

# Domestic Violence

in Communities of Color  
WOCN, Inc. FAQ Collection

The mission of the Women of Color Network (WOCN Inc.) is to eliminate violence against ALL women and their communities by centralizing the voices and promoting the leadership of women of color across the Sovereign Nations, the United States and U.S. Territories.

## Domestic Violence in Communities of Color

Domestic Violence (DV) occurs among all races/ethnicities and socio-economic classes. DV is a pattern of many behaviors directed at achieving and maintaining power and control over an intimate partner, such as physical violence, psychological aggression, stalking, and coercion (Breiding, Smith, Basile, Walters, Chen, & Merrick, 2014)

Economic insecurity contributes to and combines with isolation, racism and discrimination, limited education opportunities, and language barriers, and immigration status to shape how women of color experience and respond to DV. These challenges also make it difficult to finding help and support services (Wider Opportunities for Women, 2015).



The Women of Color Network, Inc.

# Domestic Violence and Unique Circumstances...

exist within the context of a particular community of color, common factors and considerations exist which may account for under-reporting of DV by women of color and a failure to seek appropriate help services.<sup>1</sup> They include<sup>2</sup>:

- Cultural and/or religious beliefs that restrain the survivor from leaving the abusive relationship or involving outsiders.
- Strong loyalty binds to race, culture and family.
- Distrust of law enforcement, criminal justice system, and social services.
- Lack of service providers that look like the survivor or share common experiences.
- Lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services.
- Lack of trust based on history of racism and classism in the United States and U.S. Territories.
- Fear experiences will reflect on or confirm the stereotypes placed on their ethnicity.
- Assumptions of providers based on ethnicity.
- Attitudes and stereotypes about the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual assault in communities of color.
- Legal status in the U.S. of the survivor and/or the batterer.
- Oppression, including re-victimization is intensified at the intersections of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, legal status, age and socioeconomic status.



## Key to remember:

**Some important things to remember include remembering the survivor seeking assistance is the only expert on their culture and their experiences within their community. It is critical to elicit information about what they are afraid of, what they need, and what their concerns or priorities are.**

# Black/African/African Americans

## Despite their high rates

of domestic violence, Black survivors are disproportionately more likely to be criminalized by the legal system. Stereotypes amplify the complexities Black/African/African American women encounter when trying to seek help services. Myths that Black/African/African American women are “domineering figures that require control” or that Black/African/African American women are “exceptionally strong under stress and are resilient” increase their vulnerability and discourage some from speaking out about abuse.<sup>3</sup>

Black/African/African American women are routinely arrested at higher rates of domestic violence. Often, victims are arrested when the act of violence is only in self-defense against battering when calling the police for assistance.<sup>4</sup> When Black/African/African American women make contact with the legal system, they often experience institutional violence perpetrated by police officers and the justice system itself.<sup>5</sup>

Reports and statistics show:

- According to the National Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 9.5% had been stalked and 41.2% of Black women had been physically abused by a partner during their lifetime.<sup>6</sup>
- Based on the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), between 2003-2012 at the rate of 4.7 per 1,000 Black/African/African Americans had the highest rates of intimate partner violence compared to Whites (3.9 per 1,000) and Hispanics (2.3 per 1,000).<sup>7</sup>
- According to the 2013 FBI’s Supplementary Homicide Report, 453 Black females were murdered by males in single victim/single offender homicides. Of black victims who knew their offenders, 56 percent (211 out of 375) were wives, common-law wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends of the offenders.<sup>8</sup>
- The majority of Black females were killed by male intimate partners/acquaintances during the course of an argument—most commonly with a firearm.<sup>9</sup>
- Approximately 4 out of every 10 women of non-Hispanic Black race/ethnicity have experienced rape, physical violence, and /or stalking by an intimate partner.<sup>10</sup>



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# Black/African/African Americans

News articles recently cited the deaths of fifteen unarmed Black women who were killed by police.<sup>11</sup> This shared history of disenfranchisement and police brutality often results in a collective battle against racism for Black/African/African American men and women. This battle can often override the violence that women experience at the hands of their abusive partners.

Culturally and historically, Black/African/African American women have been looked to as the protectors of their family and community. Some women may feel because of their religious beliefs they must impart forgiveness for their abusers' behavior and endure the abuse due to religious obligations under Christian, Muslim and other faith doctrines.

