The Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCADSV) unites Missourians with a shared value that rape and abuse must end, and advances this through education, alliance, research and public policy.
Rape and Abuse Against Native American/Indigenous People in Missouri

Native and Indigenous communities experience high rates of rape and abuse. Violence against Native and Indigenous women has gained increasing attention and is a priority for many domestic and sexual violence organizations within the larger movement. The work to end rape and abuse in Missouri is allied with this larger movement in other states, nationally and internationally. A look into historical and intergenerational trauma sheds light on reasons why many Native and Indigenous survivors are not engaging in services at local programs. This overview of violence against Native and Indigenous survivors in Missouri provides context to support them through local domestic and sexual violence services.

The legacy of colonization, violence and collective trauma experienced by Native and Indigenous people in Missouri persists today. Although we cannot change the past, we can increase our awareness of history, show compassion and respect for those who have experienced injustice, and work toward a future where safety and equality prevail. Familiarity with the dynamics of violence against Native and Indigenous survivors and culturally specific resources increases domestic and sexual violence service providers’ capacity to provide culturally relevant and inclusive services. Expanding domestic and sexual violence services to meet the needs of all communities is essential to the mission of ending rape and abuse in Missouri. This publication provides historical context toward providing culturally specific and relevant services to Native survivors, and includes resources available in Missouri and throughout the nation.

USE OF LANGUAGE

Many terms are used to describe the people of America before European colonization. Some terms can be used interchangeably, and some cannot. “Native American” refers to Indigenous people throughout North and South America, especially the United States. “American Indian” refers to Native Americans but not Native Alaskans. “Tribal” refers to members of a specific tribe. “First Nation” generally refers to Native and Indigenous people in Canada. “Indigenous” refers to tribal and non-tribal people from anywhere in the world who are the original inhabitants of that specific place. It is an inclusive term that recalls a shared experience of all Indigenous people.
Native people use different terms based on their age, where they are from, their values and cultural background. In general, most prefer to be identified by their specific tribe or Native nation.

CULTURE

Native and Indigenous people are not a homogenous group. There are nearly 600 tribes in the United States, each with its own culture and traditions. Although it is important to recognize their differences, they sometimes share commonalities with each other. These include:

- A spiritually based worldview
- Members of a community are relatives, whether related by blood or not
- Elders are respected
- Matriarchal social structure
- Indigenous medicines and music are used for healing
- Ceremonies and community gatherings are important
- Colonization and forced assimilation have caused ongoing trauma and social inequity

TWO SPIRIT

The term “two spirit” describes a type of gender identity specific to Native American, Indigenous and First Nation people. It refers to individuals who have the spirit of both a man and a woman, or who are both masculine and feminine—to varying degrees, they embody both genders. Two spirit is often associated with gay, lesbian or bisexual identities, but it is not a sexual orientation. Two spirit people are viewed as having been blessed with two genders and are treated with respect in Native cultures. While the term “two spirit” is relatively modern, the tradition of gender fluidity in Native and Indigenous cultures has always existed. Two Spirit Societies are organizations of two spirit people whose mission is to spread awareness and celebrate two spirit issues, traditions and history.

PREVALENCE

Domestic and sexual violence is pervasive in the United States and is widespread throughout many Native and Indigenous communities as well. A study using combined data from The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey and The National Crime Victimization Survey found that American Indian and Alaska Native women are the most battered, raped, stalked and murdered demographic group in the country. More than four of five (83.4 percent) Native people have experienced some form of physical violence. More than half (55.5 percent) have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner, and 66.4 percent have experienced psychological
aggression by an intimate partner; 56.1 percent have experienced sexual violence, and 48.4 percent have experienced stalking. This study is not alone in its findings; several other studies have arrived at similar conclusions. High rates of violence have been a call to action for many advocacy groups and public policymakers who are moving forward with efforts to address violence against Native and Indigenous people.

