

# VIOLENCE AGAINST NATIVE WOMEN

## *Battering: Statistics and Implications*

Violence against women is not natural. The occurrence of violence against women of indigenous communities is a fairly recent phenomena, resulting from the colonization and oppression of native nations. Statistics specific to battering in Indian communities are difficult to find. There is confusion about how "domestic violence" is defined. Neither the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Service nor any other tribal agency counts acts of violence crimes against women. Additionally, lack of sufficient funding in Native communities often prevent more than a crisis-oriented response to the battering of women and their children.

Advocates in Indian Country generally agree that the dynamics of battering of Native women is similar to that of other women. However, frequency of battering in Indian Country is believed to be much higher than the national norm in keeping with the higher statistical trend of other social problems, i.e., alcoholism and suicide.

Lack of "Indian-specific" statistics points to the need to learn more about battering within each Tribal Nation to create culturally appropriate approaches that effectively stop violence against native women and support the renewal of traditional culture that honors women and their children.

The following statistics and their implications outline a picture of violence against women and indicate the direction our work should take.

**STATISTIC: 50% of women in America will be battered in their lifetime; one out of three are battered repeatedly every year. (NCADV, '91)**

**IMPLICATION:** In sharp contrast to violence by strangers, at least one half of all women in America will be assaulted by an intimate male partner. Public education, resources and training of key responders, i.e., law enforcement, judicial and health systems, do not match this reality. This leads to victim-blaming, ineffective response by service providers and reinforcement and continuation of violence against women.

**STATISTIC: 95% of all domestic violence victims are female. (FBI, '83)**

**IMPLICATION:** Domestic Violence is violence against women. Other studies cite up to 98% of domestic violence victims are female. Cross-cultural studies prove that this is not a natural occurrence. This indicates root causes of violence against women are found in cultural belief systems and resulting socialization. Responses to the battering of women should incorporate social change efforts that connect individual experiences to cultural belief systems, in addition to direct services.

**STATISTIC: 42% of murdered women are murdered by their intimate partner. (FBI, '88-'91)**

**STATISTIC: In the US, 9 out of 10 women are murdered by men, half at the hands of a male partner. It is more likely for a female to be murdered by a spouse than it is for a police officer to be killed in the line of duty. (National Victim Center)**

**IMPLICATION:** Domestic violence is not “a communication problem,” a “private family matter” or “just a family squabble.” Every time a woman is hit, it’s possible that she will die. Responses to every call from a woman being battered should reflect that a potentially fatal, violent crime is occurring. What is not stated is that most of these women were murdered after they tried or did leave their batterer.

**STATISTIC: Every six hours in the United States, there are 1.3 forcible rapes of adult women; 78 women are forcibly raped each hour. (National Victim Center)**

**IMPLICATION:** The importance of this statistic is in what it doesn’t state. “Forcible rape” does not include date rape, marital rape or assaults where intercourse was attempted but penetration was not completed. “Forcible rape” occurs less frequently than any other types of rape.

The fact that rape is a major part of battering is rarely talked about even in shelters, batterer’s program or the legal system. This reflects the on-going, high degree of victim-blaming, sharing of women and collusion with rapists that happens throughout American society. The “loud” veil of silence serves to revictimize women, reinforcing the violence done to them.

**STATISTIC: The FBI estimates that only 10% of domestic violence is reported to police. (NVC)**

**IMPLICATION:** the battering of women is under-reported for many reasons. Opposite of native cultures, Euro-American social and legal systems only relatively recently deemed husband’s assaults on their wives as a “social problem.” Previously, battering was a socially approved man’s legal right. Many people still believe there is no crime to report. Or there’s no one to report to. Or the batterer is so violent, reporting increases the violence. Or she has reported before and got a response that didn’t make her feel safe.

Battering and rape are the only crimes that put the burden of safety on the woman. She’s the one who must leave home, hide and give up freedom to escape the violence.

**STATISTIC: Among victims of violence committed by an intimate, the victimization rate of women separated from their husbands was about 3 times higher than that of divorced women and about 25 times higher than married women. (DOJ, ‘97)**

**IMPLICATION:** Ironically, society tells women in many ways that they should end the violence by leaving their batterer, stand up for themselves, get on with their lives. On it’s face this statistic shows that women are safer if they stay married. On another level it says that society has not found ways to make the woman safe and hold the batterer accountable for his criminal behavior.

**STATISTIC: Between 22 and 35% of women visiting emergency rooms are there due to domestic violence. (National Violence Center)**

**IMPLICATION:** The training of health care providers need to include an understanding of the dynamics and a tactics of battering and the effects on women and their survival skills. Policies, procedures and protocols should emphasize provision of safety and coordination with advocacy/shelter programs and law enforcement agencies. Nurses may be the first and only safe contact a woman has. Non-judgmental, supportive and confidential care is integral to a woman being able to tell her story without fear of being revictimized and further endangered.