



Young Forensic Scientists Forum—2020

Y18 A Modern Trail of Tears: The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) Crisis in the United States

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the history leading up to the current MMIW crisis; top risk factors for MMIW; why this crisis needs to be addressed at both the local and national levels; and preliminary actions that can be taken by local law enforcement agencies and forensic science divisions to help mitigate this national crisis.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by raising awareness of the ongoing crisis of MMIW that is currently being experienced in cities across the United States and Canada and will offer some preliminary actions that forensic science practitioners can implement in order to facilitate positive change regarding this issue.

In the United States, American Indian and Alaskan Native people experience higher rates of violence than all other ethnicities. On some reservations, indigenous people experience murder at a rate of ten times the national average.¹ Additionally, homicide is the third-leading cause of death for indigenous women and girls between the ages of 10–24 years and the fifth-leading cause of death for indigenous women between 25–34 years of age.¹ The purpose of the present research has been to investigate the MMIW crisis, determine the cities with the highest rates of MMIW, and to offer suggestions to help fix the root causes for this national crisis.

In the present study, missing persons data was analyzed from the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), and from data collected and published in a report produced by the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI).² Additionally, unidentified persons data was analyzed from NamUs, and data regarding murder cases of indigenous women was analyzed from the UIHI report.² Locations with the highest rates of MMIW cases in the country were identified as potential “hot spots.” Additional analysis of these locations took into account demographic data from the United States census, fracking locations in the United States, and other socio-political factors that could be affecting the MMIW case prevalence in these areas.

Following the analysis, a total of 23 locations were determined to be “hot spots” for MMIW cases. Of these 23 locations, five were identified as being of the highest priority for intervention due to their disproportionately high rates of MMIW cases. These locations are Albuquerque, NM; Anchorage, AK; Gallup/McKinley County, NM; Seattle/King County, WA; and Tacoma/Pierce County, WA. Furthermore, hydraulic fracking across the United States seems likely to be a contributing factor in the rate of MMIW cases in 9 to 16 of the identified “hot spots.”

Currently in the United States, despite a national movement to raise awareness to the MMIW crisis, there has yet to be any actions taken by the federal government to address this issue. The present study has served to identify the primary “hot spots” for MMIW cases and has isolated some of the key contributing factors to this national problem. With this information, a more direct, community-based action plan can be developed in each of these “hot spots” to provide more immediate help to these communities. In order to most holistically address this issue, actions need to be taken at both the local and federal levels, and this study aims to highlight what those initial actions should be.

Reference(s):

- ¹ Savanna’s Act, H.R. 2733, 116th Cong., 1st Sess. (2019).
- ² Lucchesi, A., and Echo-Hawk, A. (2018). *Missing the Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls: A Snapshot of Data from 71 Urban Cities in the United States*. Seattle: Urban Indian Health Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report.pdf>.

Indigenous Women, Racial Violence, Missing Persons