American Indian and Native Alaskan people represent almost 3 percent of the U.S. population and 0.6 percent of the population in Missouri. The majority of these 36,558 people live in southern and western regions of the state. In some parts of southwest Missouri, Native Americans make up more than 3 percent of the population. Because many Native people identify as multiracial, the population might actually be higher in some areas. Nevertheless, the population of Native and Indigenous communities in Missouri is lower than the national average—a fact directly attributed to this state’s history and generations of social, political and economic oppression.

HISTORICAL TRAUMA

White European exploitation of Native and Indigenous people fueled the colonization of America. Throughout the 19th century, persecution intensified as state and federal governments passed laws to expand white settlements and forcibly remove Native people from their lands. The Trail of Tears and Indian Removal Act of 1830 drove many southern and eastern tribes to Missouri, where their arrival was not welcomed. State and local governments pushed these Native American people farther west, often led by militia and the use of force and violence.

Unfair land treaties already had drastically reduced tribal populations in Missouri. In 1808, the state’s largest tribe, the Osage, ceded nearly 53 million acres of their land for a payment of less than $3,000. Infectious disease, especially smallpox, further decimated Native communities—many of whom were not immune to European diseases and lacked access to vaccines and medication. Europeans also used alcohol to devastate Native communities because they often had lower genetic resistance to its effects. State law prevented permits from being issued that would allow Native people to come to or remain in the state from 1845 to 1909. Those who stayed were forced to assimilate. Those who left seldom returned.

There are no federally recognized Native American tribes in Missouri today. State law prevented permits from being issued that would allow Native people to come to or remain in the state from 1845 to 1909. Those who stayed were forced to assimilate. Those who left seldom returned.
The Violence Against Native Women triangle describes how cultural and ritual abuse are used to minimize a survivor’s connection to her community and deplete her sense of identity.

Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, a Native American trauma expert, describes historical trauma as “the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the lifespan, which emanates from massive group trauma.” Native American and Indigenous people bear the pain of historical trauma inflicted upon their people since European colonizers arrived in America. Several promising strategies, such as talking circles and other culturally specific programs, provide opportunities for collective healing that addresses historical trauma within communities. There also is mounting pressure for widespread policy change in order to have an impact on a larger scale. These strategies are being implemented throughout Indian country and are available to help Native survivors of domestic and sexual violence connect with each other and heal.

**FORCED ASSIMILATION AND FAMILY SEPARATION**

Boarding schools, or Indian residential schools, are among the most egregious acts perpetrated against Native American people in the United States. Starting in the late 1800s, young Native children were taken from their families, sometimes by force, and sent away to live at boarding schools. These schools served to eradicate Native culture and force the children’s assimilation into mainstream white society. It is estimated that, during the height of this era, as many as one in four Native children was sent to a boarding school. They were not allowed to speak their native language, wear tribal clothing or hairstyles, have visitors or leave to visit their families. They also were not allowed to use their birth names and went by English Christian names. All things Native were prohibited. The conditions of the schools were poor, and children often suffered physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Many children died. Enrollment steadily increased until 1975, when the Indian Self-Determination Act passed, largely discouraging boarding schools and opting for local schools in Native communities instead. Thousands of Native American children attended boarding schools, and the trauma from forced assimilation and family separation is ongoing. Many attribute a loss of cultural identity and difficulty with parenting to having grown up in Indian residential schools.

**DYNAMICS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST NATIVE COMMUNITIES**

In many tribal and Indigenous cultures, the circle is a sacred shape. It represents birth, the end of life and the cycle of the seasons. It is symbolic of the Earth, the Moon, the Sun and many objects found in nature. Domestic and sexual violence is not natural. Instead of a wheel—or circle—a triangle is used to represent tactics of power and control used against Native survivors of abuse and violence.

The Violence Against Native Women triangle describes how cultural and ritual abuse are used to minimize a survivor’s connection to her community and deplete her sense of identity. The triangle is significant because it
VIOLENCE AGAINST NATIVE WOMEN: BATTERING

UNNATURAL POWER AND CONTROL

MALE PRIVILEGE
Treats her like a servant. Makes all the big decisions. Acts like the “king of the castle.” Defines men’s and women’s roles.