Data and research are extremely limited regarding re-victimization Black/African/African American survivors experience when turning to faith for assistance religious leaders, or the overall community for support and assistance.<sup>12</sup> That which does exist reveals that many have received a less than helpful or desirable response.<sup>13</sup> Despite this fact, faith-based organizations are central to the lives of many Black/African/African American women and their importance cannot be excluded from any effort to end violence against the Black/African/African American women.



# Asian & Pacific Islanders

## Political barriers impact

the many API immigrant and refugee women as arrive in this country alone or with their partners with the hope of creating a better life for themselves and their children. Many flee political repression, severe poverty, domestic violence, unemployment and war. Once they are in the United States, they may experience discrimination, racism, unemployment, isolation and continuous fear of being detained or deported by Department Homeland Security (DHS) officials. This fear of detection is higher for domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking victims that tend to be in constant contact with their abusers or traffickers. API women from Immigrant and refugee communities may also have difficulty obtaining employment in the United States because they lack employment authorization or language skills. If they are able to find work, they may face low wages, sexual harassment, dangerous working conditions, or long hours because they work "under the table" and their immigration status prevents them from seeking the protection available by United States labor laws.

Reports and statistics show:

- In the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence report, between 21%-55% of Asian women reported experiencing intimate physical and/or sexual violence during their lifetime.<sup>14</sup>
- In the 2011 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Study (NISVS), 19.6% of Asian or Pacific Islander women reported experiencing rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>15</sup>
- In the National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS Study), 10.2% of Asian women reported experiencing "minor violence" (defined by the researchers to include pushing, grabbing, or shoving) by an intimate partner during the course of their relationship.<sup>16</sup>

Some complex cultural traditions or culturally based responses may contribute to API women's inability or may hesitate to ask for help or express victimization (even to people inside of a close circle of friends or family).<sup>17</sup> A survivor may be under pressure from within her own community to remain in an abusive marriage for a variety of complex reasons, ranging from cultural norms about the roles of women or the sanctity of marriage, to the abuser's powerful standing within the community. Survivors are often under tremendous pressure to keep family matters private. In some cases, immigrant and refugee women who speak out against their abusive husbands may be blamed for the violence, lose social respect and cause uninvolved family members to be ridiculed.

# Asian & Pacific Islanders

More distinguishing dynamics of domestic violence in API communities include: multiple abusers residing in the home; push factors (“leave the house, give me a divorce,” etc.) from abusive partners occurring more often than “pull” factors (“come back to me, I love you,” etc.); and gender roles, established by cultural and social values, are often “tightly prescribed and more rigid.”<sup>18</sup> Additionally, it is not unlikely for domestic violence in API communities to include domestic violence homicides that range from “honor killings, contract killings, dowry related deaths; killing of family members in the home country; and being driven by one’s husband and in-laws into committing suicide.”<sup>19</sup>

Providers need to be better able to anticipate the specific challenges that can arise in family and criminal court cases due to the intersection of family, criminal, and immigration law. When immigrant and refugee survivors work with culturally competent service providers, they are able to build trusting relationships with them. Research has found that when victim advocates provide information in a culturally competent manner, immigrant women, including undocumented survivors, are proportionately more successful in accessing protection orders, immigration relief, and other relief.<sup>20</sup>





## Inaccessibility to information

and resources in the victim's first language prevent many Hispanics/Latinas from seeking the appropriate services to aid her. Lack of English proficiency may prevent many victims from adequately knowing what kinds of resources are available to help them leave their relationships.<sup>21</sup> A limited knowledge of English can pose a barrier for the victim to understand exactly what the services entail and how to access them. Few materials are created specifically for Latinas or even translated into Spanish, making the language barrier much more real and difficult to overcome. It is always preferred to develop all materials in Spanish by bilingual and bicultural staff that translating English materials.

According to the 2011 National Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 29.7% of Hispanic women had been victims of intimate partner violence and 6.8% had been stalked by an intimate partner since age 18.<sup>22</sup>

- According to the Sexual Assault Among Latinas Study (SALSA) that gathered data from a national sample of Latinas, 15.6% had experienced IPV in their lifetime.<sup>23</sup>
- According to National Partner and Sexual Violence Survey 2010 (NISVS) 23.4% Hispanic/Latino females are victimized by intimate partner violence (IPV) in a lifetime, defined by rape, physical assault or stalking.<sup>24</sup>
- According to the NISVS, there was little difference in Hispanic and non-Hispanic women's reports of IPV (Hispanic: 21.2%, non-Hispanic: 22.1%). However, Hispanic women were more likely than non-Hispanic women to report that they were raped by a current or former intimate partner at some time in their lifetime (Hispanic: 7.9%, non-Hispanic: 5.7%). It must also be noted that Hispanic/Latino subgroup differences do exist.<sup>25</sup>
- 48% of Latinas in one study reported that their partner's violence against them increased since they immigrated to the U.S.<sup>26</sup>
- Hispanic women in general have not been found to differ from non-Hispanic populations in rates of IPV during pregnancy. However, subgroup differences exist. Cuban and Central American partners report lower rates of violence against pregnant partners. The highest rates of violence during pregnancy are reported among Puerto Rican populations.<sup>27</sup>

