SEXUAL VIOLENCE

WOMEN OF COLOR NETWORK®

FACTS & STATS COLLECTION

COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Sexual Violence is divided into *three* categories[1]:

1) Use of physical force to compel a person to engage in a sexual act against her or his will, whether or not the act is completed.
2) An attempted or completed sex act involving a person who is unable to understand the nature or condition of the act, to decline participation, or to communicate unwillingness to engage in the sexual act, e.g., because of illness, disability, or the influence of alcohol or other drugs, or due to intimidation or pressure.
3) Abusive sexual contact, e.g., the intentional touching directly, or through the clothing of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks of any person against her or his will, or of any person who is unable to understand the nature or condition of the act, to decline participation, or to communicate unwillingness to be touched.

Sexual violence is not limited to just rape, molestation, or sexual harassment. The nature, extent and type of sexual violence against women varies and can include cyber assaults and stalking, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), marital rape, and sex trafficking.

Prevailing sexist and racist attitudes make women of color particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and access to support services difficult. Women of color may also encounter a criminal justice system that has historically exercised disparate treatment between "European American perpetrators and perpetrators of color or between European American victims and victims of color."[2]

Victims of sexual violence respond differently to their own experiences. Responses to sexual victimization exist on a spectrum and can range from denial, shame, substance abuse, anger, and forgiveness. For a woman of color, often her response is both an individual and cultural one. A woman of color may have to confront both her experience, and also other issues with respect to protecting her family (honor) or community, mistreatment by law enforcement, and conforming to cultural values and norms.

Additional issues she may encounter include:

- Difficulty discussing her victimization due to the highly personal nature of sexual violence
- Religious doctrine that may increase her feelings of alienation and shame
- Confusion about whether forced sex during marriage (marital rape) constitutes an act of sexual violence
- Myths about sexual violence and general discomfort reflected in overall society
- Trying to access support and help services that are not culturally and linguistically competent

1 CDC, Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance. 2002
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

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

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

African American Women

- For every African American/Black woman that reports her rape, at least 15 African American/Black women do not report theirs.[3]
- Approximately 40% of Black women report coercive contact of a sexual nature by age 18.[4]
- The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) found that 18.8% of African American women reported rape in their lifetime.[5]

Stereotypes regarding African American women's sexuality, including terms like "Black jezebel," "promiscuous," and "exotic," perpetuate the notion that African American women are willing participants in their own victimization. However, these myths only serve to demean, obstruct appropriate legal remedies, and minimize the seriousness of sexual violence perpetrated against African American women.

Because of the disproportionate number of African American women incarcerated, there is an increased possibility she is or will be a victim of sexual violence in the form of inmate rape, sexual abuse, sexual extortion, and groping during body searches.[6]

> "An African American woman is eight times more likely than a European American woman is to be imprisoned."[7] In general, African American women make up nearly half of the nation's female prison population, with most serving sentences for nonviolent drug or property related offenses.[8]

According to the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2004, "allegations of staff sexual misconduct were made in all but one state prison and in 41% of local and private jails and prisons."[9] However, fear of retaliation, the lack of safe guards and formal procedures, and the inability to seek redress prevent many women from seeking help.

Asian & Pacific Islander Women

In Asian & Pacific Islander (API) communities, women may be subjected to sexual violence as a result of human trafficking, labor and sexual exploitation, forced marriages, and virginity examinations. API women who are forced into abusive relationships and dangerous work conditions are often unable to find protection and support because of a lack of culturally and linguistically competent programs and services.

- The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) found that 6.8% of Asian/Pacific Islander women reported rape in their lifetime.[10]
- API women tend to report lower rates of rape and other forms of sexual violence than do women and men from other minority backgrounds.[11] This may be accounted for because traditional Asian values may discourage them from disclosing such victimization, even in confidential settings.[12]

Similar to other women of color, API women are subjected to derogatory and demeaning stereotypes. Myths that API women are "submissive", "elusive", and/or "sexually available" make API women vulnerable to pervasive sexual harassment in the workplace, religious institutions, in school, and by law enforcement.

3 Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Hart and Rennison. 2003. U.S. Department of Justice
4 National Black Women's Health Project
5 USDOJ, OJP, "*Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey.*" 2006
6 Amnesty International USA. *Women's Human Rights: Women in Prison*. Available at: http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/womeninprison.html
7 Id.
8 Id.
9 Id.
10 USDOJ, OJP, "*Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey.*" 2006
11 CDC, "*Highlights in Minority Health.*" 2004
12 Id. at 10

Hispanic/Latino Women

- The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) found that there was no significant difference between sexual assault of Hispanic women and non-Hispanic women (Hispanic: 21.2%, non-Hispanic: 22.1%). However, Hispanic women were more likely than non-Hispanic women to report that a current or former intimate partner raped them at some time in their lifetime.[13]
- According to a U.S. study of violence between intimate partners, Latinas report rape at a 2.2% higher level than white women.[14]
- Approximately 7.9% of Latinas will be raped by a spouse, boyfriend or ex-boyfriend during their lifetime.[15]
- The NVAWS found that 11.9% of Hispanic white women reported rape in their lifetime.[16]
- Married Hispanics/Latinas are less likely than other women to immediately define their experiences of forced sex as rape and terminate their relationships; some view sex as a marital obligation.[17]

Myths and stereotypes that all Hispanics/Latinas speak the same language or are in the U.S. illegally, preclude victim service providers and law enforcement from providing appropriate assistance, as well as deter victims from reporting their abuse or seeking help.

