

Research on Violent Victimization Lab

a unit of the

ASU School of Criminology
and Criminal Justice

Arizona State University

2024

The Impact of COVID-19 on Missing and Murdered Indigenous (Native American) Peoples

A statewide partnership among Arizona State University,
the State of Arizona, and Indigenous Communities

A comprehensive report on the lived experience with Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Peoples (MMIP) and the COVID-19 pandemic among Indigenous
family and survivors mental health and healing journey



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Note:

Throughout this report, we use the term Indigenous Peoples to refer to those who identify as American Indian, Indian, Native American, or Native. Indigenous Peoples is also used to refer to the generality of Indigenous Populations. Similarly, we use the term Indigenous Nations to refer to communities of Indian Nations or Native Nations.

Table of contents

Forward.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Current study.....	17
Our research design.....	19
Data collection procedures.....	20
Measures.....	25
Key considerations when doing research with Indigenous Peoples.....	26
Analytic summary.....	29
Results.....	29
Recommendations.....	47
Concluding remarks.....	50
Appendix A. List of acronyms.....	51

Forward

on behalf of the Arizona Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Survivor Advisory Group (SAG)

We acknowledge that this report has heartfelt stories of missing or murdered loved ones, which have extreme value to anyone who has experienced such hurt. This report represents the honor of our loved ones who have fallen victim to MMIP-related incidents. Our sisters or nieces who are still missing or have been murdered. Our fathers who have lost their lives to violence. Our brothers, whom we will never get to hug again. Our mothers who will never return. Our relatives who were victims of homicide or had unexplained disappearances.

Unfortunately, what we experienced has become far too common, prompting our need to voice our experiences through research. Existing knowledge of MMIP prevalence is limited and often portrays an inaccurate story due to the vast undercount of cases, reporting issues, and jurisdictional complexities. In this study, we shared our loved one's story that numbers would not have captured; we shared personal narratives that go beyond statistics. Through this research, we intend to be part of the solution to stop MMIP from happening to others, to help others heal, to find justice, and to create change. We invite you to be part of this solution.

Our voices and grassroots advocacy led to this study, funded by leaders who are now paying attention. With this report, we intend to show people in positions of change the power of the Indigenous collective. Together, we must acknowledge that incidents of MMIP remain frequent because of prejudiced investigations and unjust criminal justice outcomes for Indigenous victims, survivors, and families. We need to shed light on what MMIP is, how it affects families and communities, and how to address it.

We were often told to keep quiet and not to talk about our loved ones because of traditional beliefs and cultural taboos. Some families do not even talk about what has happened, making it hard for their loved ones to grieve their loss. It is disappointing when we get pushback from our own people, our families, and communities who do not want to speak about these incidents. It is even more hurtful when community leaders do not support or even acknowledge the MMIP movement.

We were told by the police to let them do their job and that we were told not to interfere with investigations or should not be conducting searches. Now, some of us are left without answers and justice. It all has left us frustrated, angry, and ready to fight for change. We cannot turn a blind eye to the families who are suffering. We are tired of fighting an uphill battle, but we do it for our loved ones. Even though each of us SAG members comes from different Arizona tribes like the Colorado River Indian Tribes, Hopi Tribe, the Navajo Nation, and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, we share similar frustrations, experiences, and strife when it comes to MMIP.

For those who share similar experiences, please know that you are not alone. Understand that people within your own family will grieve differently and everyone's healing process looks different. Be prepared to hear victim-blaming comments that negatively focus on lifestyle choices by the victim or insinuate the victim deserved the violence they received or chose to be subjected to violence. Lastly, nobody will fight for justice for your loved one harder than you, so you must always remember to take care of yourself first.



Acknowledgments

From the Research on Violent Victimization (ROVV) Lab

We recognize that Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples (MMIP) is a complex humanitarian crisis impacting many Indigenous families and communities across the globe. This requires coordinated survivor-centered responses to uplift those who are affected by violence. With that in mind, we incorporate approaches into our work that center on the resilient efforts exemplified by Indigenous Peoples for centuries.

The Arizona Office of the Governor funded this project. That financial support made it possible to elevate Indigenous voices from all over the state and provide innovative community-based research that created a safe space to express the tragic loss of their loved ones. The funding also allowed us to create and sustain a Survivor Advisory Group (SAG), whose partnership has been instrumental in all parts of this project.

We are especially grateful to our five Indigenous SAG members, who have exhibited tremendous leadership throughout the project. Thank you to our SAG members: Jessica Antonio, Yolanda Bydonie, Wi-Bwa Grey, Raymond Meza, and Albert “A.T.” Siquah. Thank you for providing invaluable guidance and input. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with each of you and have learned so much from your expertise. We acknowledge and truly admire your dedication to addressing the violence committed against Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you to our community members who participated in the 2024 MMIP Survivor Gathering. To those who shared, thank you for your courage and for trusting us with your stories. Thank you to our healers: Valuara Imus-Nahsonhoya, Jonathan Lacapa, and Dezeray Garcia who provided trauma-informed support for our survivors. Thank you to the Indigenous professionals who provided their expertise including: Brandon Nahsonhoya (MC), Dwight Francisco (Cultural Director), Teresa Choyguha (Comedienne), LorenAshley Buford (Speaker), Durina Keyonnie (Speaker), Katonya Begay (Speaker), and Siquah Productions (Cultural Performers). We acknowledge the cultural significance of the venue we rented to host the event – the Phoenix Indian School Visitors Center.

Lastly, we acknowledge and appreciate all our volunteer research assistants: Dalavai “Ava” Surveyor, Julianne Culey, Weston Gale, Bothwell Piason, Olivia Shaw, and Rachel Carroll. We appreciate everyone who has contributed to the success of this project.



Introduction

Since 2018, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples (MMIP)¹ crisis has gained recognition in Arizona, owing initial efforts to grassroots organizations and community leaders who sought justice and answers for their lost loved relatives. While MMIP continues to be a global crisis, efforts to study its magnitude have primarily originated in North America, specifically the U.S. and Canada. Recently, the U.S. has seen a steady increase in studies across scholarly disciplines and sectors seeking to understand violence against Indigenous Peoples, including homicide and missing persons. Some of these studies have produced various recommendations to address the MMIP crisis.² By the end of 2022, at least ten states had produced comprehensive reports detailing the pervasiveness of MMIP in their communities. These states include Arizona, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, and Wyoming.³

Collectively, community activism, legislative reports, and academic responses have shed light on the prevalence of violence in the form of homicides and missing persons while bringing attention to the impacts it has had within Indigenous communities. However, no known research study has examined the impacts of MMIP on survivors and family members. To our knowledge, the current study is the first to incorporate Indigenous methodologies while taking a collaborative approach with Indigenous survivors to gather knowledge from family members and survivors who have directly experienced MMIP. The goal of this study is to learn from people impacted by MMIP to inform culturally relevant policy and prevention strategies in response to MMIP, generally, and to understand the specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their MMIP experiences.

The core elements of the MMIP crisis

A review of existing literature on MMIP in the U.S. unveils a consensus on the following as the core elements characterizing the MMIP crisis known thus far:

1. Indigenous Peoples disproportionately experience the types of victimization that lead to homicide and missing persons.⁴
2. There is limited accurate data to show the true extent of MMIP.⁵
3. There is an association between MMIP and colonialism.⁶

In the section that follows, the MMIP core elements are discussed to examine what we know about the prevalence of this crisis, its origins, and the underlying factors fueling it.

Indigenous Peoples face higher rates of victimization, leading to more cases of homicide and missing persons

Sexual assault, domestic violence (DV), family violence (FV), human trafficking, and kidnapping are the main forms of interpersonal violence associated with MMIP.⁷ Early studies and activism on MMIP in the U.S. focused primarily on addressing the crisis in relation to Indigenous women and girls, a crisis known as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) and Girls (MMIWG).⁸ The documented high rates of kidnapping, trafficking, and sexual violence affecting Indigenous women place this population at a higher risk of being murdered or going missing, sparking the MMIWG movement rooted in grassroots initiatives.⁹ However, subsequent studies on the crisis have revealed that Indigenous men, boys, Two-Spirited, and gender-diverse people also experience high rates of victimization, prompting the ongoing MMIP movement.¹⁰

[1] Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples (MMIP) refers to the unexplainable disappearance and/or the homicide of an Indigenous person.

[2-3] Fox, Kathleen A., Kayleigh A. Stanek, Leonard Mukosi, Christopher Sharp, and Valaura Imus-Nahsonhoya. "A Systematic Analysis of Statewide Reports on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples in the U.S.: What We Know and Where to Go from Here." *Rural Sociology* (2024).

[4] U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Crisis.

[5] U.S. Department of the Interior Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Crisis

[6] Native Hope, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). Across the United States and Canada Native Women and Girls are being Taken or Murdered at an unrelenting rate.

[7] Administration for Children and Families Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples (MMIP)

[8] Burns, J., Gneck, J., & Bell, S. Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls: A case for abuse screening in at-risk paediatric populations. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 56(10), 1641-1641 (2020).

[9-10] Fox, Kathleen A., Stanek, Kayleigh, Harvey, Cassie, Sharp, Christopher, & Imus-Nahsonhoya, Valaura. Understanding the scope of missing and murdered Indigenous Peoples: A longitudinal examination of the understudied population of Indigenous males in Arizona. *Homicide Studies* (2023).

A national survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revealed that non-Hispanic Indigenous women experience the second highest rate of sexual violence.¹¹ More than 2 in 5 (43.7%) of Indigenous women were reported to have been victims of rape in their lifetime, more than 29% of non-Hispanic Black and 28% of non-Hispanic White women.¹² The CDC also reported homicide as the top 10 leading causes of death among Indigenous females aged 1-45 in 2020.¹³ Indigenous males also had the second highest rates of homicide compared to males of all other racial and ethnic groups, except Hispanic males in the same year.¹⁴

Similarly, a 2017 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report revealed that from 2014 to 2016, 132 Tribal law enforcement agencies and 61 major city law enforcement agencies reported having initiated human trafficking investigations that involved Indigenous victims.¹⁵ Most recently, the high risk of Indigenous Peoples being human trafficked has been documented in Arizona, where Indigenous individuals have become the target of fraudulent recruitment practices of recovery residences, also known as sober living homes (SLHs).¹⁶

Since 2022, Arizona media has reported incidences of Arizona SLH operators facilitating the trafficking of Indigenous Peoples from Arizona reservations to treatment facilities. These trafficking practices usually target unhoused, low-income, alone, or inebriated Indigenous Peoples who use false promises for food, housing, and access to care.¹⁷

Considering that MMIP is considered the “top issue” facing Indigenous Peoples as the U.S. heads for elections in 2024, it is clear that this population experiences disproportionately high risks of victimization leading to homicide or going missing.¹⁸ However, since “less than half of violent victimizations against Native Americans are ever reported to police,” it is apparent that existing data do not accurately reveal the extent of the victimization experienced by this population.¹⁹

The impact of MMIP and violence on Indigenous families

Indigenous families tend to be close-knit and have close connections that are multigenerational and beyond immediate family bounds.²⁰ Inclusivity and fluidity define familial relatedness among Indigenous Peoples to the extent that any individual who plays a significant role in one’s life is generally viewed as a family member.²¹ The identity of Indigenous Peoples is closely tied to membership in the family, clan, or community, and it is from these social groups that individual members foster familial relations.²² The extent to which Indigenous family members feel connected to one another is central to Indigenous perceptions of resilient, healthy families.²³

Given the importance of families within Indigenous communities, the ramifications of violence perpetrated against one family member spread throughout the family and across generations.²⁴ This is particularly true when it comes to serious crime such as MMIP. Yet, there is no research

[11] U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis.

[12] Basile, K.C., Smith, S.G., Kresnow, M., Khatiwada S., & Leemis, R.W. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Sexual Violence. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2022. This percentage makes Native American Women the second largest population experiencing rape, following non-Hispanic multiracial (48.0%)

[13] US. Department of the Interior, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Crisis

[14] Basile et al The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2022.

[15] Goodwin, Gretta L. "Human Trafficking: Investigations in Indian Country or Involving Native Americans and Actions Needed to Better Report on Victims Served, Statement of Gretta L. Goodwin, Director, Homeland Security and Justice, Testimony Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, US Senate." In United States. Government Accountability Office, no. GAO-17-762T. United States. Government Accountability Office, 2017.

[16] Leonard Mukosi, Rachell Carroll, & Kathleen A. Fox "Examining the impact of the Arizona sober living home crisis in relation to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples: A media and legal analysis." Law Journal for Social Justice, (2024):19, 3-32

[17] Justin Lum, Sen. Tester: Arizona Medicaid scam targets tribal members in Montana, leaving them stranded with no way home, Fox10 Phoenix (July 21, 2023).

[18] Brookings, Murdered and missing women is the top issue facing Native American communities heading into the 2024 elections.

[19] US. Department of the Interior, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Crisis

[20-22] McKinley, Catherine E. Understanding Indigenous gender relations and violence: Becoming gender awake. Springer Nature, 2023.

[23] Martin, Donna, and Eleanor Yurkovich. "Close-knit" defines a healthy Native American Indian family." Journal of Family Nursing 20, no. 1 (2014): 51-72.

[24] Burnette, Catherine E., and Clare Cannon. "It will always continue unless we can change something": consequences of intimate partner violence for indigenous women, children, and families." European journal of psychotraumatology 5, no. 1 (2014):24585

examining the lived experiences of Indigenous MMIP survivors or victims' family members.²⁵ Existing research has examined the consequences of intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic or family violence on Indigenous family members (mainly women and children) in isolation, but not holistically.²⁶

Empirical studies have revealed that IPV affecting Indigenous women often begins at a young age, leading to mental health challenges, including depression, attempted suicide, and substance abuse.²⁷ IPV has also been reported to have impacts on Indigenous children who are five to seven times more likely to suffer psychological problems.²⁸ Mental health challenges experienced by Indigenous children who witnessed IPV include depression, anxiety, aggression, insecure attachment, and low self-esteem, than children from non-violent households.²⁹

Studies examining the lived experiences of Indigenous women have also revealed that Indigenous Peoples are less likely than non-Indigenous Peoples to report or seek help in response to family violence.³⁰ The barriers to accessing formal support by Indigenous Peoples included shame, lack of confidentiality, and inappropriate service provider responses.³¹ These studies are corroborated by the findings from the 2023 study by the Research on Violent Victimization (ROVV) Lab, which revealed that Indigenous college students, despite having experienced interpersonal violence in their lifetime, rarely use campus services to address their victimization.³²

Indigenous survivors of family violence often rely upon informal support networks, including friends, families, elders, and traditional healing. However, shame, embarrassment, and lack of safety continue to be barriers to seeking informal services by Indigenous survivors of FV.³³

The scope of the aforementioned research makes apparent the need for research capturing the lived experiences of diverse Indigenous family members. Additionally, such research needs to examine the lived experiences of family members with homicide, kidnapping, trafficking, and other forms of violence that lead to MMIP beyond. Given that MMIP violence can also be perpetrated by strangers, an analysis of perspectives on MMIP needs not to be confined to the contexts of violence occurring within families or intimate relationships.³⁴

The impact of COVID-19 on survivors and families affected by MMIP

In April 2020, at the peak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples issued a statement indicating that Indigenous Peoples would suffer the effects of the virus disproportionately and in different ways.³⁵ In the U.S., the Navajo Nation, the largest federally-recognized Indigenous community, recorded at least 700 cases of positively diagnosed community members and multiple deaths as early as April 2020.³⁶ However, globally, there has not been accurate data on COVID-19 mortality and infection rates among Indigenous Peoples, as this population is regularly excluded from demographic and health data collected by governments and research organizations.³⁷ What is known is that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already complex situation for Indigenous communities who already face historical political and socio-economic challenges, including high rates of violence.³⁸

[25-26] Burnette, Catherine E., and Clare Cannon. "It will always continue unless we can change something, 2014.

[27-28] Bohn, Diane K. "Lifetime physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, depression, and suicide attempts among Native American women." *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 24, no. 3 (2003):333-52.

[29] Cummings, E. Mark, and Patrick T. Davies. *Marital conflict and children: An emotional security perspective*. Guilford Press, 2010. Burnette sought to close the existing research gap by exploring the interconnectedness of the consequences of violence across the Native American family. However, in addition to centering only on IPV, the study examined the effects of such violence on whole families based on the perspectives of women across their multiple roles as partners, children, and family members.

[30] Fiolet, Renee, Laura Tarzia, Mohajer Hameed, and Kelsey Hegarty Indigenous Peoples' help-seeking behaviors for family violence: A scoping review "Trauma, Violence & Abuse 22, no 2 (2021): 370-380.

[31] Fiolet et al, Indigenous Peoples help-seeking behaviors for family violence, 2021.

[32] Kathleen A. Fox, Kayleigh A. Stanek, Cassie L. Harvey, Katonya Begay, Christopher Sharp, Valaura Imus-Nahsonhoya, Leonard Mukosi, and Dalavai Surveyor. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples: Perspectives of Indigenous students and the faculty and staff who serve them. Published by the Arizona State University Research on Violent Victimization lab (2023):4-69

[33] Fiolet et al, Indigenous Peoples help-seeking behaviors for family violence, 2021 see also Fox, et al Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples: Perspectives of Indigenous students and the faculty and staff who serve them, 2023

[34] Fox, K. A., Sharp, C., Stanek, K., Devreaux, T., Imus-Nahsonhoya, V., Julian, S., & Eaton, Reducing missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls: Arizona statewide study in partnership with the HB2570 legislative study committee. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development*, 11(1), 180-205 (2022):1-86

[35] National Indigenous Women's Resource Center COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Indigenous People Worldwide. Accessed May 16, 2024 <https://www.niwrc.org/restoration-magazine/june-2020/covid-19-pandemic-impacts-violence-against-indigenous-women>

[36] Rudolph Ryser, *The Earth Begins Healing, COVID-19 opens attack on the Fourth World*. (Accessed, May 15 2024) <https://www.cwis.org/2020/04/the-earth-begins-healing-covid-19-opens-attack-on-the-fourth-world/> (Center for World Indigenous Studies. April, 21 2020).

[37] Kalen Goodluck. *The erasure of Indigenous Peoples in U.S. COVID-19 data*. HighCountryNews

[38] UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) COVID-19 yet another challenge for Indigenous Peoples.

In a statement titled “Indigenous Peoples & the COVID-19 Pandemic: Considerations,” the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) noted that Indigenous women and girls often are disproportionately affected by epidemics.³⁹ Indigenous Peoples experienced greater rates of COVID-19 mortality compared with other racial and ethnic groups⁴⁰ Indigenous Peoples living on were more susceptible to the virus as a result of economic marginalization, which impacted their access to high-quality medical facilities and the capacity to maintain virus-free living conditions. Given that this population is also disproportionately affected by homicides (MMIP), COVID-19-related deaths had exceedingly devastating impacts on families already grieving MMIP-related loss.

