

Talking about Justice in Nunavut: Episode 2: Thinking about access to justice for family violence in Nunavut

Podcast/Radio Program Transcript

HOST: Welcome to Talking About Justice in Nunavut, a series of audio interviews presented by the Law Society of Nunavut. My name is Gloria Song, and I'm an access to justice coordinator for the Law Society of Nunavut. This is the second episode of this audio series, where we'll talk about access to justice issues in Nunavut, specifically with respect to family violence.

Family violence can be a difficult topic, and you may find the information to be upsetting. Make sure you take care of yourself. That could include taking any steps that you need to emotionally prepare yourself. You might also want to think about what care you might need after listening to this program. We'll share some resources for support throughout this program, and we'll also share support resources again at the end of this program.

The Law Society has been partnering with Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada on a project to study and raise awareness about family violence and abuse in Nunavut. For this program, we'll be hearing stories from women with lived experiences. We'll hear from a project manager at Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. She'll share what she heard when she and other project members spoke to women with lived experiences of family violence and service providers who worked with them across the territory. We'll also hear from Noah Papatsie, a Facilitator and Curriculum advisor with ilinniapaa Skills Development Centre, for his thoughts about how justice in Nunavut can be improved.

First we'll hear from a woman who has survived through family violence, who will share some of her insights on her experiences. Her voice has been disguised to protect her identity.

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WOMAN WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE:

It's a way of living. You think it's normal. You think it's normal, because you've seen it in your friends or your relatives, or them sharing stories of the abuse they're enduring. You think it's normal, it's a normal way of life. When in actual fact, it's not normal. That's not how two people treat each other, that love each other. You know? You don't realize that until you're older, and you've matured intellectually, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, physically. Only then do you realize, okay, that's not a normal way of life. Only until you get to that point, can you start to heal, and look for help out there. [...]

If I gave myself excuses not to get help, then I was messing up my own life, and the life of my children, my grandchildren, and my future great-grandchildren. The thing that has helped me the most in getting counselling over the years is this one amazing, amazing counsellor, who said to me: "You live in a circle. You're in the centre of the circle. Whoever in your life is in your circle is there for a reason. If they are not there to love

and respect and honour you, and lift you up and encourage you, and if they repeatedly, verbally, mental, and physically abuse you, you have every right to say, 'I don't want you in my life.' Close the door and let them out of your circle."

[...]

We have to set an example of how we want to be treated. Loved and honoured and respected and cared for. We also have to resonate that. We have to live it. We have to live the life we want to live, and how we want to be treated.

[TIME STAMP: 3:47]

HOST: These were the inspiring words from a woman with lived experiences of family violence, encouraging Nunavummiut to take action against family violence and to value healthy relationships.

We've heard about how it is important for people dealing with family violence and abusive relationships to get help in order to heal. But how does someone get help? There are many services in Nunavut to help people dealing with family violence, including counselling. One legal option is the Family Abuse Intervention Act, also known as FAIA, which provides assistance to people seeking protection from abusive relationships while using Inuit traditional values. Under FAIA, that is, the Family Abuse Intervention Act, you can apply for special orders. One order is an emergency protection order, also known as an EPO, where a Justice of the Peace can make an order such as ordering your abuser to stay away from your house or your work. This may sound similar to a restraining order, but there are differences. A restraining order is under the criminal justice system. You can apply for an emergency protection order without having to report it to the police, if you prefer. So this is an option for taking action without having to get your abuser arrested. Another option under the Family Abuse Intervention Act is a community intervention order, also known as a CIO, where a Justice of the Peace can order counselling for either you, or your abuser, or both of you. This includes traditional Inuit counselling.

You can speak to a Community Justice Specialist for more information about getting an Emergency Protection Order or a Community Intervention Order under the Family Abuse Intervention Act. For phone number for that is 1-844-534-1038. That's 1-844-534-1038, to talk to a Community Justice Specialist to get more information about the Family Abuse Intervention Act. You could also speak to the Community Justice Outreach Worker in your community to help you.

Part of what the Law Society of Nunavut and Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada have been doing as part of our project is understanding how the Family Intervention Abuse Act is working.

We are now going to talk to Raha Ravasian, project manager for Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. She used to work as an internationally trained lawyer from Iran. As part of this project, Raha traveled to communities in Nunavut to collect stories

from women with lived experiences of family violence and service providers who worked with them. She spoke with them in particular about their experiences with and observations about the Family Abuse Intervention Act. She's here to talk to us about these stories that she heard.

Hi Raha, I'd like to start by asking you: from the conversations that you had during your visits to the communities, what are some of the stories you heard when you talked to these women?