# Latinx/ Hispanic

Studies also show that Latinx/Hispanics “are more concentrated in low-paying, semi-skilled occupations than the overall workforce.”<sup>28</sup> In fact, Latinas who face domestic violence tend to be more economically disadvantaged<sup>29</sup> and may have barriers to education.<sup>30</sup> Financial insecurity and dependency associated with unstable residency status constrain a victim’s safety strategies.<sup>31</sup> Limited resources often create substantial barriers for women trying to leave the abuse or trying to obtain legal assistance, housing, and childcare.

Another common tactic to gain power and control is constant threats and intimidation. Within the Hispanic community, the threat of deportation is a powerful and intimidating control scheme and is, again, very difficult to overcome. Abusers may make threats like “you will be deported”, “the government will take the children”, or “the children will be given to me”.<sup>32</sup> In addition, undocumented immigrant victims may not disclose the abuse because they feel intimidated by law enforcement service providers or have trouble trusting legal experts due to bad experiences with law enforcement in their home countries.<sup>33</sup>

Providers must be aware and responsive to the structural inequalities that Latina victims experience if we are truly wishing to serve communities effectively. Poverty, unemployment and economic marginalization and racial discrimination contribute to and exacerbate victimization, and influence Latina victims’ responses to their abuse.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, outreach efforts must be linked to bring awareness of legal protections and legal rights for battered immigrants, as well as knowledge of public health and social services available to them.<sup>35</sup> In the development of cultural domestic violence intervention and prevention, the value of family can be a tremendous source of collective strength for the victim/survivor.<sup>36</sup>

# American Indian/Alaskan Natives

## Domestic Violence is not traditional.

While the frequency and extent of battering in Indian Country varies among different tribes, it is believed to be much higher than the current research data from the field.<sup>37</sup>

Domestic violence is not traditional (and is a relatively new phenomenon in Native American culture).<sup>38</sup> The staggering statistics of intergenerational trauma, abuse of both Native women and children by Native men can be traced directly to intergenerational trauma, genocide, and to the introduction of alcohol, Christianity, and the European hierarchical family structure.”<sup>39</sup>

Reports and statistics show:

- According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 51% of American Indian/Alaska Native women experienced physical violence by an intimate partner violence during the lifetime.
- NISVS found that after multiracial non-Hispanics, Native American/Alaskan Indian reported the second highest rates of intimate partner violence.<sup>40</sup>
- According to NISVS, 26.9% of NA/AI women are victimized by IPV in a lifetime, defined by rape, physical assault or stalking.<sup>41</sup>

Additional challenges may arise for those Native American/Alaskan Indian (NA/AI) women residing on a reservation. Finding shelter and resources can be difficult for NA/AI women who have lived on a reservation for their entire life or, because of limited exposure outside of the reservation, may not speak English. In addition, women residing on reservations are more likely to live in poverty, which may restrict their access to telephones, transportation, or childcare.<sup>42</sup> Cultural norms and practices may force additional constraints on an abused NA/AI woman, including fear of accusations of being an “informant” and/or consequences of being sanctioned within tribal or clan groups. Native American spirituality and the belief of the “interconnectedness of all things” may also be used coercively to keep a woman in an abusive relationship.<sup>43</sup>

Historical and societal oppression contributes to many Native and Alaskan Villagers women’s deep mistrust for mainstream services. Additional barriers can include: cultural barriers, mainstream values over traditional values, being discounted or untruthful, racism, being judged, fear of sanctions, and discrimination.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, A lack of cultural competency and knowledge of the impact of colonization often hinder help and service providers from

