

Title

Disrespect of Our Elders: Elder Abuse in Indian Country

Author(s)

Jacqueline Gray, Ph.D.

Source

Webinar ([recording located here](#))

Summary of Research

There are 567 federally recognized American Indian tribes and Alaskan Villages (AI/AN) and over 400 state recognized and unrecognized tribes in the United States (US) today. There is a paucity of research on elder abuse in Indian Country. AI/AN people make up fifty percent of the diversity of the US, but only about two percent of our population. About seventy percent of the AI/AN population live in urban areas. Yet, there are no large population based studies of elder abuse in Indian Country. The one national study on Native American Elders is focused on elder needs and not on elder abuse. The other studies are small and focus on regional or local areas.

Use the terms "disrespect" and "bothering" when asking about abuse, neglect and exploitation with AI/AN elderly.

Brown (1989) reported a survey of 110 "very traditional" southwestern AI older adults and a random sample of 27 had in-depth interviews. The results indicated 16% endorsed physical abuse items, 32.4% endorsed neglect items, and 21.6% endorsed financial exploitation items. No other types of maltreatment were surveyed.

A northwestern urban sample of AI/AN age 50 and over through chart review for physical abuse determined that about 10% were either definitely or probably abused in the past year. Those that were abused were more likely to be younger females who were depressed and dependent upon others for food. Only 31% of those identified were reported (Buchwald, Tomita, Hartman, Furman, Dudden, & Manson, 2000).

In 2005, Baker-Demaray conducted a survey with 470 participants age 55 and over with 54% residing on a reservation or in a Native village and 23% reported living in urban areas. Their greatest concerns were neglect, emotional abuse, and financial exploitation. The most important finding was that AI/AN elders describe abuse as "disrespect" and sexual abuse as "bothering" (Baker-Demaray, 2005).

The National Elder Mistreatment Study (Acierno, Hernandez-Tejado, & Muzzy, 2009) included 5,777 older adults with 2.3% (n=132) AI/AN. Of the entire sample, 11.4% reported experiencing at least one type of maltreatment in the past year. There was no specific data reported on AI/AN participants.

The National Resource Center on Native American Aging conducted an analysis of surveys of 18,026 AI/AN/NH elders age 55 and older from 240 American Indian Tribes, Alaskan Villages, and Hawaiian homesteads. These surveys examined the needs of Native American elderly and reported that 0.5% currently used elder abuse prevention services (EAP) and 13.4% would use the services if they were available to them (Walker, Carter, Gray, Baker-Demaray, and Davis, 2014). NRCNAA also found that 5.5% had more than 4 falls in the past year, 15.8% ate less than two meals per day, 11.8% had no help with chores, 12.8% had no money for food, 11.6% were unable to cook or feed themselves, 23% eat alone most of the time, 19% lack companionship, and 22% had no help with bills.

The Shielding American Indian Elders Research Team (SAIEP) developed a culturally relevant assessment of elder maltreatment and tested it with an urban sample and a reservation sample (Jervis, Fickenscher, Beals, and the SAIEP Team, 2014) This project used the Hwalek-Sengstock Elder Abuse Screening Test (HS-EAST) to develop the Native Elder Life Scale (NELS), a culturally relevant measure for American Indians. Fifty participants age 60 and over from each site were surveyed. Financial exploitation was the major issue indicated and physical abuse was discussed in very few cases.

Many programs that are working in Indian Country to improve the lives of elders and prevent abuse and neglect are developed from the practice and have no research to establish them as evidence based. Some of these programs include Multidisciplinary Elder Protection Teams (MDT or EPT), Elder Councils, Family Restoration Programs, and community based policing. MDTs in Indian Country put the elder at the center of the team and involve them in the process and planning. Elder Councils meet with perpetrators and the victims and establish behaviors to repair the relationships. This may include instruction in proper behavior, restitution, or in the extreme if instruction is not followed, banishment. Family restoration involves family meetings and service planning to resolve the problems resulting in the abuse or neglect with the court system involved only in the case where there is non-compliance. Project Golden Shield is a community policing initiative where police make visits to at risk elderly for coffee, to change light bulbs, check smoke alarms are other positive interactions. The Anadarko Agency in Oklahoma began Operation Golden Shield in 2012 and provided a Golden Sweetheart gift for Valentine's Day, a prepared Thanksgiving meal, and a Christmas gift for their Golden Angels in December. This process develops a positive relationship between police and the elderly so they are more likely to report abuse. This also serves as a notice that police are dropping by to those who may abuse, neglect, or exploit the elderly.

Practice & Policy Implications

The following recommendations are for practice and policy when working with American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN):

1. Use the terms "disrespect" and "bothering" when asking about abuse, neglect and exploitation with AI/AN elderly.
2. Consider restorative justice approaches to heal the relationship and correct the problem resulting in abuse, neglect or exploitation rather than punitive approaches through the Western justice system.
3. Attend to the acculturation of the elderly client and provide appropriate culturally based intervention as much as possible.
4. Utilize native language speakers as translators when working with AI/AN whose first language was the native language of their people.
5. Collect data on a national sample of AI/AN elderly to determine how often and what types of abuse occur and what types of resolution is most effective.
6. Consider practice based evidence in development of culturally relevant approaches to addressing elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation with AI/AN populations.

Further Reading

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Prepared By



Jacqueline S. Gray, PhD, Director, National Indigenous Elder Justice Initiative
School of Medicine and Health Sciences
University of North Dakota