

National Coordination Committee on the AI/AN SANE-SART Initiative Issue Paper, Sub Issue #2: Commitment to Culturally Relevant Sexual Violence Responses

Question for Committee To Address: *How can OVC and its partners better support increased commitment to culturally relevant responses to AI/AN adult and child victims of sexual violence by federal agencies?*

Definition: *Culturally relevant sexual violence responses include a process of adjusting the delivery of service options to be consistent with the client’s culture.¹ There is no one way to culturally adapt a sexual violence response; however, the best way to do so depends on the cultural background and needs of the victims and by recognizing the importance of American Indian and Alaska Native healing traditions—traditions that vary among and within native nations. Another way to provide culturally relevant responses is to understand and respect the sovereign status of Indian nations, to become familiar with the federal trust responsibility, and to recognize how the effects of oppression, colonialism, and racism have contributed to the trauma experienced by American Indians and Alaska Natives.*

Challenges of Developing Culturally Relevant Responses: *Stakeholders stated that the following issues related to culturally relevant responses can undermine or strengthen sexual violence response to AI/AN child and adult victims: misunderstanding the way AI/AN victims may respond to sexual violence or to sexual violence responders; community outreach, education, and discussions around sexual violence may be difficult; incorporating native language and/or interpreters is often lacking; and a misunderstanding that a strong cultural identity may be a healing factor.*

Background

By listening to diverse perspectives from the federal working groups—Child Sexual Abuse, Alaska Native Issues, and First Responders—and three demonstration sites, OVC and its partners learned that in the absence of culturally relevant responses, AI/AN adult and child victims do not receive an effective victim-centered coordinated community sexual violence response.

Discussion

The higher rates of exposure to traumatic events, coupled with the overarching cultural, historical, and intergenerational trauma, make it even more imperative to provide a response with a strong cultural context for AI/AN victims of sexual violence.² Culturally relevant responses are most effective in meeting victims’ needs when they are derived from, and are supportive of, the positive cultural attributes of the victim’s native identity and traditions. It is anticipated that providing a culturally relevant response to victims will foster a sense of wellness, healing, fairness, and satisfaction, thereby increasing engagement and cooperation with the criminal justice process that may lead to more thorough investigations and successful prosecutions.

¹ The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, University of Texas at Austin, *Cultural Adaptation Initiative: Providing Evidence Based Practices to Populations of Color*, 2006.

² Bigfoot, Dee. (2007). American Indian Youth: Current and Historical Trauma. *The National Child Traumatic Stress Network*. Available at http://nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/AI_YouthCurrentandHistoricalTrauma-ppt.pdf.

Preparation for Committee Recommendations

We are interested in receiving recommendations from Committee members on how OVC and its partners can support the increased commitment to culturally relevant responses to AI/AN adult and child victims of sexual violence by federal partners. Committee members are encouraged to discuss these questions with their respective organizations and/or tribal communities prior to the meeting.

Proposed General Questions on Culturally Relevant Responses

- What does an increased commitment to culturally relevant sexual violence response look like for your organization or the tribal communities with which you work? Please explain.
- How has an increased commitment to culturally relevant sexual violence response impacted your organization or the tribal communities with which you work? Please provide any specific examples or data/information you have that would help clarify collaboration and its impact.
- Are there any examples of how your organization, or the tribal communities with which you work, has successfully implemented or supported an increased commitment to culturally relevant sexual violence response?
- What are/have been the barriers to encouraging or supporting culturally relevant responses to AI/AN adult and child victims of sexual assault for your organization or the tribal communities with which you work?
- What initial recommendations do you have on how OVC and its partners can support the increased commitment to culturally relevant responses to AI/AN adult and child victims of sexual violence by federal agencies?
- What additional resources would be helpful to you and the Committee to consider increasing the commitment to culturally relevant sexual violence response at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels? Do you have any suggestions on how to best access that information?

Research/Resources on Sexual Violence Response

- For examples of culturally specific responses, see the Tribal Law and Policy Institute's *Resource Guide for the Development of a SART in Tribal Communities*, which tribal organizations can consult to develop a comprehensive response to sexual assault using the SART model. (September 2007), www.tribal-institute.org/download/SART_Manual_09_08.pdf.
- "Health promotion interventions for AI/ANs should be delivered in ways that are consistent with the norms and values of AI/AN cultures." Jennifer B. Unger, Claradina Soto & Natalie Thomas, *Translation of Health Programs for American Indians in the United States, Evaluation & the Health Professions* 124 (2008), www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18319377.
- Donald Wayne Clark, Domestic violence screening, policies, and procedures in Indian Health Service facilities, 14 *The Journal of the American Board of Family Practice* 252 (2001), www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11458967.