can be found at <https://morganswarriors.com/missing-persons#e1c64f6b-8e24-432c-b416-dde809e5e70f>.

<sup>17</sup> Anupriya Sethi, *Domestic Sex Trafficking of Aboriginal Girls in Canada: Issues and Implications*, <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/fpcf/2019-v14-n1-fpcf05475/1071298ar/>.

PICTURE THREE: HIGHWAY OF TEARS DISAPPEARANCES



PICTURE FOUR: HIGHWAY OF TEARS<sup>18</sup>



<sup>18</sup> Al Jazeera, *The Stench of Death*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2021/11/8/the-stench-of-death-life-along-canadas-highway-of-tears>,

## Disappearances and Trafficking

The issues of MMIW and the human trafficking of indigenous peoples, while in some ways distinct, are yet intertwined on many levels. While our collected data on disappearances and our collected sex ad data featuring indigenous women may seem like unrelated datasets, we believe them to be not only complimentary, but also informing and correlating with one another. While it is true that some events of MMIW may be unconnected to sex trafficking, or that an Indigenous woman featured in a sex ad was never officially considered missing, research and anecdotal evidence suggest a stronger link between the two than many have considered.

As depicted in the MMIW data, disappearance events are heavily concentrated in urban areas. Research links the migration of indigenous peoples into urban areas with disappearances and trafficking. One report states, “Indigenous women and girls are more likely to experience trafficking after travelling to urban centres..Once in an unfamiliar urban area, Indigenous women and girls may be preyed upon by traffickers”<sup>19</sup>. Even the initial movement to urban areas is now a tactic by traffickers- the RCMP noted that traffickers are increasingly using online mediums to recruit and entice Indigenous individuals to come to urban areas under false pretenses.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, as we will cover in the next section, the sex ad ecosystem is heavily concentrated in urban areas, which makes sense if that’s where traffickers are attempting to lure individuals to in order to follow the demand.

With both disappearances and trafficking concentrated in urban areas, it is important to note where these issues overlap in real-life cases. One such case was reported by the CBC in Akwasasne tribal territory in Ontario. The tribal lands are located on both sides of the Canada-US border, which make it a popular target for traffickers to engage in the movement of drugs, weapons, and people. A human trafficking liaison officer cited a recent case of a missing individual: “She was reported missing to Mohawk police. Ten minutes later, she was located in Ottawa via an escort website”.<sup>21</sup> In this example, the disappearance of the individual and the data in sex ads are wholly linked, with the latter helping authorities to recover and rescue the victim. Notably, there was also an element of travel in this situation, and evidence suggests this is typical. The liaison officer explained, “If a girl is recruited one morning [in Akwesasne], by tonight she’ll be in Toronto, Windsor, or Montreal. She won’t be in Cornwall. She’ll be as far away as possible”.<sup>22</sup>

This brings into focus the need for not only a national repository for MMIW, but also a national search effort that canvases the sex ad ecosystem. As shown in the example above of the missing Mohawk girl, marrying these two data sets may help to uncover and identify missing individuals who are being trafficked. Advancements in technology such as facial recognition

<sup>19</sup> Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, *Human Trafficking Corridors in Canada*, <https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CCTEHT-Human-Trafficking-Corridors-ENG-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Native Women’s Association of Canada, *Trafficking of Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada*, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/JUST/Brief/BR10002955/br-external/NativeWomensAssociationOfCanada-e.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> CBC, *Trafficked woman hopes sharing her story will help girls back home in Akwesasne*, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/human-trafficking-ontario-indigenous-akwesasne-survivor-2023-1.6760973>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

can aid significantly in the victim identification of personas in sex ads, as traffickers will frequently brand these individuals with new identities, physical features like tattoos, and of course, a new location.

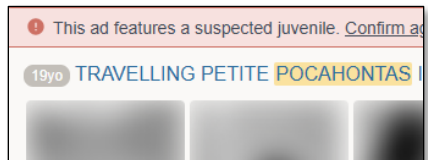
## Introduction to Sex Ad Data

With this in mind, we wanted to collect sex ad data to examine and study the prevalence of Indigenous individuals in these ads. Doing so will allow us to assess geographic trends, contextual evidence like ad language, and movement of indigenous individuals that appear in sex ads. Then, set against our collected data on MMIW, we can draw further conclusions about the overlap of the two issues and develop recommendations for future study and investigations.

