



eliminating racism
empowering women
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Fact Sheet: Barriers to Safety for Women of Color

Domestic violence impacts one in every four women in the United States. While anyone can become a victim of intimate partner violence, it is an overwhelmingly gendered crime, with women making up 86% of victims. Women experience domestic violence irrespective of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation and sex. While no two cases of abuse are the same, we know that abusers exert power over their partners in the form of physical, emotional, sexual, financial and spiritual abuse as a means to control them. For victims who identify as women of color, obstacles in leaving an abusive relationship are often heightened due to existing cultural and institutional barriers, making them amongst the most vulnerable victims.

YWCA USA Position

YWCA USA supports public policies that protect victims, hold perpetrators accountable and work to eradicate all forms of violence against women. With an increasingly diverse population, the United States is home to communities made up of robust cultural, racial, ethnic and religious affiliations. As such, it is essential that anti-violence programs and policies are multi-faceted and diverse in both their approaches to addressing violence against women as well as in assisting all victims of violence.

As one of the largest networks of domestic violence services in the country, YWCA USA deeply understands the need for policies and services to reflect the communities they serve. YWCA USA strongly supports the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), a law that was first enacted in 1994 to address the pervasive crimes of violence against women. It codified domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking as punishable crimes and streamlined services and resources available to victims of violence. In 2013, VAWA was reauthorized with critical improvements that reflect the needs and challenges of some of the most vulnerable victims of violence – native women, immigrants, and LGBTQ victims of violence. While these are all essential improvements to VAWA, YWCA USA recognizes that there is a need to collect and reflect current data on communities of color and their level of access and comfort in obtaining services from domestic violence programs.

Facts

Native Women

- Native women face the highest rates of violence, with double the rate of violence than the general population.ⁱ
- Abuse towards Native women is particularly violent, and as such, they are more likely to be physically injured and require medical attention than women of all other demographics.ⁱⁱ
- There is a high co-occurrence of sexual and physical abuse amongst Native women, with 96% of rape victims reporting incidents of physical abuse as well.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Over 70% of sexual assaults of Native women are committed by non-Native perpetrators. Because of complex issues around jurisdictions and the fact that a non-Native perpetrator cannot be prosecuted by tribal courts, they have historically been immune from being held accountable.^{iv}
- This unique legal loophole has resulted in a high rate of non-reporting by Native women, with victims often citing instances where the police were called after an incident of abuse with measuring tape to assess whether the abuse occurred on tribal land in order to decide whether they could file a report.

African American Women

- African American women are 3 times more likely than white women to experience death as a result of domestic violence – while they make up 8% of the general population, 22% of domestic violence-related homicides impact African American women.^v
- Domestic violence is the number one cause of death for African American women between the ages of 15-35.^{vi}
- Amongst this demographic, the likelihood of domestic violence is largely tied to economic factors, and occurs most amongst: married couples that are low income^{vii}, relationships in which the male partner is either underemployed or unemployed^{viii}, or when a couple is living in a poor neighborhood.^{ix}
- Mistrust of law enforcement due to a continued history of violence targeting African American communities is a large factor for why many African American victims of violence do not file police reports.^x

Asian Pacific Islander (API) Women

- The API community is diverse, comprised of over 40 countries, upwards of 30 languages, and reflecting nearly every faith tradition.^{xi} As such, it's important to ensure that this nuance is reflected when providing services to victims of violence that identify as API.
- Because of this diversity, the prevalence of domestic violence is illustrated as a range as opposed to a specific percentage. 21-55% of API women have reported having experience domestic violence at some point in their lives.^{xii}

- With the exception of the Japanese community, API women that are born in the U.S. or migrated to the U.S. as a child are more likely to experience stalking, sexual and or physical abuse than those who are born abroad or migrated as a teenager or adult.^{xiii}
- According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, the predominant forms of abuse reported by API victims of violence are: emotional abuse (95%), physical abuse (77%), and economic abuse (34%).^{xiv}
- Abuse by in laws was cited in a recent study as the number one reason for divorce amongst Muslim Americans, a demographic made up largely of API and Arab Americans.
- Language access is a unique issue API victims face and can present itself as a barrier in accessing safety:
 - Over 80% of Bangladeshi, Hmong, Pakistani, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Laotian and Cambodian Americans speak a language other than English at home.^{xv}
 - 32% of API identify as limited-English proficient, which can translate into an inability to access critical services such as counseling, housing, or the legal system, particularly when translators are not available.^{xvi}

Immigrant Women

- While certain limited legal options exist for immigrant women to safely leave their abusers such as U-Visas and VAWA petitioning, both are lengthy processes and not always guaranteed.
- Perpetrators commonly threaten deportation or a refusal to follow through on completing his partners' permanent residence and/or naturalization application as a means of control to keep her from leaving.^{xvii}
- Although patriarchal norms are prevalent in all cultures and communities, many immigrant women in the U.S. come from countries where cultural norms have a heightened acceptance of domestic violence, or they may not have access to legal and social services in the U.S. due to linguistic and cultural barriers.^{xviii}
- In addition to having limited-English proficiency, immigrant women may not have access to domestic violence programs that provide linguistically and culturally accessible services, which could prevent them from leaving an abuser.^{xix}

ⁱ Greenfeld, Lawrence & Smith, Steven. American Indians and Crime. Bureau of Justice Statistics, US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, February 1999. NCJ 173386. <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/aic.pdf>

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Justice. Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and the Criminal Justice Response: What is known. 2008:49

ⁱⁱⁱ Saylor, K., Daliparthi, N. (2006) Violence against Native Women in substance abuse treatment. American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research: The Journal of National Center, 13(1), 32-51

^{iv} Deer, Sarah. (2005) Sovereignty of the Soul: Exploring the Intersection of Rape Law Reform and Federal Indian Law. Suffolk University Law Review, 38, 455-466

^v http://www.idvaac.org/media/publications/FactSheet.IDVAAC_AAPCFV-Community%20Insights.pdf

^{vi} <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/crime/headlines/20130921-black-women-at-greater-risk-of-becoming-victims-of-homicidal-domestic-violence.ece>

^{vii} Benson, M.L and Fox, G.L (2004) When violence hits home: How economics and neighborhood play a role. Washington, DC.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

^{viii} Hampton, R.L & Gelles, R.J. (1994). Violence toward black women in a nationally representative sample of black families. Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 25, 105-119.

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- ^{ix} Benson, M., Wooldredge, J., Thistlethwaite, A., Fox, G. (2004). The correlations between race and domestic violence is confounded with community context. *Social Problems*, 51, 326-342
- ^x <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/555e2412e4b0bd5f4da5d3a4/1432232978932/SAYHERNAME+Social+Media+Guide.compressed.pdf>
- ^{xi} <http://www.apiidv.org/resources/census-data-api-identities.php#asianCountries>
- ^{xii} <http://www.apiidv.org/files/Facts.Stats-APIIDV-2015.pdf>
- ^{xiii} Ibid.
- ^{xiv} National Domestic Violence Hotline. Caller demographics: Breakdown by ethnicity CY2011. Austin, TX: Author; 2012.
- ^{xv} <http://www.apiidv.org/files/Facts.Stats-APIIDV-2015.pdf>
- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Orloff, Leslye and Janice V. Kaguyutan. 2002. "Offering a Helping Hand: Legal Protections for Battered Immigrant Women: A History of Legislative Responses." *Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law*. 10(1): 95-183.
- ^{xviii} Orloff et al., 1995. "With No Place to Turn: Improving Advocacy for Battered Immigrant Women." *Family Law Quarterly*. 29(2):313.
- ^{xix} Ibid.