Similar to African American women, Hispanic/Latinas have higher rates of incarceration than European American women.[18]

> "Latinas are incarcerated nearly four times more than European American women."[19]

Therefore, incarceration for Hispanic/Latinas increases the likelihood that she is or will be a victim of sexual violence and decreases her chances she'll seek help and legal recourse.

Additionally, "in many Hispanic/Latino cultures a woman or girl who loses her virginity to rape, incest, or molestation is seen as a 'promiscuous' woman".[20] As a result, self-blame and fear of the stigma associated with sexual violence can be a strong deterrence for women and girls to seek help.

Native American/Alaskan Indian Women

"Sexual assault in Indian Country must be understood within the context of the prevalence of violence and in conjunction with the effects of historical oppression and complicated jurisdictional issues."[21]

- U.S. Department of Justice estimates that 1 of 3 Native American/Alaskan Indian (NA/AI) women will be raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime, making the average annual rate of rape and sexual assault among American Indians 3.5 times higher than for all other races.[22]
- The National Violence Against Women Survey found that 34.1% of NA/AI women report rape in their lifetime.[23]
- 90% of American Indian women in chemical dependency treatment are victims of rape and childhood sexual abuse.[24]
- About 9 in 10 American Indian victims of rape or sexual assault were estimated to have had assailants who were white or black.[25]

(continued on page 4)

13 USDOJ, OJP, "*Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey*." 2000
14 Id.
15 Id.
16 Id.
17 Bergen, R. K. 1996. *Wife Rape*.
18 Amnesty International USA. *Women's Human Rights: Women in Prison* Available at: http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/womeninprison.html
19 Id.
20 Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, *Sexual Violence Awareness Fact Sheet: Hispanics/Latinos*. Available at: http://vsdvalliance.org/secPublications/svfshl.pdf
21 National Sexual Violence Resource Center. *Sexual Assault in Indian Country: Confronting Sexual Violence*. 2000
22 Greenfeld, Lawrence A. & Smith, Steven K. American Indians and Crime, BJS, Office of Justice, DOJ, 1999 NCJ173386.
23 USDOJ, OJP, "*Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey*." 2006
24 Henry. *Tribal Responses to Violence Against Women*. 1998. Presentation to Federal Bar Association Conference, Indian Law Section.
25 Greenfeld, L. and Smith, S., American Indians and Crime. 1997. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Washington, D.C.

Native American/Alaskan Indian Women (continued)

- 92% of American Indian girls who have had sexual intercourse reported having been forced against their will to have sex.[26]
- 44% of Indian Health Service emergency rooms reported not having an accessible protocol, or trained personnel in place for sexual assault.[27]

A Native American/Alaskan Indian woman may have deep-rooted distrust of white agencies and help providers that stems from a history of social and personal oppression, making it more difficult for her to report her crime or seek help.[28]

The fear of being ostracized by her family and tribe, along with complicated jurisdictional issues, further obscure NA/AI women from reporting their victimization. Although the U.S. Department of Justice has general jurisdiction to prosecute felony crimes by or against Indians, such crimes are rarely prosecuted.[29] Moreover, Indian nations are limited in their capacity to exercise sovereign authority to prosecute and mandate appropriate sentences for sexual violent crimes against NA/AI women.[30] The lack of jurisdictional protections for NA/AI women increases their vulnerability to sexual victimization (first time and repeated).

In addition, within Indian Country, a lack of awareness and resources results in NA/AI tribes failing to adequately address sexual violence or make perpetrators fully accountable.[31]

26 National Congress of American Indians Resolution #TUL-05-101. Available at: http://www.ncai.org/ncai/data/resolution/annual2005/TUL-05-101.pdf
27 Id.
28 Id. at 21 (pg. 4)
29 National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women, *Violence Against Women Act 2005: Title IX-Tribal Programs*. Available at: http://www.vawa2005.org/title9.pdf
30 Id.
31 National Sexual Violence Resource Center. *Sexual Assault in Indian Country: Confronting Sexual Violence*. 2000

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 below for further information.

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

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
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/

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

Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA)
P.O. Box 625
Canton, CT 06019
Phone: (860) 693-2031
Fax: (860) 693-2031 (please call first)
www.sisterslead.org

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence
P.O. Box 23921
Oakland, CA 94623
Phone: (484) 932-3166
www.incite-national.org

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

Faith Trust Institute
2400 N. 45th Street #10
Seattle, WA 98103
Phone: (206) 634-1903
Fax: (206) 634-0115
www.faithtrustinstitute.org

A Call to Men
1003 Route 45
Pomona, NY 10970
Phone: (845) 354-2556
Fax: (845) 354-2557
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

For technical assistance, training or resources on sexual violence and communities of color contact Women of Color Network office at 800-537-2238 or wocn@pcadv.org.