Overall, there are three main ways through which the effects of COVID-19 intersected with the scourge of violence, including MMIP, afflicting Indigenous Peoples. First, COVID-19 exacerbated the basic safety crisis as evidenced by the spike in domestic violence rates and other human rights abuses encountered by Indigenous Peoples during the pandemic. Second, the isolation measures enacted in response to the virus, including curfews and lockdowns, alienated Indigenous Peoples from cultural and justice-related resources that are necessary for fostering the coping and healing or closure for survivors and family members impacted by MMIP.⁴¹ Third, the high rates of COVID-19-related deaths among Indigenous Peoples compounded grief, particularly for those Indigenous families already grieving the loss of loved ones through MMIP. Together, these main effects created complications for healing and coping with grief and loss.

As articulated throughout this report, rituals and cultural ceremonies are of significant value within the Indigenous worldviews in responding to social harm, including MMIP-related violence⁴² At the peak of COVID-19, isolation measures and travel restrictions were enacted globally, including within Indigenous Nations, to curb the spread of the virus⁴³ For example, the Navajo Department of Health designated unnecessary travel as an offense punishable by incarceration for up to 30 days or a \$ 1,000 fine⁴³ Thus, the COVID-19 related isolation measures and travel restrictions put a stop to traditional and healing ceremonies where Indigenous Peoples would gather to respond to and mitigate the effects of social harm including violence.⁴⁴

Since this is the first known study to unravel the impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous families already dealing with MMIP loss, the combined effects of these two tragedies will be shown in subsequent sections of this report based on data.



Photo source: Canva images

[39] National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Indigenous People Worldwide. Accessed May 16, 2024 <https://www.niwrc.org/restoration-magazine/june-2020/covid-19-pandemic-impacts-violence-against-indigenous-women>

[40] Riis, L. Williams, Native American Deaths from COVID-19 Highest Among Racial Groups <https://spia.princeton.edu/news/native-american-deaths-covid-19-highest-among-racial-groups> (Accessed May 19, 2024).

[41] Dzingirayi et al The Disruptions of African Indigenous Culture Experienced During COVID-19 Pandemic in Zimbabwe”(2021).

[42] Riis, L. Williams, Native American Deaths from COVID-19 Highest Among Racial Groups

[43-44] Power, Tamara, Denise Wilson, Odette Best, Teresa Brockie, Lisa Bourque Bearskin, Eugenia Millender, and John Lowe. "COVID-19 and Indigenous Peoples: An imperative for action." *Journal of clinical nursing* 29, no. 15-16 (2020): 2737-2741.

[44] Dzingirayi et al, The Disruptions of African Indigenous Culture Experienced During COVID-19 Pandemic in Zimbabwe, 2021.

Federal and state executive and legislative responses to MMIP

With the growing national and federal attention on MMIP, the U.S. government has acknowledged this crisis and has acted through state and federal legislative and executive actions. Table 1 summarizes the federal legislative and executive responses to respond to MMIP as of April 2024.

In addition to the federal legislative and executive steps featured in Table 1, at least 14 states have passed legislation responding to MMIP in various ways, including allocating funds to Task Forces appointed in states like Arizona, Utah, and Washington to address this problem. One of the most

commonly identified barriers across state MMIP reports and legislation is the absence of accurate data to show the true extent of MMIP. Coupled with increased media attention on MMIP recently, state and federal legislative efforts have served to confirm a fact that many Indigenous Peoples and organizations have known for generations: that, indeed, the murder and missing of Indigenous Peoples is a crisis needing urgent attention in the U.S.



Photo source: Canva images

Table 1. Federal Legislative and Executive Responses to MMIP as of April 2024

Federal MMIP Legal Instruments	Year	Scope of purpose
Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act ⁴⁷	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowing federally recognized Tribes to be eligible for AMBER Alert grants Permits the use of grant funds to integrate state or regional AMBER Alert communication plans with Tribes across the nation
Executive Order 13898	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established the Task Force to conduct consultations with Tribal governments on the scope and nature of the issues regarding MMIP
Not Invisible Act ⁴⁸	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination of federal efforts to combat violence against Native People
Savanna's Act ⁴⁹	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving Tribal data relevance and access to federal databases to enhance the safety of Indian women from violence
Department of Justice (DOJ) Directive ⁵⁰	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination of federal, Tribal, state, and local law enforcement to respond to crime in Indian country. Supporting victims, survivors, and families
Executive Order 14053 ⁵¹	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving public safety and addressing the crisis of MMIP
Department of the Interior Report ⁵²	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal law enforcement strategy to prevent and respond to violence against American Indians and Alaska Natives, including addressing MMIP

[45-46] Fox et al, *A Systematic Analysis*. 2024.

[47] Pub. L. 115-166

[48] Not Invisible Act of 2019.

[49] Public Law No: 116-165.

[50] US. Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General promoting public safety in Indian country.

[51] Executive Order 14053.

[52] Federal Law Enforcement Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against American Indians and Alaska Natives, including to address Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons. Pursuant to Sections 2 4(d) to Executive Order 14053.

There is limited accurate data to show the true extent of MMIP

Any documentation pertaining to the prevalence of MMIP based on official records is deeply contested for not being accurately representative of the true extent of the problem.⁵³ The main limitation identified in existing MMIP studies is that existing data underreports the number of Indigenous Peoples who are missing or murdered.⁵⁴ The lack of accurate data has been highlighted by scholars, activists, and the federal government as the main challenge hampering studies on the true extent of MMIP nationally. MMIP activists have referred to the lack of data about MMIP as “paper genocide” akin to the erasure of Indigenous Peoples upon takeover by the white settlers.⁵⁵ In 2020, the Department of the Interior (DOI) indicated that extremely high rates of murder against Indigenous women occurring on Tribal lands are not reflected in the national averages⁵⁶

The causes of lack of accurately recorded MMIP data

Indigenous Peoples have been historically excluded from national databases containing homicide and missing persons data. These include the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) Supplemental Homicide Reports (SHR), the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). The historical exclusion of Indigenous information from national databases is a result of many issues, including the absence of federal laws and programs facilitating the collection of Indigenous victimization data; disregarding victimization where official data is collected; underreporting and loss of confidence in law enforcement due to over-policing and broken trust; and racial misclassification.⁵⁷

The absence of federal laws requiring the collection of Indigenous-specific victimization data

3U.S.C.C. § 41307, a statute requiring federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to report cases of each missing person under age 21 to the NCIC, does not extend the same provision to Tribal law enforcement agencies.⁵⁸ In 2010, Tribal criminal justice agencies, for the first time since the launching of the NCIC in 1967, were statutorily permitted access to enter and retrieve data from federal criminal databases.⁵⁹ However, without training infrastructure, it has remained extremely difficult for Tribal law enforcement to access and exchange data with national crime information databases for criminal justice purposes. Tribal governments’ lack of access to national databases like the NCIC is a main cause for the undercount of Indigenous victims of homicides and missing persons.⁶⁰

The Tribal Access Program (TAP) for National Crime Information, introduced by the DOJ in 2015, has sought to enhance the ability of Tribal law enforcement agencies to access, enter, and obtain information from national criminal information databases.⁶¹ However, as of February 2024, only about 23% of federally recognized Tribes (fewer than 150 Tribes) participate in the TAP, either as TAP-FULL or TAP-LIGHT.⁶² The majority of Tribes remain historically ill-equipped to effectively serve and protect their communities by entering and exchanging critical data across several national databases.⁶³

Impacting the availability of accurate data is the underreporting of cases of victimization of Indigenous Peoples. Underreporting of Indigenous victimization is a direct result of the systemic discrimination experienced by Indigenous Peoples, which manifests in three main ways discussed in the following sections.⁶⁴

[53-54] US Department of the Interior Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis.

[55] Sammy Gibbons We are misinformed!: Groups search for lacking data on missing, killed Native People. Accessed April 08, 2024.

[56] US Department of the Interior Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis.

[57] Fox et al, Reducing missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls 2020

[58] Burnette, C. Historical oppression and intimate partner violence experienced by Indigenous women in the United States: Understanding connections. *Social Service Review* (2015):89(3), 531–563.

[59] TLOA § 233(a) amended 28 U.S.C. § 534.

[60] US Department of the Interior, Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis, 2024

[61] Office of Public Affairs U.S Department of Justice. Justice Department Tribal Access Program Will Continue to Improve the Exchange of Critical Data. See also Savanna's Act of 2020. The Act requires the creation of standards on the collection, and reporting of MMIP data, including the provision of training to law enforcement agencies on how to record Tribal enrollment information or affiliation, as appropriate, of a victim in federal databases, including the NCIC.

[62] U.S. Department of Justice Tribal Access Program Tribal Access Program. TAP-FULL consists of a kiosk workstation that provides access to national systems and is capable of processing finger and palm prints, as well as taking mugshots and submitting records to national databases. TAP-LIGHT is software for criminal justice agencies that include police departments, prosecutors, criminal courts, jails, and probation departments.

[63] U.S. Department of Interior, India Affairs Department of Interior and Justice Team Up for Major Expansion of Tribal Access to National Crime Information Databases

[64] For example, the 2020 study of the FBI and SHR data by the ROVV lab revealed 634 homicides of Indigenous Peoples over a span of 40 years (1976-2018). Yet the rate of homicide for this population is certain to be substantially higher than the data shows given racial misclassification and underreported missing persons that are actual homicide victims.

Disregarding victimization where official data is collected

Law enforcement plays a critical role as gatekeepers in deciding who is a criminal and who is a victim⁶⁵ Where data and research are available, evidence shows that police exercise their discretion to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples.⁶⁶ Accounts based on the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples with law enforcement have revealed a widespread pattern of willful blindness toward victimization, a practice leading to what is also known as under-policing⁶⁷ When responding to incidences of Indigenous victimization, law enforcement draws on colonially embedded stereotypes about Indigenous Peoples to justify blaming the victim or dismissing their victimization as “imagined” by “wannabe” victims⁶⁸

There have also been reports of missing cases being dismissed by law enforcement because the Indigenous individual missing was affiliated with the wrong group of people or used drugs and alcohol.⁶⁹ In some cases where Indigenous relatives report their loved one missing, such reports remain unrecorded by law enforcement because going missing is not considered a crime, and there are no federal laws that require reporting and investigation into missing adults over 21 years of age⁷⁰

Underreporting and loss of confidence in law enforcement due to over-policing and broken trust

Indigenous Peoples are victims of police brutality and racial profiling, both practices which amount to over-policing.⁷¹ Over-policing happens when police pay disproportionately greater attention to real, perceived, or potential criminal activity suspected of racial minorities⁷² Due to over-policing, Indigenous victims, witnesses, and suspects are treated alike, mostly with incivility or blatant violence.⁷³ For example, a 2023 report by the DOJ Civil Rights Division revealed that the Minneapolis Police Department used force at significantly higher rates against Indigenous people than White people, compared to their shares of the population.⁷⁴

As a result of over-policing, many Indigenous Peoples have lost trust in the criminal justice system, which either blames

them for their victimization (e.g., victim blaming) or outright denies them justice. This creates a lack of trust in law enforcement by Indigenous victims that leads to incidences of violence, like MMIP, that go unreported to law enforcement, further adding to their victimization.⁷⁵

Incorrect racial classification assigned to Indigenous victims of crime

Racial misclassification occurs when criminal justice personnel, including law enforcement and medical examiners or coroners, attribute and misclassify crime victims based on an erroneous assumption or lack of awareness.⁷⁶ The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) is a program where, until January 2021, about 18,000 law enforcement agencies voluntarily reported data on crimes.⁷⁷ However, since its formation in 1929, the UCR has not mandated the entry of a victim's age, sex, race, and ethnicity, leaving this information at the discretion of the reporting agency.⁷⁸ As a result, certain law enforcement data collection practices have historically led to the misclassification of Indigenous Peoples. For instance, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Seattle police department used a code of “N” to identify Black or African American people; the same code was also used to identify people who were Native American.⁷⁹ Owing to racial misclassification, Indigenous Peoples living on- and off-reservation are often misclassified as Hispanic, White, or Asian⁸⁰

Since January 2021, law enforcement has transitioned from using UCR to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). The NIBRS allows law enforcement to include more details on crime occurrence, including age, sex, and race of victims, offenders, and arrestees⁸¹ Executive and legislative steps taken in recent years to enhance the ability of Tribal governments and their authorized agencies to access and enter information into federal databases. However, these have yet to be fully implemented and do not cure the historically systemic exclusion of Indigenous Peoples' information in databases, which continues to foster the underreporting of MMIP.

[65] Perry, B. Nobody trusts them! Under-and over-policing Native American communities. *Critical Criminology*, 14(4), (2006): 411-444

[66] Cunneen, C., & Tauri, J. M. Indigenous Peoples, criminology, and criminal justice, 2019

[67-68] Perry, B. Nobody Trusts them! 2006.

[69] Doering, Anna R. "Indigenous Peoples' Trust in Police: Multi-Jurisdictional Issues and the Effect on Reporting." (2021):1-74.

[70] Chakraborty, Trisha. "Reporting & investigating missing persons: A background paper on how to frame the issue." (2019).

[71-73] Perry, B. Nobody trusts them! 2006.

[74] United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division and United States Attorney's Office District of Minnesota Civil Division: Investigation of the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Police Department. 2023.

[75] Perry, B. Nobody Trusts them! 2006.

[76] Fox et al. Reducing Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2020

[77] FBI: UCR Crime in the United States.

[78] The Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR) is a nationwide, cooperative, statistical effort in which more than 18,000 law enforcement agencies voluntarily report data on crimes brought to their attention.

[79-80] Fox et al. Reducing Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2020

[81] Uniform Crime Reporting UCR Program. National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) A Guide to Understanding NIBRS

The association between colonialism and MMIP

MMIP experienced by Indigenous Peoples is a direct result of the legacy of colonialism that persists in the contemporary. The victimization of Indigenous Peoples, regardless of the identity of the perpetrator or the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, needs to be understood within a socio-historical context of colonialism. Colonialism is defined as the act of power and domination of one nation by acquiring or maintaining full or partial political control over another sovereign nation⁸² In the U.S., the colonization and subjugation of Indigenous Peoples was preceded by trade and commerce between Indigenous Nations and explorers, which turned into a violent exercise of control over the former by European monarchs and the settlers, which continues under the U.S. government.⁸³ The next section lays out the specific details of how the federal takeover of Tribal sovereignty and federal policies of assimilation were two main colonial practices whose consequences contributed to high levels of violence, including MMIP, afflicting Indigenous communities to date.

The Doctrine of Discovery led to a federal takeover of Tribal sovereignty

The Doctrine of Discovery is a legal and religious concept used by European nations and later the United States to justify the Christian colonial conquest of non-Christian lands. In the U.S., the Doctrine of Discovery remains federal law today and is still used against Indigenous Peoples to limit their governmental and sovereign powers.⁸⁴ The federal takeover of Tribal sovereignty by the federal government diminished the authority of Indigenous Nations to protect their citizens from violent victimization.

Sovereignty refers to a nation's ability to self-govern, regulate its own way of life, and live that way with independence from other nations.⁸⁵ A sovereign nation exercises monopoly within its territory, including creating laws and punishing those who violate them, a practice known as the exercise of jurisdiction.⁸⁶ Jurisdiction is a tool for Indigenous

nations to govern independently as sovereigns and protect their members from hostile external enforcement and the high rates of victimization from both Tribal and non-Tribal members.

Before contact with settlers, Indigenous nations exercised jurisdiction over their justice systems, where they incorporated cultural and community values to effectively address social harm, including violence.⁸⁷ For example, the 1883 case of *Ex parte Crow Dog* revealed how Indigenous Peoples have always preferred restitution, not retribution, in response to violent crime, with the ultimate goal being rebuilding broken relationships.⁸⁸ This differs from Western justice systems, which are adversarial and punitive, with deterrence as the impetus.⁸⁹ The Doctrine of Discovery legitimized the takeover of Tribal jurisdiction by the federal government and imposed Western justice ideals while sidelining Indigenous justice traditions. The disruption of Tribal justice systems and traditions is said to have exposed Indigenous women to rape, assault, and other forms of violence, given the Tribes' inability to protect their citizens⁹⁰

The U.S. Constitution confers plenary power upon the Congress over Indigenous affairs, including determining which government can exercise jurisdiction in Indigenous Nations between federal, Tribal, and state governments.⁹¹ Utilizing plenary power, Congress in 1817 enacted the General Crimes Act, which became the first legislation giving the federal government jurisdiction over crimes committed in Indigenous nations by non-Indigenous offenders against Indigenous victims or by Indigenous offenders against non-Indigenous victims.⁹² Further, the Major Crimes Act passed in 1885 significantly diminished the sovereignty of Indigenous nations by extending federal jurisdiction over crimes occurring on reservations where both the offender and the victim are Indigenous.⁹³

Currently, the Major Crimes Act gives the federal government jurisdiction over sixteen crimes, and some of these are: sex offenses, assault with intent to commit murder, assault with a dangerous weapon, assault resulting

[82] Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute

[83] National Indigenous Women's Resource Center: MMIW Understanding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Crisis Beyond Individual Acts of Violence.

[84] Miller, Robert J. "American Indians, the doctrine of discovery, and manifest destiny." *Wyo. L. Rev.* 11 (2011): 329.

[85] Milwaukee Public Museum: Sovereignty

[86] Pevar, S. L. *The rights of Indians and tribes.* Oxford University Press (2012).

[87] Tighe, S. 'Of Course We Are Crazy': Discrimination of Native American Indians Through Criminal Justice. *Justice Policy Journal*, 11. 1 (2014).

[88] 109 U.S. 556 (1883). In this case a Sioux Tribal member murdered another Sioux member. The Sioux Tribe applied traditional Indian justice and involved family members of both the offender and the victim. Per cultural tradition, the Tribe preferred restitution and not retribution. The parties agreed to a payment of six hundred dollars, eight horses and a blanket as restitution for the murder.

[89] Tauri, Juan Marcellus, and Ngati Porou. "Criminal Justice in Contemporary Settler Colonialism: Tauri." *African Journal of Criminology & Justice Studies* 8, no. 1 (2014).

[90] Fox, Mary Jo Tippecanoe. "Criminal Justice Challenges." *Criminal Justice in Native America* (2009): 46

[91] U.S. Constitution Article 1, section 8, Clause 3.

[92] General Crimes Act of 1817.

[93] The Major Crimes Act—18 U.S.C. § 1153.

in serious bodily injury, robbery, and other property crimes.⁹⁴

Purporting to alleviate the lawlessness that pervaded some Indigenous Nations, the U.S. Congress in 1953 passed Public Law 280 (PL 280), authorizing states to exercise criminal jurisdiction over Indigenous Peoples who commit offenses on Indigenous reservations.⁹⁵ However, it has been argued that Congress passed PL 280 to facilitate the assimilation of Indigenous Peoples into Anglo-American society and reduce the government's assistance to Indigenous communities⁹⁶ Indigenous Peoples, including juveniles who are accused of crimes in PL 280 states, are adjudicated, sentenced, and detained in state facilities.