Gathering sex ad data featuring indigenous individuals comes with some important limitations. First is the ability to identify an Indigenous individual in a sex ad vs. a non-Indigenous individual. We chose to do this through self-identification; that is to say if an ad stated that the individual shown was Indigenous, we took it at face value. As a result, we may be missing ads where the ethnicity of the individual was not stated, and simultaneously may be capturing ads where the post lied about the ethnicity of the person shown. For our purposes, we captured ads that had text stated that an individual was “Native American” or “Indigenous”. Other terms such as First Nations, Metis, and other specific tribes returned very few results, and sometimes also included Native American and Indigenous.

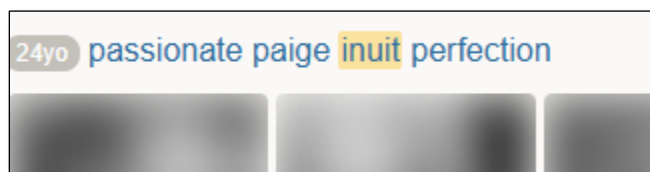
Related to the issue of intentionally mis-labeled ads, reports suggest that sex ads featuring Indigenous individuals may not be truthful about their ethnicity due to prejudices against Indigenous peoples. One victim stated, “We identified as either Latina, Asian, or exotic because if we self-identified as Indigenous, we would be devalued and our safety would be at risk”.<sup>23</sup> As a result, we have little way of knowing how many ads may exist that feature Indigenous individuals but have no measurable metric of identification. Additionally, we identified some ads that purported to feature Indigenous individuals and identified them through derogatory terms. Picture Five shows an example ad using the derogatory term “Pocahontas”. We also identified other ads that, instead of using a general term for Indigenous peoples, a specific tribal affiliation was used. An example of this can be seen below in Picture Six. In sum, while we were able to collect robust data on the terms “Native American” and “Indigenous” in the sex ads, we acknowledge that this only captures a portion of what likely exists in the ecosystem.

PICTURE FIVE: EXAMPLE OF SEX AD USING DEROGATORY TERM FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN



<sup>23</sup> Al Jazeera, *Pipelines, man camps and murdered Indigenous women in Canada*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/5/5/pipelines-man-camps-and-murdered-indigenous-women-in-canada>.

PICTURE SIX: SPECIFIC TRIBAL AFFILIATION LISTED IN SEX AD



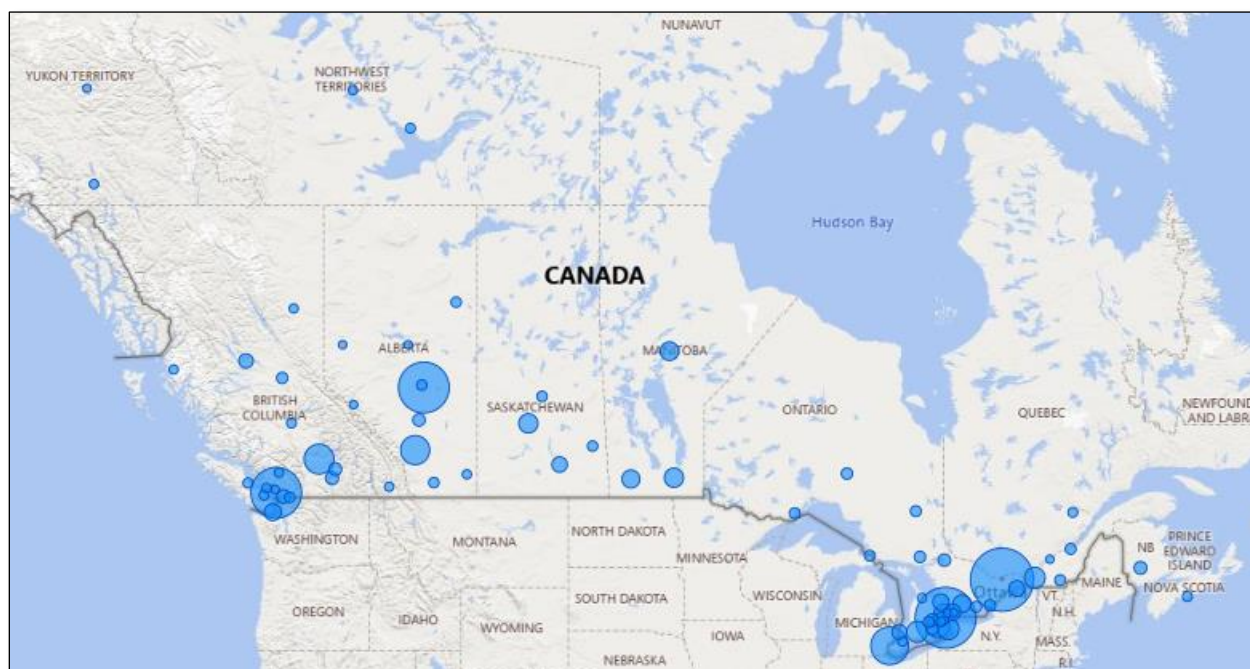
The other major factor to contend with in compiling this data was duplicate ads. Often a single ad is posted and re-posted numerous times in the same area- usually this indicates the individual is staying in that area and is opting for the simpler option of reposting an ad vs. the creation of a new one. Sometimes, the same ad can be posted hundreds of times and the question then becomes: do we count each one as a distinct post? Do we only count unique ads? If we are counting each duplicate ad as distinct, then it may skew the data. For instance, if a city only has two individuals but each has posted the same ad hundreds of times, it will measure out as more significant than a city with ten individuals that each have a few unique ads.

