

Intimate Partner Violence Towards Black, Indigenous, and Latinx Women

A Policy Report on the IPV Crisis
Facing Female Survivors in Three
Marginalized Communities

Written for Policy 365: Sexuality and Gender Policy at
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Introduction

In the United States, 33% of women experience violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives. For minority women, these rates are even higher because of many reasons, including socioeconomic status, relationships with law enforcement, discrimination, and other factors. This policy brief will focus on three marginalized groups – Black, Indigenous, and Latina women – and, will briefly cover the issue, identify contributing factors unique to each community as well as barriers to seeking medical and legal assistance, and provide two specific policy recommendations to address the high rates of Intimate Partner Violence in these communities: more targeted law enforcement policies and shelter accessibility.

Overview

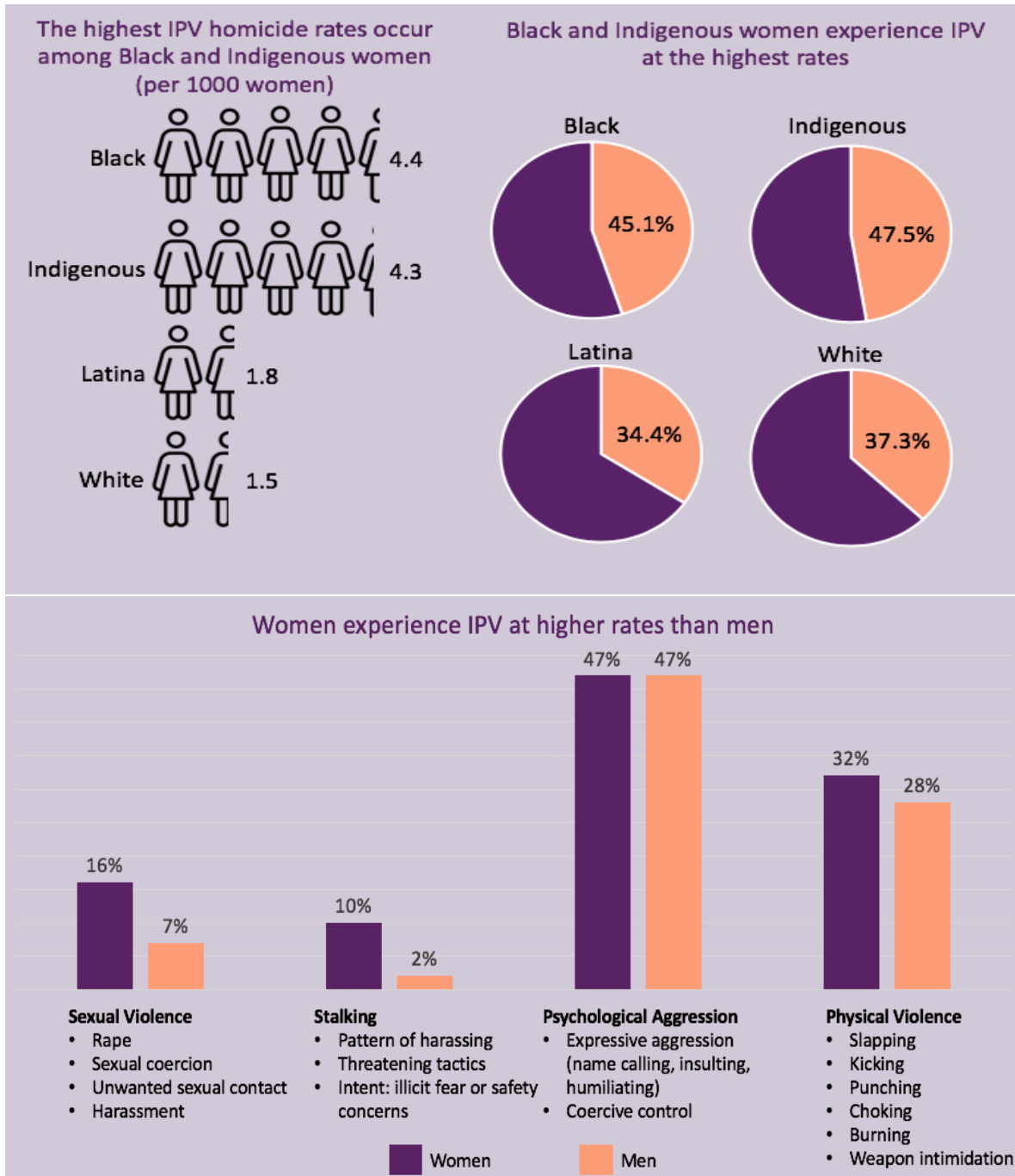
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), also referred to as Domestic Violence, is a complex and serious crime that is defined by the CDC as “physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression (including coercive acts) by a current or former intimate partner” (1). While IPV has substantially decreased over the last 20 years from 15.5 to 2.8 (per 1000 people), it still accounts for nearly 15% of all violent crimes in the United States today and affects people regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or socioeconomic status (2,3). While IPV is not exclusive to one group of people, it is disproportionately prevalent in women and racial/ethnic minorities (4).

