



Missing & Murdered Diné Relatives

By MMDR Working Group

History of Missing & Murdered Diné Relatives

- In May 2016, the tragic loss of Ashlynnne Mike in Shiprock spurred a public outcry for leadership to act
- The same month, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty sponsored legislation to establish a task force
- The 23rd Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'íyáti' Committee approved a resolution to establish the Sexual Assault Prevention Subcommittee (SAPS)
- Reestablished in June 2019 by the 24th NNC

History of Missing & Murdered Diné Relatives

- To support SAPS, Delegate Crotty created the Navajo Nation Sexual Violence Prevention Working Group (SVPWG)
- The SVPWG supported SAPS to address sexual and domestic violence, protecting Navajo children, and aid with policy advocacy at the state/federal levels

MMDR Initiative Begins

- Through SVPWG, the MMDR Team was created
- Team of subject-matter experts in data, epidemiology, victim advocacy, human rights, policy development, and history
- MMDR Team: *SVPWG, Diné College, Navajo Epidemiology Center, Northern Arizona University, Navajo Nation Missing Persons Updates, Navajo Area IHS, Navajo Human Rights Commission, Office of the Speaker, Office of the President and Vice President, and local coalitions: SWIWC, CSVANW, and RAW*

Timeline of MMDR Initiative



March 2019: Delegate Crotty met with coalitions, Navajo programs, and stakeholders to propose MMDR



April 2019: Delegate Crotty sought partnerships to aid with developing a data institute



May 2019: Partnerships were created and the MMDR Team was assembled



June 2019: MMDR Team holds its first community forum to begin developing the framework for a proposed data institute

Data on the Navajo Nation

2010-2016: Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety (NDPS) received an average of over 200,000 emergency calls annually—half of these calls involved violence

NDPS has about 200 police officers and 30 criminal investigators that cover approximately 18 million acres of Navajo land

Only 0.85 officers for every 1,000 Navajo citizens
Compared to the U.S. national average: 16-24 police officers for every 1,000 citizens

Data on the Navajo Nation (cont.)

Navajo law enforcement responds to an average of 40 homicides per year within the Navajo Nation

Murder within the Navajo Nation is 4 times the national average on a population per capita basis

The FBI reported that there were 2,534 violent crimes, 2,311 aggravated assaults, and 160 rapes reported to law enforcement in 2017

This data is comparable to crimes in major U.S. cities

Data from Community- Based Partners



164 missing Navajo persons cases have been documented starting from 1951-2019

Roughly 30% missing are female and 70% are male



38% of the cases are missing persons and 62% are murder cases



41% occurred on the Navajo Nation, 10% occurred in rural off-reservation areas, and 49% occurred in urban communities



The reports from the community-based organizations also indicated that the average age of a Navajo missing person is 31

Data from Community- Based Partners (cont.)

22% of the cases reported involved young girls under the age of 18

32% of the cases involved domestic violence and 4% involved sexual assault

Although there is little to no data reported regarding LGBTQi and unsheltered relatives, we continue to monitor and collect information on the Navajo Nation and in surrounding border towns

Intergenerational Trauma

Violence on the Navajo Nation is a multi-generational and culturally pervasive phenomenon. The lack of resources to ensure the safety of Navajo women—combined with the socio-economic challenges within the Navajo Nation, gang violence, poverty, and low educational attainment—perpetuate a systemic culture of violence within Navajo families and communities.

Although violent crimes are perpetrated by males at a higher rate, we acknowledge that they are also victims of violence and must be included in our work if we seek to address MMDR from a holistic and inclusive approach.

Case 1

26-year-old Kaczynski Ariel Begay went missing in July 2017 on the southeastern edge of the Navajo Nation in Arizona. Ariel was picked up from her residence by her boyfriend and never came back home.

Efforts were made by law enforcement and a search ensued on the Navajo Nation in New Mexico and Arizona.

Sadly, her remains were found in Oct. 2017 in Querino Canyon, Arizona. Her case remains unsolved today.

Case 2

26-year-old Amber Dakota Webster, a married mother-of-three, was murdered in Florence, Kentucky on Dec. 2018. Amber was employed as a construction worker that had traveled out of state to provide income to her family on the Navajo Nation.