We opted to count each ad as distinct for a few reasons. First, while the ads may be duplicates, the dates of the posting are not. As a result, while the ad may be the exact same as the previous ad, we can still infer important information by the variables of time and geography. With time, it is helpful to know the timeline of an individual in a given city, and of course with geography, it is crucial to see the movement of an individual through Canada, even if the ad they are posting is the exact same as the previous one. Second, while there were some outliers with many duplicate ads, the prevalence was lower than expected in the data. In general, we tended to see more unique ads from singular individuals than we did hundreds of the same ad from the same individual. Therefore, while we recognize and acknowledge the limitations of counting duplicate ads as distinct, we felt comfortable doing so for the reasons outlined above.

## Sex Ad Data

In a period covering 2016–Present, we collected 3,485 sex ads posted in Canada that claim to feature an Indigenous woman or girl. Below in Picture Seven, we map out the ads according to their geographic posting, with the bubble size correlated to the amount of ads posted in that city.

PICTURE SEVEN: SEX ADS FEATURING INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN CANADA



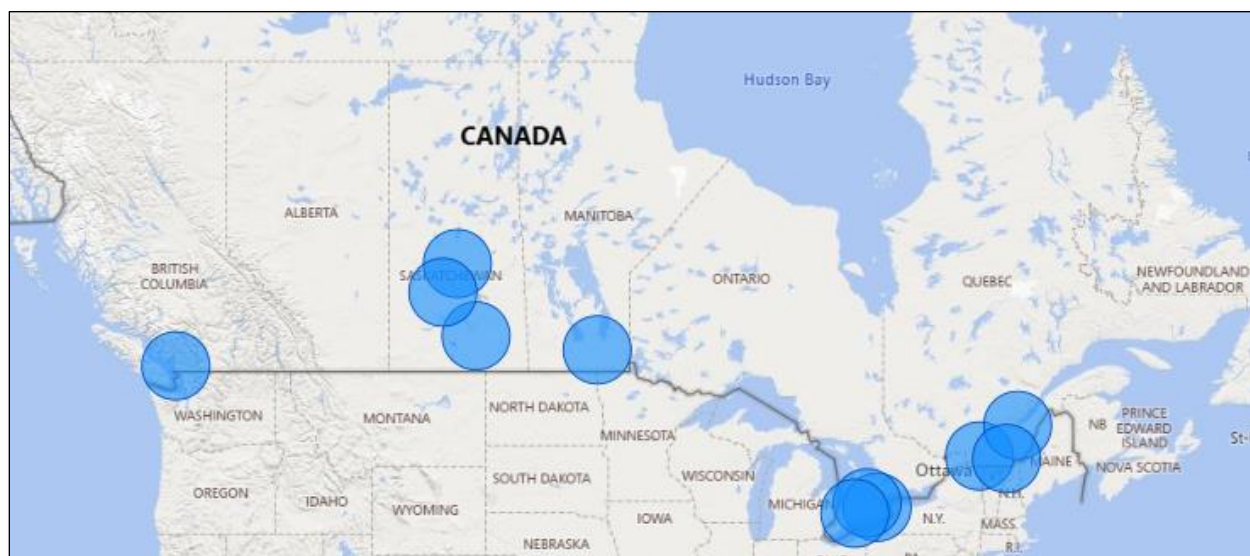
Immediately apparent are the hot spots for these ads: the urban areas of Vancouver, Edmonton, and the Windsor-Toronto-Ottawa corridor that follows Highway 401. These urban hotspots are unsurprising in the sense that sex trafficking and sex ads typically follow demand, which in turn places them in more populated places where the demand exists. However, there were two interesting cases within these cities: Edmonton and Ottawa. Both have slightly lower populations than that of Vancouver and the GTA, yet had sizeable amounts of sex ads associated with those locations. Ottawa in particular saw a high amount of ads comparable to its population- this may be explained due to its status as the capital and therefore high amount of visitors (and therefore demand) both domestic and international. Edmonton, while having a higher population of indigenous peoples, nonetheless was notable due to its relatively remote nature in comparison to the other hotspots. The city is not near the border with the US like the others, but it may act as a gravitational center for the Prairie provinces when it comes to trafficking.

