

Indigenous Perspectives On Poverty Reduction

Presented by: Hinna Ahmed
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Summary

- The webinar started with introducing the 4 speakers, Nigaan Sinclair, Leah Gazan, Leslie Varley, and Natasha Beedie. The webinar began with acknowledging the Indigenous Peoples land and then invited the speakers to speak about how to end poverty in Canada for Indigenous Peoples.
- First up was Nigaan Sinclair who started and led the discussion. He talked about how the Covid-19 pandemic has caused an immense growth in the amount of Indigenous Peoples who are living on the streets and suffering from poverty. As a resident in Winnipeg, he works in the Mama Bear Clan where they go street patrolling looking for Indigenous peoples on the streets, who are living in poverty and they provide help to them.
- He clarified that no one chooses poverty, Indigenous Peoples are put in poverty and escaping it is a miracle and only because of services like the Mama Bear Clan.
- He then moved on to ask Leah about her experience with poverty. she says it's the most violent human violation and that Indigenous Peoples suffer from resource extraction and they are left homeless on their own land.
- She said most of the Covid-19 cases in Manitoba affect the Indigenous Peoples and the Government is doing nothing to help.

Summary

- She continued to mention that we need to recognize the discrimination against Indigenous Peoples and that prior to Christmas, the shelters where Indigenous Peoples stay (those suffering from poverty) there was an outbreak of trench disease which hasn't been in Canada for 100 years, yet in Winnipeg it is seen.
- Some people will say the Indigenous Peoples should just work, but it is hard for them because of severe mental illnesses and trauma so it is hard for them to work.
- She repeated many times that poverty is violent, she started to get upset when she was talking about how Indigenous Peoples need to fight for basic human rights like a toilet, and it is not ok for the Government to do that.
- Then he moved on to ask Natasha about her work with Indigenous Peoples poverty because she works with many Indigenous Peoples. She said there is not sufficient enough data in Canada to identify the problem.
- 47% of First Nations in Canada are in poverty. She said poverty is about prosperity and wellness, having enough for yourself and generations to come
- Poverty is a very big and important issue in Canada. She said her work didn't state any solutions to end poverty because there isn't enough data to come up with a solution.

Summary

- Nigaan then turned to Leslie and asked about the poverty situation in Vancouver which targets Indigenous Peoples. Leslie works in a friendship centre. She said no one can afford housing there because they get paid (at most) \$15.20/hr.
- She said there is a poverty reduction in British Columbia as 50 less Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia who are in poverty compared to the year before so there is progress. However, the Indigenous Peoples are being asked to manage their poverty but not given much help in order to manage it.
- She touched upon the fact that many Indigenous women are fleeing downtown East side because they are experiencing too much sexual violence and issues on reserves, it is a very dangerous area for them. she said one Indigenous woman was being openly sexually assaulted on a major street and how it is unsafe for women.
- Nigaan posed another question about what the key is to the ending of poverty. He said shelters and housing isn't the solution, because if people don't have good mental health, they can't end poverty. He stated that they are trying to provide mental health services for the Indigenous Peoples because tent cities are better and safer for the Indigenous Peoples suffering with poverty due to the fact that at least they are surrounded with people that truly support them.

Summary

- Leah added to this by saying that the greatest poverty of all is the poverty of the spirit. How people are in deep pain because no one is kind to them or helps them. She emphasized the importance of being kind and how it can help them. She said Indigenous Peoples are stripped from their right to joy because they are not given basic human rights.
- Natasha believes that there is a link between kids in foster care and those who feel they are not good enough and suffering from mental health issues because as they left the foster system they had nowhere to go and no plan which causes a lot of mental stress on them.
- Leslie answered that friendship centres work for Indigenous Peoples because they are always there for each other. She said she is trying to bring more friendship centres and more mental health services in British Columbia, and more services for Indigenous women and girls suffering from abuse. She has hope that in the next ten years there will be significant change in these issues.
- To add to the friendship centre discussion, Nigaan mentioned how he grew up in a friendship centre and it made him feel very happy to go to the friendship centre as it made him feel like he was loved especially during harder times in his life. This proves that friendship centres work.
- The last question asked Leah was about the role of post secondary institutions when it comes to Indigenous Peoples poverty. She said these institutions are the ones who teach the future doctors, lawyers, politicians how to act and because of that, they are teaching them to discriminate the Indigenous Peoples. Post secondary institutions need to teach them their privilege that they are sitting in that building because of Indigenous Peoples finding the land first.

