



National Resource Center  
on Native American Aging



National Indigenous  
Elder Justice Initiative

## Elder Abuse in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

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### Overview

The traditional status of elders in American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) cultures is one of honor and respect. Elders are respected for their age, experience, maturity, and wisdom. They are considered valuable resources to the tribe as custodians of tribal history, culture, and tradition.<sup>1</sup>

A 1999 report on American Indians and crime prepared by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), reported that for every 1,000 victims of violent crime over the age of 50: 41.9 were American Indians; 16.6 were Caucasian; 15.4 were African American; and 7.4 were Asian.<sup>2</sup>

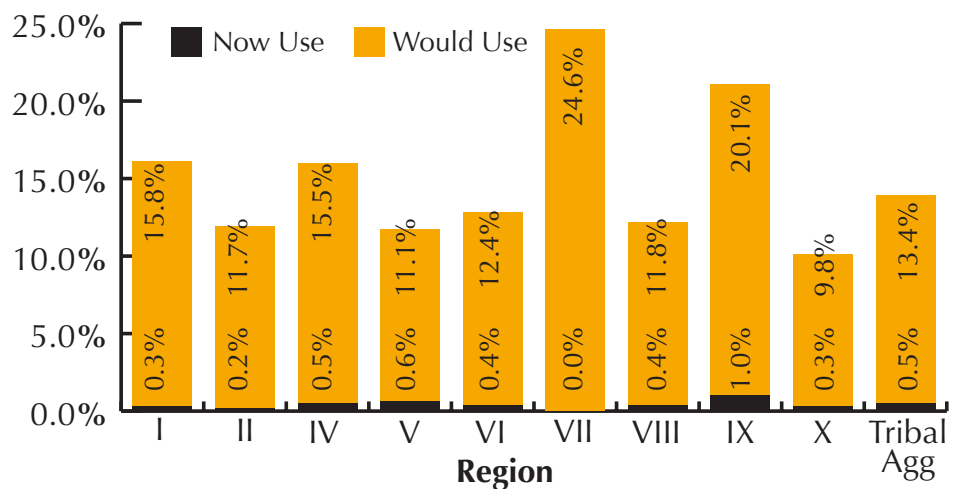
The term “elder abuse” describes a multifaceted phenomenon including abuse forms such as neglect, physical harm, sexual or emotional maltreatment, and exploitation.<sup>1</sup> Few studies have examined the issue of “elder abuse” in AI/AN populations. The purpose of this study was to:

- Utilize the National Resource Center on Native American Aging’s (NRCNAA) Identifying Our Needs: A Survey of Elders IV to analyze possible elder abuse indicators (factors which do not indicate abuse per se, but may indicate a higher risk of abuse, such as not having enough food to eat or living alone) according to those identified in the Assessment of Elder Mistreatment in Two American Indian Samples: Psychometric Characteristics of the HS-EAST and Native Elder Life-Financial Exploitation and-Neglect Measures.<sup>3</sup>

### Findings: American Indian and Alaska Native Elders would utilize elder programs that could assist in preventing elder abuse

The NRCNAA needs assessment had an N of 18,062. Less than one percent of older AI/AN’s currently utilize elder abuse prevention programs. Elder abuse prevention programs can cover anything from mental health and counseling to legal assistance and support services to help an elder live more independently, reducing the need and stresses on caregivers. Conversely, more than 13 percent of AI/AN’s would use these types of programs if they were offered (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Elder Abuse Prevention Program Use**

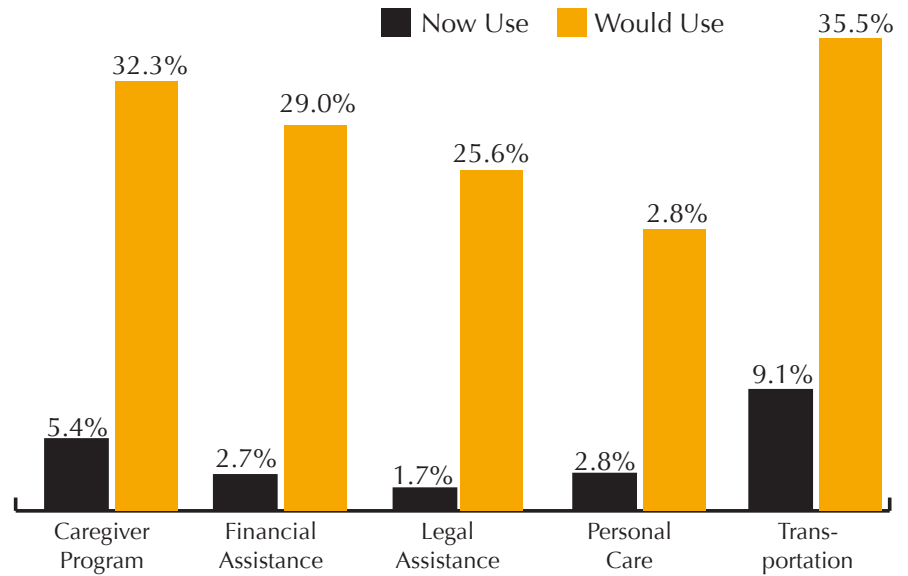


American Indian/Alaska Native elders would take advantage of caregiver, financial assistance, legal assistance, personal care, and transportation programs if they were offered by their respective tribes (Figure 2).

## Discussion

There is little known regarding the incidence of various types of elder abuse in Indian Country. Elder abuse is an issue that needs further research to grasp its true extent. The responsibility for the protection of elders, the keepers of our culture and wisdom, falls upon all people. Because of the implementation of the Tribal Law and Order Act, tribal codes are under revision providing an opportunity to offer protection and guidance in the treatment, honor and respect of our elders. The indicators above illustrate a few ways we can provide the necessary supports and protections for the elders in Indian Country restoring their dignity and honor as was true for our ancestors.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 2. Tribal Program Utilization**



## References

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