

HISTORICAL VEIWPOINT: When we talk to our Elders about domestic violence and ask them how they as Native American women dealt with it in the past, there is often an uncomfortable silence created between us. Our assumption is often that domestic violence is a phenomenon existing only in modern times. However, the reality is that our great-grandmothers, grandmothers, and mothers also experienced domestic violence and sexual assault. As tribal people looking for answers, we have to go back 500 years to examine how and when life started to change for Native American women. Prior to European contact, Native American men and women's roles were based on specific traditional values practiced and honored through individual clans and tribes. Women were honored as pivotal to the survival of the tribes. Although they had their separate roles, Native American women were generally considered equal in status to Native American men. Associating violence with power intensified in Native American communities after the advent of colonization. Along with this change came a shift in the concepts of women's roles, in particular defining women and children as property. This imbalance of power created a framework that allows domestic violence to be a common occurrence, affecting four million women every year. Native American women endure much higher levels of sexual and domestic violence than their non-Indian peers. As alarming as this statistic is, it is widely believed that it does not accurately portray the full extent of sexual violence endured by Native American women. Domestic violence affects those who are directly abused and inflicts substantial collateral damage on family members, friends, co-workers, witnesses and the community.

*No Excuse
for
Domestic Violence & Abuse*



*Domestic Violence
Among
Native Americans*

*7th Generation
United American Indian Foundation*

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Currently, there are over 560 federally recognized American Indian and Alaskan Native Indian tribes in the United States. Native American is the term used in this booklet to describe all the tribes. The pictures in this booklet do not represent a person's race or culture, just the acts of violence and the reaction to the violence.

***/Race, culture, and religion
may keep you locked into a Cycle of Violence***

Native American women experience the highest rate of violence of any group in the United States, a rate three and a half times greater than the national average.



The Purpose of Battering & Abusing Your Partner

The purpose of battering and abuse is to instill fear, intimidate, and control behavior, not to leave bruises. Some of the most effective batterers do not beat; they do not need to, at least not very often. Threats and hostile looks to spouses, partners and their children serve the same purpose: to control behavior through fear and to keep victims trapped in the **Cycle of Violence**.

Sexual assault and domestic violence are so widespread in the Native American culture that relationship abuse is occurring in younger and younger couples. Teenagers are experiencing high levels of date rape and physical abuse.



Some Symptoms Exhibited by Domestic Violence Victims

- Injuries with a suspicious explanation for cause
- Complaining about: depression, headaches, nightmares, insomnia
- Incidents of anger or arguments
- Use of tranquilizers, over using prescribed drugs
- History of suicidal thoughts or actions
- Lack of eye contact
- Medical and mental problems
- Drug/Alcohol use and abuse
- Frequent visits to a doctor

How Are The Children Affected

- Children exposed to domestic violence are secondary victims and are predisposed to numerous social and physical problems including mental illness, homelessness, school failure, and teen pregnancy.
- Children from homes where domestic violence occurs may be up to 15 times more likely than their peers to be physically abused and neglected themselves.
- Behavioral symptoms can include inability to concentrate, learning disabilities, violence, aggression, and stress-related psychological symptoms.



- Children who witness abuse are also more likely to go on to abuse alcohol and drugs.
- Girls with violent fathers are much more likely to be sexually abused in their lifetime.
- Children witnessing abuse are six times more likely to commit suicide than children in the general population

Domestic Violence and Dating Violence usually occur in the home, a setting which is perceived as a “safe haven.” Yet the home is the most likely place for a woman or child to be emotionally abused, physically assaulted, raped, or murdered. It appears that a person’s home is the most violent place to be.



Concerns

- Three-fourths of Native American women have experienced some type of sexual assault in their lives.
- More than 1 in 3 Native American women will be raped during their lifetime (general population 1 in 5).
- During physical assaults, Native American women are more likely to be injured than women of all other groups.
- Most Native American women do not report such crimes because of the belief that nothing will be done.
- Native Americans have the highest level of alcohol abuse, suicide rates, and mental distress than the general population..

Reasons why some Native America women are reluctant to report domestic violence

Domestic violence and sexual assaults are complicated crimes in any setting. In California Indian Country, the opportunities for confusion, errors and misunderstanding in reporting, prosecuting, and counseling are even greater.

- Distrust of law enforcement outside the reservation is widespread.
- Many of the crimes are committed in very isolated areas difficult to reach by non-tribal police or sheriff's deputies.
- Advocates say local law enforcement is reluctant to cite batterers or issue protective orders because the victim will not follow-up and testify in court.



- Jurisdiction issues concerning arrests and prosecution of non-Native American batterers and abusers.
- Recent experiences at women's shelters where native customs and beliefs are not respected also keep battered Native American women from seeking help.
- Many women are afraid their children will be taken from them if they get involved with government social services because of the experience of their ancestors.

Victims and Potential Victims Must Develop Three Different Plans

A Safety Plan – Where to go in your house and what to do when you and/or your children are threatened by your partner's violence and abuse.

Escape Plan – An emergency plan for leaving your partner in hopes of eliminating another episode of violence/abuse.



Protection Plan – After leaving or having your partner arrested a plan for keeping him/her from contacting you.