Summary

- The last question Natasha was asked was the challenge around collecting data and using it to support the claims on Indigenous Peoples poverty and how it can be manipulated in different negative ways. She said at the assembly of First Nations they are reviewing current poverty indicators that are very inadequate. She said we can support First Nations initiatives, visit the friendship centres, support them, and understand the real issues.
- The last question Leslie was asked was what can non Indigenous Peoples do to be good allies? She answered this with an example of when the service agencies shut down because of Covid and the , Indigenous women had nowhere to go. She contacted Vancouver women services where they helped them immensely. Just by helping and stepping up, you can be a good ally.
- To end off, they talked about how all these movements and how Covid brought the light and caused greater awareness to everyone about the Indigenous Peoples poverty issues. They believe there will be a change, they are hopeful for change.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that helping those Indigenous Peoples with mental health issues is the solution to ending poverty?

Komal: I believe that yes, helping Indigenous Peoples with their mental health issues is definitely a solution to ending poverty because when one suffers from depression, anxiety, etc. they feel as if they can't overcome the challenges that they face which makes it difficult for them to get out of. If we were to pay more attention and provide them with resources to help their mental health then it definitely can help with the solution to end poverty.

Sana: I definitely think it is a unique approach to ending poverty, but it's fitting for Indigenous Peoples. Because of their immense trauma and terrible treatment, improving their mental health is the first crucial step in getting them out of poverty. I agree with this approach to poverty, as many others have failed.

Baljot: I feel like helping them with mental health issues will help, but not completely end poverty. Mental health issues make people feel unmotivated and worthless, so by helping them with mental health issues, it may help them do better.

Discussion Questions

2. What is one way you can be a good ally to Indigenous Peoples?

Komal: A way I can be an ally to Indigenous Peoples is by educating ourselves in their history and what challenges they faced and are still facing. Our support and respect is an important thing we can give to them.

Sana: One way I can be a good ally to Indigenous Peoples is by “stepping up”, as stated in the webinar. We learned about the awful history the Indigenous Peoples had to go through in grade 10, now we must take that knowledge and act on it. By writing letters to government officials to help provide resources to Indigenous Peoples and donating o fundraisers, there are many ways I can help Indigenous Peoples move forward.

Baljot: Just by helping and stepping up we can be a good ally for Indigenous Peoples.

Discussion Questions

3. Why do you think Indigenous Peoples are treated this way? Do you think they deserve it?

Komal: In my opinion, I think they are treated this way because of their skin colour and how they do things differently than others. People are used to only what they know so I think people get frightened. I definitely do not think that they deserve the pain that they have been through and what they are still going through.

Sana: I think the Indigenous Peoples are treated this way because it's become a norm in Canadian society. As we learned in grade 10, mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples began a long time ago, and has been etched into Canadian culture over the years. It continues because no one stands up to the officials carrying out these atrocities. Indigenous Peoples most definitely do not deserve anything they have been through; they are humans like us with their own unique culture. They don't deserve the horrors they have to experience.

Baljot: I think they are treated this way due to their past. I feel as though not many people understand what they have been through, and treat them horribly due to this.

Discussion Questions

4. Define poverty in your own words. Do you agree with Natasha's definition that poverty is about wellness and prosperity and having enough for you and generations to come? Do you agree with Leah, when she says poverty is violent?

Komal: Poverty is when one cannot access basic needs like food, water, shelter. It can also mean that one cannot have access to an education. I agree with Leah when she states that poverty is violent because many people die each year due to poverty because they couldn't get access to basic needs.

Sana: Poverty is when an individual cannot meet a basic standard of living through a lack of resources. I agree with Leah: poverty is very violent. It leads people to do things they shouldn't have to just to make ends meet, including crime. It is one of the biggest problems today that is a root cause for various others, such as high crime rates, low education rates, higher addiction rates, and more.

Baljot: Poverty is when you are lacking something that is needed (money, shelter, etc). I agree with Natasha because it is important to ensure you can help provide for the generation to come- although it is not necessary, it is ideal. Poverty is violent because you wake up with nothing and are forced to fight for survival.

Discussion Questions

5. With having background knowledge about the trauma and history behind Indigenous Peoples, do you believe there will be a change in how they are treated over the next years? Or do you believe that the Government of Canada will never change their ways because of how many years, time, and effort Indigenous Peoples have spent trying to negotiate with them, and having very little success?

Komal: I believe that due to the rising number of children being taught the history of what Indigenous communities faced/facing, and the number of issues that we have spoken about on our platforms (Instagram, snapchat, twitter) there definitely will be change. Our generation is the generation to do better and not let them get away with things.

Sana: I certainly hope for there to be change in how Indigenous Peoples are treated, but I don't see the government prioritizing them in the near future. Given Covid-19, issues in the Indigenous communities have been put on the back burner even more; their needs keep getting pushed back as we go into the future. The government has had more than enough time to do something about the ongoing mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples, and yet they choose not to.

Baljot: I do not think Canada will change its ways because it has been many years since Indigenous Peoples have been fighting for their rights and there is still no change.

Thank you