IPV victimization often results in physical injury and psychological harm, both temporary and long-term, as well as death. Victims of IPV at higher risks of many health effects including: HIV and other STI's, unintended pregnancy, miscarriage/stillbirth, neurological disorders, chronic pain, disability, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), hypertension, and even cancer. They also have higher rates of depression, suicidal behavior, and are more likely to substance abuse issues (5). Suicide is not the only means by which IPV results in death. At least 1 in 3 females, and 1 in 20 male homicide victims are murdered by an intimate partner (6). Some sources report the female IPV rate as high as 50% of all female homicides (7).

The impacts of IPV are severe, and affect not only the survivor but also their families and the community. In intimate partner homicides, 20% of murder victims are someone other than the abused partner – such as family members, friends, neighbors, bystanders, and emergency responders. Additionally, 22% of workplace homicides involving female victims are the result of IPV. Children are also heavily affected by IPV; 1 in 15 children are exposed to IPV every year and

90% of them are eyewitnesses. IPV also results in major economic losses: IPV costs the US economy between \$5.8 and \$12.6 billion a year, and results in a loss of 8 million paid work days (8).

IPV is an extremely complex public health concern because of the relational connection between the abuser and victim. IPV victims only seek medical attention for their injuries 34% of the time, and are far less likely to report the crime than victims of attacks from strangers (9,10). However, IPV is also often a long-term issue and, while victims may often not report to authorities, the abuse does not go unnoticed. While only 21% of female victims communicate the abuse to healthcare professionals, 84% disclose their victimization to someone they trust, such as a friend or family member. Furthermore, 36% of female IPV victims report needing IPV-related services (such as legal, medical, and relocation services) but only half of those willing to seek assistance actually receive them (11). This results in a huge opportunity for assistance programs and policymakers to address this IPV crisis by appealing to aware loved ones and providing victims with services they need to escape the cycle of abuse.



Contributing Factors

Though there are many specific factors to each community, overall predictors of intimate partner violence include **psychiatric disorders, employment status, education, childhood exposure to intimate partner violence, and socioeconomic status** (Kessler, Molnar, Feurer, & Appelbaum). Specific in the Latina, black, and indigenous communities, though, includes individual **financial stressors, systematic oppression and violence, drugs, cultural norms, and documentation challenges**.

A Black person is **3 times** more likely to be **killed** by police than a white person, **preventing police trust** in the Black communities.

Factors Unique to Black Communities

The prevalence of Black women experiencing intimate partner violence is largely due to the institutional oppression of Black Americans.

- Intimate partner violence is more prevalent in areas where there's already widespread violence and poverty.
 - Financial stress strains relationships, and 21.3% of Black Americans fall below the poverty line, almost twice that of the national poverty rate of 12.3%.
 - The US government has issued legislation to oppress Black people since the conception of America. This oppression keeps Black people poor and unemployed, which can cause feelings of hopelessness, desperation, and overall lessen one's sense of agency in their life.
 - Violence is sometimes used as a way to relieve pent-up emotions and create the illusion of control. (NABSW)
 - Police are typically not trusted by Black communities, as police continue to brutalize Black people. Additionally, mass incarceration of Black men has caused some Black women to form intimate relationships with men they don't trust, as there are less partners to choose from.
 - A Black person is 3x more likely to be killed by police than a white person (UN) and 5x more likely to be incarcerated (Lopez)
 - This discourages Black survivors from reporting IPV
-

American Indians have a **rate of arrest for alcohol more than double the national average.**

Factors Unique to Indigenous Communities

The following factors and studies have provided information on intimate partner violence towards women in Indigenous communities and its origin.

- Systemic violence in Indigenous communities has been learned from colonialism in the U.S. Over time, the colonization of Indigenous persons contributed to the deterioration of tribal values and the protection of women.
 - *306 American Indians participated in a study that evaluated the extent of thoughts of historical loss and associated symptoms that are influenced by: traumatic events, PTSD, cultural identification, substance dependence, affective/anxiety disorders, and ASPD.*
- Alcohol and drug abuse are the most prevalent instigators of intimate partner violence in Indigenous communities. In 55% of reported cases of violence against Indigenous women, the offender was under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or both.

