



# Injustice at Every Turn:

A look at American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents  
in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey

In 2008, the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force launched a nationwide study of anti-transgender discrimination in the United States. Over a six-month period, 6,456 transgender and gender non-conforming people answered a seventy-question survey, reporting on their experiences of discrimination and abuse at home, in school, in the public sphere, and in the workplace, as well as with landlords, doctors, and public officials, including judges and police. The survey results revealed that transgender and gender non-conforming people face pervasive discrimination in virtually all aspects of their lives.

One of the most important findings of the study was that the combination of anti-transgender bias with structural and interpersonal racism meant that transgender and gender non-conforming people of color, including those who are American Indian and Alaskan Native, experience particularly devastating levels of discrimination.

Because of the history of colonialism and genocide in what is now the US, American Indian and Alaskan Native transgender and gender non-conforming people face a unique set of circumstances, which has led the Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) to publish this report illuminating these specific experiences.

The information in this report is based on the experiences of the 350 respondents who described themselves on the survey as American Indian or Alaskan Native only or American Indian or Alaskan Native and multiracial.<sup>i</sup> When this report uses the phrase “due to bias,” it refers to questions on the survey that asked about respondents’ experiences of anti-transgender bias, but the results also show the complex interactions of that bias with race and socioeconomic status.

Many respondents articulated their gender identity and expression in culturally-specific ways, using terms like Two-Spirit or the Navajo nádleehé. In this report we use the umbrella phrase “transgender and gender non-conforming,” but also recognize its limitations because the gender framework of many American Indian and Alaskan Native nations has a distinct history and cultural meaning that may or may not align with that of dominant US culture-driven frameworks for “transgender.”

## Key Findings

- Discrimination was pervasive for all respondents who took the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, yet the combination of anti-transgender bias and persistent structural and interpersonal acts of racism was especially devastating for American Indian and Alaskan Native transgender people and other people of color.
- American Indian and Alaskan Native transgender and gender non-conforming people often live in extreme poverty, with 23% reporting a household income of less than \$10,000/year. This is higher than the rate for transgender people of all races (15%) and almost three times the general American Indian and Alaskan Native population rate (8%). This is almost six times the general U.S. population rate (4%).<sup>ii</sup>
- American Indian and Alaskan Native transgender and gender non-conforming people are affected by HIV in devastating numbers; 3.24% reported being HIV positive and an additional 8.53% reported that they did not know their status. This compares to rates of 2.64% for transgender respondents of all races, and 0.60% for the general U.S. population<sup>iii</sup>
- Fifty-six percent (56%) of American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents reported having attempted suicide, compared to 41% of all study respondents and 1.6% of the general U.S. population.<sup>iv</sup>



## Education

American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents who attended kindergarten through twelfth grade expressing a transgender identity or gender non-conformity reported alarming rates of harassment (86%), physical assault (51%), and sexual assault (21%) at school; harassment was so severe that it led 19% to leave school. Eleven percent (11%) were also expelled due to bias.

Respondents who were harassed and abused by teachers in kindergarten through twelfth-grade settings showed dramatically worse health and other outcomes compared to those who do not experience such abuse. Peer harassment and abuse also had highly damaging effects.

86% of American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents were harassed in K-12 schools.



## Employment Discrimination

American Indian and Alaskan Native transgender and gender non-conforming people had a very high unemployment rate at 18%. This is higher than the rate of the overall sample (14%) and over twice the rate of the general U.S. population (7%) at the time the survey was fielded.<sup>v</sup>

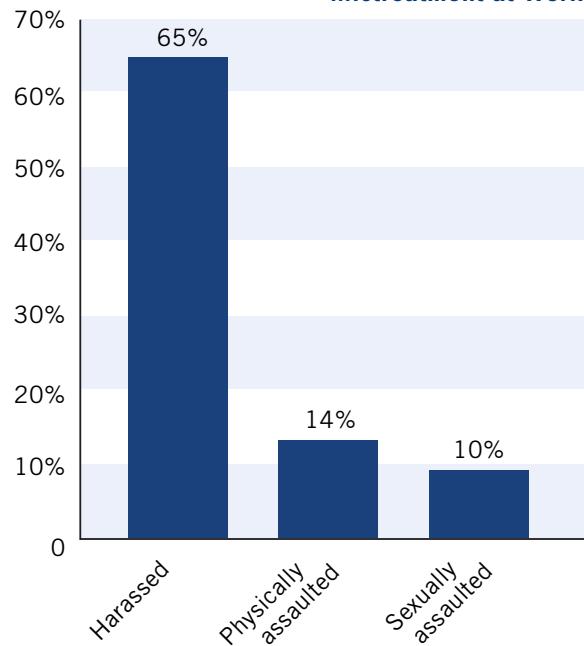
Thirty-seven percent (37%) of American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents lost a job due to bias, and 60% were denied a job because of their transgender identity or gender non-conformity.

