

NEWSWISE

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Low-Income Native American Women Suffer High Rates of Domestic Abuse

Low-income Native American women are at least twice as likely to suffer physical or sexual assault at the hand of their partner than the average American woman, according to an article published this week in BMC Medicine. This risk is greatly increased if the women live in very poor socioeconomic conditions.

Researchers from the University of New Mexico and University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center found that more than half of the women questioned reported having been assaulted by a partner during their lifetime; one in eight women had been raped by a partner during their lifetime.

Thirty percent of the women that were currently in a relationship had been abused by their partner during the last year, and over half of these women had sustained injuries.

“These rates are far higher than population-based national and state estimates for reproductive age US women,” write the researchers. Around a quarter of US women are physically and/or sexually assaulted by a partner during their lifetime, and each year between 1% and 17% of US women are assaulted by their partner, according to estimates.

In the study, 312 Native American who were visiting a clinic for low-income pregnant and childbearing women in Southwestern Oklahoma were asked to fill in a questionnaire about their experiences of assault by a partner and about their socioeconomic circumstances. These women were enrolled in one of 29 different tribes and some 59 percent of the women had non-Native American partners.

Thirty-nine percent of the women questioned had been severely assaulted by a partner at some point in their life. This included being kicked, bitten, or hit with a fist, being choked, or being hit with an object. One in five of the women reported that they had been ‘beaten up’ and more than one in ten had been threatened with a knife or a gun.

Nearly 75% of the women questioned lived at or below the federal poverty level and 30% lived in severe poverty (on income less than half of the officially-designated poverty level). However, living on low income did not, by itself, put women at higher risk of assault by their partner. Women were four times more likely to have been assaulted by their partner if they experienced additional severe socioeconomic conditions, as indicated by living in severe poverty, receiving public assistance, or having a partner who had not graduated from high school.

“The severely depressed socioeconomic conditions under which a disproportionate percentage of Native American families live may explain their higher rates of ‘intimate partner violence’,” write the researchers. Lorraine Halinka Malcoe, the lead author on the study, said: “Primary prevention of domestic abuse of Native American women will likely require fundamental redress of social inequities that negatively impact Native American families. The study findings also underscore the need for programs and services designed to address the needs of abused Native American women.”

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This press release is based on the following article:

Socioeconomic disparities in intimate partner violence against
Native American Women: A Cross-Sectional Study
Lorraine Halinka Malcoe, Bonnie M Duran, and Juliann M Montgomery
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