

Violence and abuse against Indigenous Women (2004)

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Numerous studies have documented the widespread and disproportionate levels of violence and abuse against Indigenous women. In spite of the troubling statistics that have been reported in national studies, little is known about best practices with this underserved population.

This study explores the phenomenon of violence and abuse against Indigenous women using a culturally-based empowerment framework. Two primary research questions were considered in this study. What is the lifetime prevalence and incidence of violence and abuse in a college sample of tribal women? The second question considered in this study was whether significant group differences on four variables associated with empowerment (self esteem, sense of belonging, social support and social action) existed between First Nations college women who had experienced violence and abuse and those who had not.

Data was collected and analyzed (n=112) using univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis. The overwhelming majority of the sample (86%) reported violence and abuse. The most common form of abuse was emotional abuse (76%) followed by physical victimization (66%), sexual victimization (36%), being threatened (28%) and being stalked (27%).

Initial analysis reported no significant differences between group on the dependent variables. Follow-up analysis reported lower self esteem scores for those who had experienced violence and abuse in adolescence and as an adult. Higher self esteem, social support and social action scores were reported for those raised on reservations, tribal lands, pueblos and villages.

The majority of the sample (66%) had never reported the incident to the police or talked to a professional (64%). Slightly over one-half reported talking to a trusted friend or relative (53%) or using a traditional healer or ceremony (54%) to overcome the incident. Those who had been threatened, stalked or physically victimized were more likely to report the incident to police. Those who were sexually victimized were more likely to talk to a trusted friend or relative. Those who had been threatened and sexually victimized were more likely to talk to a professional and to use a traditional healer or ceremony.

Practical implications of the research for tribal communities: There are multiple implications of the research for tribal communities that include:

- Multiple forms of violence and abuse are being experienced by a college sample of Indigenous women across the life span and practitioners must be prepared to assess and respond to a wide range of gender and race-based violence against First Nations women
- The effects of violence and abuse on Indigenous women may differ depending on the form of violence and abuse or age at the time of the abuse
- Protective factors that promote resiliency despite experiences of VAA, such as social support, sense of belonging, social action and cultural affiliation should be considered in working with survivors and in program development

- Build on the strengths of reservation communities and culturally based programs rather than accepting assumptions of pathology
- Design interventions in ways that communities need and will use
- Integrate tribal approaches into VAA best practices for tribal women

Policy implications or practice relevance:

Practice relevance

- Practitioners must be prepared to assess and respond to a wide range of violence and abuse
- Requires awareness of and sensitivity to the cultural dynamics of history and geography
- Develop skills for collaborating with underserved Indigenous urban and reservation communities

Policy relevance

- Need for equitable funding for both urban and reservation programs serving First Nations women
- Support and funding for Indigenous researchers and graduate students who are committed to examining violence and abuse against Indigenous women

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