Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women: What Mental Health Providers Should Consider

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• Active in the MMIW Movement for 8 years.

• Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women: Motivation and Activism- Dissertation

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Alarming Statistics

In the US, Native women are murdered at 10 times the national average rate (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

84% of Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime, and 56% of Native women are survivors of sexual violence (National Institute of Justice, 2016).

Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be violently raped or sexually assaulted when compared to any other race of women in the U.S (Flowers, 2015).

34% reported surviving a completed or attempted rape at some point in their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

- 44% of rape experience before the age of 12 years old. (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Native women are targets regardless of station or socioeconomic status. Native actress Misty Upham, 32, was missing for 11 days before she was found dead in a Washington state ravine with her ribs broken and skull shattered, in 2014.

50% of individuals in sex trafficking business in the US are Native women and girls (New American Media, 2016).
**Areas with the Highest Number of Cases (by Region)**

Southwest  
Northern Plains  
Pacific Northwest  
Alaska  
California

**Top 10 States with Highest Number of MMIWG Cases**

1. New Mexico (78)
2. Washington (71)
3. Arizona (54)
4. Alaska (52)
5. Montana (41)
6. California (40)
7. Nebraska (33)
8. Utah (24)
9. Minnesota (20)
10. Oklahoma (18)

**Top 10 Cities with Highest Number of MMIWG Cases**

1. Seattle, WA (45)
2. Albuquerque, NM (37)
3. Anchorage, AK (31)
4. Tucson, AZ (31)
5. Billings, MT (29)
6. Gallup, NM (25)
7. Tacoma, WA (25)
8. Omaha, NE (24)
9. Salt Lake City, UT (24)
10. San Francisco, CA (17)

See Appendix for data from all 71 cities surveyed.
The Importance of Decolonizing Self & Therapy
Prior to Colonization

- Women & children were considered sacred and valued (Clairmont, 2011)
- Violence (outside of war) against Native women was extremely rare (Agtuca, 2008 as quoted by Farley et al. 2011)
- Prior to colonization, tribes had full jurisdiction (Canby, 2009 as quoted by Crossland, Palmer, & Brooks, 2013)
- Not a word for rape (Clairmont, 2011)
After “First Contact”

- Patriarchal model/ Women devalued
  - Europeans refused to negotiate with women leaders
  - Perceived connection between prostitution devaluation and colonization devaluation of Native people (Farley et al. 2011)
- Theft of Land, Geographical Displacement
- Alcohol as a tool of colonization
- Systematic Genocide
- Failure to Enforce Treaties
- Federal and Local Termination Laws and Policies
Modern Day Colonialism

- Institutionalized Racism
- Refusal to Fund Treaty Obligations
  - Consistent, intentional underfunding of BIA/IHS
- Prostitution/Trafficking/Sexualization of Native bodies
- Public Law 280
  - Grants CA the criminal jurisdiction over Natives on reservations and allows civil litigation under tribal or federal court jurisdiction to be handled by state courts.
Inequality in the Justice System

- The Federal Government often declines to prosecute crime on NA land.
  - In 2011 alone, the Justice Department filed charges:
    - In only about half of murder cases
    - 35% of sexual assault cases on reservations nationwide.

- Who handles a crime—Federal, State, Tribal agencies—depends on who is involved.
  - Offenses committed by NA against NA go to the tribal police and courts, unless the crime is magnified (murder, rape, or sex trafficking, then the FBI and federal prosecutors can step in (whether they do is decided by the U.S. attorney).

- Crime committed by non-NA must be turned over to the federal government or state authorizes
  - A 1978 U.S. Supreme Court ruling found that tribes have no jurisdiction over crimes committed by non-NA people

- When tribal members call the police to report rape or murder, officers must determine whose authority it falls under.

- Such complications may make the reservation a "safe haven" for all kinds of criminals, including sex traffickers.

- Systematic and purposeful policies to disenfranchise Native peoples and make them powerless
Why is this important?