Currently, six states – Alaska, California, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, and Wisconsin – are recognized as PL 280 states that exercise mandatory criminal jurisdiction over Indigenous Nations within state boundaries. On the other hand, other states assume full or partial jurisdiction over Indigenous Nations, including Florida (1961), Idaho (1963, subject to tribal consent), Iowa (1967), Montana (1963), Nevada (1955), North Dakota (1963, subject to tribal consent), South Dakota (1957-61), Utah (1971), and Washington (1957-63).⁹⁷

Additionally, the U.S. Supreme Court in 1978 gave a ruling which significantly constrained the sovereignty of Tribes within their reservation boundaries. In the case *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, the Court found that, while Tribes have inherent sovereignty over Tribal members, they had no jurisdiction over non-Indigenous individuals even within the boundaries of their reservations.⁹⁸ The Oliphant decision has compounded the problem of high crime rates in Indigenous Nations since it exposed Indigenous Peoples to the vulnerability of non-Indigenous offending on Indigenous lands while also stripping away Tribes' authority to prosecute non-Indigenous perpetrators.

The federal colonial framework's intrusion into the authority of Indigenous Nations over their people and territories has created a maze of complex, overlapping jurisdictions in federal governments. These jurisdictional problems have Indigenous Nations between Tribal, county, state, and enacted a situation of dependency and serious safety issues on Indigenous Peoples' reservations.⁹⁹ Due to the complexities often associated with determining jurisdiction and investigation on

reservations, federal prosecutors decline to prosecute some cases or pursue two-thirds of Indigenous nations criminal investigations that are referred to their offices.¹⁰⁰

Without jurisdiction over nonmembers who commit offenses within their territories, Tribes are left with limited capacity to protect their members from the types of victimization that lead to MMIP.¹⁰¹ Additionally, in responding to violence or social harm, Indigenous nations historically invoked their restorative programs that emphasize healing through traditional ceremonies led by respected elders. The allocation of jurisdiction to state and federal governments has resulted in the collapse of Tribal justice systems. In turn, the collapse of Tribal justice systems is often associated with high rates of re-offending among Indigenous Peoples who commit crimes on reservations and are ushered into the harsher, punitive federal or state system while being deprived of culturally appropriate and rehabilitative services.¹⁰² Moreso, the complex jurisdictional layers create a maze that results in a "ring of referrals" whereby Indigenous victims of crime often get referred from one law enforcement agency to another due to not knowing who has jurisdiction.¹⁰³

The U.S. Congress has attempted to return jurisdiction to Tribes through the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA) of 2010 and the Violence Against Women (VAWA) Reauthorization Act of 2013.¹⁰⁴ Both the TLOA and VAWA purport to support Indigenous Nations' jurisdiction by enhancing Tribal courts' sentencing conditions and giving Tribes special domestic violence criminal jurisdiction (SDVCJ) over certain defendants, regardless of their Indigenous or non-Indigenous status, respectively. However, the conditions imposed for Tribes to exercise jurisdiction under both TLOA and VAWA have been regarded as "jurisdiction baiting" as they require Tribes first to adopt Western ideals of justice to exercise criminal jurisdiction over crimes committed on Tribal land.¹⁰⁵ As of December 2023, at least 94 percent of Tribes (543 of 574) had not opted into VAWA's SDVCJ provisions to protect their members from domestic violence offenses occurring on the reservations.

In sum, the high rates of violence characterizing most Indigenous Nations, leading to MMIP, are a direct result of the federal intrusion into the authority of Indigenous nations

[94]The General Crimes Act—18 U.S.C. § 1152.

[95] Public Law 83-280 (18 U.S.C. § 1162, 28 U.S.C. § 1360).

[96] Pevar, S. L. *The rights of Indians*, 2012.

[97] Administration for children and families, *American Indians and Alaska Natives - Public Law 280 Tribes Fact Sheet*.

[98] Bradford, W. *Beyond reparations: an American Indian theory of justice*. *Ohio St. LJ*, 66, 1 (2005):1

[99] Fox, et al *Reducing missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls* 2020.

[100] U.S. Government Accountability Office: *U.S. Department of Justice Declinations of Indian Country Criminal Matters*.

[101] Nielsen, M. O. *Introduction to the context of Native American criminal justice involvement*. *Criminal Justice in Native America*, 1-17 (2009).

[102] Behrendt, M. C. *Settler colonial origins of intimate partner violence in Indigenous communities*, 2023.

[103] Fox, et al *Reducing missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls* 2020.

[104]The Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010 and Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013.

[105] Lussenden, A. *Reimagining the Violence Against Women Act for tribes in 2022*. *Berkeley Journal of Criminal Law*, 27(1), (2022):141-169.

leading to a result of the federal intrusion into the authority of Indigenous nations, which has resulted in perpetrators of crimes facing little, if any, consequences for their actions.¹⁰⁶

Additionally, the presence of federal and state law enforcement in Indigenous Nations has caused the collapse of Tribal justice systems, eliminating opportunities for restoration of relationships, healing, and re-integration of the individuals into their communities. The adversarial and punitive Western justice system imposed on Tribes is associated with high rates of recidivism, fueling a vicious cycle of violence characterizing Indigenous communities.

Colonial policies of cultural and economic assimilation

Assimilative policies interrupted the egalitarian structures within Indigenous families while imposing hegemonic gender norms and inflicting trauma that persists across generations, fueling a vicious cycle of violence ravaging Indigenous communities.¹⁰⁷ The origins of high rates of violence occurring in Indigenous communities can also be attributed to the colonial tactics of cultural and economic assimilation mainly occurring during the nineteenth century. Policies of assimilation interrupted and unsettled the egalitarian values that characterized pre-contact Indigenous families and imposed hegemonic gender norms by introducing both patriarchal and sexist ideologies.¹⁰⁸ In certain instances, MMIP results from violence caused by their intimate partners or family members.¹⁰⁹ It is, therefore, imperative that we unearth how colonial policies of assimilation created preconditions for the high rates of violence ravaging Indigenous families in the contemporary.

Between 1869 and the 1960s, the U.S. government operated at least 523 boarding schools to accelerate the assimilation of Indigenous children into Western culture.¹¹⁰ During this era, Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families, violently victimized, and underwent gendered vocational training, whereby girls were forced to relinquish their traditional labor activities and trained in domestic skills, while boys were taught agricultural skills. Indigenous children experienced abuse and trauma that endured across subsequent generations and continues to fuel the involvement of Indigenous Peoples in the criminal justice system, both as offenders and as victims.¹¹¹

Many Indigenous young women were also sterilized against their will in boarding schools as a method of genocide.¹¹² The magnitude of boarding school-era abuses continues to be revealed today through ongoing discoveries of hundreds of remains of Indigenous children in unmarked graves near boarding schools.¹¹³

The unresolved trauma endured by former boarding school Indigenous attendees has been transmitted intergenerationally, laying a foundation for the contemporary prevalence of domestic abuse and violence against women and children in Indigenous families and communities!¹⁴ The boarding school-era trauma has been linked to the high rates of victimization, including MMIP, both afflicting Indigenous communities!¹⁵ For example, research has identified the connection between domestic violence in contemporary Indigenous households to the intergenerational trauma from abuse experienced by Indigenous children in boarding schools!¹⁶

Economic or land management policies were also a colonial instrument through which gender hierarchies that bred violence within Indigenous families and communities were transmitted to Indigenous Peoples. The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 is one such example of legislation that institutionalized Western gender norms relating to responsibilities of farming, property ownership, and domesticity.¹¹⁷ With Tribal land having been allocated for commercial and residential (non-Indigenous) purposes, Indigenous land ownership declined from 138 million acres in 1887 to a mere 52 million acres in 1934, women suffered the most as they lost all ties to the land. The little land left Indigenous Peoples was owned or controlled by men, resulting in the relegation of women to vulnerable, subordinate members of society.

The loss of an economic foundation of land and resources shifted Indigenous gender norms from more complementary practices to more hegemonic and adversarial family and societal arrangements. Maia Behrendt, an intimate partner violence scholar, argues that the colonial socio-economic reconfiguration of Indigenous lives resulted in "Indigenous men attempting to reassert their masculinity through violence against those who have lesser status," contributing to the high rates of MMIP in Indigenous communities.¹¹⁸

[106] Hawes, Morgan B., Danielle C. Slakoff, and Nikolay Anguelov. "Understanding the missing and murdered Indigenous women crisis: An analysis of the NamUs database." *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 34, no. 2 (2023): 184-207.

[107-108] Behrendt, M. C. *Settler colonial origins of intimate partner violence in Indigenous communities*.

[109] Fox et al. *Reducing Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, 2020

[110] Hennessey, J. J. *American Catholics: A history of the Roman Catholic community in the United States*. Oxford University Press (1983).

[111] The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. *US Indian Boarding School History*.

[112-113] National Public Radio. *Hundreds of Unmarked Graves Found at Another Former School For Indigenous Children*

[114] Cunneen, C., & Tauri, J. M. *Indigenous Peoples, criminology, and criminal justice*. *Annual Review of Criminology*, 2, (2019): 359-381

[115] Burnette, C. E., & Renner, L. M. *A pattern of cumulative disadvantage: Risk factors for violence across Indigenous women's lives*. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(4), (2016): 1166-1185

[116] George, Lila J. "Why the need for the Indian child welfare act?." *Journal of Multicultural Social Work* 5.3-4 (1997): 165-175.

[117] Behrendt, M. C. *Settler colonial origins of intimate partner violence in Indigenous communities*, 2022.

[118] Burnette, C. E., & Renner, L. M. *A pattern of cumulative disadvantage: Risk factors for violence across Indigenous women's lives*. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(4), (2016): 1166-1185

Policies of assimilation help explain violence originating from within Indigenous communities, including DV and FV. However, Indigenous Peoples also experience other forms of interpersonal violence stemming from outside the family context at the hands of strangers. Violence against Indigenous Peoples can be attributed to colonial violent or racist rhetoric and ideology that vilifies Indigenous Peoples, their culture, and their way of life!¹⁹ Offensive and harmful representations of Indigenous Peoples based on colonial stereotypes fuel and rationalize the violence against Indigenous Peoples!²⁰ For example, the hyper-sexualization of Indigenous women through sexually provocative stereotypes behind the so-called “Native-inspired” revealing Halloween costumes sustains the culture of sexual violence against Indigenous women.²¹



Photo source: Canva images

Past MMIP research from the ASU ROVV Lab

Since, 2020, the ASU ROVV Lab (a unit of the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice) has brought statewide scholarly attention to the MMIP crisis in Arizona. The ROVV Lab is among one of the nation’s first institutions to examine MMIP, producing studies that highlight the crisis’s pervasiveness and impact on Indigenous families and communities!²²

Table 2. Research on Violent Victimization MMIP studies as of June 2024

ROVV MMIP study	Type of data collected	Significant findings
MMIWG in partnership with the HB2570 Legislative Study Committee (2020)	Existing data from: 1 - FBI's Supplemental Homicide Report 2 - NamUs 3 - Justice for Native Women Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murders of Indigenous women have steadily increased since 1976 • Indigenous females of all ages are murdered, with those between 20-40 at higher risk
MMIP: Perspectives of Indigenous Students and the Faculty and Staff who Serve them (2023)	Original data from: 1 - Surveys 2 - Interviews with Indigenous college students, faculty, and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 82% of the students experienced at least one form of interpersonal victimization • 75% of the students experienced at least one form of interpersonal victimization • 94% of the students were aware of MMIP • 22% of the students had used campus services in response to their victimization
Systematic analysis of the published statewide reports on MMIP	1 - Federal and State MMIP legislation 2 - Statewide MMIP reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal legislation is the most comprehensive model for responding to MMIP, which 14 states have implemented at the state level

Together, studies by the ROVV Lab highlight the pervasiveness MMIP has had among Arizona’s Indigenous communities. Yet, a major gap that remained unaddressed, until now, pertained to the importance of hearing directly from MMIP survivors and families. Learning directly from Indigenous Peoples is necessary for the collection of survivor-oriented and policy-relevant MMIP data. Additionally, working closely with MMIP survivors and family members of the victims is instrumental to the designing of culturally relevant responses and prevention strategies to this crisis.

[119] Kennedy, Tristan, and Ryan Frazer. "Indigenous people and the varieties of colonial violence on social media." *Journal of Global Indigeneity* 5, no. 2 (2021): 1-13.

[120] Croisy, Sophie. "Fighting Colonial Violence in “Indian Country”: Deconstructing racist sexual stereotypes of Native American Women in American popular culture and history." *Angles. New Perspectives on the Anglophone World* 5 (2017):1-16.

[121] Smithers, Gregory D. "Predatory Colonialism: Indigenous Women and the Violence of Sexual Objectification in the United States." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 30, no. 2 (2021): 253-278.

[122] Sium, Aman, and Eric Ritskes. "Speaking truth to power: Indigenous storytelling as an act of living resistance." *Decolonization: indigeneity, education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013).

Current study

Context of the current study: Arizona

The state of Arizona shares geography with at least 22 Indigenous Nations, with an Indigenous population of 391,620 (5.64%), making it the state with the third-highest number of Indigenous Peoples.¹²³ In a 2018 study by the Urban Indian Health Institute, Arizona also had the third-highest prevalence of MMIP.¹²⁴ Similarly, based on the limited data available, an analysis by the Arizona Mirror found that more than 25% of murders of Indigenous women in Arizona go unresolved.¹²⁵

Like in Canada, and across the U.S., grassroots movements originating from Indigenous communities played a critical role in igniting the MMIP movement in Arizona. Long before MMIP gained attention outside of Indigenous communities, Indigenous activists in Arizona organized walks to raise awareness, hosted events where personal stories were shared, mobilized search parties to assist in finding missing Indigenous relatives, and testified at the state capitol to support legislation to address MMIP.¹²⁶



Photo source: Canva images

Importance of the current study

The current study is the first known MMIP study guided by an Indigenous Survivor Advisory Group (SAG) to examine the formal and informal responses to homicide and missing persons to address the needs of families and survivors. The study was funded by the Office of the Arizona Governor, approved by Arizona State University's (ASU) Institutional Review Board (IRB), and underwent a cultural review performed by ASU's Tribal Advisory team. The current study builds upon past works conducted by the ROVV lab designed to promote wellness, safety, and empowerment of Indigenous communities. Previous research that examines MMIP has largely used administrative data to identify the prevalence of Indigenous victimization, its impacts on communities, and service needs. Yet, no known MMIP research until now has collaborated with actual survivors and family members to be guided by their lived experiences, with the goal of promoting their well-being and survival and supporting overall healing when it comes to dealing with homicide and missing persons.

This study addresses several gaps in previous research. First, this is the first known study to blend Indigenous healing and cultural practices with Western research methods to ensure that Indigenous survivors participating in research are treated in culturally appropriate, healing-centered, and trauma-informed ways. Second, this study sheds light on the lived experiences of diverse Indigenous family members pertaining to the impacts of formal and informal responses to homicide and missing persons (i.e., MMIP). Third, this is the first known study to examine the impacts of COVID-19 on Native American families dealing with MMIP-related grief. Finally, the current study offers original data collected during a two-day Missing and Murdered Indigenous Survivor Gathering held in Arizona. This qualitative study produced a rich dataset, providing a comprehensive account of Indigenous Peoples' experiences with homicide and missing persons and healing. The data draws from an Arizona sample of 29 Indigenous Peoples with various Tribal representations.

[123] World Population Review, Native American Population by state 2024

[124] Lucchesi A., & Echo-Hawk, A Missing and murdered Indigenous women & girls: A snapshot of data from 71 urban cities in the United States. Urban Indian Health Institute (2018)

[125] Jerod Macdonald-Envoy, More than 25 percent of Native women murders go unsolved in AZ. *AZ Mirror*

[126] Noel Lynn Smith Dozens participate in walks to raise awareness about domestic violence and MMIW. *Daily Times*.

Project aims

The specific aims of this study were to:

Aim #1	Be guided by Indigenous community members across Arizona who have direct experience with homicide or missing persons to guide and provide consultation on various research areas, including design, recruitment, data collection, and dissemination
Aim #2	Directly learn from Indigenous families and survivors who have personal experience with MMIP
Aim #3	Document responses to elevate Indigenous perspectives and voices that inform communities, service providers, and policy to address MMIP.

Research questions

In order to learn from Indigenous survivors and family members who have experienced MMIP, the following research questions (RQs) were developed. These research questions were considered “provisional” until the approval of the Indigenous Peoples whom we were going to partner with to direct our research

RQ #1	What are the challenges to mental health that MMIP survivors and families face after losing a loved one?
RQ #2	How do people impacted by MMIP heal from their trauma?
RQ #3	What are the challenges that families and survivors with MMIP experience perceive based on their interactions with the criminal justice system?
RQ #4	How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact Indigenous families and survivors dealing with MMIP?
RQ #5	What supportive responses do Indigenous Peoples with MMIP experience perceive would be helpful?
RQ #6	What were the reflections of MMIP survivors after participating in an MMIP research event focused on healing?

Our research design

Indigenous research methodologies (IRMs)

This study responds to the growing calls for the need to integrate Indigenous knowledge into Western research methods, especially when research involves Indigenous participants.¹²⁷ Historically, disregard for Indigenous knowledge in research has exposed Indigenous participants to the risk of cultural and scientific arrogance of researchers.¹²⁸ Data collection, analysis, and dissemination in research have primarily been maintained as “Indigenous free zones,” causing statistical bias in quantitative analyses and the formation of policies that do not respond to Indigenous Peoples’ needs.¹²⁹ Thus, the unavailability of accurate MMIP data and culturally relevant services for survivors can be attributed to decontextualized research methodologies that tend to aggregate and do not consider Indigenous lived experiences, knowledge, and social and cultural realities.¹³⁰

Diverse methodological approaches were meticulously incorporated throughout the project to minimize the risks of harm. These include the integration of various IRMs components of community-based participatory research and ethnographic approaches were fused with trauma-informed and survivor-centered designs. Additionally, the research team utilized an Indigenous Holistic framework to highlight Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. Together, this comprehensive approach underscores the commitment to respecting and valuing the Indigenous community's knowledge and experiences.

ROVV Lab researchers invested efforts in shifting intellectual and institutional boundaries to create space for Indigenous expertise to inform the design of an “experiential” methodology constructed through an Indigenous lens. It is crucial to involve Indigenous worldviews and perspectives in research that shape how institutions respond to and address issues related to homicide and missing persons.

IRMs create space for Indigenous participation

Two eminent Indigenous-specific principles informed the creation of space for Indigenous participation, including:

1. Indigenous data sovereignty: the right of Indigenous Peoples to control the collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination, and reuse of Indigenous data. (IDSov)¹³¹
2. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)

Honoring data sovereignty through the C.A.R.E. Principles

Researchers invoked the C.A.R.E. principles for Indigenous Data Governance. The C.A.R.E. represent: collective benefit, authority to control, responsibility, and ethics.¹³² These principles provided a guiding framework through which ROVV lab researchers incorporated into the research design to ensure data is used respectfully.

C.A.R.E. Principles

Collective benefit	Data collection, use, and storage were designed to support Indigenous peoples
Authority to control	Indigenous participants had access to research and could oversee its ethical reuse
Responsibility	Ensure the use of data respectfully empowers Indigenous peoples
Ethics	The use of data remains informed by Indigenous ethical considerations.

[127] Walter, M. Using the ‘power of the data’ within Indigenous research practice. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, (2), (2005): 27-34.

[128] Smith, L. T *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. 3rd ed Bloomsbury Publishing (2021).