- *A report done by the FBI showed that American Indians have a rate of arrest for alcohol violations (DUI, liquor law violations, and public drunkenness) more than double the national rate.*
- Stressors, both economic and emotional contribute to intimate partner violence in these communities. Women experiencing financial problems, psychological and emotional abuse or a controlling partner, are experiencing stressors that further fuel the issue of intimate partner violence in Indigenous communities.
 - *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that 4 in 5 American Indian women have experienced violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.*

Increased struggles from immigration are correlated with aggressive behavior and intimate partner violence situations.

Factors Unique to Latin@ Communities

The intimate partner violence within the Latinx community is founded upon a variety of factors, including childhood experiences with intimate partner violence, lack of economic resources, and traditional male dominance in personal relationships. Studies on these unique factors have been performed, resulting in the following findings:

- A national study of 846 Latin@ couples found that the lack of economic resources typical in Latinx communities was related to increased partner assault. (Aldarondo, Kantor, & Jasinski)
- In Latinx communities, high scores of dominance were found related to increased psychological aggression, physical violence, and infliction of injury towards an intimate partner. Typical of these groups is a male-dominant power structure within relationships, wherein the male is the decision maker who holds the familial power. (Sugihara & Warner)
- Negative acculturation experiences may result in increased intimate partner violence. (Hancock & Siu)

Though these are factors for the community overall, there are additional challenges among undocumented individuals.

- There is a correlation between increased stress from the struggles of immigration and taking out aggression on an intimate partner. (Dutton, Orloff, & Hass)
- Studies suggest undocumented Latin@s are at an increased level of isolation because of their inability to seek formal networks and social ties, so they are more vulnerable and ill-equipped to respond to intimate partner violence situations. (Reina, Maldonado, & Lohman)

Barriers to Seeking Assistancess

Barriers Unique to Black Communities

Accessing resources for IPV survivors is more complicated for Black women, as racism, sexuality, and cultural norms restrict their ability to report IPV and seek support.

Police brutality and Mass Incarceration Many Black people fear the police and, as a number of horrific headlines have demonstrated, that fear is legitimate. Violence at the hands of police officers is disproportionately experienced by Black people, as only 13% of the US population is Black but 62% of unarmed police killings are Black. The terror created by police carelessly mishandling Black lives prevent the development of a trusting relationship between police and Black communities. A similar issue exists within the Criminal Justice System, which disproportionately imprisons Black men. **Fear of police physically harming themselves or their partners, and knowledge of the racial injustices within the law, are two of the primary reasons many Black women don't report intimate partner violence and are unable to access resources for survivors.** (

The “Strong, Black Woman” and Other Cultural Norms There is a prominent belief that Black women must keep their vulnerability hidden in order to survive their intersectional experiences of racism and sexism, an idea which can be empowering but also isolating. They also feel the need to protect their partners, as the criminalization of Black men can cause Black survivors of IPV to endure the abuse in order to prevent another case of systematic racism in courts. IPV is typically addressed with silence in these communities, since they don't need another reason to be hated. Thus, **many women don't feel comfortable sharing their experience of IPV with friends and family because of the normalization of intimate partner violence and the internalized belief that they should be able to do it handle it on their own.**

Despite highly effective IPV-related policies, IPV rates are still too high, especially among women of color.

Racism within IPV shelters Even when Black survivors access resources for intimate partner violence, they still are faced with racism. IPV shelters are designed to be safe havens for women who have had to escape their abusive partners; however, **racist microaggressions** are commonly directed at Black women in these spaces. **This substantially stunts the connections and support needed to heal from the trauma of IPV.** (Nnawulezi)

Black and LGBT Intersections Homophobia within many Black churches prevents Black LGBT people from seeking their shelter or support from intimate partner violence. Additionally, much of the homophobia found in the Black community originates from the teachings of conservative Black churches which often condemn LGBT people. **Trans Black women are the most vulnerable to intimate partner violence**, along with other types of violence like hate crimes. Their pain is often not taken seriously, as their gender identity is used to dismiss and dehumanize them. (Simpson)

Barriers Unique to Latinx Communities

There are many specific reasons why Latina individuals don't report their intimate partner violence situations, including cultural norms, abusive strategies, anti-immigrant laws, and lack of accessibility.

Cultural Norms Culturally, Latin@s prefer to rely on close familial structures rather than governmental agencies. Studies show this group is more likely to tell family members, friends, or neighbors about their intimate partner violence, compared to non-Latin@s who are more likely to tell health care workers or clergy. The studies also show that Latinas seek local shelters significantly less than women from other racial / ethnic groups. (Pan, Rivera, Williams, Lingle, & Reznik) The source of this might be **a focus on religion in Latinx communities**, as religious beliefs may stop some Latin@s from using services; religion values the "sanctity of marriage" and taking those steps might preclude separation or divorce.

