



# Native American Children Reported Missing to NCMEC

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DATE RANGE: INTAKED BETWEEN 1/1/2009 AND 12/31/2018

NCMEC DATABASE QUERIED ON 6/20/2019

The information provided in this report does not reflect all cases of missing or abducted Native American children, only those reported to NCMEC between 1/1/2009 and 12/31/2018. Children were determined for inclusion in this analysis based on demographic information provided by an official source, including the child's parent(s), the child's legal guardian, social services or law enforcement.

In addition to information provided by these sources, NCMEC also examined the individual narratives of each child to determine challenges faced by Native American children including abuse and interactions with law enforcement,

## OVERALL CHILDREN

From 1/1/2009 to 12/31/2018 there were 1,909 cases involving Native American children intaked by NCMEC. A majority (85%) were Endangered Runaway cases<sup>1</sup>, followed by 12% Family Abduction

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### <sup>1</sup> Case Types:

**Endangered runaway or ERU** – Any missing child between 11 and 17 years of age who is missing of his or her own accord and whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her parent(s) or legal guardian.

**Family Abduction or FA** – The taking, retention or concealment of a child, younger than 18 years of age, by a parent, other person with a family relationship to the child, or his or her agent, in violation of the custody rights, including visitation rights of a parent or legal guardian.

**Lost, injured or otherwise missing or LIM** – Any missing child younger than the age of 18 where there are insufficient facts to determine the cause of the child's disappearance or any child 10 years of age or younger who is missing on his or her own accord.

**Nonfamily abduction or NFA** – The unauthorized taking, retention, luring, confinement or concealment of a child younger than the age of 18 by someone other than a family member.

**Missing Young Adult** – a missing person 18 years of age or older but younger than the age of 21. This category is derived from Suzanne's Law, a provision in the PROTECT Act of 2003 (codified at 34 U.S.C. § 41307), which extends to missing young adults the same reporting and law enforcement response requirements already provided for children younger than 18 years of age.

cases<sup>2</sup>.

Fifty-nine percent of these children were female, and 41% of these children were male. Almost two thirds (65%) of these children were between the ages of 15 and 17, while almost a quarter (23%) of these children were between the ages of 10 and 14.

Over a third (35%) of these children had at least one tribal affiliation. The five most common tribal affiliations were Cherokee (46 children), Navajo (40 children), Sioux (35 children), Chippewa (33 children) and Alaska Native (31 children)<sup>3</sup>.



**MEAN AGE OF MISSING NATIVE  
AMERICAN CHILDREN REPORTED TO  
NCMEC: 14**

A majority (59%) of missing Native American children were reported to NCMEC by social services. Missing Native American children were almost as likely to be reported to NCMEC by law enforcement (17%) as they were a parent (18%).

### **Abuse**

This report examined individual narrative details for a variety of types of abuse, namely: sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, neglect, and the grooming that can be associated with these types of abuse. Abuse was mentioned with some frequency for missing Native American children based on information provided to NCMEC by the child's parent, legal guardian, social worker or law enforcement. Twelve percent of cases involved possible or suspected abuse by a non-family member, and 10% of cases involved confirmed abuse by a non-family member. Four percent of cases involved possible or suspected abuse by a biological family member, and 4% of cases involved confirmed abuse by a biological family member. Another 4 cases involved suspected abuse by a foster family member, and 2 cases involved confirmed abuse by a foster family member.

In addition to examining multiple types of reported abuse, this report focused on sexual abuse in particular, which is also reflected in external research. A 2016 Research Report from the National Institute of Justice found that over half (56%) of all Native American women and over a quarter (28%) of Native American men had experienced sexual violence in their lifetime<sup>4</sup>.

Eleven percent of missing Native American children intaked by NCMEC in the most recent decade had a reported history of sexual abuse. The types of sexual abuse ranged from child sex trafficking (62% of all cases involving a history of sexual abuse), sexual abuse by a family member (10%), statutory rape (13%), and sexual assault by an acquaintance (4%).

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<sup>2</sup> The remaining 3% belonged to the Nonfamily Abduction, Missing Young Adult, and Lost, Injured or Otherwise Missing case types.

<sup>3</sup> Tribal name/affiliation for each child was documented based upon information provided by an official source and any omissions or lack of Tribal specificity is unintentional

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249736.pdf> *Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men*, page 2

### **Missing and Recovery Circumstances**

A majority (71%) of children were reported missing from a biological family or foster family home.

There were 277 children who were involved in at least two missing incidents. Children who were involved in multiple missing incidents had a mean amount of three missing incidents. Forty-five was the highest number of missing incidents for one child.

Nearly all cases (98%) were resolved, with 79% of children recovered after 48 hours. Children had an average missing duration of two months. Only 3% of recovered children were missing for more than a year.

#### **TOP FIVE STATES WITH MISSING INCIDENTS REPORTED TO NCMEC**

- WASHINGTON (396)
- OKLAHOMA (325)
- MINNESOTA (126)
- NORTH DAKOTA (108)
- ARIZONA (95)

### **Deceased Children**

There were 13 children who were recovered deceased. Five of these were accidental deaths, four were homicides and two were suicides. Manner of death was unknown for two children. Only two deceased children were recovered within 48 hours.