ISOLATION
Controls what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads. Limits her outside involvement. Uses jealousy to justify actions.

INTIMIDATION

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

MINIMIZE, LIE, AND BLAME
Makes light of the abuse and doesn’t take her concerns seriously. Says the abuse didn’t happen. Shifts responsibility for abusive behavior. Says she caused it.

USING CHILDREN
Makes her feel guilty about the children. Uses the children to relay messages. Uses visitation to harass her. Threatens to take away the children.

ECONOMIC ABUSE
Prevents her from working. Makes her ask for money. Gives her an allowance. Takes her money. Doesn’t let her know about or access family income.

COERCION AND THREATS
Makes and/or carries out threats to do something to hurt her. Threatens to leave her, to commit suicide, to report her to welfare. Makes her drop charges. Makes her do illegal things.

CULTURAL ABUSE
Competes over “Indian-ness.” Misinterprets culture to prove male superiority/female submission. Uses relatives to beat her up. Buys into “blood quantum” competitions.

RITUAL ABUSE
Prays against her. Defines spirituality as masculine. Stops her from practicing her ways. Uses religion as a threat: “God doesn’t allow divorce.” Says her period makes her “dirty.”

Developed by:
Sacred Circle - National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women
Because crimes on Indian reservations and tribal land are largely committed by people who are not Native, many acts of domestic and sexual violence were committed with impunity. Common knowledge held that if a person wanted to get away with murder, they could do it on the reservation.

represents hierarchy, or the unequal power dynamics that exist between victims and perpetrators of rape and abuse. Hierarchy is a hallmark of oppression and signifies the process of “othering” that guides and informs violence—one group with power over others sees them as less than and uses violence to maintain their position of power.

The triangle also represents a teepee, a traditional Native American house. Not all violence happens behind closed doors, yet the teepee symbolizes the private and silenced nature of violence against Native women.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Emerging research of Native and Indigenous communities has found biological evidence of intergenerational trauma, or the effects of traumatic experiences that are passed down through generations. After intense trauma, survivors can develop physical and psychological symptoms that change their response to stress and reduce their ability to cope. These changes become imprinted on a person’s genes and might play a role in later generations’ vulnerability to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and even developing diabetes and other chronic diseases. Additional stress in life can exacerbate symptoms of intergenerational trauma and can inhibit a survivor’s healing process. Intergenerational trauma resulting from collective historical trauma experienced by Native and Indigenous groups long ago likely contributes to physical and mental health disparities that exist today.

LATERAL VIOLENCE

The overwhelming majority of violence against Native people is perpetrated by people who are not Native. A study by the National Institute for Justice found that 97 percent of women who have been victimized and 90 percent of men who have been victimized experienced violence from a non-Native person. Although not as common, violence within Native communities does occur. “Lateral violence” is a term used to describe violence and abuse between members of an oppressed group. “Internalized oppression” refers to members of an oppressed group adopting the values and beliefs of an oppressor. In Native and Indigenous communities, lateral violence is deeply connected to internalized oppression and historical trauma.

Violence against Native women is not traditional. Native and Indigenous cultures value women and honor feminine power. Many of their social systems are matriarchal and consider women to be sacred givers of life. Women do not usually take their husband’s name or change their name with marriage. Many Native and Indigenous languages do not have words for domestic violence or rape because it was not common before European colonization.
SOVEREIGNTY

Native American tribes are sovereign nations whose power to govern themselves predates the formation of the United States federal government. Tribes have their own systems of government, law enforcement and civil and criminal courts. Yet the federal government considers Native tribes “domestic dependent nations” and continues to overlook and undermine Native sovereignty. For this reason, there has long been tension between Native nations and the U.S. federal government.

In addition to tribal membership, Native Americans also are citizens of the United States with access to the full rights and responsibilities that citizenship entails. They pay taxes, vote and can hold public office. Federal and tribal laws apply to Native people on tribal reservations, although tribal laws do not apply to non-Native people on tribal reservations. This has been problematic for Native survivors of abuse perpetrated by non-Native people.

