



Intimate Partner Violence and Elder Abuse

Among Older Native Americans during COVID-19

BACKGROUND ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV) AMONG NATIVE AMERICAN ADULTS

In comparison to other races/ethnicities, American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) have higher rates of interpersonal violence. Child abuse, violence against women, and elder abuse are important contributors to the increased risk of morbidity and mortality among AI/AN.¹

THERE ARE VERY FEW STUDIES ON ELDER ABUSE IN INDIAN COUNTRY. FINDINGS ON ABUSE FROM TWO STUDIES INDICATE THAT ELDER ABUSE DOES HAPPEN IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES.

- 9% of men reported experiencing physical violence, intimate partner violence at 1%, emotional abuse at 12% in the past year.
- 5% of women reported physical violence in the past year, 3% reported intimate partner violence, and 18% reported emotional abuse.²
- Abuse tended to be associated with sudden dependency, having mental problems, family crises due to having abrupt caregiving responsibilities for which they were unprepared, and personal problems of primary caregivers.³

OVERVIEW OF STAY-AT-HOME ORDERS

- Stay-at-home orders limit the circumstances under which people can leave their houses.
- Under a stay-at-home order, all non-essential workers must stay home.
- People can leave their homes only for essential needs like grocery stores, medicine, or for individual outdoor exercise.
- Only businesses that have been deemed essential can continue to operate.⁴

STAY-AT-HOME ORDERS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

- Many tribal communities have strict stay-at-home orders to slow the spread of the disease.
- Tribal elders, revered for their knowledge and cultural guidance, are the biggest concern during COVID-19.
- Tribal communities do not want to lose them, as older adults are disproportionately effected by the disease with health complications and death.⁵

SLOWING THE SPREAD

Many of the recommendations for preventing the spread of COVID-19 are difficult for Indigenous communities, especially those living on reservations or in rural areas because there are barriers to resources. Many tribal members do not have:

- Enough money to buy two weeks' worth of groceries
- Access to a local grocery store
- Internet access to work from home, or space to have an at home office
- Ability to washing hands with soap and water, because there may not be any running water.

OTHER CHALLENGES FOR TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

- Housing on reservations is often overcrowded with intergenerational families and/or extended families living together.
- Many Indigenous communities face food insecurities, as they are in food deserts.
- Indigenous populations have an average poverty rate of 25.4%, and for some it is way higher.
- Native Americans have increased health risk disparities that make them more susceptible to severe illness from COVID-19.
- Heart disease, cancer, unintentional injuries, and diabetes are leading causes of death among AI/AN and lead to a life expectancy that is 5.5 years less than that for the US all-races population.
- Native people die from diabetes at a rate that is 189% higher than other Americans.
- In addition, it is estimated that more than 28% of AI/AN under the age of 65 do not have health insurance.⁴

INCREASED RISK FOR ELDER ABUSE DURING COVID-19

- Many non-professional caregivers (spouses, adult children, other relatives, and friends) find taking care of an elder to be satisfying and enriching; however, the responsibilities and demands of caregiving, especially when stay at home orders are in place, services are limited, and stress of the situation increases.
- Elder abuse includes physical, emotional, spiritual, or sexual harm inflicted upon an older adult, their financial exploitation, or neglect of their welfare by people who are directly responsible for their care.
- Domestic elder abuse generally refers to the mistreatment that is committed by someone with whom the elder has a special relationship. For example spouse, sibling, child, friend, or caregiver.
- 90% of elder abuse is committed by a family member.⁷

RISK-FACTORS FOR ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT:

- Social isolation
- Frailty, functional disability, or cognitive impairment
- Pathology of the abuser
- Caregiver stress or anger
- History of violence in the family
- Dependence of the older adults on the abuser
- Dependence of the abuser on the older adult⁶

CAREGIVERS SELF-CHECK

Caregiver self-care is the best way to ensure proper care for elders. It is essential to implement self-care measures when feeling stressed or burnt out.

- Ask for support.
- Develop individual coping skills: deep breathing, self-talk etc.
- Take breaks throughout the day.
- Use journaling to document stress, recognize patterns, and develop strategies to reduce stress.
- Find outside sources for support, such as the state's human service center, crisis centers, counselors, or clergy.⁷

REPORTING ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT

If you suspect elder abuse or neglect, report it to your state or tribal APS office or local police department. If you need help locating a number to call to report elder abuse please visit: <https://www.nijii.org/hotlines>.

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The NIEJI project has been retired, but they have granted NIJII permission to share materials.

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