Abusive Strategies Generally, the aggressors in the intimate partner violence relationships use a multitude of tactics and threats to prevent their victims from leaving. Typical strategies include surveillance, work disruption, harassment, and manipulation. As a result of these tactics, victims feel shame, guilt, loyalty, and/or fear of their partners. Studies have also found **strategies unique to the Latin@ community including: abusers preventing their partner access to legal documents, using their children as tools against them, or having them sent to their countries of origin.** One study found a 35% rate of fear in survivors due to these additional control mechanisms. (Tahirih Justice Center)

Anti-Immigration Due to barriers from immigration laws, Latinas are half as likely to contact formal services for intimate partner violence resources or report abuse, as compared to other racial / ethnic groups. **Immigration status is a very common abuser control mechanism, as well as a source of fear in itself for these victims of intimate partner violence.** 41% of Latinas believe the primary reason victims may not come forward is fear for their immigration status or of police response. (NO MÁS Study) Additionally, many Latinas who have immigrated may not be familiar with their options or laws regarding intimate partner violence.

Accessibility Even if Latinx individuals were to overcome these initial barriers, there's not much accessibility for them. They first of all are under-educated about their options if they get caught in a intimate partner violence situation. If they do try to visit a intimate partner shelter, **1 in 3 IPV shelters do not have Spanish-speaking staff.** Additionally, **only half of participating shelters offer child-related services**, a service that is reported to be very important to Latina survivors. (NO MÁS Study)

"I have been scared to call the police in the past because my husband told the police that I'm crazy and because I live in Arizona and my husband told me that the law 1070 states that the police could take me and my children away. When I did call the police, they left the scene because they did not speak Spanish."

-an anonymous Latinx call to the National Domestic Violence Hotline

Barriers Unique to Indigenous Communities

“We’re so connected with each other on the reservation that reporting [abuse] against a family member is a really difficult thing, a lot of Native people do not trust the law enforcement on the reservation to take care of them.”

-Deborah Parker has lived on the Tulalip Indian Reservation in Washington her whole life

The lack of effective resources and protections available to Indigenous women experiencing intimate partner violence create a cyclical pattern of abuse throughout generations of women. Indigenous men and women are living in a system that perpetuates situations of intimate partner violence in tribes. Currently, they do not have a tangible representation of restoration or recovery available to them.

Governmental Issues The issue of **disorganization amid tribal, state and federal government is an inhibiting factor in implementing laws**, the prosecution of offenders and the protection of victims of intimate partner violence. If an Indigenous woman is victimized by an Indigenous male, the tribe and federal government have jurisdiction over the offender. If an Indigenous woman is victimized by a non-Indian male, state and federal government is responsible for handling the case. A lack of resources and trust in state and federal government, often lead to under-reporting and the mishandling of cases. It is crucial that abusers are held accountable beyond the tribe and by both the federal and state government.

Addiction Substance abuse is a prevalent struggle in Indigenous communities. **Alcohol and the use of drugs such as OxyContin are becoming more common in younger Indigenous persons.** 7 in 10 Indigenous persons convicted of a violent crime were drinking when they committed an offense. Public health services and proper healthcare for Indigenous persons is limited and underfunded. Mental health clinics are scarce on tribal lands and preventative education is lacking in school systems that have predominantly Indigenous student populations.

Current Policies

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) VAWA is the main policy protecting female victims of IPV: since it was passed in 1994, IPV against women has declined 72% (NC Advocates). Positive impacts of VAWA are plentiful, but **there are still many challenges facing policymakers in addressing IPV against women**, including: high IPV rates, high risks for young women, bias against women of color, and the costs of providing resources to victims is too high to allow for expansion. (White House Archives)

Family Violence Prevention Services Act (FVPSA) In 1984, the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) was created and now **serves as the main source of funding for IPV-related services**. Each year, FVPSA funds programs that assist 1.3 million survivors, respond to 2.7 million crisis calls, and provide education to over 5 million people (NC Advocates)

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) of 1984 was created to **compensate victims of crimes**. The act does so by collecting the proceeds of criminal activity and redistributing them via grants to states and territories to fund services for victims of IPV, as well as compensate victims for financial expenses related to the crimes committed against them, including medical and therapy costs, as well as lost wages (NC Advocates).