VAWA PROTECTIONS

For nearly 35 years, tribal courts were not able to prosecute crimes against Native or Indigenous people if the person who perpetrated the crime was not Native. Tribal criminal jurisdiction extended to other members of the tribe but not to non-Native individuals. In the 1978 decision Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that American Indian tribes do not have criminal jurisdiction over non-Indians due to a legal precedent known as implicit divestiture, or the federal government’s sole ability to determine tribal sovereignty. Because crimes on Indian reservations and tribal land are largely committed by people who are not Native, many acts of domestic and sexual violence were committed with impunity. Common knowledge held that if a person wanted to get away with murder, they could do it on the reservation.

Since the Oliphant decision, violence against Native and Indigenous women increased dramatically. For many women, violence is not a question of “if” but “when.” The issue gained significant national attention, and many tribal and women's advocacy groups pushed for change. Their efforts paid off with the 2013 renewal of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which restored special domestic violence jurisdiction to tribal courts and clarified provisions for protection orders against non-Native offenders. Many tribes already have begun to prosecute these cases, and there is renewed hope that violence against Native and Indigenous women will decline. The story of the effort to pass VAWA 2013 is recounted in Sliver of a Full Moon, a play by Cherokee author and activist Mary Katheryn Nagle.

MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Native and Indigenous women face significantly higher risk of kidnapping, sexual assault and murder. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, homicide is the third-leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women between the ages of 10 and 24 and is the fifth-leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native women between the ages of 25 and 34.
Prevention, homicide is the third-leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women between the ages of 10 and 24 and is the fifth-leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native women between the ages of 25 and 34. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) is a grassroots movement in the United States and Canada that seeks to draw attention to the issue and prevent further violence against Native women.

The MMIW Database, www.mmiwdatabase.com, maintains a centralized list of Native and Indigenous women, girls and two spirit individuals who are missing or have been murdered in the United States and Canada from 1900 to today. Submissions of new cases can be made online. This information is available by request and serves as a comprehensive resource for researchers, policymakers and advocates seeking to address violence against Native women.

The 115th Congress passed a resolution recognizing May 5 as a National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Native Women and Girls. The resolution was passed in honor of Hanna Harris, a Northern Cheyenne woman from Montana who was raped and murdered in 2013. May 5 was her birthday. Supporters of the movement are encouraged to wear red in recognition of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

**HEALTH CARE**

People from Native and Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by poor health and chronic disease. Members of federally recognized Indian tribes are eligible for no-cost primary and specialized health care through the Indian Health Service. However, this care can only be accessed at Indian Health Centers, located on tribal reservations. Because there are no reservations in Missouri, health care is not available through the Indian Health Service within the state.

**HEALING AND COMMUNITY WELLNESS**

Trauma-informed culturally specific programs and policies are needed for collective healing and to decrease violence against Native and Indigenous people. While there are some resources in Missouri, the state’s brutal history has left Native populations greatly diminished, and few Indigenous communities remain in most regions of the state.

Community wellness, harmony and equality are inherent values of many Indigenous cultures. These values support both personal and collective healing. Native and Indigenous communities are working diligently to recover from personal and historical trauma. As advocates working to end rape and abuse against all communities in Missouri, we must support this work.
Community wellness, harmony and equality are inherent values of Indigenous cultures. These values support both personal and collective healing. Native and Indigenous communities are working diligently to recover from personal and historical trauma. As advocates working to end rape and abuse against all communities in Missouri, we must support this work.

RESOURCES IN MISSOURI

Although limited, there are culturally specific Native and Indigenous social service and assistance programs in Missouri. Indian Centers in Kansas City and Springfield provide food and general assistance, and organize community events. There is an employment program through the American Indian Council in Kansas City. Some domestic and sexual violence programs throughout the state have Native advocates on staff and are providing culturally relevant services. Native helplines and databases are available to connect survivors with resources. Native survivors also should consider contacting their tribal government directly to find out what resources are available. Native survivors in western and southern regions of Missouri have the easiest access to resources on Indian reservations in Oklahoma.