[129-130] Walter, M., & Suina, M. Indigenous data, Indigenous methodologies, and Indigenous data sovereignty. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 22(3), (2019): 233-243

[131] Walter, M., & Carrol, S. R1 Indigenous Data Sovereignty, governance, and the link to Indigenous policy. *Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Policy*, 1, (2020).

[132] Carroll, Stephanie Russo, Edit Herczog, Maui Hudson, Keith Russell, and Shelley Stall. "Operationalizing the CARE and FAIR Principles for Indigenous data futures." *Scientific data* 8, no. 1 (2021): 108.

Project Aim #1: Creating and collaborating with an MMIP Survivor Advisory Group (SAG)

Purpose of the SAG

To truly understand MMIP and the material realities of the people who have lived through this crisis, it was imperative to infuse processes that center Indigenous healing and cultural practices. Thus making the preliminary step necessary to adopt an approach to engaging Indigenous survivors that is trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, and not extractive or exploitative.

The Indigenous cultural practices and elements presented in the research design are not mere interpretations or opinions of the researchers. They are based on knowledge shared by SAG members and other Indigenous partners who were actively engaged in the study. The SAG, as an integral part of the research, would be directly involved in designing a trauma-informed, culturally relevant, and healing-centered methodology. This collaborative approach is aimed at engaging more Indigenous survivors for the purposes of what is referred to in Western research as data collection.¹³³

SAG criteria

- Indigenous Peoples who were 18 years or older
- Direct survivors or surviving next of kin* to an Indigenous victim of homicide or missing persons
- Had direct experience* with an incident of MMIP that occurred in Arizona or on a reservation whose Tribal land intersects with Arizona boundaries.

Defining “direct experience” and “next of kin.” Honoring Indigenous self-determination, we deferred to Indigenous Peoples to define what “direct experience” would entail. Survivors defined “direct experience” to include Indigenous individuals who had gone missing as a result of victimization and later returned or an Indigenous person who has experience with a family member(s) who is missing or was a victim(s) of homicide.

Similarly, to uphold Indigenous values of communitarianism, an expansive interpretation was adopted based on Indigenous understanding of who is considered “next of kin.” This included extended family members who have been actively seeking answers and justice for their loved.

Recruitment of SAG members

SAG members were chosen from the networks of lab members and a key informant who identified potential candidates who were 18 years of age or older and had MMIP experience. Other factors were also considered as a part of being trauma-informed and survivor-centered to avoid re-traumatization and harm. These factors included

the amount of time since the MMIP incident, case association and status, individual readiness, and community involvement. After identifying an internal list, five individuals were issued an offer to participate based on their location, Tribal representation, and willingness to act as a recruitment liaison to aid in the attainment of the study’s sample. The methodological approaches adopted by the ROVV and SAG incorporated elements of Indigenous healing that can be found in cultural customary practices, including activities like dance, humor, prayers, or speaking Indigenous languages. In addition, as a sacred practice, healing can be provided by recognized healers, health practitioners, artists, musicians, and community members.

SAG members identify healing as a top priority

SAG members emphasized the significance of healing in the face of intergenerational trauma, systemic trauma, collective grief, and loss. Loosely defined as the “physical, spiritual, psychological, and social collective restoration,” Indigenous healing is regarded as the most comprehensive approach to trauma-informed care for Indigenous trauma survivors.¹³⁴ For survivors and families impacted by MMIP, healing goes beyond the avenues offered by the Western criminal justice system (e.g., apprehension, prosecution, and sentencing of the perpetrator). Healing represents non-confrontational and holistic Indigenous values of restorative justice by addressing the historical, cultural, spiritual, emotional, social, and even political dimensions of social harm.

The methodological approaches adopted by the ROVV and SAG incorporated elements of Indigenous healing that can be found in cultural customary practices, including activities like dance, humor, prayers, or speaking Indigenous languages. In addition, as a sacred practice, healing can be provided by recognized healers, health practitioners, artists, musicians, and community members.

Readiness assessment for SAG members

To mitigate and prevent re-traumatization that would potentially arise from the MMIP discussions that would ensue for several months, ROVV lab, through the assistance of the trusted partner, assessed the readiness of potential Indigenous SAG members to act in the capacity of advisors. The readiness assessment evaluated:

1. How long SAG members had been in survivorship
2. Emotional and mental preparedness
3. Prior experience with public speaking to be able to share their stories.

Six Indigenous Peoples who met the above criteria accepted invitation letters from the ROVV lab in April inviting them to serve on the SAG, yet one member withdrew shortly after the first meeting, citing the acceptance of a new employment opportunity that limited their availability to participate.

[133-134] Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.

Contributions of the SAG

Between May 6, 2023, and May 27, 2024, SAG and ROVV members convened on 16 separate occasions to make team decisions about the project. SAG/ROVV consultative meetings were held at least once a month, except for July and October, where two meetings were held during each of those months. Each SAG member was considered an expert on MMIP by virtue of their lived experience and cultural or healing knowledge. During each of the consultative meetings, SAG experts provided advice and guidance in all critical areas of the research. In line with the IDSov and FPIC principles, we ensured SAG members' full participation in shaping, designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the project, including:

- Reviewing research questions
- Shaping the research design
- Guiding the drafting of story-sharing questions
- Informing the development of healing-centered and culturally-informed data collection process
- Recruiting additional MMIP survivors and family members who would participate in the healing-centered and culturally informed data collection process
- Framing of the policy directions that flow from those data
- Deciding upon a dissemination plan for the findings

Based on the “free” element of FPIC, we ensured that the conditions and language were conducive for SAG members to consent voluntarily without feeling pressured, cajoled, or required to participate. SAG members were paid an honorarium of \$1,000 at the beginning of the project as an expression of appreciation for their time and expertise. To ensure that consent or advice was sought with enough time “prior” to data collection to give the SAG members time to decide on important project aspects, we sent detailed meeting agendas containing issues for discussion sufficiently in advance of each meeting. SAG members were kept “informed” through detailed, yet non-technical, language in correspondence and agendas. Where SAG input was needed on complex topics, follow-up calls were made to each SAG member individually, and the request details were explained. To maintain the validity of “consent,” researchers informed the SAG members of their right to withhold/withdraw or modify their consent at any point during the consultation phase. Consultative meeting dates were scheduled on Saturdays at the request of the SAG members, given their weekday work commitments. SAG members generally attended meetings except where individual members had schedule conflicts. Members who occasionally missed meetings were kept informed of team decisions through detailed post-meeting minutes distributed to SAG members after the meetings and follow-up meetings where necessary.

Headshots were provided for all SAG members at the beginning of their consultation



Top to bottom: Wi-Bwa Grey, Yolanda Bydonie, Raymond Meza, Albert Siquah, Jessica Antonio

Project aim #2: Learning directly from Indigenous families and survivors who have direct experience with MMIP

MMIP survivor gathering event

We present original data from a two-day MMIP Survivor Gathering event hosted in January 2024 and a post-event debrief meeting with SAG members in April 2024. Individualized Western approaches to research could not sufficiently capture or address Indigenous Peoples' cultural and healing dimensions. The MMIP Survivor Gathering Event ensured a non-extractive approach to data collection while enhancing benefit sharing and cultural appropriateness by integrating Indigenous Peoples' culturally embedded healing practices and support systems.

The first day of the Survivor Gathering Event was focused on story sharing through sharing circles, an Indigenous tradition where stories or experiences can be shared within a group where all participants have an equal and honored voice. Sharing circles were preferred as they offered a culturally appropriate medium¹⁸⁵ for participants to narrate their MMIP lived experience, consistent with Indigenous oral traditions, which continue to be a reality in day-to-day Indigenous lives. In line with the current research's commitment to decolonization, the storytelling approach represented diversities of truth within which MMIP survivors, rather than the ROVV lab researchers, retained control. As such, despite MMIP being a topic of demise and tragedy, the opportunity for Indigenous survivors to share their experience in story form represented "survance" and success by placing Indigenous Peoples at the center of their research and its consequences.

The second day of the event was dedicated to healing-centered cultural activities facilitated by celebrated cultural

activities facilitated by celebrated Indigenous healers, a cultural director, artists, an inspirational speaker, and historical trauma specialists. The cultural activities were dedicated to fostering healing from historical trauma and healing within families. No data was collected during day two to center on healing and being in community.

Participant eligibility

By virtue of their activism and advocacy in their respective communities, SAG members were entrusted with identifying Indigenous survivors of MMIP, who would attend the Survivor Gathering Event as participants to share their MMIP lived experiences. After careful consideration and consultation with the SAG members, the inclusion criteria for this study required each participant to meet the following:

- Be an Indigenous survivor or a surviving next of kin to an Indigenous victim of homicide or missing persons
- Have direct knowledge about an MMIP incident that occurred in Arizona or on Tribal land within Arizona
- Be age 18 years or older.

Although terms like "direct experience" and "next of kin" have formal definitions within the criminal justice system and other state institutions, the study relied upon the participants' own interpretation and self-identification to determine their eligibility. Through our collaboration with the SAG, it was evident that formal definitions often put limitations on the voices and perspectives of loved ones who are actively seeking justice or awareness.



Photo taken at the end of the 2024 MMIP survivor gathering research event

Left to right: Bothwell Paison, Yolanda Bydonie, Raymond Meza, Wi-Bwa Grey, Leo Mukosi, Julianne Culey, Chris Sharp, Kayleigh Stanek, Kate Fox, Cassie Harvey, Albert Siquah, Jessica Antonio

[135] Global Learning Partners Talking Circles: More than a Technique.

Participant recruitment

The research team relied on the SAG's positive connections with their Indigenous communities to mitigate possible feelings of uncertainty and build relations. Each SAG member was tasked with identifying up to five individuals who met the eligibility criteria and wanted to participate. SAG members were trained on recruitment and were provided access to IRB-approved materials, such as flyers, the criteria, the purpose, and why the SAG members identified the participants. Additionally, each SAG member informed potential participants of the incentives, times, dates, and project goals.

Upon receiving verbal confirmation from the potential participants, each SAG member obtained their contact information and the best times to reach them. Then, a research team member fostered positive relations by personally calling each potential participant to confirm attendance and eligibility, providing additional information, and answering questions. The five SAG members collectively agreed to participate and identified 17 survivors who also agreed to participate, resulting in 22 initial participants.

Participants were allowed to bring a support person who had the option to participate

Guidance from the SAG members revealed that Indigenous Peoples experience healing as family and community collectives, with the support of their loved ones who see them through trauma throughout their pursuit of justice. Support persons for Indigenous persons may be parents, children, siblings, spouses, extended family members, or community members who are also likely to share the same MMIP trauma with the survivor.

To honor the value of support to MMIP survivors, we obtained IRB approval for participants to be allowed to bring support persons who remained present during the story-sharing phase. A total of 8 participants identified an additional person they would bring for emotional support during the process, including the sharing circle, resulting in 30 expected participants, although one person was unable to attend the event. The participant/support distinction became less significant during the event because all support people elected to become participants, sharing their lived experiences relating to MMIP and corroborating the accounts shared by their participant loved ones. In total, 29 Indigenous Peoples participated in the MMIP Survivor Event and shared their stories during data collection.

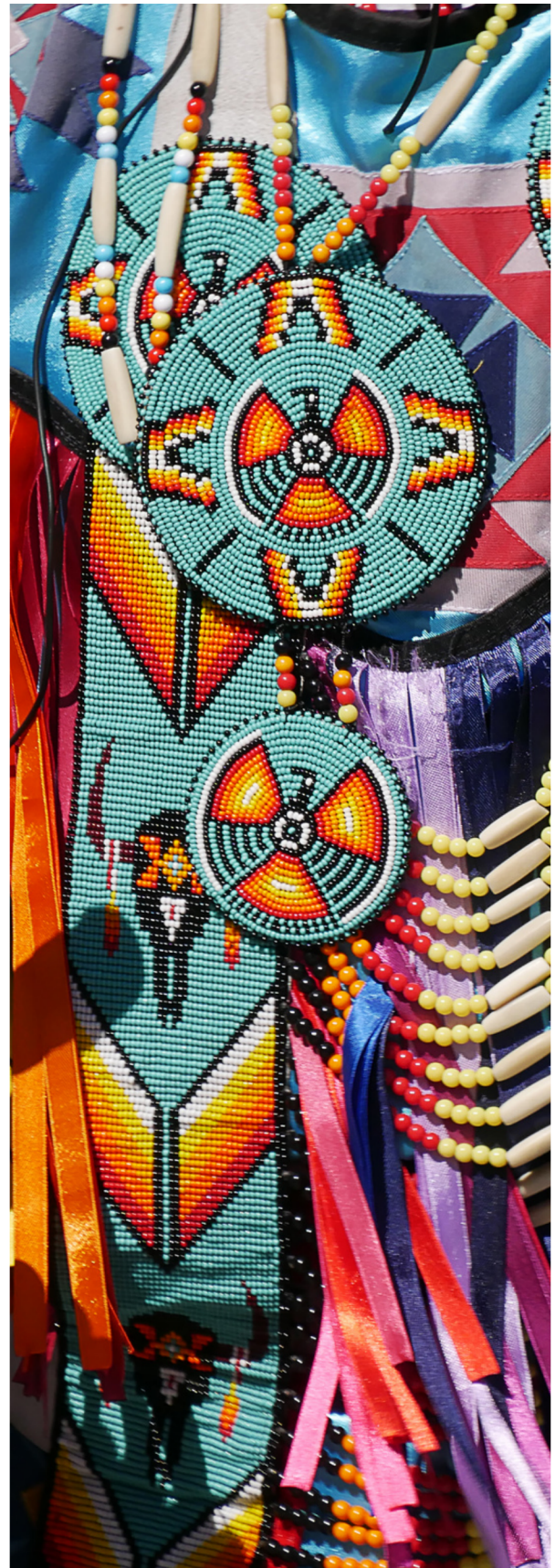


Photo source: Canva images

Data collection procedures

Part 1: Survey intake and informed consent

Event registration check-in

Registration check-ins at large events and conferences are common for providing general information and collecting demographical data. So, to lessen feelings of extraction and increase comfortability, the research team used this method to conduct survey intakes and provide informed consent. Each participant was initially greeted by a research team member and guided to the registration desk, where they gave their informed consent and were invited to complete a short, self-administered survey on paper. All participants were provided with materials to use at the event (e.g., carrying bag, notebook, water bottle) and welcomed by members of the SAG and research team.

Part 2: “Sharing circles” as small focus groups

Two sharing circle sessions were organized during day one of the event

The term “sharing circles” was created to define the Indigenous method of data collection within the MMIP Survivor Gathering, where participants narrated their lived MMIP experience and provided responses using methods consistent with Indigenous pedagogies. For example, talking circles are a form of Indigenous oral technique used to foster respect and cohesion while allowing for individual differences to be honored and equal.¹³⁶ This technique grants diverse perspectives with which MMIP survivors portray their experiences in ways that represent their survivance, resilience, and healing.

Two sharing circles were organized on the first day of the event – one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The first sharing circle session consisted of four general MMIP-related questions, and the second sharing circle session consisted of healing and solution-focused questions. Participants were separated into five groups such that the five sharing circles were comprised of the same participants for both the first (morning) and second (afternoon) sharing circles. Each sharing circle was facilitated by a senior member of the research team and comprised of five to eight participants. Sharing circles were audio recorded, with permission from participants, and transcribed verbatim.

Part 3: “Collective reflection” as one large focus group

Collective debrief at the end of day one

One of the objectives of the data collection was to ensure collective benefit and support. Since the participants were in small sharing circle groups throughout the day, at the end of the first day of the event, participants had the opportunity to convene as one large group to debrief on the sharing circles for the final data collection during the event. This allowed survivors to expand their networks and build positive connections with others experiencing similar life events. The collective reflection was performed at the end of the first day of the event. This portion was facilitated by a member of the research team, and participants initially discussed their responses to each question with those seated at their small tables and then a representative from the table volunteered to summarize group responses to share with the group at large. The conversation generated lively and positive responses that many other participants, outside of the table representatives, voluntarily spoke to participants at large.

Part 4: SAG debrief

Final meeting after the event

Our approach to MMIP research engaged survivors in trauma-informed ways with a vested responsibility to uplift and uphold Indigenous voices. In doing so, we integrated components of community-based participatory research (CBPR) methods that allowed SAG members to participate in all parts of the research. A virtual meeting with the SAG members was conducted via Zoom approximately three months after the event to allow time for the SAG members to (1) process their perspectives on the event, (2) reflect on their experiences as a SAG member generally, and (3) reconnect with other event participants to learn their feedback about the event. A member of the research team facilitated the focus group and allowed each member time to respond to the questions.

[136] Bohanon, J. P. (2013). The talking circle: A perspective in culturally appropriate group work with indigenous peoples. University of Southern Mississippi.

Measures

Demographics

During the event registration, participants were asked about their tribal affiliation (open ended), birth year (open ended), whether or not they live on the reservation (yes/no), type of area they reside in (rural, border town, urban area, or other) and whether they brought a support person (yes/no).

Sharing circle measures

Each of the five facilitators asked open-ended questions aimed at answering the research questions that circle the following topics:

- MMIP experiences
- Criminal justice system responses to MMIP
- Healing and coping with loss (i.e., mental health)
- Impacts of COVID-19
- Capacity building

Collective reflection measures

Three questions were asked to all participants collectively to gauge their experience in the story-gathering event.

1. What are the three takeaways you received from today's event?
2. How did it feel to participate in this event?
3. Is there anything else you want to share?

Collective reflection measures

The purpose of the SAG debrief was to measure the overall success and effectiveness of the event based on the perceptions of the SAG members. Additionally, SAG members were also asked to provide brief overviews and thoughts on their involvement with the project and how that was beneficial to their healing. Lastly, this debrief provided SAG members the opportunity to provide in-depth feedback to the research team by sharing their experiences.



Photo source: Canva images

Key considerations when doing research with Indigenous Peoples

To bridge the gap between research and Indigenous communities, the research team adopted an approach recommended for IRMs. This approach utilizes the “six R’s” that Indigenous scholars have developed over time to shape a conceptual framework that guides research with and for Indigenous communities and peoples. The “six R’s” are relationship, respect, responsibility, relevance, representation, and reciprocity. Below is a detailed explanation of the six Rs and how they were implemented in the present project.

Consideration #1: Relationship

The relationship component of the six Rs of IRM encompasses taking cognizance of the complex nature of Indigenous relationships, founded on kinship and accountability built on mutual honesty and trust, therefore shaping Indigenous realities.¹³⁷ The research team assumed responsibility and accountability for all relationships that shaped the direction of the research by:

- Dedicating time at the beginning of the project to build relationships with SAG members based on trust and honesty. During this period, the research team established rapport with SAG members, which respectfully transcended researcher/participant relationships
- Clarifying the purposes and objectives of the research with honesty and transparency throughout the project
- Honoring pre-existing Indigenous relationships by allowing each SAG member to identify and recruit five potential participants from their communities
- Fostering positive relationships by making personal calls to each potential participant identified by the SAG to confirm attendance and eligibility, provide additional information, and answer any questions about participating in the event



Honoring our SAG members at the MMIP Survivor Gathering research event
SAG members, Chris Sharp, and Kate Fox



Indigenous healers (counselors and therapists)
Jonathan Lacapa and Dezeray Garcia



Community partners offering opening blessing
Dwight Francisco (Cultural Director) and Brandon Nahsonhoya (MC)

[137] Tsosie, Ranalda L., Anne D. Grant, Jennifer Harrington, Ke Wu, Aaron Thomas, Stephan Chase, D. Barnett et al. "The six Rs of Indigenous research." *Tribal college journal of American Indian higher education* 33, no. 4 (2022).

