



Domestic Violence and the Connection To Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives

KEY TALKING POINTS

Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women in Indian Country

- Violence against Native women is a severe crisis in the U.S., with more than 84% of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) women experiencing violence, and more than half (55%) experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime.¹
- More than half (56%) of AI/AN women have experienced physical violence by their intimate partners.²

Homicide Rates Among AI/AN Women

- In the U.S., the homicide rates of AI/AN women have reached alarming levels, both on Tribal lands and in urban areas. In certain U.S. counties, the murder rates for AI/AN women are more than 10 times the national average, in contrast to other ethnicities and races.³
- In 2019, homicide was the third leading cause of death among AI/AN girls aged 15 to 19 and AI/AN women aged 20 to 24.⁴
- The murder rate of AI/AN women is almost three times that of non-Hispanic White women.⁵

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives: Why Does it Matter?

- The crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR) underscores the urgent necessity to address violence against Indigenous women, girls, and their families, which is often linked to domestic violence (DV) and other serious crimes.
- The MMIWR movement catalyzed a grassroots initiative focused on raising awareness, preventing violence, advocating for accountability, improving data collection, and strengthening responses.

The Overlap: MMIWR, Domestic Violence, and Stalking

- The MMIWR crisis highlights the necessity of addressing its correlation to domestic violence and stalking. Understanding these intersections is crucial for developing effective solutions.
- AI/AN communities face challenges linked to MMIWR and violence, including high rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) and trauma. Proximity to rest stops and “man camps” associated

¹ Rosay, A. B. (2016). Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men: 2010 Findings from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

² Breiding, M., Smith, S., Basile, K., Walters, M., Chen, J., Merrick, M. (2014). Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization. United States, 2011. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 2, 17.

³ Bachman, R., Zaykowski, H., Kallymer, R., Poteyeva, M., & Lanier, C. (2008). Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and the Criminal Justice Response: What is Known. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

⁴ Heron, M. (2021). Deaths: Leading Causes for 2019. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 70(9). NCHS. DOI

⁵ Petrosky, E., Blair, J., Betz, C. J., Fowler, K. A., Jack, S. P., & Lyons, B. H. (2017, July 21). Racial and Ethnic Differences in Homicides of Adult Women and the Role of IPV, 2003–2014. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 741-746.



with infrastructure projects increases these risks. These developments often lead to higher rates of sexual assault and violence in nearby communities, especially those next to Tribal lands.

- Victim blaming and harmful stereotypes about Native communities foster indifference and limited engagement. Stereotypes related to alcoholism, poverty, and the oversexualization of AI/AN women minimize the injustices they face, enabling perpetrators to act with impunity.

Data Challenges and MMIWR⁶

- Jurisdictional complexities, unreported cases, variations in law enforcement response times, and racial and ethnic misclassifications of MMIWR have a significant impact on data accuracy and contribute to inconsistent findings.
- In 2016, the National Crime Information Center reported 5,712 cases of missing AI/AN women and girls. Still, the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) database logged only 116 of those cases.
- Research on homicide and violence among AI/AN women in urban areas is lacking, despite approximately 71% living in cities. The Urban Indian Health Institute notes that no studies examine this violence, highlighting a disparity between reported and actual cases.

Strengthening Responses for MMIWR

- Federal court rulings and laws have significantly impacted how Tribal Nations address violence. The federal government has a trust responsibility to ensure Tribal Nations possess the resources and authority necessary to protect their communities.⁷
- Jurisdictional complexities can create a legal maze, resulting in gaps between Tribal, state, and federal systems. These gaps contribute to under-prosecution, delays, and challenges in law enforcement coordination, particularly in cases involving non-Native perpetrators.⁸
- Challenges in law enforcement's approach to MMIWR include limited funding for essential resources, such as equipment, technology, and staffing, which reduces overall operational effectiveness.

Savanna's Act⁹

- Savanna's Act became law on October 10, 2020, named after 22-year-old Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind, a member of the Spirit Lake Nation of North Dakota, who was murdered while she was eight months pregnant in August 2017.
- Savanna's Act aims to enhance responses to MMIWR by requiring the U.S. Department of Justice to train law enforcement in recording Tribal enrollment data, thereby creating a public education strategy for the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs).

⁶ Urban Indian Health Institute. (2018). MMIWR: A snapshot of data from 71 urban cities in the United States.

⁷ Reminder, the unique relationship between the U.S. government and Tribal Nations is founded on the U.S. Constitution, treaties, and statutes that recognize their sovereign status.

⁸ National Congress of American Indians, VAWA 2013's SDVCJ Five-Year Report, 20 March 2018

⁹ Savanna's Act: Factsheet. (2022, April 27). *National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, Inc.*



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- The act also emphasized outreach to Tribal Nations and encouraged them to submit information through NamUs. It establishes guidelines for region-specific responses to these cases and provides training and technical support to Tribal Nations and law enforcement agencies.
- Mandated compilation of statistics on MMIWR to promote accountability and action.

Not Invisible Act (Public Law 116-166)¹⁰

- The Not Invisible Act of 2019, enacted on October 10, 2020, complements the Savanna's Act by creating a joint commission to address violent crimes against AI/AN people on Tribal lands.
- The Act requires the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) to designate an official within the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to lead prevention efforts, grants, and programs related to MMIWR, as well as other violent crimes.
- The joint commission, comprised of Tribal leaders, law enforcement officials, federal partners, service providers, and survivors, prepared a report to present key recommendations to the DOI and the DOJ to combat violence against AI/AN women and people.
- In November 2023, the Commission released its final recommendations, *Not One More: The Not Invisible Act Commission Final Report*, which included recommendations to strengthen coordination, prevention, and responses to violence affecting AI/AN people.

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¹⁰ Not Invisible Act: Factsheet. (2022, April 27). *National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, Inc.*