One striking difference with the sex ad data when compared to the data we collected on MMIW was the city of Winnipeg. While there was a concentration of MMIW events in Winnipeg, the sex ad ecosystem in the city was relatively sparse. This disparity could be for a variety of reasons: the higher Indigenous population may have an inverse effect on the demand for Indigenous sex trafficking, or victims that are trafficked from Winnipeg may be moved to other places like Edmonton. As one report stated, "Although several factors

contribute to the movement of girls, an emerging trend that a key informant pointed out is the increased trafficking of girls due to the flourishing oil drilling rigs and mining businesses in Alberta”.<sup>24</sup> This points to the possibility that Manitoba and Saskatchewan may act as more “feeder” provinces for victims to be supplied to Alberta, with Edmonton being the closest major city to the oil fields in Northern Alberta.

Pulling out individuals within the data revealed both cases of significant cross-country travel and cases where the victim stayed in one place for a significant period of time. An example of the former is shown below in Picture Eight, where we see via the ads that the individual is moving across Canada.

PICTURE EIGHT: AN INDIVIDUAL FEATURED IN SEX ADS ACROSS CANADA



Another important observation we can make from the geographic visualization of sex ads featuring Indigenous individuals in Canada is the amount of ads close in proximity to the US border. In some ways, this tracks with the general population demographics of Canada, where much of the population lives within driving distance of the US border. However, when we examined some of the ads in these locales, we saw that not only were they close to the US border, but in many cases, there were cross-border connections. Take for instance Picture Nine below, featuring an Indigenous individual. The post lists the geography as both Cornwall, Ontario (likely tied to the aforementioned Akwesasne), but also Rochester, NY.