American Indian Council
Kansas City, MO
816.471.4898
- Employment assistance

Kansas City Indian Center
Kansas City, MO
816.421.7608
information@kcindiancenter.org
www.kcindiancenter.org
- Food pantry
- Monthly cultural nights and summer camps for children
- Community referrals

Southwest Missouri Indian Center
Springfield, MO
417.869.9550
swmoindiancenter@hotmail.com
- Assistance with food and clothing
- Must have tribal identification for services

OTHER STATE AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

Native and Indigenous survivors of domestic and sexual violence need culturally relevant services, programs and policies to end the violence they are experiencing. The National Institute for Justice found that 38 percent of Native women were unable to obtain domestic and sexual violence services while 15 percent of non-Hispanic white women were unable to do so. The Strong Hearts Native Helpline maintains a current database of culturally specific programs and has identified 60 shelters for Native survivors of domestic and sexual violence; it estimates that there are approximately 300 culturally specific Native programs in the United States. The Office for Victims of Crime with the U.S. Justice Department also compiles a directory of Native-specific resources for survivors of violence, available at www.tribalresourcelo.org.

Other national Native and Indigenous technical assistance, advocacy and direct service programs include:
Alaska Native Women's Resource Center  
Fairbanks, AK  
907.328.3990  
www.anwrc.org  
- Strengthens local tribal government responses through community organizing efforts.  
- Provides a voice at the local, statewide, national and international levels for changes needed in laws and policies advocating for the safety of Alaska Native women and children in their communities, especially against domestic and sexual abuse and violence.

Coalition Against Missing and Murdered Women  
Albuquerque, NM  
505.248.9199  
www.csvanw.org  
- Provides training, advocate support, technical assistance and public policy advocacy for missing and murdered Indigenous women.

Indian Law Resource Center  
Helena, MT  
406.449.2006  
www.indianlaw.org  
- Safe Women, Strong Nations provides legal training and supports public policies to end violence against Native women.

Mending the Sacred Hoop  
Duluth, MN  
888.305.1650  
www.mshoop.org  
- National advocacy group that promotes Native leadership and sovereignty, provides culturally specific training and technical assistance, coordinates community responses and promotes public policy on behalf of Native survivors of domestic and sexual violence.  
- Extensive education and training materials available online.

Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition  
St. Paul, MN  
651.646.4800  
www.miwsac.org  
- Leading tribal coalition engaged in efforts to address intersections of sex trafficking, domestic and sexual violence, as well as other issues related to violence against Native women.  
- Provides technical assistance, conducts research and organizes community education and awareness events.

The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center  
Lame Deer, MT  
406.477.3896  
www.niwrc.org  
- Provides community education and technical assistance, builds tribal capacity and sovereignty.  
- Native Love Program promotes healthy relationships for Native youths.  
- Publishes Restoration Magazine, a quarterly publication covering news of the movement to end violence against Native women.  
- Defends VAWA and promotes Native interests with the renewal of VAWA.  
- Organizes the biannual Women are Sacred Conference bringing tribal and Indigenous programs together to network and share resources.

“Rape is more of a fundamental threat to self-determination of tribal nations than the drawbacks of federal reform could ever be. Rape and child sexual abuse are directly related to most of the social challenges tribal nations face, and when people are hurting, they cannot effectively govern themselves or provide guidance and support for the children in the community.”

—Sarah Deer, Native American Lawyer and Professor

“What I really stress to people is that it happens everywhere. People imagine that it just happened in the oil fields of North Dakota and the huge expanse of Navajo Nation—and it does—but it also happens in the cities.”

–Annita Lucceshi, Founder
MMIW Database

Gray, L.A. [14, August, 2018] Forgotten Women: the conversation of murdered and missing native women is not one north America wants to have, but must have. New York