

# Some Barriers for Native American



## Victims Facing Domestic Violence

### The historical Context of Domestic Violence:

Domestic violence is a relatively new act of abuse in Native American culture. Many tribes indicate that when domestic violence did occur, the community responded. The batterer would be banished or excluded, or retaliation was left to the male relatives of the victim.

### Societal Oppression

Several factors have accompanied the increase in domestic violence in Native American communities. These include the removal of tribes from their ancestral lands, suppressed religious and cultural practices, the introduction of alcohol, the introduction of boarding schools, and a disruption of traditional living patterns. All these factors can be compounded by the poverty of reservation life, and a 90% reduction of the Native American population from the time of European contact to the establishment of reservations.


### The Family

Indian families are very extended including: grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and adopted relatives. They are also very close knit. If domestic violence happens, the family is supposed to take care of it. If a victim goes outside of the family for help, her/his family may exclude them.

### The Reservation


The reservation can be very remote for some families. Often times, telephones, running water, transportation, or child care can be considered a luxury versus a necessity. Also a victim may have lived on the reservation most of their life and may not be very fluent in English. It can be too stressful for a victim to leave familiar surroundings and a support system for a shelter.

### Confidentiality




This is a big issue for small communities. Sanctions within tribal or clan groups or other family subgroups are often more severe in relation to someone who reports the abuse rather than an abuser. Due to various group and subgroup relationships, outside intervention is often seen as undesirable. An example of this would be the abuser having relatives on the tribal council, police force, or BIA office. It can be intimidating to go to the police if the batterer's relatives are on the force. The police may side with the abuser because he/she is a cousin, auntie, brother, sister, or uncle. Other relatives may put pressure on the responding police officers for throwing a family member in jail. Paperwork for land sales or lease money might be mysteriously "lost" at the BIA office by someone working in higher level administration jobs because they are related to the abuser.

### Spirituality



Native American spirituality can be a source of profound support, comfort, and healing for many battered victims. The connection to Mother Earth and to each other is frequently used by the batterer and other family members as a reason for the victim to remain in a violent relationship.

### Trust



Some Native Americans can have a high level of mistrust for white agencies and helpers. This lack of trust is not difficult to understand given the historically oppressive way that white society has treated Native Americans in the past. This mistrust may keep the battered victim from reaching out for help. In many cases, when battered Native American victims do reach out, they may be faced with helpers who have a lack of sensitivity towards their culture and lifestyle.



Despite the barriers that are represented here, there is: Hope For The Victim