[TIME STAMP: 6:50]

RAHA: Most of them, they have some idea of how women help each other and how to go to their elders. Most of the time they go to the elders in their communities and talk with them and try to discuss their situation with the communities and elders in the communities. Or I saw that some people were going to their neighbours or their friends. But at the same time, there is some stigma about violence and abuse. And some women prefer not to talk about it, and they don't want their story shared within the community, and there is still a stigma regarding that, family abuse and violence.

The other thing is that I heard so many women talk about it, is that they love the person. So when it comes to abusive relationships between their loved ones, between for example, their husband or their son or their brother, sometimes they were not sure what to do. In this case, they also prefer to go to other women or elders. Sometimes mental health community services if it's available to them. But in most of these cases, they prefer women from their own communities.

HOST: Can you share more about this stigma that you talked about? Did you get a sense as to why people might be reluctant to talk about the problems of violence or abuse that they were observing?

RAHA: I can talk about it. As I said there's always a stigmatization about family abuse and violence. So some people maybe felt not safe enough to talk about it, or ashamed of it. There were also mental belief that, if something happened to you, it's your fault, you are guilty, you did something that instigated the situation. Also, some people, for not talking about it with other members of the family, they were concerned about how they will react or how people judge them, how people judge them of why they stay in their life if there is abuse and violence going on.

There are other issues like, if I stay with, for example, the partner that is abusing me, it's because of the money, I get judged that I don't have enough courage to work, so I stay in the relationship to kind of just have financial security, and I have to tolerate the violence that comes with it.

So it was mostly some sort of psychological or mental belief about not talking about it, because of being ashamed or stigmatized, if you are subjected and if your life is impacted by violence.

And also the other thing which I observed again, most of the people that are in communities that I visited, most of the people who are in charge of mental health, if they are not Inuit, people are not feeling safe enough to go and talk to them. If they know about the culture, if they know about the societal values of Inuit people, Inuit women feel more comfortable to go and talk to them.

HOST: So that brings up an important point. For the women that you talked to, what did they say they would like to see in terms of solutions to get help with family violence?

RAHA: What they really talked about is kind of accelerating the process of legal options available to them, and make more information in the communities. For example, in some communities, CJOWs know about FAIA, but if they are going to mental health workers, if they are going to counsellors, to other services available to them, nobody...because other people don't know about it, nobody introduced the Act to them. So it maybe requires more education for the criminal system and the mental health system to at least get some basic information about available options for Inuit women who are dealing with violence.

And also, another thing... people always see some gap and some delay in the process, and it gets them frustrated. They are not there to follow all these time-consuming things, so they decided not to go with the order, or just there are breaches under the order.

I think having more people dealing with FAIA or at least having some kind of coordinator or support just to help women with FAIA with how to get protection and how to get the order, that's going to be helpful.

And other than that, there are other issues related to this. For example, sometimes violence and abuse is instigated and involved with alcohol and drug use, so having in-patient and out-patient treatment centres are going to be helpful. Again, having safe houses for women and also shelters for men. Because most of the time, abusers are men, and if they want to leave the house, they have to have somewhere to go, so they can actually leave the house and not be homeless. And even if women would like to leave the house, there is no option, there is no safety houses, there is no shelter, or even adequate housing to live separately. So there are other basic things that are involved in family abuse and violence.

Another thing is that, I saw that even some women generously, they shared their houses. They were survivors of violence and they shared their houses with women fleeing abuse. They have some strategies, some self-driven strategies in helping these women, young women, they provide them with housing and they get some kind of shelter and coupons for buying groceries. But it was all community-based. It was something that the women surviving the abuse came up with the idea. And that was not something infrastructural. But at least it works. It works for short-term, leaving the house. But still there are needs to have something bigger than that, even to help women.

[TIME STAMP: 14:57]

HOST: This is really good to hear about. Is there anything else you want to share from the trips you made to the communities to talk about family violence, Raha?

RAHA: Yeah thanks Gloria for having me. And again, I'm really honoured that I had the opportunity to travel and talk with women directly. The other thing I always want to say about me as an outsider: I feel welcomed by women, I feel welcomed and trusted when women shared their stories with me, but I think we don't have to forget how colonization plays a role in communities, in Inuit communities. How colonization further instigates violence, and what happened throughout history. And what happens even nowadays. Colonization is still there. And we need to, whatever solution we have, whatever recommendation that we have, we have to use a de-colonized and Indigenized lens to address the issues, and also to help make better opportunities and safer communities and safe homes for Inuit women and children.