Consideration #2: Respect

In the context of the six R's of IRMs, respect entails valuing Indigenous Peoples' opinions, traditions, and beliefs, regardless of whether one personally agrees with them.¹³⁸ Respect further requires honoring the holistic nature of Indigenous worldviews, which are not embedded in hierarchies and separation between beings.¹³⁹ To fulfill the respect component of IRMs during the present project, the research team was guided by an understanding that Indigenous worldviews, traditions, and cultures are identified and defined by Indigenous Peoples!¹⁴⁰ Therefore, taking a listening approach and being directed by the SAG, the research team included Indigenous worldviews by:

- Inviting Indigenous counselors, therapists, victim advocates, and traditionalists to provide participants with culturally appropriate therapy and emotional support throughout the MMIP story-gathering event
- Inviting a renowned Indigenous traditional dance group to provide cultural performances for the participants on the second day of the event
- Inviting an Indigenous keynote speaker who used comedy as a method of medicine for the participants on the second day of the event
- Negotiating accommodations from the IRB to allow participants to bring "support persons" to accompany them, circumventing Western research practices that allow only "participants" to be present during data collection¹⁴¹
- Including healing-based activities to foster Indigenous-based healing and exchange of healing/coping ideas among the participants



Eagle feathers used during the data collection (sharing circle focus groups) as "talking sticks," provided by our Cultural Director, Dwight Francisco

Consideration #3: Responsibility

Responsibility is a mutual element on which healthy and reciprocal relationships between Indigenous communities and researchers are built!¹⁴² On one hand, researchers take responsibility for their participants and the knowledge and trust of Indigenous communities!¹⁴³ On the other hand, Indigenous communities are responsible for their own narratives, stories, people, and histories in the present and for future generations!¹⁴⁴ The research team honored responsibility by:

- Listening to and documenting MMIP experiences shared by survivors in trauma-informed and healing-centered ways
- Acknowledging the role of the SAG to design and shape the context within which they shared their stories
- Providing a safe, quiet room for participants to retreat to in case of emotional distress during the sharing circles
- Ensuring the safety of participants and confidentiality of stories by using pseudonyms
- Protecting the integrity of the data by restricting access only to certified team members.



Closing ceremony and prayer over the feathers that hold the stories shared during the event
Cassie Harvey and Dwight Francisco

[138] Tsosie, Ranalda L., Anne D. Grant, Jennifer Harrington, Ke Wu, Aaron Thomas, Stephan Chase, D. Barnett et al. "The six Rs of Indigenous research." *Tribal college journal of American Indian higher education* 33, no. 4 (2022).

[139] Tessaro, Danielle, Jean-Paul Restoule, Patricia Gaviria, Joseph Flessa, Carlana Lindeman, and Coleen Scully-Stewart. "The five r's for Indigenizing online learning: A case study of the First Nations schools' principals course." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 40, no. 1 (2018)

[140] Jacobs, Beverley. "Indigenous justice in Oceania and North America." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. 2021.

[141] It is important to note that all support persons elected to become research participants.

[142-144] Tsosie, R. L. et al. *The six Rs of Indigenous research*, (2023).

Consideration #4: Relevance

Relevance recognizes that research needs to speak to Indigenous culture and ways of knowing.¹⁴⁵ In doing research with Indigenous Peoples, relevance requires going beyond the ways of learning offered within Western academia and incorporating the unique components of Indigenous pedagogies and epistemologies.¹⁴⁶ The research team ensured that the project was relevant to Indigenous communities by:

- Inviting the SAG members to carefully review the research and interview questions to ensure that they were relevant to MMIP survivors, Indigenous worldviews, and ways of living and knowing
- Using a data collection method (sharing circles) that mimics the storytelling practice of Indigenous Peoples, also known as talking circles
- Inviting Indigenous participants to design and formulate policy recommendations that are relevant to their lived experiences and cultures
- Inviting Indigenous guest speakers who addressed healing-oriented topics identified by the SAG

Consideration #5: Representation

Representation, the most recently developed element of the six R's of IRMs, refers to maintaining the presence of Indigenous Peoples in all research activities, from defining, planning, implementing, and evaluating the project.¹⁴⁷ Through representation, Indigenous participants are empowered to identify and share what is relevant and important to their people.¹⁴⁸ The present project hinged on the representation of Indigenous Peoples by:

- Engaging with the ASU Special Advisor to the President for American Indian Affairs at the outset of the project, who advised on the relevance of the research to Indigenous communities
- Employing Indigenous researchers who have extensive familiarity with needs and issues that are pertinent to their communities that are pertinent to their communities;
- Launching the project upon the appointment of the SAG to ensure Indigenous representation throughout the research phases
- Elevating the SAG to play a key role in all aspects of the project, including dissemination to ensure Indigenous representation in primary and secondary use of data

Consideration #4: Reciprocity

Lastly, the reciprocity element of the six Rs of IRMs underscores a continuous and intentional exchange process based on "the belief that we receive from others, we must also offer to others."¹⁴⁹ The exercise of reciprocity in the context of partnering with Indigenous Peoples in doing research is therapeutic, given that this population has suffered decades of exploitative, one-sided research projects aimed solely at advancing academic milestones.¹⁵⁰ Recognizing that "in reciprocal relationships, resources are considered gifts,"¹⁵¹ the research team honored reciprocity by:

- Dedicating a portion of the finances from the grant to cover the financial costs for participants' lodging and food over the two days of the MMIP Survivor Gathering Event
- Compensating the Indigenous counselors, traditional dancers, inspirational speakers, and all Indigenous consultants who were invited to participate in the event
- Providing a gift card to participants
- Ensuring that the SAG members had a voice in formulating a dissemination strategy and using the data to strengthen their activism and allow them to give back to their communities.
- Maintaining the relationship with the SAG members beyond project activities to support addressing MMIP, their healing, and activism

[145-146] Tessaro, D et al The five r's for Indigenizing online learning: A case study of the First Nations schools' principals course, (2018).

[147] Grant, Anne D., Katherine Swan, Ke Wu, and Ruth Plenty Sweetgrass-She Kills. "A research publication and grant preparation program for native American faculty in STEM: Implementation of the six R's indigenous framework." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2022): 734290.

[148] Tessaro, D et al The five r's for Indigenizing online learning: A case study of the First Nations schools' principals course, (2018).

[149] Tsosie, R. L. et al. *The six Rs of Indigenous research*, (2023).

[150] Tessaro, D et al The five r's for Indigenizing online learning: A case study of the First Nations schools' principals course, (2018).

[151] Tsosie, R. L. et al. *The six Rs of Indigenous research*, (2023).

Analytic summary

Data were transcribed and cleaned from the sharing circles, collective reflection, and SAG debrief. To increase confidentiality, participants and SAG members were given pseudonyms, and the names of participants were redacted. We conducted content and thematic analyses to capture the nuances and cultural components within the data by inductive coding. The sharing circle transcripts were then organized by sharing circle groups and question prompts. All data were uploaded into ATLAS.ti, a software platform used for qualitative analysis, manually coded using initial codes created during the inductive coding for all documents. Then, ATLAS.ti was used to identify other codes that may not have been identified through the inductive manual analysis. To assess interrater reliability, each document was analyzed by a second research team member who performed a deductive analysis using the codes created manually and using the software. After cross-examining the manual codes, a final codebook was developed that summarized the macro responses derived from merged micro themes from the manual and AI codes.

Results

Participant demographics

There was a total of 29 participants, ranging in age from 18 to 78, with 48 as the mean age. Among the 29 participants, 8 (28%) were male and 21 (72%) were female. Participants represented eight different Tribes in Arizona or neighboring states with Tribal land that touches Arizona. Three-quarters of participants traveled to the MMIP Survivor Gathering event from Indigenous reservations (n=22; 76%). When asked what type of area in which they reside, 34% (n=10) lived in rural areas, 21% (n=6) lived in urban areas, 28% (n=8) lived in border towns, 14% (n=4) answered "other," and one left the question unanswered.

Table 3. Participant Demographics (n=29)

Variables	Frequency (n)/ Mean (SD)	Range
Sex		
Female	72% (21)	
Male	28% (8)	
Age	48.24 (0.35)	18-78
Lives on reservation		
Yes	76% (22)	
No	24 (7)	
Location of Residence (n=28)		
Urban	21% (6)	
Rural	34 (10)	
Bordertown	28% (8)	
Other	14% (4)	

Note: n = number, SD = standard deviation

Contextualizing participants' MMIP experiences

All participants shared their stories regarding their experiences with MMIP. Participants had lost children, parents, cousins, and friends. Losing a loved one resulted in a personal grieving process, and many participants reflected on the last time that they saw their loved one, as articulated by Doreen, who stated:

“The last time I saw my daughter was when she went to see her baby. She said, ‘Mom, I love you’ and I said, ‘I love you too, but I love you more.’ She responded, ‘Pray for me, Mom, pray for me.’ I said, ‘I always pray for all of you. I love you, and be careful.’ She responded, ‘I will, Mom’ and that was the last time I saw her.” - **Doreen**

Some participants' loved ones were still missing at the time of data collection, and they described the heartache associated with uncertainty and lack of closure. This was evident in Ivy's remarks when she explained the difficulties of searching for her missing sister:

“I wish I had known how hard it is to be out there to find [my sister], to find your missing loved one, and how much it is going to take. The organizing, planning, and writing to get the resources and funds. It costs a lot of money to get out there. It costs to feed horses, four-wheelers, and your vehicles. I just wish I would have known how much we were going to go through. How much our family would be going through. Of course, we didn't know what we were doing because it never happened within our family. We thought she was going to show up.” - **Ivy**

Other participants described the heartache associated with finding their loved one's remains, as illustrated by Noah:

“I am the father of a missing person, who is my son. I lost my son a couple of years ago, and we eventually found his remains. We had no support at all. We did a search on our own because we didn't have any support from the police. We were totally lost and had no idea where to go, who to ask, or what to look for. When we finally did a legitimate search with police and resources, we found identified remains which proved to be my son. So, by participating in this research, I'd like to come up with a system so people don't have to experience the same obstacles we did.” - **Noah**



Participants also discussed the shock of losing a loved one. Many participants articulated their disbelief that what they were going through was real. As Laura illustrates in the following quote, nobody expects MMIP to happen to their family. She lost a nephew and had a hard time processing what happened. Laura explained how losing her nephew was a traumatic experience for the entire family:

“When I first heard about what happened, it was like something you didn't believe; you didn't think it actually happened. And then I called my sister and I said, ‘I heard this, did it really happen?’ Nobody really knew that my nephew went missing...I think you go through a traumatic experience that was really traumatic for the family.” - **Laura**

Many participants were particularly devastated to know about the violence their loved ones experienced. For instance, as one participant shared her story about the murder of her father, she became emotional and elected to pass her talking stick on to another participant because it was still too painful to share the details of how her father was murdered. The feelings of loss were compounded for some family members who either witnessed their loved one's death in front of them or were asked to identify their loved one's remains. Ultimately, participants acknowledged that losing a loved one to violence was a traumatizing experience. Danielle, who had lost both parents in separate homicide incidents, said:

“I've experienced a lot of trauma from losing my mom, dad, and other relatives to violence.” - **Danielle**

The trauma from experiencing MMIP creates lasting effects on Indigenous families and communities, creating enormous obstacles discussed in the next section.

Research Question #1: What are the challenges to mental health that MMIP survivors and families face after losing a loved one?

A total of 37 challenges were identified for mental health, discussed by 26 participants over 159 times during the sharing circles. All but three participants (n=26) discussed the impact MMIP has had on them and on the lives of their family members. Participants described many different mental health concerns associated with their MMIP experiences, including uncertainty associated with their loved one's murder or disappearance and the psychological distress it created for them. Their distress commonly stemmed from an overall lack of answers that participants experienced from the criminal justice system, compounded by multiple deaths or disappearances within their families or communities.

Balancing their grief with their cultural values often created conflicting feelings for participants who wanted to grieve their loved ones but also wanted to respect their cultural beliefs associated with the dead. For example, in some cultures, it is taboo to mention the name of a deceased person because doing so is akin to calling them back to earth and prevents their transition to the afterlife. Together, these themes tell a collective story of the mental health challenges Indigenous family members face while attempting to find answers, receive justice, locate their loved ones, and grieve.

Uncertainty

Families and survivors of MMIP talked at length about the trauma of uncertainties regarding the whereabouts of their loved ones and the uncertainties of what actions law enforcement was taking to seek justice. Many participants (n=16; 55%) spoke about the pain of not knowing what happened to their loved one. Not knowing the truth about what happened to their family members created speculations about the incident and made it increasingly harder to understand and grieve, especially when family members were unable to see physical proof that their loved one was gone. This was explained by Evelyn, who stated:

"So it's like, I guess I can't really start healing until I know the truth. All these speculations and all these what ifs, you know, it's hard to heal. And actually, when they found [my father's remains], they thought maybe it was his jawbone and [another body part]. So when they brought him, it was just a little box. It was not even a body. It is hard to let somebody go [when] you have never even seen them dead yet. You know what I mean? I didn't see him dead yet, so in my eyes, he's not dead. I need to see him physically to actually start healing." - Evelyn

The uncertainty of not knowing how their family members died, combined with the inability to see the physical remains, impeded their own healing for some participants, like Evelyn. Participants often engaged in suppositional questioning, which created "what if" scenarios that had negative consequences for mental health and wellness, as Mateo explained:

"Once your emotions are out of whack, your physical and mental capabilities kind of go with it. If you're not emotionally fit, you can't really accomplish anything because you get caught up with staying at home crying and blaming yourself." - Mateo

As Mateo points out, constant replaying of the past and scenarios derived out of uncertainty kept severe feelings of grief at bay often leading to other negative outcomes, such as mental distress discussed in the next section.

Mental distress

Participants experienced 13 psychological impacts upon becoming aware that a loved one was missing or a victim of homicide. However, there were three specific distresses that were identified to be the most prominent.

Helplessness. About half of the participants (n=14; 48%) expressed an overwhelming sense of helplessness due to being turned away from receiving help, not getting answers from authorities, and lack of resources. Lily explained:

I kept trying to ask for help, and then I tried to go past the police and ask for help from our Tribe.
- Lily

This sentiment was echoed by another participant, Lucas, who had been turned away in time of need because of the negative and victim-blaming perceptions from community members. He states:

"The people that were supposed to help me, which is my Tribal council, which is the police department, the churches, they [didn't help]. My wife drove me around, and I knocked on every church door, and I asked them to help us fight this, to fight drugs, to help with organizing the community to march, to come out and show support. And a majority of the churches gave me a lecture about how they've been trying to fight drugs for a long time, and you know, basically, 'good luck.' So we ended up doing everything ourselves." - Lucas

Guilt and regret. Twelve participants expressed that they often experienced feelings of guilt and regret. When family members became aware that an MMIP incident involved their loved one, they often thought back to the last interaction they had with the victim. One example of this is explained by Levi, who reflected on those last interactions that generated feelings of guilt:

“I’ve had some guilt to cope with. Right before he went missing, he called me but I was sitting in a dentist chair. I texted him back and told him, I’m sitting in the dentist chair, I call you back when I’m done. But I didn’t because my mouth was swollen and I was feeling all crappy so I thought I’d call him later. Then I got home, and I was too tired and I thought I’ll just call him tomorrow. Around that time is when he went missing and I felt bad about that.”
- Levi

Negative emotions. A majority of participants (n=26) mentioned how MMIP experiences caused feelings of anger, frustration, confusion, hurt, sadness, fear, and even shame. Ezra explained:

“Somebody in investigations or something that like [needs to] at least try to reach out to the families who have unsolved murders. Just like, reach out and let them know what’s going on. The [families] don’t know if the [cases] really progress or if they’re still working on it at all. Like, I saw him [brother] die. And I don’t get closure and I still get angry and still want answers. I want justice. Without that, I stay angry inside because I feel like the people need to answer for what they’ve done. I just stay with the anger and I’m angry with the justice system and I’m angry with the people who did it. It doesn’t let me heal.” - Ezra

These emotional afflictions were brought upon families and survivors who experienced MMIP stemming from a lack of justice, uncertainty, and not having their needs met.

Injustice

Perceptions of justice experienced by participants differed depending upon the circumstances surrounding their loved one’s murder or disappearance. Some family members (n=9; 31%) explained that they had not received justice, which created challenges for them to grieve their loss. Participants also discussed the lack of support by entities—such as law enforcement, courts, Tribal agencies, and churches—all of which were perceived by participants as places that should

have provided help. The lack of support negatively impacted participants’ mental health, explained by Mia.

“With my son’s murderer, we were told that he had already been sitting in jail for eight to nine months. And they’re only allowed to hold them for up to 12 months. So that was why they pushed for us to go to trial because they had already pushed it back. In doing that, they said they would be pushed into the new year. And he would have been released by then because he would have already had served his 12 months. So that’s why [prosecution] said you should just go for trial, so we went for it [trial]. Unfortunately, we lost...That was a big letdown for me and my family, the whole [criminal justice] system there.” - Mia

As Mia pointed out, family members and survivors’ perceptions of not receiving justice originated from fruitless encounters with formal agencies and systems, both Tribal and non-Tribal.

Experiencing frequent death

Participants discussed the disproportionately high number of deaths that Indigenous families and communities experience. In addition to discussing their MMIP experience, nearly half of the participants (n=12; 41%) talked about how other untimely deaths within their communities or families impacted their ability to heal. Coping with frequent death negatively impacted participants’ mental health and prevented or delayed their healing. This is explained by Ellie, who shared how multiple losses within her family over a short period of time negatively impacted her ability to grieve:

“When [my cousin] passed I was on my healing process, but then it stopped because my mom passed away. Two months later my brother passed away. Three months later, my cousin passed away in an ATV wreck. Two months later my uncle passed away in his sleep. And then my niece passes away like three four months later in a car accident. How do I grieve for her and grieve for my mom, my brother, my cousin, my uncle and now my niece? That’s where it [healing] stops. It was like back to back. It’s challenging. Still is.” - Ellie

Ellie’s daughter, Willow, who was also a participant, affirmed how losing several members of their family unit caused lasting pain, regardless of how the death(s) occurred.

"I lost a lot of people in my life. First it was my cousin. Then three years later, it was my dad. I was only 16 at the time and I didn't understand why. And then it was death after death. Then my little cousin, when she was only 14 when she died in the car accident. She lived with us. I considered her and her sister as my little sisters and it hurts to see all of them go. I lost a lot of people in my life. First it was my cousin. Then three years later, it was my dad. I was only 16 at the time and I didn't understand why. And then it was death after death. Then my little cousin, when she was only 14 when she died in the car accident. She lived with us. I considered her and her sister as my little sisters and it hurts to see all of them go." - **Willow**

Additionally, the short interval of time between deaths had a significant impact on healing for participants. Experiencing multiple deaths within the family and community results in collateral consequences for participants, including unresolved grief, financial loss, loss of productivity, collective trauma, destruction of the family unit, and traumatization from diverse entities (e.g., law enforcement, coroner, Tribal institutions).