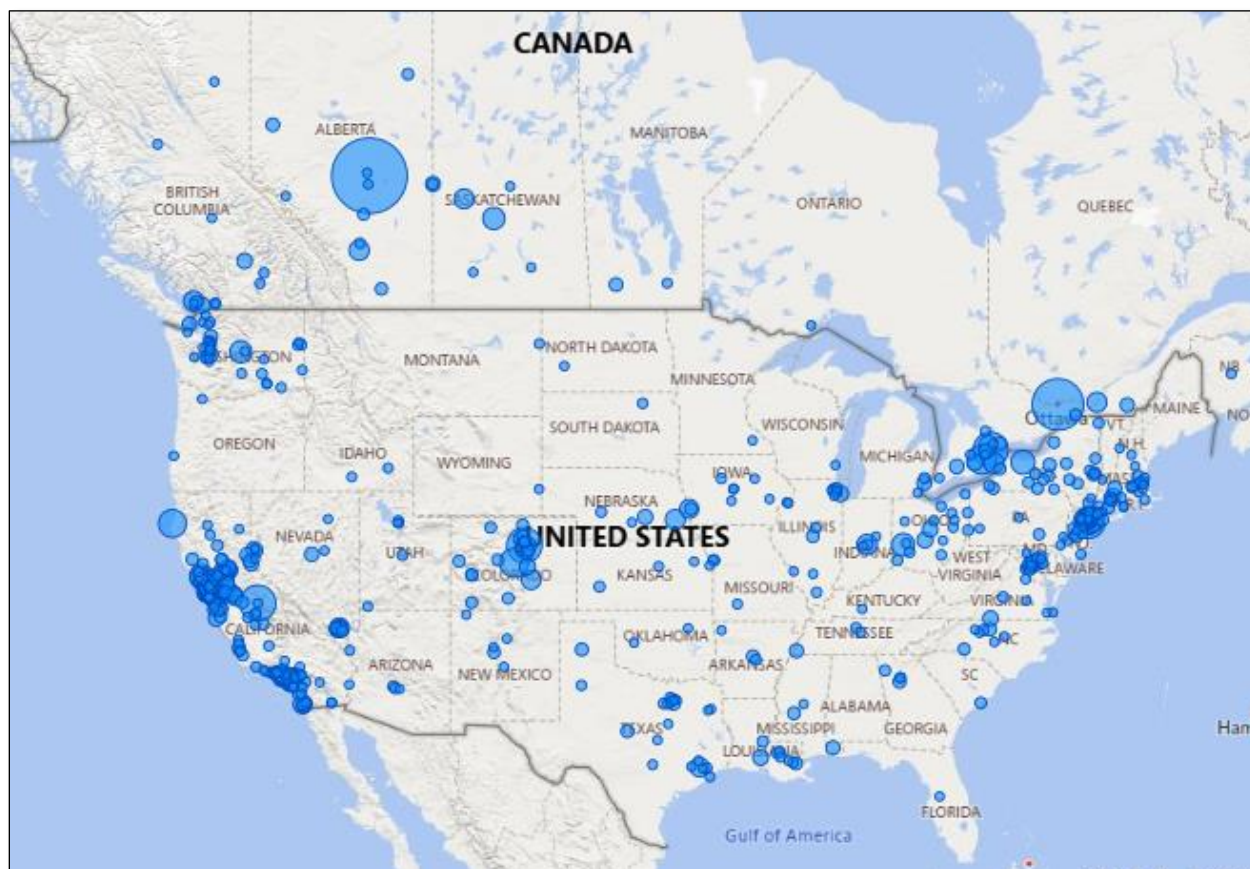
<sup>24</sup> Anupriya Sethi, *Domestic Sex Trafficking of Aboriginal Girls in Canada: Issues and Implications*, <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/fpcfrr/2019-v14-n1-fpcfrr05475/1071298ar/>.

PICTURE NINE: CROSS-BORDER AD FEATURING INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUAL

emails	-
location	Cornwall, ON Rochester
url	skipthegames.co... <a href="#">copy</a>

This forced us to ask the question: how prevalent are cross-border ads? Can we measure in some way the amount of profiles showing Indigenous individuals that have ads in both Canada and the US? In order to do this, we took the phone numbers listed in the Canadian ads featuring Indigenous individuals and widened the search return scope to also return US-based ads with the same phone number. Phone numbers are good search selectors because of their specificity and longevity- while some traffickers utilize methods like burner phones and numbers, the same phone number can be associated with a sex ad persona for years. Because of this, the likelihood of a Canadian ad with a phone number being in some way linked to a US ad that features the same phone number is high. Picture Ten below shows the results of this search.

PICTURE TEN: CROSS-BORDER SEX ADS FEATURING INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUALS



Specifically, this image shows the location of ads in both Canada and the US posted by the same phone number. Each phone number and ad in Canada must have a match reflected on the US side. In other words, every ad and bubble shown on the US side has a phone number match in Canada to a sex ad featuring an Indigenous individual.

This image is striking- we did not expect to see such a cross-border connection between the two countries. While trafficking is often a borderless crime, seeing the reach inside of the United States with these ads was surprising. A quick glance at this visual will bring attention to Edmonton, which has a far larger connection to the sex ad ecosystem in the US than its peer cities, rivaled only by Ottawa. While these two cities were near the top in the previous visualization of just Canada, seeing their deep connections to the United States raises the question: why is the Indigenous sex ad ecosystem in Edmonton connected to other sex ads in the United States? More research is needed to examine this phenomenon, but it may be due to its status as a major metropolitan area close to natural resource exploitation.

