

## COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Domestic Violence (DV) occurs among all race/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, emotional abuse, isolation of the victim, economic abuse, intimidation, coercion, and threats.<sup>1</sup>

For women of color, high rates of poverty, poor education, limited job resources, language barriers, and fear of deportation increase their difficulty finding help and support services.<sup>2</sup>

Although there are unique circumstances 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>3</sup> Some commonalities among women of color are:

- A strong personal identification based on familial structure/ hierarchy, patriarchal elements, and cultural identity (e.g., role as wife, mother, and homemaker)
- Religious beliefs that reinforce the woman's victimization and legitimizes the abuser's behavior
- Fear of isolation and alienation
- A strong loyalty to both immediate and extended family, as well as loyalty to race and culture (the "yoke of silence")
- Guarded trust and reluctance to discuss "private matters"
- Fear of rejection from family, friends, congregation, and community
- Individual needs often defer to family unity and strength
- Distrust of law enforcement (fear of subjecting themselves and loved ones to a criminal and civil justice system they see as sexist, and/or racially and culturally biased)
- Skepticism and distrust that shelter and intervention services are not culturally or linguistically competent
- For immigrant and undocumented women, in particular, a fear or threat of deportation or separation from children

1 American Bar Association, "Know Your Rights: Domestic Violence." 2001

2 Women's Institute for Leadership Development for Human Rights, "The Treatment of Women of Color Under U.S. Law: Violence." Available at: <http://www.wildforhumanrights.org/publications/treatmentwomen/p4.html>

3 Administration for Children and Families (ACF). "Domestic Violence." 2001



**Women of Color Network**  
National Advocacy Through Action  
<http://womenofcolornetwork.org>

*A project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence*

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*The following sections highlight specific issues and distinguishing dynamics that confront different women of color*

## African American Women

- An estimated 29.1 % of African American females are victimized by intimate partner violence in their lifetime (rape, physical assault or stalking).<sup>4</sup>
- African American females experience intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white females, and about 2.5 times the rate of women of other races.<sup>5</sup> However, they are less likely than white women to use social services, battered women's programs, or go to the hospital because of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup>
- According to the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), African American women experience higher rates of intimate partner homicide when compared to their White counterparts.<sup>7</sup>
- Statistics show that African American women typically comprise about 70 % of black congregations. Religious convictions and a fear of shame or rejection from the church may contribute to their remaining in an abusive relationships.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of historical and present day racism, African American women may be less likely to report her abuser or seek help because of

discrimination, African American men's vulnerability to police brutality, and negative stereotyping.<sup>9</sup>

Non-arrests of suspected abusers of African American women and a fear that police will exercise an abuse of power have contributed to African American women's reluctance to involve law enforcement.

Stereotypes amplify the complexities African American women encounter when trying to seek help services. Myths that African American women are "domineering figures that require control" or that African American women are "exceptionally strong under stress and are resilient" increase their vulnerability and discourage some from speaking out about abuse.<sup>10</sup>

Culturally and historically, 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 doctrine. This form of "religious maternalism or caretaking toward their spouse" casts them as their husband's protectors and makes it more difficult for women to report their abuse or leave the abuser.<sup>11</sup>

4 USDOJ, OJP, "Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey" 2000

5 Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2001

6 Feminist Majority Foundation's Choices Campus Campaign, "Women of Color and Reproductive Justice: African American Women." Available at: <http://www.feministcampus.org/fmla/printable+materials/WomenofColor/AfricanAmericanWomen.pdf>

7 Lee, R.K., Thompson, V.L., & Mechanic, M.B. (2002) Intimate partner violence and women of color: A call for innovations. *American Journal of Public Health*, 92, 530-534.

8 White, E.C., *Chain Chain Change: For Black Women Dealing with Physical and Emotional Abuse* (Seattle, WA: The Seal Press, 1985) 63-65.

9 Nash, Shondrah Tarrezz (2005). Through Black Eyes: African American Women's Construction of Their Experiences With Intimate Male Partner Violence. *Violence Against Women*, 11, 1427. Sage Publications

10 Bell, C.C., & Mattis, J. (2000) The Importance of cultural competence in ministering to African American victims of domestic violence. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 66, 266-271; Washington, P.A. (2001) Disclosure patterns of Black female sexual assault survivors. *Violence Against Women*, 7, 1254-1283.