Our Policy Recommendations

1. Law Enforcement

In Black Communities	In Latin@ Communities	In Indigenous Communities
<p>Mass Incarceration and Police Brutality The little trust between law enforcement and the Black community results in underreporting of IPV. Our recommendation is to end all mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenses, as the racial targeting of “The War on Drugs” is shown to be a major cause of mass incarceration and overall police presence in Black communities.</p>	<p>Immigration Reform Given that many Latin@s statistically don’t report intimate partner violence situations from fear of being sent away, it is important that we provide these individuals with help that doesn’t accompany punishments. Programs that will help without threatening police retaliations will logically increase the rate of reporting and decrease the fear culture within the community.</p>	<p>Centralized Jurisdiction Given the maze of jurisdiction that IPV cases weave through, an advisory committee would organize and facilitate programs that foster more efficient organization of tribal, state and federal law.</p>
<p>Mandatory Arrests In general, IPV survivors are more likely to prematurely die if their partner and IPV perpetrator is arrested. As seen in studies, this phenomenon is even more likely if the survivor is a Black woman. In order to prevent this outcome, we recommend instituting first offense warning policies in law enforcement agencies. Although this may seem counterintuitive to preventing IPV, but the risk of premature death in Black women is significant in cases of arrest and must be addressed first in order to allow Black women the opportunity to seek resources for survivors. (Sherman)</p>	<p>Increased Government Funding for Prevention Programs A qualitative evaluation of 309 Latino migrant men found that programs such as “Hombres Unidos Contra la Violencia Familiar” and “Coaching Boys into Men” have been found to increase recognition of abusive behaviors, create greater gender equity, increase willingness to intervene in intimate partner violence situations, and allow for healthier relationships to be developed. Because of these findings, we recommend government allocations towards intervention programs. (National Latin@ Network)</p>	<p>Education Programs IPV education programs in schools and communities, that stem from Indigenous tribal values, will create a more specific awareness of Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons. We recommend increased government funding to these programs, along with the usage of these programs in public schools.</p>

2. Shelter Accessibility

In Black Communities	In Latin@ Communities	In Indigenous Communities
<p>Racial Biases Microaggressions are commonly directed at Black survivors in IPV shelters and programs, preventing Black survivors from accessing resources and building communities after reporting IPV experiences (Nnawulezi). In order to prevent this, we recommend shelters training staff to monitor and dismantle racist comments of other survivors. Additionally, we recommend shelters and intervention programs to focus on strengthening the networks of social support that Black survivors need from their existent communities. This is necessary for the stability and overall mental health of Black survivors and their future safety. (Goodman)</p>	<p>Spanish-Speaking Staff at Shelters Currently, only 66% of shelters have a staff member that speaks some level of Spanish, and 16.7% of the American population – or 52 million people – are Latin@ (US Census Bureau). As this includes both documented and undocumented individuals, it is likely that few – if any – speak fluent English. For accessibility purposes, we recommend either shelters employing someone who can speak at least minimally conversational Spanish <i>or</i> educating current staff members on basic Spanish words and phrases, both of which are highly economical options.</p>	<p>Counseling Programs Counseling services in Indigenous communities can play a major role in the treatment of victims of IPV and their loved ones. An approach to behavioral, mental, emotional and physical health can help in the treatment of IPV and contributing factors such as drug and alcohol abuse.</p>
<p>Accessibility in Poor and Rural Areas Shelters and resource centers for survivors of IPV are often consolidated in areas with more affluent and less diverse populations. This means that the accessing of these services is often difficult for women who are poor and lack reliable transportation. In order to remedy this, we recommend a move to offer services in areas that are more affected by poverty and provide transportation to these resources. (Sullivan)</p>	<p>Child Services Offered at Shelters Since children are very important to Latin@ families and commonly used as tools by abusers, it is imperative that shelters can accommodate children of victims trying to escape their situations. We recommend shelters having bunks for families, toys and games, and elementary educational materials.</p>	<p>Cultural Value After centuries of historical loss and trauma, it is important to support the cultural identities of Indigenous communities. Through community events and incentives, Indigenous persons can reclaim fragments of their identity and educate their communities. As cultural value is restored, more Indigenous communities can become involved the identities of their tribes and combat issues they all face.</p>

In Conclusion...

Latinx, Indigenous, and Black women are especially at risk of Intimate Partner Violence in the United States. IPV is intertwined with legislation that oppresses these communities as a whole. In order to address this concern, policymakers need to address the specific concerns of these communities. Additionally, service providers must tailor their resources to be more inclusive of racial and cultural differences among survivors. This is necessary for Latinx, Indigenous, and Black women to rebuild their social support networks, regain agency over their lives, and ultimately thrive after experiencing IPV.

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