

# WORKING WITH HT SURVIVORS: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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## Overview

Although there is limited data regarding human trafficking in Native Communities, one study indicated that an average of 40 percent of women involved in sex trafficking identified as Native American and that the practice of selling indigenous women and children for sex has been an ongoing practice since colonial times.<sup>1,2</sup>

Historical trauma leads to vulnerability within indigenous communities. Such historical practices included systemic discrimination, boarding schools, relocation, involuntary sterilization, the out-adoption of Indian children, and violence against Native women. Additionally, more recent research indicates that an average of 25% of Indian children live in poverty, compared to 13% nationally.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, many studies show that there are great disparities between the general population and indigenous communities regarding health, mental health, and education among other things.

## Considerations

- As with any survivor, it is important to understand the dynamics of trauma when working with indigenous communities and recognize that there are added layers of historical trauma and current disparities in indigenous communities.
- There is also a need to recognize the cultural strengths among many indigenous communities, such as the importance and availability of extended family, which often includes members who would not be considered in mainstream culture.<sup>4</sup>
- Every tribal community is different, therefore it is not possible to create one plan to meet the needs of survivors that will work for everyone. Individual communities should analyze their own resources and develop a plan that works with the needs and abilities of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Tribal Insight Briefs. (2016). Human and Sex Trafficking Trends and Responses Across Indian Country. <http://www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/research-data/prc-publications/TraffickingBrief.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Polaris Project. (2017, January). Coming Together to Address Human Trafficking in Native Communities. <http://www.tribal-institute.org/2016/E2PP.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Aces Connection (2018, September). Addressing historical and childhood trauma: Why native people across the country are gathering in San Diego in October. <https://www.acesconnection.com/blog/addressing-historical-and-childhood-trauma-why-native-people-across-the-country-are-gathering-in-san-diego-in-october>

<sup>4</sup> Sarche, M., & Spicer, P. (2008). Poverty and health disparities for American Indian and Alaska Native children: current knowledge and future prospects. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2567901/>



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- Some communities might have a tribal court that addresses issues of trafficking. Determine whether there is a tribal court in your community and whether that court has a special process addressing trafficking.
- As a provider, seek out support from local tribal coalitions and tribal governments and find out if there are resources available specifically for these communities. Also look into national resources such as the National Indigenous Women’s Research Center and Strong Hearts Native Helpline.<sup>5</sup>
- Modify your intake questions to give clients the opportunity to disclose their pronouns, preferred name, gender, and sexual orientation. Check out this example from Polaris:
  - » In one study that focused on the trafficking of Native peoples in the state of Oregon, many of the women felt they owed their survival to Native cultural practices—and most wished for Native healing approaches to be integrated with mainstream social services.
  - » Some culturally appropriate practices affirmed by The Administration for Native Americans include the use of women’s circles and sweat lodges.
  - » Finally, as one study notes, although much research has been conducted to document disparities among indigenous communities, it is time to move beyond documentation of disparities and work toward culturally appropriate and effective intervention.

## Resources

### US Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Trafficking In Persons: Native Youth Toolkit on Human Trafficking

The purpose of this toolkit is to raise awareness and prevent trafficking of Native youth by educating them on what human trafficking is, available resources, safety tips, and ways to get involved in their communities.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/resource/nativeyouth>

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<sup>5</sup> Native Youth Toolkit on Human Trafficking. (n.d.).

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/resource/nativeyouth>

<sup>6</sup> Admin, S. H. D. V. (2019, October 16). Domestic Violence Helpline - 1-844-7NATIVE.

<https://www.strongheartshelpline.org/>

<sup>7</sup> National Indigenous Women's Resource Center. (n.d.).

<https://www.niwrc.org/>

<sup>8</sup> National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Creating a Human Trafficking Strategic Plan to Protect and Heal Native Children and Youth. (n.d.).

<https://www.niwrc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Resources/Human-Trafficking-Strategic-Plan.pdf>



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## Resources (continued)

National Congress of American Indians, Tribal Insight Brief: Human and Sex Trafficking: Trends and Responses Across Indian Country

This short article provides data, definitions and historical information regarding trafficking in native communities as well as recommendations for supporting survivors and resources.

<http://www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/research-data/prc-publications/TraffickingBrief.pdf>

National Indigenous Women's Resource Center

Native nonprofit organization that was created specifically to serve as the National Indian Resource Center (NIRC) Addressing Domestic Violence and Safety for Indian Women. This website has a collection of resources for a large variety of topical issues, including domestic violence, sex trafficking, cultural humility, and trauma.

[https://www.niwrc.org/resources?field\\_field\\_document\\_type\\_tid=104&keys=&sort\\_by=created&sort\\_order=DESC](https://www.niwrc.org/resources?field_field_document_type_tid=104&keys=&sort_by=created&sort_order=DESC)