Balancing culture and grief

Upholding cultural beliefs about death and grieving created internal conflicts among several participants (n=10; 34%). As noted earlier, according to some Indigenous cultures it is taboo to mention the name of the deceased because doing so will call their spirit back to the physical realm and prevent their peaceful transition to the afterworld. One participant, Sherie, talked about how some cultural beliefs create additional complexities for grief and healing:

"It's complicated because in our way of our healing, when somebody passes away we don't talk about it a lot of time. You have to let [the victim] go [so they] go to where their supposed to go, make that journey. They'll never get to where they're supposed to go [if you talk about them]. It's really hard. You cry, you remember, you cry happy tears. It's really complicated in our culture." - **Sherie**

Many participants discussed feeling overwhelmed due to uncertainties about how to express or cope with their grief, particularly among those who had a loved one go missing without any evidence of physical remains. This internal conflict was described by Ivy, who questioned how it was possible to uphold her cultural beliefs since she has yet to find her sister or the answers for necessary closure:

"I know our culture says that when somebody passes and dies, you let them go, you let them be. But does that have to be with the missing too? I say no because they went missing." - **Ivy**

Another participant, Oliver, also discussed the challenge of incorporating historical teachings about death when it came to the disappearance of his sister-in-law. He mentioned how it was difficult to uphold cultural beliefs when a loved one was still missing and her remains, or physical being, have yet to be found:

"We have always been taught that whenever [people die], you let them go. But [with] being missing, you don't let them go till you actually put [you bury them]. That's when they leave [this world] to go somewhere where they need to go. But not seeing them and not [having a burial means] they're still out there. They're still out there waiting for somebody to find them or bring them home so we can put them to rest." - **Oliver**

In some Indigenous cultures, being on life support is perceived to interfere with transitions into the next life. This, again, caused challenges for grief and death for families to navigate due to policies and procedures within hospitals to implement technology to keep victims' hearts beating. Gianna stated that she was not afforded the right to choose whether or not her son was put on life support, and was not given proper notification of her son's incident until several hours later. She stated:

"I was shocked. I was so confused. When I arrived at the hospital after finally being notified hours later, my son was on life support already. In our culture, we don't believe in life support. I don't wish this on any parents to go through. It's the worst pain to have to bury your child before you. Especially with the way he was murdered, it was brutal. So if I can help other people that's what I'm going to do. Because I'm still here. I'm a survivor. I'm going to keep going." - **Gianna**

Research Question #2: How do people impacted by MMIP heal from their trauma?

A total of 43 protective factors were mentioned by 25 participants over 159 times during the sharing circles. Several themes emerged that are discussed in the next section and have been organized based on the frequency with which they were discussed by participants.

Sharing MMIP experiences

Three-quarters of participants (n=21; 76%) expressed that talking about their MMIP experiences helped them heal and build resilience. Participants described how incredibly difficult it was for them to process, grieve, and come to terms with the loss when they were left without answers. The uncertainties and injustices faced by those who experience MMIP often prevent closure, acceptance, and learning to live with loss, as explained by Charlotte:

"I want to remember who [my sister] is. I want to remember the laughs we shared together. The jokes we shared, the happy moments, I don't want to forget her, so of course, I'm going to talk about her. Of course I'm going to share about her. They still haven't found who killed her, who shot her, and no one's talking. The investigation is cold and closed, and the [murderers] are still unknown."

- **Charolette**

Charlotte explained how dealing with inexplicable loss can create internal struggles between moving forward with life and holding onto memories of loved ones. She also shared that talking about loved ones and reminiscing provided honor to her sister's name and her legacy while still moving forward with her own healing:

"You know, [my sister's] gone. But you still really have those memories. You still have those good memories about your loved one. You still continue to go on in life. And that hurts. But you know, eventually, we'll all overcome the grief that we that we have." - **Charolette**

Talking about what happened to their loved ones with people who also have MMIP experience can help with collective healing. For example, Eric acknowledged how difficult MMIP is to talk about but also recognized that the pain of talking about MMIP can lead to overcoming a tragedy as a family:

"What happened was hard. But being around the people it happened to was good because we didn't just stay quiet about it. We talked about it, and we still talk about it."

- **Eric**

Eric's sentiment was further supported by Camilla, who pointed out the importance of allowing her children to voice themselves as a means of dealing with trauma and managing their grief through expression:

"I think that just being able to be there for them [children impacted by MMIP], allowing them to talk about how about the situation, letting the kids express that they miss them [the victim]. Letting the kids express how they feel. We weren't allowed to talk about things as kids and I want my kids to be able to talk about how this impacted them."

- **Camilla**

Restorative support

Fourteen participants (48%) recognized that having strong support systems helped them manage emotions associated with experiencing MMIP. Participants identified their support systems included family members who played a crucial role in providing emotional support that helped them cope with the trauma. This is illustrated by Erica, who discussed the important role her parents played in increasing the likelihood of handling their trauma in a healthy way:

"I was fortunate enough that my family was always supportive and helpful. In the three losses we've had, my [parents] would talk to me and teach me their traditional way of handling a situations like this and how I should handle myself and move on [from losing two sons to MMIP]. Just them being there for us was really helpful for me." - **Erica**

Erica, and other participants, pointed out that family members were pillars of strength and provided great sources of guidance, wisdom, knowledge of traditional practices, and reassurance. Having a supportive family network can help alleviate some of the burden felt by participants by providing comfort and reassurance that enhances resilience, as explained by Doreen:

"I have my sisters and them [other family members]. My sister's son was killed two years ago right around Christmas time. He was shot in the back. Now I talk to her because I know how she feels and she knows how I feel. So we both support each other. We all try to support each other." - **Doreen**

Although many participants discussed the importance of family, participants also discussed the challenges caused by continuously relying on family. Over-relying on family members sometimes creates fatigue and leads to the strain experienced within the family unit. Participants talked about the strain that caused some family members to withdraw, either because they felt they were a burden on others or because they were attempting to protect their family members from further stress and pain. Sherie stated:

“My husband and I mainly go to my daughter and her husband who are both counselors. We go to them for help and advice. But sometimes I get to the point that we're always calling on them. They're always working and yet they have to deal with us too.” - **Sherie**

For some participants (n=4; 14%), Tribal support played a significant role in helping families who experience MMIP. For instance, Danielle explained how her Tribe helped her receive services that contributed to her healing:

“I would also say that our Tribe definitely helped us a lot. They helped us get into services when they found out about that stuff and those situations. They helped us get the services that we needed.” - **Danielle**

Danielle's Tribe acted as a gateway to services she needed in order to heal from the grief she felt from the loss of her parents. Her Tribe also provided support for her family and helped her locate services that could address the needs of each individual family member. Another participant, Gianna, also had a positive experience when seeking help from her Tribe. She stated:

“I called my legal services on my reservation. And I thank God, because they are helping me. If it wasn't for my tribe, I don't know where I'd be right now.” - **Gianna**

Taken together, participants' insights highlight the importance of building a strong and sustainable support system that fosters culture, care, and guidance for individuals going through the MMIP experience.

Reciprocity

For many Indigenous communities, reciprocity—giving back and helping others—is a highly valued practice that was exemplified by the families and survivors who experienced MMIP. Several participants (n=11; 38%) talked about a shared sense of duty and purpose that helped them cope with loss and manage grief. Some participants shared a solution-oriented mindset that aimed to address violence and MMIP in their communities despite dealing with the pain and suffering from losing a beloved relative. As Lily explained,

reciprocity through helping others provided a sense of fulfillment, which outweighed her negative emotions, such as guilt:

“When I see somebody in need, somebody that wants help, I picture [my sister] and that's kind of what helps but in a way I feel guilty since I couldn't help her. Maybe I can help this person, you know, and maybe turnout a different outcome.” - **Lily**

Several participants spoke about two specific notions of reciprocity, including advocacy (n=5; 17%) and helping others (n=8; 28%). Participants felt compelled to speak out about their MMIP experiences for various reasons. Some participants, engaged in advocacy to bring awareness to MMIP, help others receive justice, and prevent others from experiencing the same kind of loss she experienced. Gianna said:

“It 's [the] worst pain to have to bury your child before you. And the way he was murdered, it was brutal. So if I can help other people, that's what I'm going to do. Because I'm still here. I'm a survivor. I'm going to keep going.” - **Gianna**

Reciprocity through advocacy allows those impacted by MMIP to honor the memory of victims and maintain hope that justice will be served. Lucas illustrates this point:

“A big healing part is getting to tell [my sister's] story. Getting it out there [advocating], because there's a lot of people that are hurting, and they need to hear it. And just by speaking and telling her story and seeing, seeing how it helps them. It could have been tragedy, but we're turning it into triumph. To tell it, to keep spreading her story, is healing.” - **Lucas**

Lucas said that telling his sister's story was not always easy due to a lack of support, rumors, victim blaming, and judgment within his rural community. He states:

“[Through advocacy,] I've been blessed to witness with my own eyes both good and evil in the community. I've seen the lies of the people that are supposed to help you, how they really are. I witnessed the power of ex-drug addicts, prostitutes, people in the community who would be brush off by normal people. I've seen them rise up, watched them organize like an army. I've watched normal citizens have the tribal council and the police department shaking in their boots. Just because they're scared of the uprising and the power. I was able to witness the power of our voice. It's helped me heal.” - **Lucas**

Participants shared that speaking out and sharing their stories can also come with a cost, including threats of violence or death, retaliation, family discord, deteriorating health, and extreme psychological and emotional stress. Even so, participants continued to prioritize their efforts to keep the victims' memories alive and seek justice, even if it meant sacrificing their own well-being.

Participants discussed other forms of healing through reciprocity including taking the initiative to help others through leadership, learning about the causes and how to prevent violence and MMIP, and teaching others through community engagement. Participants took action to be the solution that mitigated the adverse impacts MMIP had on others. Danielle, who lost both her parents in separate, unrelated homicide incidents, explained how she continued to help address violence and MMIP by being community and culturally embedded:

"I'm just trying to help my community as much as I can because I didn't really know how to help myself. So, I took criminal justice classes to try to understand the criminal justice system and the aspects of how they handled cases. I took the initiative to learn about it myself. I wanted to be that person [I needed] for [other] people. Then, later on, I decided to focus more on how to heal myself. So I think that immersing myself with my Tribe and all those programs helped me to not be depressed." - **Danielle**

Spirituality

Twenty participants (69%) said engaging in traditional or cultural practices (n=11; 38%), saying prayers (n=11; 28%), or going to church (n=2; 7%) provided strength to cope with the loss of their family members. Practicing faith, whether through Western religion or Indigenous traditional beliefs/practices, helped participants comprehend the philosophical nature of life and death. Two participants mentioned they attended church as a way of connecting with their spiritual community while seeking support within their healing journey. Mia explained how her "church family" offered support from the beginning:

"I had my church family. They were always calling or stopping by, or sending me, you know, emails, or texts or whatever, asking me how I was doing. Because I have never been a person who comes out and hangs around with a lot of people or anything. I'm always at home. I never really got out there to make friends or anything other than my church family, and so I didn't really have anybody else coming around, except for maybe my close cousins. [My church family] were there from the beginning." - **Mia**

Reliance on religion allowed many participants to have something to hold onto and helped them maintain faith that helped them heal from the trauma associated with their MMIP experience, as Mia explained:

"What got me through my MMIP experience is my belief in God, and my church family. Because when all of this happened, I'll tell you right off, it just threw me for a big loop. I lost my faith for the first couple of months." - **Mia**

Participants who practiced prayer felt a sense of security and peace in times of turmoil, which allowed them to acknowledge and speak to their loved ones who were missing or murdered. Ivy said:

"To get me through this is prayer. I pray every day, every evening, every night. I talked to [my sister] through prayer." - **Ivy**

Participants shared a common desire for spiritual fulfillment and community connection that granted them permission to grieve. Praying allowed some participants to give themselves permission to express their pain, guilt-free through their faith, as explained by Levi:

"I gave myself permission to go ahead and grieve and I will talk to [my deceased loved ones]... I used to pray to something out there... That really helped me to understand. Participating in cultural [practices and] listening to people; hearing their own personal journeys gave me an understanding [of] death." - **Levi**

As Levi pointed out, listening to others interpret their own spiritual journeys allowed him to gain a deeper perspective into his own emotional unrest. Through this process, Levi discovered that acknowledging his grief was an essential step in attaining his inner peace with death.

Practicing ancestral ways

Five participants (17%) found comfort in connecting with their cultural heritage. Levi mentions historical teachings that highlight the significance of these practices:

"Our ancestors knew how to [cope with loss], this is just my belief. They knew how to do that. Their connection to the natural world was so intimate that they understood life and death better than we do today. They accepted it on a deeper level than we know how to do today. For many of us, we don't know how to do that - we get stuck." - **Levi**

Another participant found refuge in engaging in ancestral practices that have been passed down through generations, which were not limited to spiritual customs but rather traditional practices, such as beading, drumming, and being culturally centered. Camilla explained:

“What helped me with being able to learn and connect with our Creator, or with my ancestors, connect with other women who shared their stories. That was one of the things that helped, just being able to recover in a safe place, culturally-centered. I still drum and I started to bead in my recovery so that really took a lot of patience but it really helped me. I never did beading or anything like that before so being able to bead and being in the moment and do those types of things with prayer really helped me during the process of my healing.” - **Camilla**

Camilla sought ways to heal that allowed her to not only engage in her traditional practices (i.e., beading), but to be in an environment that facilitated her healing in the presence of others. Participants noted that practicing inherited, ancestral, ways provided a valuable source of support for them in their healing journey.

Acceptance of death

Participants who had accepted the loss of their loved one were better able to heal (n=11; 38%). Importantly, their acceptance was in no way apathetic and in agreement of the traumatic experiences they encountered. Instead, some participants reached a point of acceptance that allowed them to start the healing process. Precursors to acceptance were believing their loved one is no longer in danger and is not suffering or in pain, as one participant explained:

“I think that's what helped me, just remembering that they are okay wherever they are now.” - **Penelope**

Yet, acceptance was different for participants whose relatives were still missing. To illustrate this point, Laura stated:

I think we pretty much think [my nephew is] not going to come back but there's still hope that he could be out there and that he would come back. - **Laura**

Realizing a loved one is never going to return was extremely painful for participants. Participants' desire for the return of their loved ones nurtured hopes of reuniting. In contrast, this hope was perceived to extend their grieving process, making it hard for participants to accept reality.



Photo source: Canva images

Research Question #3: What are the challenges that families and survivors with MMIP experience perceive based on their interactions with the criminal justice system?

Over 81 statements regarding criminal justice barriers pertaining to MMIP were discussed by 25 participants. Almost three-quarters of participants (n=21; 72%) experienced adverse experiences with the criminal justice system whereas far fewer experienced positive experiences (n =3; 10%). Participants discussed multiple encounters with the criminal justice system, starting with the police. As evidenced in the sharing circles, encounters with criminal justice personnel left lasting impressions on participants.

Lack of support from law enforcement regarding missing persons

When participants' loved ones went missing, families first sought help from local law enforcement agencies to report their loved ones' disappearances. However, many families perceived that law enforcement did not provide effective support (n=11; 38%). The lack of support from law enforcement created additional barriers for participants and created feelings of frustration. When police were unable or unwilling to help, regardless of the reason, participants were left with uncertainty and no official guidance. Ivy illustrated this point as she discussed what she wished she would have known when her sister went missing:

"I wish I would have known the lack of information that was out there. The lack of resources. I wish I wouldn't know how our tribe has no idea how to deal with MMIP. I wish I would have known how much I would have been dealing with, and the walls that I would hit. You would think that your tribal law enforcement would be there to help but yet they don't know what they're doing, they don't know how to deal with the MMIP, [and have] a lack of training. I wish I would have known, in my instance, the [jurisdictional] issues. I wish I would have known that if you disappear on a [jurisdictional] border, it gets tossed back and forth. When she went missing on a [neighboring] reservation it got shoved [back and forth] from one reservation to the other]. She's been missing since March of 2022. It's 2024 now." - Ivy

Another participant, Mia, talked about her frustrations with law enforcement when she attempted to file a missing persons report when her son went missing. Mia had become concerned about her son's whereabouts given his previous violent encounters with another community member. Yet she was told by law enforcement that, because he was an adult,

she could not file a missing person's report for him. Mia shared:

"When I call[ed] the police to talk to them about it, they told me "well, we can't do anything about it. They're both adults and neither of them are coming in here to file any complaints." So he said, "we can't do anything." And this was actually told to me twice by two different officers. All they said was that it's going to end bad for one of them. I told [the officer], "can't you come and talk to [the offender] and ask him or see about him having the weapons and all that?" And they said, 'Oh, we did that once. He didn't have anything on him.'" - Mia

This was a frustration among many participants who knew that ineffective actions and delayed investigations by law enforcement could negatively impact the outcome of the case; meaning that their loved ones would not receive proper justice they deserved.

Inconsiderate disclosure of homicide

It is common for law enforcement to be the first to communicate the death of a loved one to the next of kin. Ten participants (34%) shared that becoming aware of a homicide was even more traumatizing when the disclosure was not conducted in a trauma-informed way by law enforcement. As explained by Camilla, detectives informed her – in the presence of her children – that her husband was killed. Camilla described this traumatizing situation as a result of law enforcement not investing as much time or compassion into the deaths of Indigenous Peoples:

In the moment, when the detectives came to the house to knock on the door, they told me what happened in front of my kids. We were in the living room. I opened the door and the kids were there. They didn't have consideration before they just started asking me questions right away, like, 'Do you know who could have did this?' I understand they had a job to do, but at the same time they didn't give me any kind of opportunity to be in the present. My mind was lost. They didn't take the time to do a thorough investigation. There were sometimes I felt like that may have been because he was Native American. They don't give us the time that they put into everybody else. - Camilla

Ineffective encounters with law enforcement

Several participants (n=8; 28%) explained how the lack of communication from law enforcement resulted in unsettled feelings and a yearning for answers and justice. These participants expressed how ineffective, or absent, communication fuels negative perceptions of law enforcement, which is explained by Eric:

“I still don't know what happened. I still don't know. I know that he [my son] was shot in the face, but for what reason? Over whom? Or who did it? I still have no knowledge of that. I have gone to the police, but there is nothing, there's nothing. They have told me nothing even though, I mean, it's my son.” - **Eric**

Other participants explained how a lack of communication from law enforcement evoked frustration that led to distrust in law enforcement.

Positive encounters with law enforcement. Although most experiences with law enforcement were negative, five participants (17%) reported positive experiences with criminal justice institutions. Negative encounters among participants included dissatisfaction with the amount of care from agencies. For instance, Doreen, who initially had expectations that her Tribe would assist, discussed how she was disappointed when they did not help. However, the participants who shared positive experiences with law enforcement regarded the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) positively, as explained Doreen:

“We didn't have [any] help from the tribe, not from the court. The police are giving us all kinds of trouble. They were talking to people that they shouldn't be. The FBI gave us more help than our own tribal police did. They helped us a lot.” - **Doreen**

Another participant, Lucas, explained how positive experiences with the FBI helped to mend the relationship and address negative perceptions of police corruption.