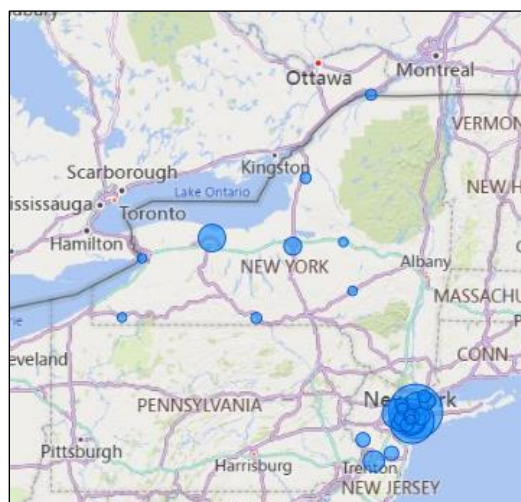
The sex ad concentration in the United States loosely correlates with population centers and border areas, with a noticeable outlier in Colorado. Another major finding we did not expect was that some of the Canadian sex ads we originally collected in the first phase turned out to be one-time hits in Canada. For instance, an Indigenous individual was featured in a sex ad that was posted in Canada, but unbeknownst to us at the time, most of the individual's ad history was actually in the US. An example of this is shown below in Picture Eleven, where the individual was posted in sex ads primarily in San Francisco Bay area, yet at some point traveled to Windsor, Ontario and had an ad posted there.

PICTURE ELEVEN: US-BASED INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUAL WITH A SEX AD IN CANADA



With these cases of US-based individuals, the border towns of Langley, British Columbia and Windsor, Ontario were the most popular Canadian cities to post ads from. For some individuals, like below in Picture Eleven, there was a tighter concentration of geographic movement. Picture Twelve shows a NY-based individual that crossed the border and had an ad posted in Cornwall, Ontario.

PICTURE TWELVE: SMALLER RADIUS OF CROSS-BORDER SEX AD ACTIVITY



While the majority of Canadian sex ads were for individuals who were Canada-based, there were enough examples of the above cases for us to conclude there is a trend of Indigenous individuals based in the US traveling across the border and posting sex ads in Canada. It is difficult to estimate concrete numbers, but it is a major takeaway nonetheless. This supports not only the notion of trafficking being a borderless crime, but also emphasizes the necessity for Canada-US collaboration in these cases.

## Conclusion: Next Steps

With both MMIW and the trafficking of Indigenous peoples, the data available to inform decisions and investigations is sparse. Our aim was to address a gap in this area and help decision-makers, law enforcement, and victim services have better insight into both problems. The findings in this report naturally beget several next steps.

First and perhaps most important, a national database for indigenous disappearances would aid in the speed and efficacy of missing persons investigation. While the Government of Canada and groups like Aboriginal Alert keep certain types of databases, they are either restricted by their areas of focus or the threshold for missing persons reporting. Aboriginal Alert, unlike other databases, seems to excel in speed of reporting and may be a model moving forward in the future. Another major takeaway is the necessity of marrying the datasets of MMIW and sex ads. As discussed at length, the issues of MMIW and the sex trafficking of indigenous individuals are intertwined. One concrete way of merging these spaces in real-time is taking pictures of a missing individual and searching the picture in sex ad data. Certain victim identification tools like Spotlight use software that can allow for matches based off sex ad pictures, therefore opening the possibility that a recently missing individual could be quickly found if a sex ad was posted featuring the same individual.

Next, the hotspots of Winnipeg in the area of MMIW and Edmonton in the area of sex ads must be examined more thoroughly. These cities could tell us much about these issues and engaging individuals on the ground will help advance intelligent research and investigation. Additionally, the anticipation of new hotspots in Canada demands further attention. Researchers point to the warming Arctic region of Canada as an area that is inviting continued

investment and natural resource exploitation- and along with it, the potential for exploitation and violence against Indigenous peoples.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, stories like Minnie Wigwans must be told. We acknowledge that the points and bubbles on the maps we produced can be at risk of reducing each individual tragedy to a mere data point. The aim, however, is not to reduce each person to a data point, but rather amplify these stories through their collection. Behind each bubble is a person and family's heartbreak, pain, and loss. Rather than ignore it, we chose to seek these stories out and analyze them with the goal of gaining further insight into these problems so that similar stories can be prevented in the future.

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<sup>25</sup> Victoria Sweet, *Rising Waters, Rising Threats*, <https://turtletalk.blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/sweet-rising-waters-rising-threats.pdf>.