

American Indian and Alaskan Native Maternal Mental Health

While mothers of any race can face mental health conditions during pregnancy and after childbirth, American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) women experience higher rates than the average population (Foley & Strunz, 2022). Though the body of research is still growing in the U.S., initial data on the prevalence of maternal depression for AI/AN women in the United States ranges from 14-30% (Heck, 2021). Studies based on international Indigenous populations suggest that Indigenous women experience an even greater risk for maternal depression and anxiety: Indigenous women experience depression 87% more often than White women (Black et al., 2019) and experienced maternal anxiety 37% more often than non-Indigenous women (Owais et al., 2019).

Maternal Death

AI/AN women are disproportionately impacted by pregnancy-associated deaths. Indigenous women have much higher rates of pregnancy-associated drug-related death and suicide than other racial or ethnic groups (Margerison et al., 2022).

Based on a review of pregnancy-related deaths among AI/AN people, mental health conditions and hemorrhage were the most common underlying causes of death, accounting for 50% of deaths with a known underlying cause. Most pregnancy-related deaths of AI/AN people (93%) were determined to be preventable. About 64% of deaths occurred 7 days to 1 year after pregnancy (Troost et al., 2022).



Who is classified as American Indian and Alaskan Native?

A [report](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) uses an approach for classifying AI/AN populations that include those who also identify as multi-racial or of Hispanic ethnicity (Troost et al., 2022).

Trauma: A Contributing Factor to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

AI/AN people have almost twice the percentage of lifetime PTSD than White people (Emerson et al., 2017). This can be attributed to historical trauma from forced relocation and the prohibition of cultural and spiritual practices, leading to high levels of multigenerational psychological distress. One study found that the historical relocation of AI/AN people can elevate multigenerational risk for developing substance use disorders and increasing depression in female caretakers, perpetuating a cycle of trauma sometimes labeled as intergenerational PTSD (Walls & Whitbeck, 2012).



Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Research shows that AI/AN women experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) and homicide in the US (Campbell et al., 2021). Intimate partner violence is a substantive risk factor for depression, PTSD, anxiety, and suicide (Ellsberg & Emmelin, 2014).

Inequities and Systemic Racism Lead to Stress and Adverse Outcomes

Researchers have found that racism, rather than race, increases risk for distress as increased stressors and the cumulative experience of historical trauma due to relocation, violence, and genocide negatively impact physical and mental health (Solomon et al., 2022). Gestational age at birth and gestational weight are two of the strongest indicators of long-term wellness or potential impairments for a newborn child. Indigenous women are 62% more likely to give birth prematurely than White women, leading to higher rates of low birth weight and developmental delays (March of Dimes, 2022).

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