32-year-old Jesse James confessed to brutally stabbing Webster to death while staying at the same hotel as her. The two had no prior interactions with one another preceding the incident. James was arrested on Dec. 1, 2018, and the case is ongoing.

Case 3

Three transgender Navajo women were found beaten to death in Albuquerque, New Mexico:

- 23-year-old Vera Shey Hoskie (Jan. 2005)
- 32-year old Kelly Watson (June 2009)
- 42-year-old Cato Terri Benally (July 2009)

All three victims' bodies were found in the southeast side of Abq within a block of one another lying in a street or alley. Details of the murder of Hoskie and Watson remain unknown and no suspects have been detained.

In Feb. 2018, Cato Benally's murderer was found and indicted on murder charges and is classified as a hate crime. In April 2019, Roger Paul Preston was convicted and sentenced to 16 years in prison for the murder of Benally.

Case 4

62-year-old Maranny “Marena” Hatalie Holiday, mother of three and grandmother, was murdered in Comb Ridge, Utah on Nov. 30, 2015.

Marena was killed within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation after she was beaten then shot in the head by Timothy Lee Smith, a neighbor. In disposing of the body, the perpetrator tied a rope around Holiday’s ankles to the back of his truck and dragged her body to hide under a tree.

Marena was found the next day. Lee was later indicted by a federal grand jury for first-degree murder and sentenced to at least 20 years and no more than 30 years in prison by the U.S. District Court.

MMDR Data Institute

- When comparing the data information from the Navajo Nation Police Department and the community-based research/data organizations, it is a ***stark*** contrast
- Understanding that many Navajo programs are underfunded and data information does not interface across the board on the Nation, the MMDR Team have been working diligently to develop a framework for a proposed data institute that would address missing and murdered relatives

MMDR Data Institute (cont.)

- The institute would improve the nation's capability to track cases, collect data, and develop informed policies in the overall effort to bring our Diné relatives home.
- The need to track data information is important because it would allow the Navajo Nation to take another step towards self-determination in having control over its own data clearinghouse
- Increased access to opportunities such as federal funding, creating strategies to combat violence, and increase awareness/prevention throughout Navajo communities

Community Forums

Objective:

- With stakeholder and community input, the MMDR Team was tasked to create a framework for the Navajo Nation's first MMDR data institute

Rather than labeling MMDR as an epidemic, we recognize that this issue is an ongoing crisis with historical roots dating back to the initial colonization of the American southwest

MMDR Forum #1: Diné College
– Shiprock, NM (June 2019)

MMDR Forum #2: Northern
Arizona University – Flagstaff, AZ
(Aug. 2019)

MMDR Forum #3: TBD – Gallup,
NM (Nov. 2019)

MMDR Community Action Kit

- MMDR Working Group met with NDPS/CI to begin discussions for a missing persons community action kit
- The action kit would include:
 - The missing persons reporting process, proactive steps for prevention, and training to educate Navajo communities on how to mobilize and coordinate efforts to locate their missing relatives within their communities

Navajo Nation Developments

- Coordinating with existing Navajo Nation working groups and available resources to address missing and murdered Navajo people: Navajo Nation Missing Persons Updates, Diné We Can, New Mexico MMIW Task Force, and Arizona MMIWG Study Committee
- Navajo Nation Police Department is developing a Missing Persons Unit
 - Hiring a crime analyst to collect and interpret data relating to missing persons cases
 - Hiring of 4-5 additional victim advocates
- Expanding the Navajo Nation 911 emergency call services across the Navajo Nation

Navajo Nation Developments (cont.)

- Bulking up the Navajo Nation Police Department's Information Management Section (NNPD-IMS) for data collection and hiring a crime data analyst
- Seeking additional resources for victim advocates in each police district
- Active recruitment for additional police officers and currently operating a Navajo law enforcement academy

For more information:

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Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/MMDRDataInstitute/>

Data References:

- Navajo Nation Police Department
- Federal Bureau of Investigations
- Sovereign Bodies Institute
- Navajo Nation Missing Persons Updates group

