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## **U of L grad student creates database of missing and murdered Indigenous women**

As a survivor of domestic and sexual violence and with hundreds of new cases of missing Indigenous women every year, Annita Lucchesi, a University of Lethbridge doctoral student, started a database of missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW).

“The domestic violence almost killed me and I almost became one of the women on this list,” she says. “If that had happened to me, I would want my story to have meaning; I would want it to be used in the struggle to make sure that other women and girls don’t experience that, too.”

Started three years ago, Lucchesi continually adds more names and information. The database contains about 3,000 entries of MMIW, including their names, where they lived, if they were a mother, if other women in their family went missing or were murdered, if they experienced domestic violence and any other pertinent details.

“The idea is to have a comprehensive resource for not just researchers like me, but also for policy makers and service providers who are doing the on-the-ground work to address the issue,” she says. “In Canada and the United States, but particularly in Canada, the issue of missing and murdered native women is something that gets talked about quite a bit but there’s no reliable data or analytics for it. That’s the gap that I’m trying to fill.

So far, Lucchesi says the database does a better job of showing the holes in the data rather than providing any new conclusions. Sometimes information about missing women contained in federal or national databases isn’t shared with local forces that have jurisdiction over missing persons cases.

“In terms of a unifying trend, if anything, the database shows the diversity of cases,” says Lucchesi. “There’s no one path that puts somebody at risk or one intervention to make because these thousands of women have very different stories.”

Lucchesi learns about MMIW cases from news articles, missing persons databases, social media accounts, archival sources and family members. She also requests records from law enforcement offices.

“That’s been a really challenging and also illuminating process of seeing just how poor the records are to begin with and the kind of negligence, racism and sexism that existed in police departments,” she says.

Lucchesi hopes that making state and provincial leaders aware of the scope of the problem will eventually lead to changes.

“I don’t think I’d be doing this work if I thought nothing would ever change,” she says. “But I also understand it’s going to take a long time and the likelihood of any immense change in rates of violence anytime soon is not high. People have asked me when I’m going to be done and I say ‘When native women stop getting murdered.’”

Lucchesi is working on a doctorate in Cultural, Social and Political Thought under the supervision of Dr. Jan Newberry. Coursework completed, Lucchesi is now planning to do fieldwork in native communities, on and off reserve, in Canada and the U.S. She plans to host workshops where people will create community maps to tell stories about MMIW and how they are affected.

“The idea for the final product is to have a beautiful atlas of thematic maps created by community members telling their perspective on the issue,” she says. “This work is important because women are dying. It shouldn’t be that way and I hope it’s healing not just for native communities but all of our communities as they grapple with this in a substantive way and create something healthier and safer.”

Additional information about Lucchesi and her work can be found on [UNews](#).

This news release can be found online at [MMIW database](#).

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