



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

## POLICY RESEARCH CENTER

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### Research Policy Update

#### *State of the Data on Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Girls*

##### Key Points:

- American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women and girls experience higher rates of violence.
- AI/AN women and girls experience violence more commonly by non-AI/AN perpetrators.
- AI/AN victims of violence are less likely to receive needed services.
- Violence against AI/AN women and girls continues to experience a lack of comprehensive reporting and prosecution at the federal, state, and local levels.

#### **Violence Against AI/AN Women & Girls –** *Data Trends*

In the United States, violence against AI/AN women has reached devastating levels on tribal lands, in Alaska Native villages, and in urban centers. At present, the most comprehensive report on the issue of violence against AI/AN women and girls continues to be the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Research Report released in May 2016. From current reporting, the following statistics reflect the disparities experienced by AI/AN women and girls:

**3<sup>rd</sup>**

Homicide was the **third highest** cause of death among AI/AN girls aged 15 to 19 and AI/AN women aged 20 to 24 in 2019 (Heron, 2021).

**4<sup>th</sup>**

Homicide was the **fourth highest** cause among AI/AN women 25 to 34 in 2019 (Heron, 2021).



**More than 4 in 5** AI/AN women (84.3 percent) have experienced violence in their lifetime (Rosay, 2016).



**More than half** of AI/AN women (56.1 percent) have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime (Rosay, 2016).



**More than half** of AI/AN women (55.5 percent) have experienced physical violence by intimate partners in their lifetime (Rosay, 2016).



**Almost half** of AI/AN women (48.8 percent) have been stalked in their lifetime (Rosay, 2016).



**Nearly two thirds** of AI/AN women (63.8 percent) experience psychological aggression in their lifetime (Breiding et al, 2014).

**1.7x**

AI/AN women are **1.7 times** more likely than White women to have experienced violence in the past year (Rosay, 2016).

**2.8x**

The murder rate of AI/AN women is almost **3 times** that of non-Hispanic White women (Petrosky et al, 2017).

**2x**

AI/AN women were almost **2 times** as likely to have experienced rapes as non-Hispanic White women (34.1 percent vs. 17.9 percent) over the course of a lifetime (Bachman, Zaykowski, Kallymer, Poteyeva, & Lanier, 2008).

**38.3**  
years

AI/AN women victims of intimate partner violence lose an average **38.3 potential years of life** per death in a study of 16 states (Graham, et al, 2021).

The rates of violence against AI/AN women and girls are even higher in certain regions, states, cities, and tribal reservations. Some states have published their own reports on the issue of violence against AI/AN women and girls and missing AI/ANs, given the lack of overarching research and reporting and the widespread, disproportionate impact on AI/ANs in comparison to the other races and ethnicities. The following data trends are for statistics at the state, city, and county levels in Alaska, Arizona, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Washington, Wyoming, and selected regions where data are currently available.

**10x**

AI/AN women face murder rates more than **10 times** the national average in **11 counties**: Bristol Bay Borough, AK; Labette County, KS; Dakota County, NE; Knox County, NE; Humboldt Count, NV; Bladen County, NC; Graham County, NC; Harnett County, NC; Latimer County, OK; Bon Homme County, SD; and Iron County, UT. In one county, Bon Homme, SD, the rate is more than 100 times the national average (555.6 per 100,000 in comparison to the 2018 national average of 5.0 per 100,000) (Bachman, Zaykowski, Kallymer, Poteyeva, & Lanier, 2008).

**29**  
years

The Urban Indian Health Institute found that of 506 cases of murdered or missing AI/AN women, the median age of the victim was **29 years** of age in a survey of **71 cities** (Lucchesi and Echo-Hawk, 2018).



AI/AN women are over-represented among domestic violence victims in **Alaska** by 250 percent (Indian Law and Order Commission, 2015).



The average time missing for AI/AN women in **Arizona** as of 2020 is 21 years. Twenty-eight percent of AI/AN homicide victims were killed by intimate partners (Fox et al, 2020).



In **Montana**, AI/ANs are four times more likely to go missing, comprising over a quarter (25.5 percent) of missing persons, but are only 6.6 percent of the state population; 60 percent of missing AI/ANs in **Montana** are women (Montana Department of Justice, 2020).



AI/AN missing persons in **Nebraska** constituted 4.6 percent of the total, but only 1.5 percent of the state population. AI/AN Women are 43 percent of AI/AN missing persons in **Nebraska** (Sutter et al, 2020).



AI/ANs comprised 48.5 percent of missing persons in **Farmington, New Mexico**, with 66 percent of those cases being AI/AN women. AI/ANs made up 10.5 percent of missing persons in the much larger urban core of **Albuquerque, New Mexico**, with AI/AN women representing 43 percent of the total missing AI/ANs (New Mexico Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives Task Force, 2020).



AI/AN women went missing at a rate of 78.6 per 100,000 in the state of **Washington**. In a survey of 148 AI/AN women in **Seattle, Washington**, 94 percent has been raped or coerced in their lifetime (Echo-Hawk, Dominguez, and Echo-Hawk, 2019).



