



# Young Forensic Scientists Forum Posters – 2021

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## Y2 “The Squeakiest Wheel Doesn’t Always Get the Grease”: Indigenous Perceptions on the Highway of Tears Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Investigations

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will be better informed regarding the concerns and perceptions that Indigenous families and friends of MMIWG have on how investigations are conducted and where further research is needed to address these concerns.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by acknowledging the impacts homicide and missing persons investigations can have on victim’s communities, especially when discussing the Canadian Indigenous community. This presentation will also exemplify that continued conversation about investigative practices between scientific professionals, law enforcement, and the victim’s community needs to be an ongoing effort to help mitigate further trauma, even if national recommendations have already been set in place to address existing concerns.

Canada is well-aware of its situation with MMIWG. Yet there is a notable limit to what is public knowledge and what has a level of importance when it comes to MMIWG investigative practices for both prominent Highway of Tears and related Canadian cases. This exploratory study began as a content analysis of news articles, inquiry/commission reports, and academic literature to determine both what information about the Highway of Tears cases are available for public access and how exhaustive that information is. The results uncovered that while there has been an increase in media acknowledgment and government conversation about the Highway of Tears MMIWG cases in particular after the early 2000s, there remains a vacant hole in the prepared narrative of investigative practices. This hole is largely only addressed by the Indigenous community, leaving them to lay the groundwork for identifying where they perceive investigations fall short and creating community organizations to address the situation themselves.

For this research development, a subsequent content analysis of publicly accessible Indigenous testimonies about experiences with MMIWG investigations uncovered common themes in perceptions on how cases were conducted. From such perspectives, flaws in MMIWG investigations were identified as inaccurate victim portrayals in the media, unequal investigative support, slow responsiveness by and distrust in police, withheld case information, and lacking support and assistance from non-Indigenous organizations. Accompanying these themes were occasional accounts of successes in investigative practices, recognition of the difficulties in conducting investigations of such importance, and calls for finding ways to improve the themes identified that negatively affect the Indigenous community.

This research highlights the Indigenous perception of MMIWG investigative practices in Canada as they are the loudest voice in advocating for better practices currently, even though they often have the smallest platform in which to present it to the public, while also arguing to the academic community that further research needs to test these themes in current investigative practices. There is importance in not only determining if these Indigenous concerns have continued in MMIWG investigations following recent inquiries and recommendations, but also if remedies of these concerns have begun and determining how to mitigate the still present and real concerns of Indigenous families and friends of MMIWG victims.

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### MMIWG, Investigative Practices, Indigenous Perspectives