Sixty-five percent (65%) of American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents were harassed, 14% were physically assaulted, and 10% were sexually assaulted at work.

Twenty-five percent (25%) of American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents reported being forced to participate in the underground economy for income, including sex work and drug sales.



Mistreatment at Work





## Housing Discrimination and Homelessness

American Indian and Alaskan Native transgender and gender non-conforming people endured various forms of direct housing discrimination; 39% reported being refused a home or apartment due to bias, and 20% reported being evicted due to bias.

American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents were less likely to own homes than the general population with a rate of 23%. This compares to 32% of transgender people of all races in the study and 67% of the general U.S. population.<sup>vi</sup> Also, for comparison, the U.S. Department of Housing and

Urban Development reports that “minority home ownership” nationwide is 49.7%.<sup>vii</sup>

An alarming 40% of American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents reported experiencing homelessness at some point in their lives, almost six times the rate of the general U.S. population (7.4%).<sup>viii</sup>

40% of American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents have experienced homelessness, nearly six times the rate of the general US population.



## Health Care

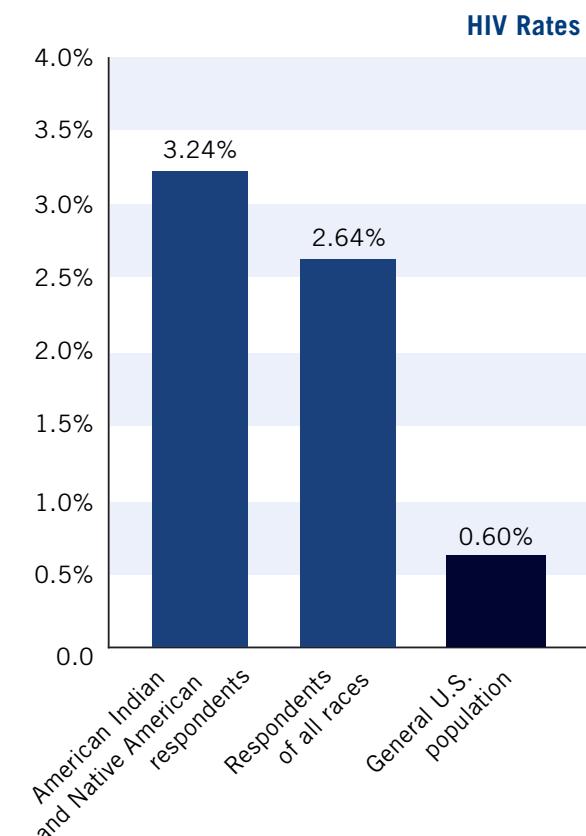
Health outcomes for American Indian and Alaskan Native transgender and gender non-conforming people show the appalling effects of social and economic marginalization, including much higher rates of being HIV positive, smoking, drug and alcohol use and suicide attempts compared to the general population.

Thirty-four percent (34%) of American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents reported being refused medical care due to bias.

Sixty-five percent (65%) of American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents reported postponing care when they were sick or injured due to fear of discrimination.

Fifty-six percent (56%) of American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents reported having attempted suicide, compared to 41% of all study respondents and 1.6% of the general U.S. population.<sup>ix</sup>

American Indian and Alaskan Native respondents were affected by HIV in devastating numbers; 3.24% reported being HIV positive and an additional 8.53% reported that they did not know their status. This compares to rates of being HIV positive of 2.64% for transgender respondents of all races, and 0.60% for the general U.S. population.<sup>x</sup>



## Methodology

The National Transgender Discrimination Survey was developed and fielded by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality. Links to the online NTDS survey instrument were distributed through a network of more than 900 trans-serving and trans-led advocacy and service organizations, support groups, listserves and online social networks. Nearly 2,000 paper surveys were distributed to hard-to-reach transgender and gender non-conforming populations. A total of 6,456 completed questionnaires were included in the final data set, 350 of which were American Indian and Alaskan Native including multiracial people.

**A Note on Language:** At the Task Force and NCTE, we always strive to use inclusive language that reflects the current conversation about how we self-identify in our communities. For native

peoples, this is often of particular concern because all terms used to describe the broad range of nations referred to under the indigenous umbrella are contested. At this time, we have chosen to use "American Indian" and "Alaskan Native" because it reflects the language we used in the original survey questionnaire, though terms like First Nations and First Peoples also resonate with our anti-racist, anti-colonial values.