The FBI was helpful. It took an agent who walked the last steps my sister took, to pull over the side of the road and cry, putting herself [in] my sister 's shoes made us realize that they [are] good people and that all the police aren't all corrupted. There are good people out there. - **Lucas**

Trauma-informed and human-centered interactions between families impacted by MMIP and justice actors, like the one Lucas described, are vital for creating positive ripple effects leading to improved trust, procedural justice, and healing for grieving families.

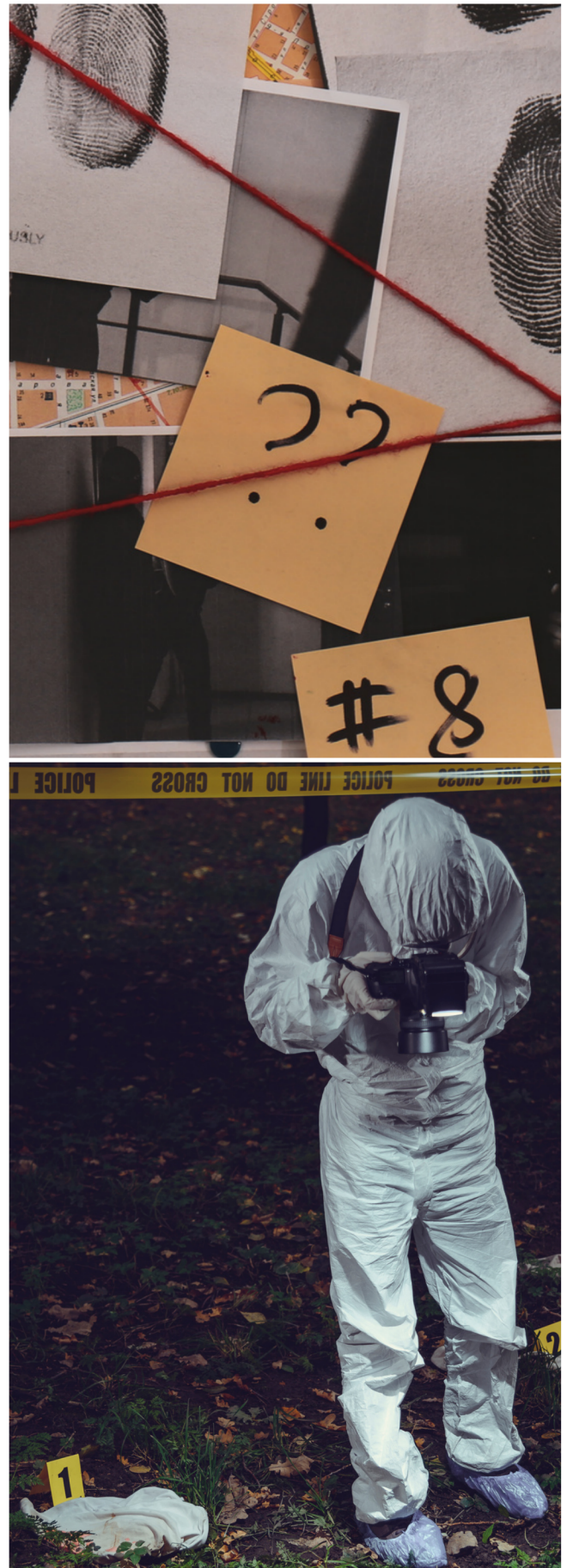


Photo source: Canva Images

Research Question #4: How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact Indigenous families and survivors dealing with MMIP?

A total of 8 themes regarding COVID-19 were identified by 13 participants and discussed 29 times throughout the sharing circles. The global pandemic created additional challenges for families grieving MMIP-related losses

Impacts of COVID-19 on services and MMIP support

Ten of the 13 participants who spoke about their COVID-19 experiences citing reductions in services and support for those who experienced MMIP. Services were halted when the national lockdowns occurred, resulting in participants having to find alternative ways to cope with their loss. Camilla previously discussed how she felt supported by the services offered by her Tribe to help her and her family heal from their loss. This is explained by Camilla and other participants about how COVID-19 resulted in additional strains experienced within her family:

"[My husband's murder] happened like right before COVID. So when [COVID] hit, all of the services were ripped out from under us. We were in wraparound services for maybe just about three months and then the schools shut down. And then everybody was scared to go to people's houses, so we didn't have services. So those were like the challenges that I faced, and I think that's what stemmed the addiction. I didn't have the therapy anymore. We didn't have anybody to reach out to like that. And before I knew, I was self medicating. My older kids were like 15. When I was in the middle of my addiction, I left them at home to take care of the little kids. And financially, we were okay, so I could afford my addiction and that didn't help the situation. My late husband left us pretty well off, so I was fortunate enough not to have to be struggling financially, but that was also a barrier because I got into addiction and I ran with it. Instead of dealing with [his death] I just dealt with drugs. I think the barriers were just that it came in the mix of COVID, and we didn't have you couldn't reach out for support."

- Camilla

Camilla highlights how her husband's murder negatively impacted her family and her alcoholism as a coping mechanism, which was exacerbated by the lack of services and support during the COVID-19 pandemic. She also pointed out other forms of support that were lost during the pandemic, including cultural ceremonies:

"After the funeral, in our culture, we have a whole year to be in [grief]. We have our own ceremony a year later to, like, let go. So we have that but they even stopped doing cultural ceremonies, too, because they didn't know how to with the whole COVID thing. So that was put to a stop too, so that didn't help the situation. So we couldn't really lean on ceremonies. I didn't lean on culture [during the pandemic]." - Camilla

Another participant, Erica, explained that the COVID-19 pandemic severely limited their ability to search for their missing loved ones. Participants were acutely aware that "time is of the essence" when a person is missing in terms of prioritizing the investigation and organizing search parties.

"I remember having calls on Zoom. People were afraid of one another, you know, they were just distancing. Keeping our distances. And so it did have an impact because we couldn't gather. I think a lot of people were still afraid to start searching together and being in a crowd. I think that a lot of people were using that to not to help. I don't know if that was an excuse for them. So they're like, "well COVID's still around, we can't help." So, you know, there wasn't a lot of help available to go and have a search party. And then just talking to one another [was reduced during the pandemic] and I think it still has an impact on a lot of families because they still don't want to get the sickness going around now. People are not wanting to leave [home] or be together. Then services, a lot of the offices were closed or limited office hours. And everything [services] was centralized [in larger towns on my reservation]. So in our areas, we were limited to police officers. A lot of people retired so a lot of people after COVID were new employees. So I think that has provided some problems. [People are] hesitant to go out and get any help or be in good settings." - Erica

Given that Indigenous Peoples are collectivist societies, the community often mobilizes to search together when an Indigenous person goes missing. However, COVID-19 caused many people, including Indigenous Peoples, to be afraid to gather together out of fear that they could

become infected with coronavirus. The COVID-19 pandemic caused delays in both formal and informal searches for missing persons.

In summary, the amount of support available to MMIP families and survivors was severely and negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. With many support services either canceled or moved to a remote platform, survivors and families found it increasingly difficult to access the help they needed in response to MMIP.

Impacts of COVID-19 on MMIP grief, community loss, and healing

Four of the 13 participants who shared that COVID-19 impacted their experience with MMIP explained that the pandemic hindered their ability to manage their loss. A participant discussed how, prior to the pandemic, they gathered together to advocate and spread awareness about MMIP as a form of coping with their grief.

“As a part of healing, we would help others. I helped my brother do the [MMIP awareness] march and whatnot. And when the pandemic hit—[my sister's death] happened that first year—so the second year, they came up with a drive-thru style march to bring awareness to our missing and murdered loved ones. Just bringing awareness is a part of our healing too. And so it was a hurdle [to gather and] we had to adjust. So in a way [COVID] did [impact us helping others], but we found ways around it.” - Lily

Participants also discussed how COVID-19 presented many cultural problems that they were forced to navigate while they were already grieving the loss of their loved ones. Mateo succinctly summarized the totality of the additional stressors caused by the pandemic:

“You didn't get to mourn them. That was my brother [who was murdered] and nobody let us know. [Officials and family] couldn't even let people know that they're dying. One person dies and the next person is already dying. I don't think people are fully really recovered from that yet because nobody has actually mourned. They're not letting people have a proper burial. I still go around asking [about people I knew not realizing] they passed away. [When you finally find out] it really hits you that person is gone. You have to sit there and [let it] sink in. [I think to myself,] I didn't get to go see them one more time. I didn't get to donate to them, like take them blankets or something to give the person that passed away. That's what we do [we give] something. That shows respect to them. [We] help you out in the next the next world. So, [didn't get to help [the deceased transition to the next world], because I didn't get to [give anything].” - Mateo

Indigenous Peoples value gathering supportively together, which is known as “being in community.” However, COVID-19 halted this source of coping due to the numerous restrictions and closing down of services, organizations, and the country.

Lucas explained how minimal responses to death, violence, and disproportionate loss within Indigenous communities serve as a reminder of the injustices Indigenous Peoples continue to face for centuries. He points out a common question that is asked among loved ones grieving from MMIP or COVID loss: who is held responsible? He states:

“To heal from MMIP, we gather together, we march, we bring awareness, we reach out and tell the people. We speak about it. We were in the process of [awareness] march after march. Going to speak and everything for MMIP and then the world came to a stop [because of COVID-19]. You know, you can't help but feel there's somebody to blame for this. The world came to stop and we had to get put in our houses and watch everyone around us die and there's nothing we could do about it. We had to sit there and listen helplessly as we hear person after person after person after person die in our community. Who is going to be held responsible for that? I mean, my sister might have got justice, but this is far from over. These are deaths that could have been prevented.” - Lucas

A notable similarity between COVID-19 and MMIP loss is that both could have been prevented. Yet, due to historical and systemic oppression, as well as unequal access to services, resources, and support, those impacted were uncertain about who should be held accountable for these deaths.

Impacts of COVID-19 on criminal justice responses to MMIP

For some participants, the COVID-19 pandemic produced additional negative perceptions of law enforcement. Four of the 13 participants explained how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their pursuit of justice for their loved ones. For example, Mateo said:

“Soon after my brother went missing COVID came. So everything kind of just stopped, you know, all the investigations and everybody just had to stay at home. So did the police, too, I guess. There's a lot of things going on during that time because the police were just doing nothing. That that caused a lot of problems.” - Mateo

Participants identified that COVID-19 causes delays in law enforcement investigations and communication. Eric explained:

“I feel like [COVID was] one of the reasons we didn't get a lot of answers because nobody was out in the community doing anything. We were on lockdown. That's probably [why law enforcement] ended up going so far without even getting answers because they probably weren't doing their job. [They were] not out there making contact with people, trying to get evidence. I know that they did find a phone in those kiosks where you turn in the phones and so I guess the person ended up taking the phone was one of the guys that were involved. And they were like “It's taking us so long to get information back because of COVID.” So I know that one of the barriers because they couldn't make the contact with the people. Nobody was calling back. So that delayed the process a lot. But I do feel like it impacted us a lot. And our nephew was also murdered the same exact way but here in [our reservation] and he was shot in the head and that was during COVID. So that was during the mix of all that too. So we were impacted by that as well. [Overall, law enforcement] were not able to go out and make contact and do all the things that they were doing before, as fast as they can before [the pandemic].” - **Eric**

Additionally, Lucas also highlights how COVID-19 limited efforts received by other established systems outside of the criminal justice system, such as funeral homes. He states:

“Yeah, it [COVID-19] caused problems with the [MMIP] movement because the world stopped. The world stopped. It killed momentum. During the pandemic when people were murdered, there weren't funerals allowed. They hurried them up and told them, you know, you can show the body at your house, but only [invite to the funeral home] like 10 people. And people got away with everything. You know, the cops were out, they just weren't doing their jobs. I asked the cop, I said, ‘your job must be easy right now.’ He's like, ‘ah, it's all homeless, homeless people, it's all we got to look out for.’ And it's like, so you gotta tell me that now when the world's locked down, that's your only problem? Homeless people? You don't see that the tweakers are still going to each other's houses. While everybody's locked, you don't see that with everybody inside their house, crime has revealed itself on the open? And all you guys [police] see are the homeless people? Yeah, that's the problem. COVID made law enforcement stupid. And it stopped us from doing what we're doing.” - **Lucas**



Research Question #5: What supportive responses do Indigenous Peoples with MMIP experience perceive would be helpful?

A total of 16 needs were mentioned 60 times by 25 participants throughout the sharing circles. Participants highlighted their MMIP-specific needs including centralized resources, strong support systems, awareness, and prevention.

Accessible MMIP services and resources for healing and grief

Many participants (n=10; 34%) expressed the need for a place to go for help that was dedicated to providing resources for those trying to locate their loved ones. This is explained by Ellie who stated:

"I wish I would have known [about] resources where I could go to find people that are willing to help. I wish I would have known that before. Because it's a lot, it's really a lot with, you know, the tragedies that we go through. And we think we're alone, but we're not. I mean, I wish I could have reached out to a lot more people than within my own family to help. I wish I would have known more about the resources in the state of Arizona." - **Ellie**

Participants also pointed out the stark differences in available resources in rural areas, including reservations, versus larger urban areas and cities. This was articulated by Laura who stated:

"You see all these ads about services [that say] 'we have resources available for people who are grieving,' but when you call them it's not there. I think resources should be more available. These families are suffering. They need support. Those [services] are not readily available on the reservation. And here in Phoenix, I know there's quite a few people in Phoenix, they don't understand what it's like on the reservation with support groups. There's a big difference when you live in a city and you live on the reservation. So, if research is like this is happening, I'm glad that the natives are being involved so hopefully more resources come out of this." - **Laura**

Participants also expressed the need for resources, even for family members impacted by MMIP who may appear to be strong and not need help. For example, participants explained that it is common for one person in the family to carry the weight of keeping everything together, essentially serving as the backbone of their family or relationship. Sherie explained how she felt the need to remain strong for her husband and her

family who were openly grieving the disappearance of their son:

"I wish I had known who to go to and reach out for help. I just wish I knew. And then when it happens, how to deal with my husband. He was going really hard, really breaking down and I had to be the strong one. I can't really say I had a chance to really, really break down, because I had to be strong for him. I had to be the one to try and lift him up when he's really bad." - **Sherie**

Another participant, Sam, explained that she often felt helpless while observing her husband deal with his sister's death. Sam said:

"For me, I'm a supporter. At that time I didn't have a sibling who passed away. So seeing him go through it was a lot. And he doesn't cry. He organizes these marches, he does all these things. And he talks, but he doesn't cry. In the beginning he did. He would sit up at the end of the bed and he would just cry. And for me it was a helpless feeling. I love him very much. I don't want to see him hurt. His mom, his sister, I love them too. To see him crying, hurt. I'm a mother and I don't want to ever imagine this happening to my daughter. So I'm still healing. And when we do these things [talk about lost loved ones], I get really emotional. And I feel like it's for both of us. We're one. We're married. So for both of us, but we always say this is an ugly club to belong to. In hearing other people's stories, I just feel for them. It hurts my heart." - **Sam**

Social Support systems

Nearly half of the participants (n=12; 41%) mentioned the need to be connected with people who shared similar experiences. Charlotte stated:

"I think it'd be helpful to know there's a support system, a support group, support people, [or] somewhere you can go where you can talk to people that have been through it, that can help you and say, 'this is what I tried,' or 'this is what I did,' and 'this is how our family dealt with it.' When you don't have that, you're flying in the dark and you're taking it day by day, minute by minute. It helped a lot of family members that go through this trauma, so that this trauma doesn't repeat itself and negatively affect the family that's still there." - **Charolette**

Several participants (n=6; 21%) explained that having a supportive listener was important to their healing. Having someone to talk to helps participants process their situation and let their emotions out, which Lily described:

“At the time when our sister was murdered, they didn't know who did it. And so I tried going into the counseling office because I was gonna break down. I didn't know what to do. I needed to talk to get it out. So what I would have liked to have known would have been grief support groups, if that was available in our area. The FBI agent that was in charge, she said “there's support groups here, here and here” but they were in another town. And when they [FBI] tried to reach out to them and let them know, ‘hey, you know, there's a family here that needs grief support to talk about it,’ they declined because of the situation, because of the rumors that she was murdered. They just go off of the rumors of why she was murdered and they didn't want any part of that, so we basically had to deal with it ourselves. I feel like resources for grief emotional support [is needed] because at the time, that's what we needed. We needed to be around people who understood our hurt.” - Lily

Increased MMIP awareness

Additionally, several participants (n=8; 28%) shared the need to address MMIP by raising awareness. Participants stated that there is still a general lack of awareness of MMIP, even within Indigenous communities. One participant, Alyssa, who had personally been missing previously and now was recovered, described the experience of realizing that she was a victim after escaping her captor and explained the challenges she experienced from her Tribe when she attempted to bring awareness to MMIP. Alyssa stated:

“For me, for my Tribe, we don't talk about MMIP. When I started learning about MMIP, I realized ‘hey, that was me.’ And I tried to share my story with my community. They didn't accept it. I got so much backlash because they didn't want to believe stuff like that happens in our community. So I started pushing more for more [awareness] like, ‘Hey, we have missing people. Why aren't we looking for them? Why aren't their cases being opened?’” - Alyssa

Alyssa explained that she had been kidnapped and hidden from her loved ones while being held captive and abused. Her mother attempted to locate her but was unsuccessful because Alyssa had been an adult when she went missing, which created complexities for filing a

missing persons report. This was difficult because adults have the legal freedom to leave their lives at their own will. Participants often expressed frustration when law enforcement would not create a missing persons case for an adult when the police believed that their missing loved one would return. To illustrate this point, Alyssa explained:

“I just realized what MMIP is and that I was missing at one time. Then talking to my mom [after I was recovered], and asking her like, “what did you do? How did you feel?” Because we never talked about it. And she just, you know, gave me her perspective. And she said that she didn't know what to do when I never came home. And she heard rumors about where I was and how I looked. Because I was an adult she couldn't file a missing person report. The Tribal police said was ‘She can go missing if she wants to because she's over 18.’ [My mom] felt hopeless. She said that she didn't know what to do.” - Alyssa

Taken together, participants identified the need for more awareness about MMIP among the general population, Indigenous Peoples, Tribes, and law enforcement. In addition, participants discussed the need for law enforcement to take missing persons cases seriously, to issue missing persons reports, and to begin active investigations immediately when adults are reported missing.

MMIP prevention

Several participants (n=8; 28%) discussed various factors related to MMIP risk that needed to be addressed to reduce MMIP. Specifically, participants mentioned the need to provide counseling to address unresolved trauma and addiction, and incorporate cultural healing methods into services. Oliver discussed how prevention starts by taking active steps to heal from trauma, talking to elders about MMIP, and recognizing that MMIP is an issue that affects all Indigenous Peoples:

“Elders help us get through with our traditional doings, beliefs [and] thoughts, so we can have all that to fall back on someday. I like to listen to elders talk about how things were why we're going through this or why we are going through that but nobody has an answer. Talking about our missing and murdered, we need to talk about it, get it out instead of holding it. We're getting ourselves sick holding on to that. We don't realize it, you know, until something happens when going to the hospital. We need to talk about things.”
- Oliver

One other participant articulated the link between adverse health outcomes and MMIP like Oliver, making this is an important observation that warrants further investigation for future research.

