

# Sex trade stigma can be deadly for indigenous women, chief says

Thunder Bay police are 'making an effort to change,' NAN Deputy Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum says

Audio

Jody Porter · [CBC News](#) March 23, 2016



'Many of our women have been found dead as a result of being stigmatized, marginalized, labelled as a sex trade worker,' says Nishnawbe Aski Nation Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum. (Nishnawbe Aski Nation)

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## NAN Reaction to Police Incident

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NAN Reaction to Police Incident 5:17

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A First Nations leader in northwestern Ontario says addictions and homelessness are increasing for indigenous peoples in Thunder Bay, creating a deadly combination of vulnerability and stigma.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum is responding to concerns raised by the mother of [a woman who was found naked and screaming for help](#) earlier this month on a residential street in the city.

A witness told CBC News he heard the woman tell police she was selling sex that night when a man tried to kill her. Thunder Bay police said there are currently no grounds for a criminal charge in the incident.

"Many of our women have been found dead as a result of being stigmatized, marginalized, labelled as a sex trade worker," Achneepineskum said.

### 'Easy target'

She said First Nations people become an "easy target" when they turn to the sex trade because of homelessness or addictions — circumstances she says are on the rise in Thunder Bay in the last decade.

The Truth and Reconciliation Report, the promise of an inquiry into Missing and Murdered indigenous women and the on-going inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations students in Thunder Bay are leading to a growing awareness of the issues, Achneepineskum said.

"Police are making an effort to change," she said, adding that everyone has a role to play in keeping vulnerable members of society safe.

"People are aware of it and they're just choosing to turn away," Achneepineskum said. "Why are they choosing to turn away? We need to ask ourselves that too."

"That little girl that's a drug addict, that is selling herself, is she worth less as a human being than us? I don't think so."