The homicide rate for AI/AN women in **Wyoming** (15.3 per 100,000) was 6.4 times higher than the homicide rate for non-Hispanic White women. Of 710 AI/AN missing persons reports, 57 percent were AI/AN women (Grant, Dechert, Wimbish, and Blackwood, 2020).

## Non-AI/AN Perpetrators of Violence Against AI/AN Women & Girls – *Data Trends*

The challenging reality is that AI/AN women and girls are significantly more likely than other women to experience violence committed by interracial perpetrators. The 2013 Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) included an historic provision reaffirming tribes' inherent power to exercise **Special Domestic Violence Criminal Jurisdiction (SDVCJ)** over non-Indian perpetrators who commit acts of domestic violence, dating violence, or violations of qualifying protection orders in Indian Country, though it does not cover all forms of domestic violence.

At present, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) reports that **28 tribes** are currently implementing VAWA SDVCJ. Of the 128 defendants prosecuted by the implementing tribes, 90 percent were male (NCAI, 2018). In contrast, zero cases of sexual assault between a non-AI/AN perpetrator and AI/AN victim were closed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in Indian Country in 2019 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019), which does not appear to reflect reality. The following statistics on non-AI/AN perpetrators of violence against AI/AN women are from the NIJ Report (Rosay, 2016):

96%

**The vast majority** (96 percent) of AI/AN female victims of sexual violence experience violence at the hands of non-AI/AN perpetrators; 21 percent have experienced intraracial violence.

5x

AI/AN women were **5 times as likely** to have experienced physical violence by an interracial intimate partner as non-Hispanic White women (90 percent as compared to 18 percent).



**More than 4 in 5** AI/AN women (89 percent) have experienced stalking by a non-AI/AN perpetrator.

## Access to Services & Justice – *Data Trends*

AI/AN victims of violence are more likely to experience injuries requiring medical treatment and less likely to be able to access services than non-AI/AN women. This includes increased risk of hospitalization, lack of access to rape kits, and the need for time to recover from injury and assault.

1.5x

AI/AN female victims are **1.5 times as likely** as non-Hispanic white female victims to be physically injured (Rosay, 2016).

47%

**Forty-seven percent** of AI/AN women who experience rape or sexual assault also required medical care for additional injuries (Bachman et al, 2008).

1.9x

AI/AN women are **1.9 times as likely** as non-Hispanic white women to have missed days of work or school as a result of their victimization (Rosay, 2016).

2.5x

AI/AN women are **2.5 times as likely** as non-Hispanic white women to lack access to needed services (Rosay, 2016).

## Gaps in the Data on Violence Against AI/AN Women & Girls – Current Trends

Very limited data and reporting mechanisms exist for AI/AN women and girls who are victims of violence. This is due to a number of factors, including underreporting and racial or ethnic misclassification, as well as jurisdictional issues and data sharing barriers between intergovernmental agencies and tribal governments. The Urban Indian Health Institute found significant amounts of racial misclassification within police records for missing AI/AN women and girls, as well as a large undercount of AI/AN missing and murdered women overall (Echo-Hawk, Dominguez, Echo-Hawk, 2019). They also found that 95 percent of the cases had not been covered by the mainstream media in their survey of 71 cities (Lucchesi and Echo-Hawk, 2018). The Urban Indian Health Institute also found that of the 5,712 National Crime Information Center reports of missing AI/AN women and girls, only 2 percent (116) were found in the Department of Justice's federal missing persons database (Lucchesi and Echo-Hawk, 2018).

There are current efforts to improve tracking of missing AI/ANs and violence against AI/AN women and girls. Both **Savanna's Act** and the **Not Invisible Act**, signed into law in October 2020, work to improve reporting requirements, data accessibility, and intergovernmental cooperation for AI/AN missing and murdered victims, in particular AI/AN women and girls who are victims of violence. In April 2021, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland instituted a Bureau of Indian Affairs **Missing and Murdered Unit** specifically to help with interagency efforts at addressing the crisis of murdered and missing AI/ANs and violence against AI/AN women and girls. Various states have also begun to require improved reporting and data sharing on the issue of missing AI/AN women and girls. There are also efforts from non-governmental organizations to improve the data:

- The **Sovereign Bodies Institute** is using crowd sourcing methods and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to build a database of missing and murdered AI/AN women, girls, and two-spirit individuals. Their work can be found [here](#);
- The Yurok Tribal Court, in collaboration with the Sovereign Bodies, has begun the **To'kee skuy' soo ney-wo-chek' Project**, which aims to create an MMIW databased focused on Northern California. Their work can be found [here](#).

At present, NIJ has funded multiple research studies to better inform existing work on violence against AI/AN women and girls, including and most substantially a national baseline survey. The study is expected to conclude with results in late 2021 or 2024.

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**Questions:** NCAI Policy Research Center – email: [research@ncai.org](mailto:research@ncai.org); website: <http://www.ncai.org/prc>

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