

Thunder Bay police criticized for response to indigenous woman found naked on city street

Witness says woman told police a man tried to kill her, but police say no grounds for laying charges

Jody Porter · [CBC News](#) March 22, 2016



A woman was found naked and calling for help on this street near the rail tracks on the north side of Thunder Bay, Ont., around midnight on March 10. Thunder Bay police say there is no evidence to support a criminal charge. (Jody Porter/CBC)

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Police Response

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Police Response 7:58

The mother of a 28-year-old woman found naked and crying for help late one night in Thunder Bay, Ont., says police are ignoring a crime because her daughter is a First Nations woman and an addict.

Robin Sutherland, 31, said he and another man responded to a woman's calls for help on Clavet Street around 12:15 a.m. on March 10.

"We saw a naked lady approaching us and she was quite distressed, screaming for help, and so she came up to us and I gave her my sweater to warm her up," Sutherland said.

He stuck around after police arrived, waiting to get his sweater back. He said he heard the woman tell police she had been paid for sex that night and the transaction had gone horribly wrong.

"She started off by saying that he tried to kill her and drown her in the lake," Sutherland said.



The industrial area across the railway tracks, near Lake Superior, on Thunder Bay's north side, is a common place for prostitutes to be taken, says the mother of a woman who says her daughter sells sex to support her drug habit. (Jody Porter/CBC)

The woman's mother said her daughter told her the same story.

CBC News is not identifying the mother because she said her daughter still fears for her safety.

"She said, 'Mom, I thought I was going to die. He almost threw me in the water, naked,'" the mother said. "She showed me her bruises and how he dragged her and tried to drive off with her hanging on to the vehicle because her clothes were in the vehicle and she was all naked."

"When he got out and attempted to throw her in the vehicle, that's when she ran," the mother added.

She said she is aware that her 28-year-old daughter sells sex in order to pay for the fentanyl to which she has become addicted, but said that is not an excuse for police inaction.

'It's because my daughter is First Nations'

"I think it's because my daughter is First Nations and is a drug addict and that's already two strikes against her, and this man who attempted to kill her is not First Nations," the mother said.

CBC News attempted to contact the woman, without success, through Facebook and through her mother.

Thunder Bay police said they are also attempting to get in touch with her again.

"At the time of the original investigation, there were no reasonable grounds to lay criminal charges," said Thunder Bay police spokeswoman Julie Tilbury. "We would be interested in following up further with the complainant."



Cora-Lee McGuire-Cyrette, of the Ontario Native Women's Association, says studies show indigenous women who are sexually exploited are more likely to become counted among the missing and murdered. (Cora-Lee McGuire-Cyrette/Facebook)

The police response is "disheartening," especially as awareness grows around the dangers faced by indigenous women, said Cora-Lee McGuire-Cyrette, the interim executive director of the Ontario Native Women's Association.

"There's a direct connection ... reports show that those [indigenous women] who have been sexually exploited are at even greater risk of becoming a missing or murdered indigenous woman," McGuire-Cyrette said.

Sutherland said he noticed police showed "a bit less care and less compassion" when the woman told them she was a prostitute.

After the ambulance came to get the woman, Sutherland said, the police officer handed him back his sweater using two fingers and said "to wash or burn it as soon as I got a chance."

Sutherland said he didn't think twice about giving the woman his sweater, even though it had his keys and money in the pockets.

"She needed help, I wasn't going to just leave her there," he said.