11 Id.

## Asian & Pacific Islander Women

- In an Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence survey, 41-60% of API respondents reported experiencing DV (physical and/or sexual) during their lifetimes.<sup>12</sup>
- Project AWARE's (Asian Women Advocating Respect and Empowerment) 2000-2001 survey of 178 API women found that 81.1% reported experiencing at least one form of intimate partner violence in the past year.<sup>13</sup>
- A survey of immigrant Korean women found that 60% had been battered by their husbands.<sup>14</sup>
- In a study conducted by the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence in Boston – using self-administered questionnaires at ethnic fairs – 44-47% of Cambodians interviewed said they knew of a woman who experienced domestic violence<sup>15</sup>
- In a random telephone survey of 262 Chinese men and women in Los Angeles County: 18.1% of respondents reported experiencing “minor physical violence” by a spouse or intimate partner within their lifetime, and 8% of respondents reported “severe physical violence” experienced during their lifetime.<sup>16</sup>
- In a survey conducted by the Immigrant Women's Task Force of the Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services, 20% of 54 undocumented Filipina women living in the San Francisco Bay Area reported having experienced some form of domestic violence, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, either in their country of origin or in the U.S.<sup>17</sup>
- In a study of 30 Vietnamese women recruited from a civic association that serves Vietnamese women in Boston, 47% reported intimate physical violence sometime in their lifetime and 30% reported intimate physical violence in the past year.<sup>18</sup>

In API communities, emotional control, respect for authority, self-blame, perseverance, and the acceptance of suffering are considered highly valued virtues and traits. However, those culturally based responses contribute to API women's unwillingness or hesitance to express their victimization (even to people inside of a close circle of friends or family).<sup>19</sup>

Distinguishing dynamics of domestic violence in API communities include: multiple abusers residing in the home; push factors (“leave the

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12 Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, *Fact Sheet: Domestic Violence in Asian Communities*. Available at: [http://www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute/PDF/Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute/PDF/Fact_Sheet.pdf)

13 Available at: <http://www.napawf.org/page.php?view=dvmonth>

14 Tjaden, Patricia and Nancy Thoennes. 2000. *Extent, Nature and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. The National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>

15 Asian Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence (2002). Available at: [www.apiahf.org](http://www.apiahf.org)

16 Id.

17 Id.

18 Id.

19 Wilson, K.J. *When Violence Begins At Home: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding and Ending Domestic Abuse* (126). 2005

## Asian & Pacific Islander Women (continued)

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>20</sup>

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>21</sup>

Issues may arise regarding food, undressing in front of others, or the informal habits women often display in exclusively female surroundings that can make some API women feel uncomfortable and alienated in shelters and housing programs.<sup>22</sup> As a result, API women may be hesitant to escape from their violent situation if they have to relocate or find shelter.

## Hispanic/Latino Women

- According to the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), 23.4% Hispanic/Latino females are victimized by intimate partner violence (IPV) in a lifetime, defined by rape, physical assault or stalking.<sup>23</sup>
- According to the NVAWS, 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>24</sup>

- 48% of Latinas in one study reported that their partner’s violence against them had increased since they immigrated to the U.S.<sup>25</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>26</sup>

20 Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, “Strengthening Advocacy, Changing Communities: Gender & Culture in Violence against API Women.” 2006

21 Id.

22 Id. at 19

23 USDOJ, OJP, “Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey.” 2000

24 Id.

25 Dutton, Mary; Leslye Orloff, and Giselle Aguilar Hass. 2000, *Characteristics of Help-Seeking Behaviors, Resources, and Services Needs of Battered Immigrant Latinas: Legal and Policy Implications*. Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy. 7(2)

26 Torres, S., Campbell, J., Campbell, D., Ryan, J., King, C., Price, P., Stallings, R., Fuchs, S., & Laude, M., (2000). Abuse during and before pregnancy prevalence and cultural correlates. *Violence and Victims*, 15, 303-321.

## Hispanic/Latino Women (continued)

Culture has a profound and significant influence in the decisions and actions abused Hispanic/Latinas have to consider.

“In the Latino culture women are often designated to the roles of wife and mother. It is socially unacceptable to be divorced, to marry several times, or to remain single and have children out of wedlock. For these reasons, it may take some time for battered women to consider leaving their partners.”<sup>27</sup>

Hispanic/Latinas’ religious beliefs may also contribute to their inability to escape domestic violence.

“Latinas often accept their situations with resignation, believing their family life is the way God wants them to live. Additionally, a lack of information about birth control and limited access to it, combined with other aspects of Catholic doctrine, often result in Latinas having larger families, which can make it difficult to move or to find affordable child care.”<sup>28</sup>

In Latin culture, the term “Machismo” refers to excessive masculinity and most machistas believe in conservative gender role ideas (e.g., opposing a woman’s right to work, participate in sports, or pursue other traditionally male roles in society).<sup>29</sup> The female equivalent is “Marianismo”, a term derived from Catholic beliefs of the Virgin Mary as both a virgin and a madonna, as well as the personification of the ideal woman.<sup>30</sup>

“This ideal woman is emotional, kind, instinctive, whimsical, docile, compliant, vulnerable, and unassertive. She has a higher status in the community if she has children and is a caring mother. She is also pious and observant of religious laws.”<sup>31</sup>

Inaccessibility to information and resources in the victim’s native language prevent many Hispanic/Latinas from seeking the appropriate services to aid her.