**A Note on Native Hawaiians:** In the survey questionnaire, Native Hawaiians were included in the category of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders rather than with American Indians and Alaskan Natives, the groups included in this report. However, we know historically that the Native Hawaiian community's relationship to imperialism, colonization, and racism also resonates strongly with the other indigenous nations of what is now the United States.

For the full report and detailed recommendations, please visit our websites at [www.TheTaskForce.org](http://www.TheTaskForce.org) or [www.TransEquality.org](http://www.TransEquality.org) (see: [http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports\\_and\\_research/ntds](http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/ntds) or <http://transequality.org/Resources/index.html>). More information about the survey is available at [www.EndTransDiscrimination.org](http://www.EndTransDiscrimination.org).

## Notes

- i. Some numbers in this report differ slightly from numbers in other reports based on the NTDS data because generally those reports break out respondents who were only American Indian or Alaskan Native from those who were multiracial and native. American Indian and Alaskan Native multiracial respondents were included in the general multiracial category. In this report, however, these groups were combined.
- ii. U.S. Census Bureau, "Current Population Survey," Annual Social and Economic Supplement (Washington, DC: GPO, 2008).
- iii. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, "2010: A Global View of HIV Infection" (2010): [http://www.unaids.org/documents/20101123\\_2010\\_HIV\\_Prevalence\\_Map\\_em.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/documents/20101123_2010_HIV_Prevalence_Map_em.pdf). For information on HIV status of American Indians and Alaskan Natives of all gender identities in the US, see: Center for Disease Control, "HIV/AIDS among American Indians and Alaska Natives" (Atlanta: CDC, 2008) <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/PDF/aian.pdf>.
- iv. "U.S.A. Suicide: 2002 Official Final Data," prepared for the American Association of Suicidology by John L. McIntosh, Ph.D. Official data source: Kochanek, K.D., Murphy, S.L., Anderson, R.N., & Scott, C. (2004). Deaths: Final data for 2002. National Vital Statistics Reports, 53 (5). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics DHHS Publication No. (PHS) 2005-1120. Population figures source: table I, p.108. of the National Center for Health Statistics (Kochanek et al., 2004), see [http://www.sprc.org/library/event\\_kit/2002datapgv1.pdf](http://www.sprc.org/library/event_kit/2002datapgv1.pdf).
- v. Seven percent (7%) was the rounded weighted average unemployment rate for the general population during the six months the survey was in the field, based on which month questionnaires were completed. See seasonally unadjusted monthly unemployment rates for September 2008 through February 2009. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Employment Situation: September 2008," (2008): [http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empsit\\_10032008.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empsit_10032008.htm).
- vi. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "U.S. Housing Market Conditions, 2nd Quarter, 2009" (Washington, DC: GPO, 2009): [http://www.huduser.org/portal/periodicals/ushmc/summer09/nat\\_data.pdf](http://www.huduser.org/portal/periodicals/ushmc/summer09/nat_data.pdf).
- vii. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "U.S. Housing Market Conditions, 2nd Quarter, 2009" (Washington, DC: GPO, 2009): [http://www.huduser.org/portal/periodicals/ushmc/summer09/nat\\_data.pdf](http://www.huduser.org/portal/periodicals/ushmc/summer09/nat_data.pdf). HUD did not define "minority" in this report.
- viii. United States Conference of Mayors, "Hunger and Homelessness Survey" (2006): 48, <http://usmayors.org/hungersurvey/2006/report06.pdf>.
- ix. "U.S.A. Suicide: 2002 Official Final Data," prepared for the American Association of Suicidology by John L. McIntosh, Ph.D. Official data source: Kochanek, K.D., Murphy, S.L., Anderson, R.N., & Scott, C. (2004). Deaths: Final data for 2002. National Vital Statistics Reports, 53 (5). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics DHHS Publication No. (PHS) 2005-1120. Population figures source: table I, p.108. of the National Center for Health Statistics (Kochanek et al., 2004), see [http://www.sprc.org/library/event\\_kit/2002datapgv1.pdf](http://www.sprc.org/library/event_kit/2002datapgv1.pdf).
- x. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, "2010: A Global View of HIV Infection" (2010): [http://www.unaids.org/documents/20101123\\_2010\\_HIV\\_Prevalence\\_Map\\_em.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/documents/20101123_2010_HIV_Prevalence_Map_em.pdf). For information on HIV status of American Indians and Alaskan Natives of all gender identities in the US, see: Center for Disease Control, "HIV/AIDS among American Indians and Alaska Natives" (Atlanta: CDC, 2008) <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/PDF/aian.pdf>



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