# American Indian/Alaskan Natives

adequately and appropriately addressing the needs of NA/AI victims. Cultural norms and practices may force additional constraints on an abused NA/AI woman, including fear of accusations of being an “informant” and/or consequences of being sanctioned within tribal or clan groups. Native American spirituality and the belief of the “interconnectedness of all things” may also be used coercively to keep a woman in an abusive relationship.<sup>45</sup> Historical and societal oppression contributes to many Native and Alaskan Villagers women’s deep mistrust for mainstream services. Additional barriers can include: cultural barriers, mainstream values over traditional values, being discounted or untruthful, racism, being judged, fear of sanctions, and discrimination.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, a lack of cultural competency and knowledge of the impact of colonization often hinder help and service providers from adequately and appropriately addressing the needs of NA/AI victims. Providers should be aware that most information taught in schools about Native history and people are wrong. It is also key to remember that a “get over it already” is not helpful when thinking about the impacts of historical trauma. Many treaty violations, funding barriers, and political methods are currently still happening. The historical trauma is not only historical, but is still happening and impacts current and future generations of Native people.

Being an Aspiring Ally, it is important to recognize they may also need healing so their hearts and heads can appreciate differences and seek to find commonalities. Being an Aspiring Ally doesn't mean becoming an “authorized speaker”, savior, or an expert who knows enough to speak on Native issues without including Native people in the conversation. Being a good aspiring ally means keeping Natives at the table to represent themselves and keeping their voices central to any conversation.

# Conclusion

## The impacts...

of domestic violence impedes upon all communities including racial, ethnic, linguistic, economic, faiths, sexualities and genders. There are unique barriers and historical layers of oppression for marginalized populations. These populations include American Indian/Alaskan Villager/First Nations, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American/West Indies/Caribbean Islander, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Disabilities communities, Hispanic/Latino, Immigrant and Refugees, LGBTQ and Middle Eastern. Survivors of color and marginalized/underserved communities share a common thread of a lack of culturally specific services, education of mainstream aspiring allies, prevention education and sometimes-legal protections and implementation. Each program participant, advocate, activist, public policy maker and those in leadership have an opportunity to become educated aspiring allies to others and eliminate the barriers that impede upon the safety of ALL women and their communities.





# Resources

Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Gender-Based Violence  
500 12th Street, Suite 330 San Francisco, CA 94607  
Phone: 415.568.3315 Fax: 415.954.9999  
Email: [info@api-gbv.org](mailto:info@api-gbv.org)  
<http://www.api-gbv.org>

Black Women's Blueprint, Inc.  
PO Box 24713  
Brooklyn, NY 11202  
Phone: 347-553-9102  
Email: [info@blackwomensblueprint.org](mailto:info@blackwomensblueprint.org)  
<http://www.blackwomensblueprint.org>

Casa de Esperanza  
P.O. Box 40115 St. Paul, MN 55104  
Phone: 651. 646. 5553  
Fax: 651-772-1611  
<http://www.casadeesperanza.org>

Institute of Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC)  
290 Peters Hall  
1404 Gortner Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55108-6142  
Phone: 612-624-5357 or 1-877-NIDVAAC  
Fax: 612-624-9201  
Email: [info@idvaac.org](mailto:info@idvaac.org)  
<http://www.dvinstitute.org>

Manavi  
National Organization Addressing Violence in South Asian Communities  
P.O. Box 3103 New Brunswick, NJ 08903  
Phone: (732) 435-1414  
Fax: (732) 435-1411  
E-mail: [mailto:manavi@manavi.org](mailto:mailto:manavi@manavi.org)  
<http://www.manavi.org>

# Resources

## National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (Native American/Alaskan Villager)

515 Lane Deer Ave.

PO Box 99 Lane Deer, MT 59043

Phone: (406)477-3896 or (855)649-7299

<http://www.niwrc.org>

## National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project

P.O. Box 341455

West Bethesda, Maryland 20827

Phone: 202-274-4457

<http://www.niwap.org>

## The New York City Anti-Violence Project (LGBTQ)

240 West 35th Street, Suite 200, New York, NY 10001

Phone: 212.714.1184 | TTY: 212.714.1134 | 24-hour Hotline: 212.714.1141

Email: [webmaster@avp.org](mailto:webmaster@avp.org)

<http://www.avp.org>

## Northwest Network (LGBTQ)

P.O. Box 18436, Seattle, WA 98118

Phone: (206) 568-7777 | TTY message: (206) 517-9670

Fax: (206) 325-2601

Email: <mailto:info@nwnetwork.org>

<http://nwnetwork.org>

## Vera Institute (Disabilities)

1100 First St NE, Suite 950 Washington, DC 20002

Phone: (202) 465-8900

Fax: (202) 408-1972

<http://www.vera.org/contact>

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