

***“The Devastating Impact of Human Trafficking of Native Women on Indian Reservations”***

**Testimony of Lisa Brunner, Program Specialist, National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center**

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Human Trafficking of Native women in the United States is not a new era of violence against Native women but rather the continuation of a lengthy historical one with the colonization of America through wars, forced removal from their homelands to reservations, boarding schools and forced urban relocation. Domestic human trafficking in the United States has a longstanding history.

Native women experience violent victimization at a higher rate than any other U.S. population. Congressional findings are that Native American and Alaska Native women are raped 34.1%, more than 1 in 3, will be raped in their lifetime, 64%, more than 6 in 10, will be physically assaulted. Native women are stalked more than twice the rate of other women. Native women are murdered at more than ten times the national average. Non-Indians commit 88% of violent crimes against Native women.

Given the above statistical data and the historical roots of violence against Native women, the level of human trafficking given the sparse data collected can only equate to the current epidemic levels we face within our tribal communities and Nations.

As an enrolled member of the White Earth Ojibwe Nation in Minnesota, I live, work and raise my children on my reservation. I have worked for over 15 years addressing domestic violence and sexual assault of Native women and have witnessed and heard countless stories of human trafficking occurring to the point that we have girls as young as 12 years olds who are victims. With the introduction of heroin, we now have an epidemic of the same age group and up of girls and women who are trafficked now have heroin needles in their arms. Native women and girls are sold for \$20 worth of heroin.

We have mother’s call local county sheriffs departments reporting their daughters missing only to be told, “We have better things to do with our time or why don’t you be a mother and know where the hell your daughter is”. It is difficult given the jurisdictional complexity of the 566 federally recognized tribes in the country with non-Public Law 280, Public Law 280, 638 Contract, Land Claim Settlement States, Oklahoma’s checkerboard and Alaska Native villages. To add to the complexity, if

the perpetrator is non-Native, then the Tribes and Alaska Villages do not have criminal jurisdiction

With the recent wide-range impact of extractive industries such as oil fracking and pipelines is predatory economics at its worse for the Fort Berthold Nation in North Dakota and Fort Peck Reservation in Montana. With the fracking of the Bauken formation, comes “man camps”. The victim advocates responding to calls for service on Forth Berthold said there has been a doubling and tripling of numbers of sexual assaults, domestic violence and human trafficking incidents since 2008.

The multiple layers of issues that have come to the forefront are the lack of documentation of these man camps. Emergency services often can’t find their locations and since they are located in isolated and desolate areas, there often are no cell phone services available. There are two types of man camps: documented and undocumented. Undocumented camps are often 50-100 trailers that a rancher or farmer has set up on his land to rent out and make money. These undocumented camps present a special problem for emergency services and organizations since they don’t exist on a map or have addresses.

The other issue involved with the man camps in Forth Berthold is lack of monitoring and registration of sex offenders whether they are in the documented or undocumented man camps that pose a serious threat to the safety of women and children in the area.

In Montana, the Bauken Oil Boom has impacted the largest reservation, Fort Peck, and residing counties have experienced both a population and crime explosion.

The majority of employees from the oilrigs are not from Fort Peck Tribes or Roosevelt County or even from Montana. There have been documented increases in drug use and human trafficking, theft, alcohol related incidents and assaults within the last year. Law enforcement response, tribal DV/SA services, and medical response to these crimes have tripled in the last year.

Within Northeastern Montana there are currently three man camps with several more only seventy miles away in the neighboring state of North Dakota. Many Tribal advocates have responded to victims that have been trafficked at the man camps often preying on young native women. Groups of men from the man camps use free access to drugs and alcohol as a method of coercion for young native women to “get in the car” and go party. This has resulted in 11 young native women ranging from the ages of 16-21 years of age reporting rape, gang rape and other sex acts; the majority of these victims are afraid to report due to fear and shame.

The Fort Peck Tribes SORNA program reports that one year ago there were forty-eight registered sex offenders and now there are over six hundred registered sex offenders. The struggle has been that non-native sex offenders do not recognize the tribal jurisdiction and feel they “do not” have to report to the tribal SORNA

program. However, the U.S. Marshals and other law enforcement agencies have assisted in gaining registration of known sex offenders on the tribal registry.

Another aspect of the domestic human trafficking issues in the U.S. and Tribal Nations is the U.S. Adoption Industry. In an article in Indian Country Today titled: Trafficking of Native Children: The Seamy Underbelly of U.S. Adoption Industry brings to light the practice of selling Indian infants and children to the highest bidder which brings in revenue for lawyers from \$25,000-\$100,000 per child. In this article, it is stated that in 2012, 50 Native children were adopted out from North Dakota to South Carolina. These adoptions are done without the Tribes knowledge or consent or that of the biological fathers.

To really gain insight to domestic human trafficking in the U.S., one must take examine the many sectors in which this is facilitated, whether it be extractive industries, pimps, gangs, cartels, family members or lawyers working in an adoption industry. Many different avenues must be examined and taken into account to fully understand what leads to this epidemic of human trafficking that not only impacts Tribal Nations and Alaska Villages but all citizens of this country.

I am a Program Specialist with the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center. Our role as an organization is to serve as a National Indian Resource Center that provides technical assistance/training, resource development, policy development, research activity and public awareness that also seeks to enhance Native American and Alaska Native tribes, Native Hawaiians, Tribal and Native Hawaiian organizations to respond to violence against Native women.