



Policy Insights Brief

Statistics on Violence Against
Native Women

NCAI Policy Research Center -
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In this Policy Insights Brief, the NCAI Policy Research Center synthesizes available data on violence against Native women to guide policy decision-making and media reporting. This brief stands alongside other materials in the Violence Against Women Act Toolkit by the National Congress of American Indians to demonstrate the need for a policy framework with funded, enforceable regulations and tribal authority to protect Native women. This brief aims to provide detail on previously reported statistics and original sources of data used often in policy discussions. NCAI and NCAI's Policy Research Center acknowledge the importance of regularly collecting more in depth and regular data for developing effective policy solutions.

As national policymakers consider legislation to reauthorize funding for critical domestic violence and sexual assault programs that aim to eliminate the pervasive violence against women, it is imperative that the context of disproportional violence against Native women remain in the forefront. As outlined in the data below, Native women experience violence at a higher rate than we would expect given their representation in the US population and at a higher rate than any other group.

From what we know about the high rates of intimate partner violence against Native women, about the fact that assaults against Native women tend to take place at private residences, about the reports from Native women of perceived perpetrator race, and about the high rates of interracial marriage and unmarried partners of Native women, it is clear that violence against Native women tends to be perpetrated by non-Native men. In other words, "while the majority of rapes and sexual assaults against other women were intra-racial, victimizations against American Indian and Alaska Native women were more likely to be interracial" (Bachman, et al., 2008).

While there is a great need for more and better data on where violence against Native women occurs, the information available suggests that Native women on tribal lands lack the most government protections from the threat of violence against them. Consider the data below about the fact that assaults against Native women tend to take place at private residences, that a significant number of Native women live on tribal lands (often with their non-Native partners), that the death rate of Native women on some reservations is ten times the national average, that in recent times US Attorneys have declined to prosecute a majority of violent crimes in Indian country, and that tribes do not have the authority to prosecute non-Natives who commit violent crimes on tribal lands.

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- **American Indians and Alaska Natives are 2.5 times as likely to experience violent crimes – and at least 2 times more likely to experience rape or sexual assault crimes – compared to all other races.**
- **61 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women (or 3 out of 5) have been assaulted in their lifetimes, compared to 52 percent of African American women, 51 percent of White women, and 50 percent of Asian American women have been assaulted.**
- **34 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women will be raped in their lifetimes, compared to 19 percent of African American women, 18 percent of White women, and seven percent of Asian and Pacific Islander women.**
- **39 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women will be subjected to violence by an intimate partner in their lifetimes, compared to 29 percent of African American women, 27 percent of White women, 21 percent of Hispanic women, and 10 percent of Asian women.**
- **17 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women reported being stalked during their lifetimes, compared to eight percent of White women, seven percent of African American women, and five percent of Asian women.**
- **While there is limited data available on where assaults against Native women take place, the rate of violent victimization of Native people in suburban areas is 2.8 times higher than that of the average for all races in suburban areas; 2.6 times higher for Natives than for all races in rural areas; and 2.5 times higher for Natives than for all races in urban areas.**
- **On some reservations, Native women are murdered at a rate more than ten times the national average.**
- **At least 70% of the violent victimizations experienced by American Indians are committed by persons not of the same race— a substantially higher rate of interracial violence than experienced by white or black victims.**
- **US Attorneys declined to prosecute nearly 52 percent of violent crimes that occur in Indian country; and 67 percent of cases declined were sexual abuse related cases.**

These statistics are disturbing, and due to jurisdictional issues and limitations, many offenders are never prosecuted. The division of authority among tribal, federal and state governments results in an inefficient system that limits tribal courts' criminal jurisdiction over non-Indians and creates conflicts and confusion for law enforcement, prosecution, courts, service providers, and crime victims in Indian Country. In addition, the Supreme Court has held that tribal governments may not prosecute non-Indians.

As a result, non-Indians who commit acts of domestic violence that are misdemeanors on Indian reservations are virtually immune from prosecution. The recent Violence against Women Act (VAWA) began to address this, but it fall far short of what is needed.