

Sexual Violence against Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Women

Introduction

Sexual violence is a critical issue affecting Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander battered women. The API Institute's analysis enumerates the kinds of sexual violence women face; identifies the contexts that increase the vulnerability of immigrants and refugees, such as coming from conflict zones; addresses issues such as advocate discomfort and language difficulties that can inhibit access to services; and develops trainings for domestic violence programs to address the intersections of sexual and domestic violence in Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. However, the information on types of sexual violence, vulnerable women, and potentially dangerous settings is applicable to victims and survivors in any community.

The API Institute trains domestic violence advocates on sexual violence because:

1. *Compartmentalized services don't work for our communities.* Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women coming to domestic violence programs eventually disclose sexual violence and may be reluctant to go to different programs once they've established rapport with a domestic violence advocate.
2. *Immigrant and refugee battered women have experienced, but not disclosed sexual violence in their home countries and in the conflict zones they fled.* Immigrants and refugees who experienced sexual violence in their home countries, particularly if they lived in conflict zones and were victimized during civil or international wars, may not have dealt with these experiences, nor would they have gone to a rape crisis center.
3. *Advocate discomfort about sexual violence inhibits disclosure by victims/survivors.* Asian battered women often mention that their domestic violence advocates hesitate to bring up sexual violence beyond the issue of marital/intimate partner rape and that they in fact need a place to talk about their sexual abuse in their home countries.

Definition

Sexual violence includes sexual actions and threats that are experienced as invasive to the body and violate bodily integrity. ~World Health Organization Report, 2002.

Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. ~Jewkes, Sen and Garcia-Moreno WHO Report 2002.

We distinguish between experiences of, and vulnerabilities to sexual violence & ask:

- What kinds of sexual violence do Asian, Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander women experience?
- What particular contexts increase their vulnerability?

Types of Sexual Violence

1. Body modification by men or bodily humiliation by other women
2. Child sexual assault by known assailants or strangers
3. Coerced (forced) sex
4. Coerced sexual initiation
5. Custodial rapes: in police stations, jails, etc.,
6. Cyber assaults, cyber stalking and cyber predators
7. Date rape/Drug facilitated rape
8. Female Genital Mutilation or Female Genital Cutting
9. Forced marriages, including marriage of children
10. Forced group sex
11. Gang rapes
12. Ignorance about sexuality, anatomy, sex or sexual safety to ostensibly 'protect' girls
13. Incestuous sexual assault
14. Marriage related sexual violence
 - Abandonment, physical and/or sexual abandonment of wives/brides
 - Infidelity
 - Marital rape
 - Polygamy: one man has several wives – whether through legal or 'cultural' marriages (listed as sexual violence because the culture or the husband forces women to accept this arrangement)
 - Polyandry: one woman has several husbands (listed as sexual violence if a woman is forced into this arrangement)
 - Temporary marriage: practiced as a way to legitimize sexual relations between non-married couples (over the dating period, for example) or with a prostitute (for the time of the encounter).

- Marriage by capture: a woman is 'captured' by potential husband and kept captive for a few days in his family home till she 'consents' to marry him
- 15. Neglect/coldness: extreme sexual neglect or coldly going through the motions of sex
- 16. Pornographic-related violence: being forced to watch and mimic pornographic acts
- 17. Public molestation by strangers in crowded public spaces, particularly public transport. In India, this is termed 'eve-teasing'.
- 18. Rape by a known assailant or by a stranger
- 19. Rape and its aftermath, which can include:
 - Victim-blaming
 - Being forced to marry rapist or someone else right away
 - Abandonment or violence by the victim's family towards the victim
 - If a pregnancy results from the rape, her family may send her to their home country permanently, force her to carry the pregnancy, give up child for adoption, or force her to have an abortion.
- 20. Sexual harassment in workplaces, places of worship, homes, schools, or university campuses.
- 21. Survival or transactional sex: women having sex in exchange for necessities like food, children's clothes, a place to stay, etc., and not necessarily with multiple men (this is not the same as sex work).
- 22. Unprotected sex (forced) leading to an unwanted pregnancy, HIV, or STI exposure. This can affect women with trans-national partners who travel between the U.S. and home countries frequently.
- 23. Virginity examinations and attendant surgeries (e.g., sewing up a torn hymen) to ensure an intact hymen. In fact, ruptured hymens do not necessarily bleed - referred to medically as a compliant hymen.
- 24. Voyeurism, includes flashing, peeping, or using technology.
- 25. Wife inheritance: also called fraternal polyandry where a widow must marry her dead husband's brother.
- 26. Witnessing rape: children or family forced to watch (or know it is happening) and how it affects both victim and witness.

<h2 style="margin: 0;">Vulnerable Women & Girls and Potentially Dangerous Settings</h2>

- Actresses
- Advocates
- Athletes
- Battered women
- College campuses
- Disaster zones (e.g., tsunami in SE Asia, earthquakes in Pakistan, Iran)
- Divorced and separated women
- Domestic workers
- Elderly
- Healthcare settings
- High schools (predatory behavior from teachers, coaches, other authority figures)

- Homeless women and kids
- Immigration processes/unsafe travel routes
- Incarcerated or jailed women
- International Marriage Bureaus: women marrying through such services
- Lesbians, Bisexual and Transgender individuals, including teens and young women
- Mentally disabled or mentally ill
- Military wives/partners and women in the vicinity of military bases
- Models
- Poor women and the exploitation of female poverty in the form of adoption, trafficking, and transactional sex.
- Pregnant women
- Prostituted women, teens, and children/sex workers
- Refugees or Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in war or post-war camps
- Religious and cultural minorities
- Sexual abuse by clergy/clerics
- Stalked women
- Teens: pregnant, sexually-active teens, or runaways
- Trafficked women
- War survivors of civil or international wars
- Widows
- Women with disabilities
- Workers in exploitative settings

About the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence

The Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence is a national resource center and clearinghouse on gender violence in API communities. It serves a national network of advocates, community members, organizations, service agencies, professionals, researchers, policy advocates, and activists from community and social justice organizations. Its goals focus on strengthening advocacy, promoting community organizing and addressing systems change.

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

The APIA Health Forum is a national policy organization advocating for the health and well-being of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders and their full representation and participation in health, political, social and economic arenas.

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