“In Mexico, a law called ‘abandono de hogar’ punishes women who leave their homes, even to flee violence. Women convicted of ‘abandoning the home’ often lost custody of their children. Some Mexican women who immigrate to the U.S. erroneously believe that this law applies here.”<sup>32</sup>

Studies also show that Hispanic/Latinas “are more concentrated in low-paying, semiskilled occupations than the overall workforce.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, limited financial resources create substantial barriers for women trying to leave the abuse or trying to obtain legal assistance, housing, and child care.

27 Wilson, K.J. *When Violence Begins At Home: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding and Ending Domestic Abuse* (124). 2005

28 Id.

29 Wikipedia: Machismo. Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machismo>

30 Wikipedia: Marianismo. Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marianismo>

31 Id.

32 *Mujers Latinas En Accion: Latinas and Domestic Violence*. Available at: <http://www.mujerslatinassenaccion.org/index.html>

33 Wilson, K.J. *When Violence Begins At Home: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding and Ending Domestic Abuse* (125). 2005

# Native American/Alaskan Indian Women

While the frequency and extent of battering in Indian Country varies among different tribes, it is believed to be much higher than the national norm.<sup>34</sup>

“... domestic violence is a relatively new phenomenon in Native American culture.<sup>35</sup> Abuse of both Native American women and children by Native American men can be traced to the introduction of alcohol, Christianity, and the European hierarchical family structure.”<sup>36</sup>

- The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) found that Native American/Alaskan Indian women and men report higher rates of intimate partner violence than do women and men from other minority backgrounds.<sup>37</sup>
- According to NVAWS, 37.5% of NA/AI women are victimized by IPV in a lifetime, defined by rape, physical assault, or stalking.<sup>38</sup>

Additional challenges may arise for those Native American/Alaskan Indian 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 child care.<sup>39</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>40</sup>

Historical and societal oppression contributes to many NA/AI women’s deep mistrust for white agencies and service providers.<sup>41</sup> 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.

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34 USDOJ. Bureau of Justice Statistics. 1999

35 Id. at 33 (pg. 129)

36 Id.

37 CDC “*Highlights in Minority Health.*” 2004

38 USDOJ, OJP, “*Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey.*” 2006

39 Wilson, K.J. *When Violence Begins At Home: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding and Ending Domestic Abuse* (130). 2005

40 Id.

41 Id. (pg. 131)

# Resources

## **ALIANZA: National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence**

P.O. Box 672  
Triborough Station  
New York, NY 10035  
Phone: (800) 342-9908  
Fax: (800) 216-2404  
[www.dvalianza.org](http://www.dvalianza.org)

## **Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence**

450 Sutter Street, Suite 600  
San Francisco, CA 94108  
Phone: (415) 954-9988 ext. 315  
Fax: (415) 954-9999  
<http://www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute>

## **Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community**

290 Peters Hall  
1404 Gortner Ave  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
Phone: (612) 624-5357  
Fax: (612) 624-9201  
[www.dvinstitute.org/](http://www.dvinstitute.org/)

## **Sacred Circle**

722 Saint Joseph Street  
Rapid City, SD 57701  
Phone: (605) 341-2050  
Fax: (605) 341-2472  
[www.sacred-circle.com](http://www.sacred-circle.com)

## **The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute**

2740 Greenbriar Parkway, Suite 256  
Atlanta, GA 30331  
Phone: (770) 909-0715  
Fax: (770) 907-4069  
[www.bcdvi.org](http://www.bcdvi.org)

## **Faith Trust Institute**

2400 N. 45<sup>th</sup> Street #10  
Seattle, WA 98103  
Phone: (206) 634-1903  
Fax: (206) 634-0115  
[www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)

## **A Call to Men**

1003 Route 45  
Pomona, NY 10970  
Phone: (845) 354-2556  
Fax: (845) 354-2557  
[www.acalltomen.com](http://www.acalltomen.com)

## **National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women**

1522 K Street, NW, Suite 550  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: (202) 326-0044  
Fax: (202) 326-0040  
[www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)

The Women of Color Network (WOCN) Facts & Stats Collection is intended to present a series of data relevant to communities of color in a easy-to-read, concise document. The information and statistics published are not meant to be exhaustive. Statistical data may change and are not fully representative of all communities of color. Therefore, WOCN strongly encourages individuals to conduct additional research and/or contact WOCN and the resources above for further information.

**WOCN's mission is to provide and enhance leadership capacity and resources that promote activities of Women of Color advocates and activists within the United States and territories to address the elimination of violence against women and families.**

**For technical assistance, training or resources on domestic violence and communities of color contact Women of Color Network office at 800-537-2238 or [wocn@pcadv.org](mailto:wocn@pcadv.org).**