Research Question #6: What were the reflections of MMIP survivors after participating in an MMIP research event focused on healing?

After the conclusion of the sharing circles, participants gathered all together at the end of the day and participated in a collective reflection. Participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of the story-sharing event in small groups of four or five people. An Indigenous member of the research team asked three questions designed to solicit collective feedback from participants regarding their experience with this unique research event.

Participants articulated several important “takeaways,” or key points to be remembered following the event. We observed strong consensus across groups during the collective sharing portion of the themes, whereas participants were nodding and vocalizing agreement when others were speaking. The main takeaways of the MMIP story sharing is discussed in the next sections.

Takeaway theme #1: participants realized that there is a community of survivors and family members impacted by MMIP

Participants spoke at length about feeling isolated and alone in their experience with MMIP, yet coming together with others experiencing similar events evoked feelings of connectivity, community, and support. Participants recognized that, although they are individually coping with their loss, they felt supported by others who are familiar with the pain and grief associated with MMIP. One survivor stated, “I’m with people who have gone through the same thing.” Another participant said: “I know that I, myself, am not alone, and my family is not alone.” Numerous other participants responded with a chorus of support and nodded in agreement. Participants explained that the solution to MMIP starts with Indigenous Peoples coming together to heal from their experiences and take action to address MMIP. One survivor stated:

“I thought I was the only one going through this but as I went through this [event] and see that I am not the only one, this is a big issue. It’s an epidemic, you know, that’s going on around the United States. And in our tribes.”

Another participant discussed the importance of coming together as a community to heal:

“Being together, not only like a family, but as, you know, community – but not only as a community, but as Native people, as a whole [is key for healing].”

Takeaway theme #2: participants recognized inequities in the criminal justice system, particularly law enforcement, that need remedy

Participants collectively identified serious problems within the criminal justice system that impede success in responding to MMIP. In particular, participants identified the need for law enforcement to have the resources and training to prioritize investigating MMIP cases and communicate in a trauma-informed way with families. One participant emphasized this point:

“We need to start getting this media exposure. We need to start getting law enforcement involved. We need to get them trained. They need to understand our pain because every one of us in this room is suffering and it’s sad because it is an epidemic.”

Takeaway theme #3: participants experience unresolved grief and need safe places to talk about MMIP

Participants shared that they experienced unspeakable pain from the loss of their loved ones. Participants also recognized the importance of having safe places to talk about MMIP and to process their grief. One participant summarized this by saying:

“We’re all hurting. It’s okay to speak. We need more safe places to talk about this. To know that it’s okay to speak, that you’re not alone.”

Another participant stated:

“Our loved one is important. You know, speaking about them is important. That’s why we’re here. You know, we wouldn’t be here if they weren’t important, if they didn’t mean the world. But we’re all in different stages of frustration and pain. I mean, some have justice, some are missing, some have been found, but no answers. So we’re in different stages of frustration and disappointment.”

How participants felt talking about MMIP

When asked how it felt to participate in the MMIP story sharing event, several themes emerged related to participants' positive mental health:

Trust and security. This study resulted in participants trusting each other to hear the traumatic stories of grief for their loved ones. Trust in one another was particularly impactful given the many instances of distrust this population has experienced, within and outside of their own communities. This was articulated by one participant who said:

"I felt just in general I noticed with my observation of all the groups is that we trusted one another and was trusting this organization [the research team]."

Support. Participants felt supported by one another as a result of participating in the MMIP story sharing event. Many participants talked about feeling the need to stay strong for their family members who were also grieving the loss of their loved ones. However, as one participant explains, the MMIP story sharing event allowed them to let go of some sadness and relax more:

"I felt relieved to let go of a lot of sadness that I held. Being a support to my husband, I had to be strong and I haven't been really able to let go. And even though I didn't break down what it is, I'm relieved. I am relaxed, I guess. Hanging on and trying to be super strong is my thing. I just found that I am among people that understand."

Thankfulness. Participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the MMIP story sharing event. One participant stated:

"I'm very thankful to be here. It's pretty hard because, you know, as a younger person, talking about this with people isn't very easy. My mother lost her life to domestic violence. So she got her life taken from her. My father, he got his life taken from him. There is nobody really my age who is really willing to talk about it and for me to lean on. So I'm very thankful to be here, to be able to hear people's stories, and to be able, to be on that same level of giving my, my personal experience, and not having to be someone who's, you know, on a stage talking about it. You know, I think that definitely, I admire that ability to be comfortable, and to be able to openly talk about how I'm feeling and listen to other people's feelings."

Empathy. Although participants discussed experiencing positive feelings from sharing their MMIP experiences, they also felt a weight when learning of the traumatic experiences of other participants. One participant described this like "riding a wave" of emotions:

"I wanted to share my story, so it felt like a breath of fresh air, it was a release. But then, whenever someone else shared their story with me, my heart sunk for them. I was hurt. And so I went outside. It feels like a wave. I get air and then I go back down, and then I go back up, and I get air and I go back down. And I was emotional. So for me, I just kept telling myself 'just ride the wave, just ride the wave.' You know, you're sharing, but you're also taking someone else's story and then you're telling your parts of it. So I just kept telling myself, 'ride the wave today, just let go, just go, don't fight it.'"

Comfort. Participants often remarked that they felt safe to share their personal and traumatic stories of MMIP in the story sharing circles because others did not judge them. One participant said:

"This is our first time undertaking one of these. It has been two years since my father was murdered. We didn't feel judged, is one of the big things. We don't talk about things because people judge and we didn't feel judged. We felt comfortable, our group was very compassionate and they listen to us. They listen to us babble about things, it was nice. It was very nice, thank you."

Love. Participants felt supported by one another as a result of participating in the MMIP story sharing event. Many participants talked about feeling the need to stay strong for their family members who were also grieving the loss of their loved ones. However, as one participant explains, the MMIP story sharing event allowed them to let go of some sadness and relax more:

"I have three other kids at home that I have to be the strong mom for...but when I participated in this event, and meet other families that have experienced the same loss, I feel the love, and I feel the joy, and I appreciate this event."

Recommendations

For supporting MMIP survivors through legislative actions

Recommendation #1: continue listening sessions with MMIP survivors and families throughout Arizona

Holding official, state-sanctioned, listening sessions with MMIP survivors and families is essential to address MMIP. Listening sessions will allow for government officials and agency leaders to listen to the stories of those impacted by MMIP to better understand and address their needs. Additionally, listening sessions provide avenues for service provision and resource utilization. Survivors and families are attuned to the unique needs of those who experience MMIP and can provide essential information regarding how to reduce MMIP in Arizona. One participant, Gianna, highlights the need for high-ranking officials to dedicate attention to MMIP in order to prevent this crisis:

“We [need to make sure] Governor Hobbs hears this. I hope she can facilitate a meeting with us survivors. I don't want it to be 10 years down the road. I think they need to facilitate it and then invite people from each reservation who we represent. Because they need to be here and they need to hear what we have to say. That's the only way it's going to end.”

Recommendation #2: create a statewide missing persons clearinghouse

One of the main challenges that many participants faced was the inability to file a missing persons report and limited communication once the case was reported. This inability to launch a formal report immediately left many participants frustrated as it meant inaction during the first crucial hours in the search of a loved one, thereby lessening the chances for safe recovery. To address the lack of communication regarding missing persons cases, the creation of a statewide missing persons clearinghouse would provide both law enforcement and families with resources to ensure each case receives adequate resources and investigation. The statewide missing persons clearinghouse would also provide a centralized location for law enforcement and families to utilize when investigating missing persons cases.

Recommendation #3: develop and invest in a MMIP command center for centralized resources

The unexpected loss left many participants unsure about what they should do to ensure justice for their loved ones. Many participants recommended a centralization of MMIP

resources for families to access, including information about how to file a missing persons report, how to conduct searches for missing persons, and how to navigate the criminal justice system. Additionally, participants discussed the importance of culturally relevant services for healing, grief, and trauma after experiencing the loss of a loved one to MMIP to enhance family and survivor healing and wellbeing. One participant, Laura, remarked:

“For cultural reasons, they need a counselor on hand and a crisis team to help families understand what happened and what to do. We don't have that type of service on the reservation.”

Recommendation #4: funding to address MMIP, including funding for Tribes

Participants recommended increased funding for resources, services, training, infrastructure, and research in order to address MMIP effectively. Tribes and Indigenous communities must receive adequate funding to create protocols and services that directly address the needs of those who experience MMIP and prevent future victimization. Funding should also be provided to maintain current research and data collection efforts focusing on the experiences, needs, and recommendations of those who are directly impacted by MMIP. This recommendation was reinforced by Lucas who stated:

“We should put money away for a detective or... somebody, just a program that looks for missing people...there's government money out there for these kinds of things. It's kind of upsetting that Tribes [do not fund these kind of programs].”

Implementing MMIP protocols within government agencies

Recommendation #5: create a first responder MMIP intervention team

Participants recommended that dedicated officers and agency personnel who are trained to respond to MMIP are needed to assist with timely responses to cases of missing persons or homicide of Indigenous Peoples. Similar to police crisis intervention teams for those in mental health crises, creating an MMIP intervention team would allow officers who have specialized training and knowledge to respond to these cases and provide more effective communication to the

families involved. An intervention team focused specifically on MMIP may include a specific MMIP law enforcement officer, an MMIP victim advocate, and a counselor or social worker to ensure continuity of care. Levi articulated this point by stating:

My suggestion would be to have at least one group, like a task force [with] at least one officer, one lead officer or one agent who understands [the complexities of MMIP] and that's good at it. I know there's some police officers that aren't very compassionate but are still brave and strong courageous men or women. So at least one to go through all that training then take the lead on things.

Recommendation #6: implement trauma-informed MMIP family notification procedure

Participants explained the pain associated with being told that their loved ones had been murdered. The emotions brought on by this difficult news were often exacerbated for our participants when they were told the news in a retraumatizing or triggering way by the police. Ensuring that family members are told of their loved one's death in a timely, trauma-informed way can promote healing and avoid unnecessary harm. Participants recommended a culturally- and trauma-informed protocol for law enforcement to use when providing death notifications to Indigenous families that recognizes the cultural needs of the Indigenous communities they serve and reduces the uncertainty and emotional distress that many of our participants experienced. The delay in death notification can create more grief and emotional distress as told by Gianna:

"The police department should get better with their notifications because this should not have taken five hours. In those five hours I could have been with my baby. I could have been there sooner and that's what I can't stand. I hate it. He was murdered and it's rough still going through it. That is why I want to work on a notification system. They need to notify us in a timely manner."

Recommendation #7: develop missing persons search protocol for rural and urban areas

Similar to a death notification protocol that is culturally sensitive, participants recommended that law enforcement agencies create specific missing persons protocols that are culturally sensitive to detail when a search is to be conducted, how it is to be conducted, those who can be involved, and the frequency of searches for each case. Many

participants voiced their frustration with law enforcement when attempting to search for their missing loved one due to their inability to aid in the official searches. These protocols could also contain sections highlighting what families can do while the police are setting up their own searches or are unable to search at that moment for various reasons. Missing person search protocols would allow the case to continue moving forward and allow the families to be involved in searching for their loved ones, which has implications for healing.

Recommendation #8: create silent witness program partnership to address MMIP

Participants suggested that some community and family members do not always feel comfortable talking with law enforcement given close-knit community dynamics. Silent witness programs allow people to confidentially provide information about unsolved crimes in partnership with the local police department. Currently, the Phoenix Police Department has a partnership with Silent Witness to address all felony crimes in the Phoenix Valley. By creating a larger partnership with Silent Witness on reservations and with other police departments focused on MMIP, some community members who have vital information about the investigation could share what they know anonymously without fear of retaliation, mentioned by Mateo.

"Cities have silent witnesses, but I don't think most reservations have silent witness. There are people that might know something but they're afraid to tell because somebody might find out and they will be the next one on the list [to be murdered]. So everybody just keeps quiet like with what happened to my brother."

Recommendation #9: collect administrative data on MMIP-related incidents

Participants understood that obtaining accurate data on MMIP is difficult yet necessary to ensure that agencies (i.e., law enforcement) are documenting and reviewing quality data on MMIP-related incidents and/or calls for service, including details on police responses, reports, victim demographics, incident circumstances, and referrals to services. With accurate information, law enforcement can better understand MMIP trends and track cases that have implications for solving these cases. Accurate MMIP data can also help reduce MMIP with the identification of risk and prevention factors.

Providing first responder training

Recommendation #10: cultural awareness surrounding death

Participants noted the need for law enforcement and criminal justice personnel to be aware of the cultural implications of death in Indigenous communities. There are many cultural considerations to be made when an Indigenous person passes away, which law enforcement was reported to be unaware of, according to the participants. These range from announcing the news of death to the Indigenous family members or media, handling the remains of the deceased, and the sacredness of funerals. When law enforcement personnel fail to honor the unique ways in which death is handled in Indigenous communities it causes additional pain and perpetual mourning to the bereaved family members.

Recommendation #11: trauma-informed responses

Participants identified the need for trauma-informed responses from criminal justice personnel given the trauma they experienced in the face of losing loved ones. The use of trauma-informed responses has recently increased as a practice among law enforcement generally; however, many participants said they were not treated with dignity. As discussed in the previous sections, evidence has demonstrated that being Indigenous plays a role in the racist treatment of Indigenous Peoples by law enforcement. Training law enforcement and criminal justice personnel in trauma-informed practices for interacting with family members or survivors of MMIP can reduce further harm and build trust with those they interact with.

Facilitating stakeholder buy-in

Recommendation #12: supportive law enforcement leadership to implement MMIP protocols

In addition to training for law enforcement officers, participants discussed the importance of ensuring that law enforcement leadership personnel support and enforce the use of proper protocols for MMIP cases. This was highlighted by Noah who stated:

[Leadership] needs to make sure that our officers are trained and they have a resource to deal with situations like [MMIP]. There's got to be a specific process to follow so that we can we know what the process is the community knows is, and we hold them to that process. [We need] to come up with a step we'll come up with a system that will help us here, but just in general, because this happens and there's got to be a process.

The need for law enforcement support was mentioned by a participant in the collective reflection who stated:

Our lives matter, too. MMIP needs to stop. We need to have more of these events so people can share. We need to invite law enforcement so they can hear what we have to say because it's the only way we'll make the changes.

Recommendation #13: hire personnel who have cultural competence

Participants recommended that agencies with touch-points to MMIP families and survivors employ staff that are knowledgeable about Indigenous culture. This is particularly important for non-Indigenous staff, as articulated by Sam:

On our reservation, they hire a lot of [non-natives]. They don't know our people. They don't know our traditions. They don't know family or know family wars. They don't know who—even within the family—we don't get along with and things like that. So, like, I mean, [leadership should] pull them aside for a day to tell them, this family has a longtime war with this family. When you go to address them, you know, don't talk about their cousins over here. And not all Natives are traditional, some of the Natives are Christians. So I think it should be, they should be taught that too. [Leadership] should research so that they are familiar, and not going to offend somebody. Maybe families open up more, seeing that you're trying with them

MMIP prevention

Recommendation #14: create a coordinated community MMIP response team

MMIP requires a holistic approach to reduce its prevalence and support families and survivors. A coordinated community MMIP response team in each community, comprised of many different stakeholders within the community, could provide insights on how to handle MMIP cases, the needs of family members, and the best course of action for addressing MMIP at the community level. MMIP response teams could include law enforcement (Tribal and non-tribal), court actors (Tribal and non-Tribal), case managers/social workers, child protective services, mental health practitioners, public health officials, victim advocates, and community leaders. Having individual coordinated community MMIP.

[152] United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division and United States Attorney's Office District of Minnesota Civil Division: Investigation of the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Police Department (2022).

Response teams may allow for the unique challenges and needs of each community to be taken into consideration when addressing MMIP. Alyssa discussed how her Tribe has a crisis response team to address the needs of the community when something happens and mentioned how it is vital to incorporate culture into these teams. She stated:

"In our Tribe, we have a crisis team when something happens, even in the city, which are counselors. They'll go and come out and be there for the family counseling on site. But I think what's missing is the cultural practitioner part, because a lot of families want to pray. Everybody prays in their own way, but just seeing somebody there that they can resonate with, I think would bring comfort. I know cities have crisis teams. But just to have another native family that you can resonate with and understand cultural ways of handling death, I think will bring a lot of comfort. So that when they are called to the scene they understand that they're [the victim's] just not another number that they tagged at the foot of a body. They're our family."

Recommendation #15: educate the community about cultural healing practices

Although the grief for their lost loved ones often seemed insurmountable for our participants, many emphasized the importance of cultural healing practices. Some participants also talked about their cultural knowledge diminishing among younger generations. Thus, it is important to create educational programming within communities focused on teaching cultural healing practices. Oliver articulated this point:

"Get out there and start speaking about [culture]. Take it to the kids, the younger kids. If we don't, how are they going to learn? When it's too late, you know? How are we going to handle that? So right now it's time to speak about it. I wish we could get through all our schools, our Native schools, white men schools, and teach these things. So, you know, we should be teaching these things, taking [it] to the schools, to parents, homes, to the communities, teaching it to law enforcement."

Concluding remarks

Reducing MMIP and supporting families and survivors requires listening to Indigenous Peoples lived experiences. Indigenous Peoples must be included and have leadership roles to guide culturally-appropriate responses. This project elevated the Indigenous voices and represents a collaborative effort between families, survivors, and researchers. It is the goal of this project that the stories shared within continue to mobilize change, via the implementation of the specified recommendations, to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are safe and afforded justice and healing.

Appendix A

List of acronyms

ASU.....	Arizona State University
CARE.....	Collective benefit, Authority, Responsibility and Ethics
CBPR.....	Community Based Participatory Research
CDC.....	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
DOJ.....	Department of Justice
DOI.....	Department of the Interior
DV.....	Domestic Violence
FBI.....	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FV.....	Family Violence
FPIC.....	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GAO.....	Government Accountability Office
IDSov.....	Indigenous Data Sovereignty
IPV.....	Interpersonal Violence
IRB.....	Institutional Review Board
IRM.....	Indigenous Research Methodology
MMIP.....	Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples
MMIWG.....	Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
MPD.....	Mammoth Police Department
NamUs.....	National Missing and Unidentified Persons System
NCMEC.....	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
NIBRS.....	National Incident-Based Reporting System
NCIC.....	National Crime and Information Center
ROVV Lab.....	Research on Violent Victimization Lab
SAG.....	Survivor Advisory Group
SDVCJ.....	Special Domestic Violence Criminal Jurisdiction
SHR.....	Supplemental Homicide Reports
SLH.....	Sober Living Homes
TAP.....	Tribal Access Program
TAP-FULL.....	A kiosk workstation that provides access to national systems and is capable of processing finger and palm prints, as well as taking mugshots and submitting records to national databases.
TAP-LIGHT.....	Software for criminal justice agencies that include police departments, prosecutors, criminal courts, jails, and probation departments.
TLOA.....	Tribal Law and Order Act
UCR.....	Uniform Crime Reporting
UN DESA.....	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
U.S.....	The United States
VAWA.....	Violence Against Women Act