[TIME STAMP: 16:30]]

HOST: That was Raha Ravassian, Project Manager for Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. She traveled to different communities in Nunavut to learn about family violence issues and how the Family Abuse Intervention Act is working in the territory. This was part of a project with the Law Society of Nunavut and Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. We took these stories and lessons that we learned, to work with other partners working in this area and launched an awareness campaign to help break the silence on family violence.

If you want to hear more about what family violence and abuse is and what you can do about it, I encourage you to go to the Law Society of Nunavut's website at <https://www.lawsociety.nu.ca/> where we have free resources with more information. You're listening to Talking About Justice in Nunavut, an audio program hosted by the Law Society of Nunavut, and we're talking about family violence.

Now we're going to hear from Noah Papatsie, who will share his thoughts about what needs to be done to improve access to justice in Nunavut generally. Noah is a Facilitator and Curriculum advisor with ilinniapaa Skills Development Centre, born and raised in Iqaluit. He is also an advocate for disability rights, and a proud father. Thanks for joining us, Noah. Can you share with us some of your thoughts about the legal system in Nunavut?

[TIME STAMP: 17:47]

NOAH: I really believe that during the process of people being charged or other, I think there should be proper information provided for both sides of the court system. Especially for individuals who are facing the charges themselves. As well as people who have disabilities. People have different barriers, disability issues, most of them are

mostly mental health related. Anywhere in the world. It's not just here either. So those are important. That we understand when there's a court system happening.

Or especially when there's a language barrier. Language is a very big topic anywhere. I believe respecting the languages itself and understanding each other will create a better form of understanding how to judge people within the court system.

Inclusion is very important. That both sides of individuals. That we provide proper care. Proper care is very important to have proper healing on both sides. So to understand the system itself, it is important that you or I be part of it, as we are part of a living family within a community system. It is important, community, for individuals to engage together, especially through difficult times when the individual is trying to heal.

The working world is like... we need to work as an engine together, to make it work. So to have everyone in place, we need to have it barrier-free. Challenges are not barriers. We need to understand that as a whole, anywhere. To have better success, in every individual, or people within the system. So it is important that we move forward in a better manner, instead of creating a one-sided system that will create an imbalanced justice.

And again, I mentioned earlier during the interview, I mentioned during the first process of the court system when they're being... one standing in court, there's no proper system where the individual knows where he or she needs to go. Or especially after the fact, after being taken out of the police station, there needs to be a proper system that give you... who are abled or disability, need to have a system in place. It's great that we got a lawyer, but even better that we have a system to follow up on, to have a better system in place, instead of waiting three to six months, to a year, to have the individual being judged. There's other things, like misdemeanours can be taken care of right away, as in local things, such as... Misdemeanours can be taken care of locally with families healing. Other issues such as mental health or other related topics such as individual who's being sentenced is not educated. So education is very important, that we understand mental health plays a big role, anywhere else, not just in Nunavut.

[TIME STAMP: 21:43]

HOST: That was Noah Papatsie of Iqaluit with ilinniapaa Skills Development Centre, sharing his vision for an inclusive justice system. Thank you, Noah.

We've talked about some serious topics during this audio program, and sometimes that can bring up some difficult feelings. If you need to talk to someone, the Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Help Line offers anonymous and confidential telephone support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The number is 1-800-265-3333. Again, that's 1-800-265-3333.

In this program, we've heard from a woman with lived experiences of family violence in Nunavut, explaining why it's important to do something if you are in an unhealthy

relationships. We also talked to a project manager from Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada who shared the stories and lessons she learned while talking to people about family violence in communities across Nunavut. Finally, we heard from Noah Papatsie from the ilinniapaa Skills Development Centre, about what he believes is needed for more inclusive justice in Nunavut.

The Law Society of Nunavut has been honoured to work with Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, women with lived experiences of family violence, and service providers in Nunavut on this project to stand together and break the silence on family violence and abuse. We look forward to continuing to work together on these issues, as well as other issues of access to justice,

We are thankful to our funders, the Law Foundation of Ontario through its Access to Justice Fund, as well as the Department of Justice Canada. While this project was financially supported by our funders, the Law Society of Nunavut and Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada are responsible for the content.

If you want to listen to this recording again, this recording can be found on the Law Society of Nunavut's website, along with other resources about family violence that we've developed with our project partners. For more information about this project on family violence or these resources, you can also call the Law Society of Nunavut toll-free at 1-844-979-2330. That's 1-844-979-2330.

It's been a pleasure Talking about Justice in Nunavut with you. We hope you all stay safe and healthy.