• Historical Trauma and colonialism create barriers in seeking treatment/justice
• The trauma endured has caused distrust for Western-based solutions
• Western Psychology has failed to take Native history & culture into account (SIP Commentary on APA Code of Ethics, 2014)
• Culturally informed and trauma informed; strength based
• Family & Community based interventions
• Learn to integrate traditional medicine and practices into care
Decolonizing Self & Therapy
Disclaimer

• There are 566 federally recognized tribes located in 35 states, and 60% of Native Americans/Indigenous Populations, in the United States reside in urban areas (Indian Health Services, 2009).

• Knowledge of and respect for a Native American’s worldview and value system—which varies according to the client’s tribe, level of acculturation, and other personal characteristics—is fundamental not only for creating the trusting counselor-client relationship vital to the helping process by also for defining the counseling style or approach most appropriate for each client. (LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990).
"The medicine is already within the pain and suffering. You just have to look deeply and quietly. Then you realize it has been there the whole time."

A Therapist’s Decolonization Journey

- History and Position of Privilege.
  - Identity Development (Box)
- Heart and Body over Head
  - Thinking “Outside the Box” or “opening the box”
- Values and Respect
- Communities Tribal Customs
- Cultural Strengths
  - Mother Earth
- Supervision

NO JUSTICE ON STOLEN LANDS
Decolonizing Interventions

- Acculturation Awareness
- Healing the Soul Wound
  - Eduardo Duran
- Felt Theory
  - Dian Million
- Cultural Strengths
TFCBT- Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Trauma Narrative, Exposure-based, stimulus confrontation
- Acronym (abbreviation) for intervention: TF-CBT
- Average length/number of sessions: 12-25 sessions (60-90 minute sessions, divided approximately equally between youth and parent/caregiver)
- Aspects of culture or group experiences that are addressed (e.g., faith/spiritual component, transportation barriers): TF-CBT has been modified to address the needs of Latino, Native American, deaf and hearing impaired, military and many international populations. It has been provided in group formats and in multiple settings (e.g., homes, foster homes, schools, residential treatment facilities) to address transportation barriers
- Trauma type (primary): Sexual abuse, domestic violence, traumatic grief, disaster, terrorism, multiple or complex traumas
- Trauma type (secondary): Other trauma types
- Additional descriptors (not included above): TF-CBT addresses the multiple domains of trauma impact including but not limited to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, externalizing behavior problems, relationship and attachment problems, school problems and cognitive problems.
- TF-CBT includes skills for regulating affect, behavior, thoughts and relationships, trauma processing, and enhancing safety, trust, parenting skills and family communication.
Native Sexual Assault Expert’s Request:

- Be open to critically-evaluating your treatment approaches for American Indian/Alaska Native/Indigenous women survivors of SA
  - Historical Trauma grief/loss; complex trauma
  - Cultural identity/Acculturation & intersectionality
  - Use of traditional medicine/support & spirituality
  - Family based interventions
  - Cultural humility and sensitivity
  - Adapting traditional clinical approaches so that they are culturally-informed and trauma-informed
Increasing Knowledge

- **Savanna’s Act**
  - Tribal governments, states, and units of local governments working together to develop and implementing MMIP protocols and training.

- **The Not Invisible Act of 2019**
  - Engaging and improving coordination across federal agencies

- **The Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA)**
  - Helps to address crime in tribal communities and places a strong emphasis on decreasing violence

- **Studying the Missing and Murdered Indian Crisis Act of 2019**
  - To make recommendations on how to improve the utilized databases and notification systems.

- **The White House**
  - Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 & 2022
  - McGrit V Oklahoma
  - Training Tribal Law Enforcement and Judicial Personal
  - Asst Tribal, State, and local law enforcement apply appropriate trauma-informed and victim-centered practices
  - Improving data collection, analysis, and information sharing
  - Strengthening Prevention, Early Intervention, and Victim and Survivor Services
Summary

- Humble
- Accountable
- Race Fluent
- Respectful
- Collaborative
- Flexible
- Trust
- Knowledgeable
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