

Missing individuals may not wish to be found or they may be too afraid to leave their current situation. Perpetrators often coerce or deceive individuals into taking opiates, leading to addiction. The severe discomfort of withdrawal can compel a person to remain with their captor to avoid these symptoms. Traffickers use their addiction to force compliance in sexual encounters. Additionally, the prevalence of fentanyl in street drugs has made overdoses increasingly common. Traffickers frequently relocate their victims between urban areas, complicating efforts to locate them and deepening their dependence on their captors.

Issues in Indian Country related to the MMIP Movement

Jurisdiction

The jurisdiction for missing persons cases can vary greatly, encompassing tribal, federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. Until recently, there was no specific database for missing and murdered Indigenous people. However, in April 2021, the Department of the Interior (DOI) announced the creation of the Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU) within the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Office of Justice Services. This unit is an extension of the Operation Lady Justice task force, with a mission to solve cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous women.

The Operation Lady Justice task force aims to "enhance the operation of the criminal justice system and address the legitimate concerns of American Indian and Alaska Native communities regarding missing and murdered people—particularly missing and murdered women and girls," as stated in the Operation Lady Justice Executive Order.

Human Trafficking of Native Americans

An issue commonly linked to Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) is human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking. Sex trafficking involves the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for labor, services, or commercial sex through the use of force, coercion, or fraud. Research has shown that Indigenous people, both in the United States and internationally, are at a heightened risk for trafficking. Areas with "man camps," such as those near oil fields, have notably higher rates of human trafficking.

Violence in Indian Country

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey in 2020:

- Non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Males and Females experienced the second highest rate of homicide in 2020.
- In 2020, homicide was in the top 10 leading causes of death for AI/AN females between 1-45 years of age.
- In 2020, homicide was in the top 10 leading causes of death for AI/AN males between the ages of 1-54.
- More than 2 in 5 non-Hispanic female AI/AN (43.7%) were raped in their lifetime.

- One in seven non-Hispanic AI/AN males (14.4%) were forced to penetrate someone during their lifetime.

Lack of Reporting, Misidentified Race

In 2016, there were 5,712 reported cases of missing Native females, but only 116 of these cases—just under two percent—were recorded in the Department of Justice (DOJ) Missing Persons Database. Often, Native individuals are misidentified as white or Mexican when their bodies are found, making it extremely difficult to match the missing persons with the discovered remains.

Statistics from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), May 2016

Table 1. Lifetime and Past-Year Violence Experienced by AI/AN Women

Lifetime	Past Year
84% experienced violence ^a	40% experienced violence ^a
56% experienced sexual violence	14% experienced sexual violence
56% experienced physical violence by an intimate partner	9% experienced physical violence by an intimate partner
49% experienced stalking	12% experienced stalking
66% experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner	26% experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner

Source: Dr. André B. Rosay and National Institute of Justice (NIJ), "Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men, May 2016," <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249736.pdf>, p. 44.

a. The statistic for violence includes sexual violence, physical violence by an intimate partner, psychological aggression by an intimate partner, and stalking.

Table 2. Lifetime and Past-Year Violence Experienced by AI/AN Men

Lifetime	Past Year
82% experienced violence ^a	35% experienced violence ^a
28% experienced sexual violence	10% experienced sexual violence.
43% experienced physical violence by an intimate partner	6% experienced physical violence by an intimate partner
19% experienced stalking	4% experienced stalking
73% experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner	27% experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner

Source: Dr. André B. Rosay and National Institute of Justice (NIJ), "Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men, May 2016," <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249736.pdf>, p. 45.

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Resources:

A page dedicated to showing missing and murdered indigenous people:

<https://www.facebook.com/mmiwusa/>

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Report, U.S. Attorney's Office District of Oregon, February 2021 [usao_mmip_report_final_final_2-18-2021_0.pdf](#) ([justice.gov](#))

Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP): Overview of Recent Research, Legislation, and Selected Issues for Congress, January 10, 2022, [1.pdf](#) (SECURED) ([congress.gov](#))

Urban Indian Health Institute, A snapshot of data from 71 Urban Cities in the U.S. [Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report.pdf](#) ([uihi.org](#))

The federal government's Missing and Murdered Unit [Missing and Murdered Indigenous People | Indian Affairs](#) ([bia.gov](#))

When a Loved One Goes Missing, a Pocket Guide, [mmiw_pocket_guide_new.pdf](#) ([niwrc.org](#))