

HISTORICAL VIEWPOINT

When we talk to our Elders about domestic violence and ask them how they as Native women dealt with it in the past, there is often an uncomfortable silence created between us. Our assumption is often that domestic violence is a phenomenon existing only in modern times.

However, the reality is that our great grandmothers, grandmothers, and mothers also experienced domestic violence and sexual assault.

As tribal people looking for answers, we have to go back 500 years to examine how and when life started to change for Native women.

Prior to European contact, Native men and women's roles were based on specific traditional values practiced and honored through individual clans and tribes. Women were honored as pivotal to the survival of the tribes. Although they had their separate roles, Native women were generally considered equal in status to Native men.

Associating violence with power intensified in Native communities after the advent of colonization. Along with this change came a shift in the concepts of women's roles, in particular defining women and children as property. This imbalance of power created a framework that allows domestic violence to be a common occurrence, affecting 4 million women every year.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Definition: A pattern of assaultive, abusive, controlling, or coercive behavior including physical, sexual, spiritual, emotional, and psychological tactics, as well economic coercion that is used in effort to gain or maintain control or authority in an intimate relationship.

Domestic violence differs from other forms of violence in that the violence or threat of violence is used to maintain an intimate relationship through the abuse of power.

POWER & CONTROL – This model is based on a belief system in which an individual has control in a relationship and maintains that control through certain actions and behavior. These actions have an intent and purpose behind them. Physical violence is only one tactic used to maintain control. Other tactics may be:

- Economic abuse: making all financial decisions on how money will be spent,
- Intimidation: such as threatening to use physical force,
- Isolation: cutting off friends and family members from talking or visiting,
- Threats: threatening to take the children away if she leaves the relationship,
- Sexual abuse: forcing her to have sexual intercourse, particularly after a physical assault.

HOW CAN OUR COMMUNITIES ADDRESS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Welcome women's leadership.

Ownership is about taking responsibility for the safety of battered women by developing safe housing or shelter services for women in crisis.

Men need to organize to support other men in changing attitudes and beliefs about women.

End domestic violence by creating a "No Tolerance" resolution to domestic violence.

Negotiate for time at tribal council meetings to educate tribal leaders on the effects of domestic violence within the community.

Acknowledge that domestic violence is not traditional and reclaim our traditional values and beliefs.

Respect women as sacred in the same way you respect mother earth.

Encourage members of the community to organize and get involved in ending domestic violence.