

TRAUMA IN INDIAN COUNTRY

WHAT IS INDIAN COUNTRY?

Indian Country is a political, geographical, and legal term that describes the physical boundaries or locations of reservation, tribal, and/or trust land; it is also used as a legal definition to delineate federal, state, and tribal jurisdiction and tribal sovereign status. Geographically, Indian Country is typically located in isolated and rural settings, with most reservations in the western part of the US. According to the US Census in 2005, there were approximately 2.5 million persons who identify themselves as American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN).

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is an emotional or physical reaction to any event that is witnessed or experienced by a child or adolescent and is disturbing to them. Examples of events that can be traumatic are:

- Being a victim of physical or sexual abuse
- Witnessing violence within the family or community - murder, gangs, bullying
- Witnessing violence on television, movies, video games
- Loss of a loved one - due to accident, illness, disease, or violence
- Loss or displacement due to a natural disaster - fire, tornado, earthquake, hurricane
- Loss due to traffic accidents - injury, death, disability
- Loss of a relative or friend due to suicide
- Exposure to an act of war or terrorism

HOW PREVALENT IS TRAUMA IN INDIAN COUNTRY?

- AI/ANs are more than twice as likely as others to become victims of violent crimes
- Victimization of AI/AN children is 20 out of 1000 children compared to 10 out of 1000 of white children

HOW TRAUMA IS EXPERIENCED IN INDIAN COUNTRY

- As a single event - car accident, shooting, stabbing
- As a personal event that continues to have impact over several generations - boarding school, loss of children/grandchildren through the child welfare system
- As a prolonged experience - removal from homelands, placement in boarding schools
- As an historical event with prolonged impact - relocation, massacres
- As a cumulative effect of the above factors

FACTORS THAT INCREASE VULNERABILITY IN AI/AN

- Multiple traumatic events
- Loss of cultural values and belief systems
- Poverty
- Chronic health problems
- Chronic exposure to violent acts - family, community, gangs, bullying
- Lack of or limited parental or adult supervision
- Disabilities - physical, emotional, and cognitive
- Family history of suicide
- Family history of incarceration
- Alcoholism

WHAT CAN PROFESSIONALS DO?

- Understand the various reactions to trauma
- Understand the impact of one or multiple traumas or a family's ability to cope and respond to children
- Understand the impact of historical trauma



HOW TO ASSIST NATIVE FAMILIES

- Promote trauma informed services
- Identify community helpers to support families
- Identify healthy ways of coping with stress
- Help parents/caregivers understand trauma and how to better help their children

HELPFUL WEBSITES

Indian Country Child Trauma Center

www.icctc.org

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

www.nctsn.org

National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

www.ncptsd.org

Indian Health Service or local tribal behavioral health program

www.ih.gov

TRAUMA IN INDIAN COUNTRY

A GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS



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