### **CHILDREN MISSING FROM TRIBAL TERRITORY**

There were 162 children (8% of the total) who were reported missing from tribal territory. The following paragraphs will highlight differences between the populations of Native American children missing from tribal territories versus Native American children who were reported missing from outside tribal territories.

At the time this report was compiled, children reported missing from tribal territory were more likely to have active cases, meaning they remained currently missing. Children missing from tribal territory tended to be younger. They had a mean age of 11 years old as opposed to the mean age (14 years old) of children missing from outside tribal territory.

Three percent of these children had active cases, as opposed to 1% of children missing from outside tribal territory who had active cases. Most of the Native American children who were recovered deceased went missing from tribal territory (9 out of 13).

Children reported missing from tribal

#### **TOP FIVE RESERVATIONS WITH MISSING INCIDENTS REPORTED TO NCMEC**

- NAVAJO NATION (14)
- FORT PECK RESERVATION (10)
- TULALIP RESERVATION (9)
- PINE RIDGE RESERVATION (8)
- BLACKFEET INDIAN RESERVATION (8)

territory were more likely to be victims in Family Abduction cases compared to children reported missing outside of tribal territory. Over a third (36%) of children missing from tribal territory were victims in Family Abduction cases, while only 10% of Native American children missing from outside tribal territory were victims in Family Abduction cases. In addition, a higher proportion of children missing from tribal territory were victims in Nonfamily Abduction cases. Five percent of children missing from tribal territory were victims in Nonfamily Abduction cases, while only 1% of Native American children missing from outside tribal territory were victims in Nonfamily Abduction incidents.

Children missing from tribal territory had a slightly shorter missing duration. They had an average missing duration of 65 days, while children missing from outside tribal territories had an average missing duration of 68 days.

There are unique challenges as law enforcement responds to reports of children missing from tribal territory, including lower police coverage than jurisdictions outside of tribal territory. The most recent comprehensive federal survey indicated that Indian reservations have an average of 1.3 officers per 1,000 residents. Comparable rural jurisdictions outside tribal territory have approximately 1.8 officers per 1,000 residents, while the national average is 2.3 officers per 1,000 residents. Non-tribal areas with a comparable crime rate to tribal jurisdictions range from 3.0 to 6.6 officers per 1,000 residents.<sup>5</sup> Reservations in the western region of the United States also cover a great deal of territory, which makes the limited number of police officers challenging. Police officers in these areas could be occupied for half a day responding to a call for service<sup>6</sup>. NCMEC's data involving Native American children missing from tribal territory demonstrated that law enforcement in these areas often had to traverse long distances. Law enforcement on tribal territory had a mean travel distance of 15 miles and 22 driving minutes to the last known location of a missing child. Ninety-six miles was the furthest distance a police officer would have had to travel in order to reach the last known location of a missing child on tribal territory.

### **NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE**

There were 1,305 cases involving Native American children missing from care who were intaked by NCMEC (68% of the total). The vast majority (94%) of these were Endangered Runaway children. Fifty-six percent of these children were female, and 44% of these children were male. Three quarters (75%) of these children were between the ages of 15 and 17, and nearly a quarter (22%) were between the ages of 10 and 14. While nearly all (99%) of these cases were resolved, a vast majority (79%) were not resolved within 48 hours. Twenty-four of the resolved cases involved children who had been missing for a year or longer.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/188095.pdf>, *Policing on American Indian Reservations*, page 27

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, page 28

## ENDANGERED RUNAWAY NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN

As stated previously, Endangered Runaway cases make up the majority (85%) of missing Native American children who were reported to NCMEC during this time period. For this report, individual narrative details were reviewed in order to ascertain the circumstances surrounding a child's missing incident. This next section highlights the various challenges missing Native American children reportedly faced during their missing incidents.

### *Challenges and Endangerments Before Missing Incident*

Prior to missing incidents, some children were reported to have experienced conflict with their family members and guardians. Some Endangered Runaway children reportedly expressed a dislike of being in placement (8% of all Endangered Runaway children). Five percent reportedly disliked the rules at home, and 5% had an altercation with someone prior to their missing incident. Furthermore, children reportedly expressed an interest in living with their biological family (2%), or a peer (2%). Some had recently experienced consequences related to illegal behavior (2%).

Four percent of Endangered Runaway children had truancy issues, and 6% had been in a mental health treatment facility.

A small percentage (8%) of Endangered Runaway Native American children were reported to be in some type of sexual relationship with adults they described as a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" at the time of their missing incident. The average age of Endangered Runaway Native American children was 15 years old, while the average age of the men or women these children were involved with was 20-years-old<sup>7</sup>.

According to data collected by a non-profit organization conducting research on sentencing policy, racial disparities and alternatives to incarceration, Native American youth are overly represented within the incarcerated youth population. In fact, they are three times more likely to be incarcerated than their white peers<sup>8</sup>.



3% OF MISSING NATIVE AMERICAN ENDANGERED  
RUNAWAY CHILDREN REPORTED TO NCMEC WERE  
LGBT

The narratives for all Native American children reported missing to NCMEC during this time period, showed that 29% of Native American Endangered Runaway children reported missing to NCMEC had some involvement with the criminal justice system. Information reported to NCMEC indicated that 9% had been arrested, 12% had been in juvenile detention, 5% had been on probation, 1% had been incarcerated, and 13% were noted to have violated the law but the consequences were not clear in

<sup>7</sup> This mean is derived from cases where the age was reported.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Native-Disparities-in-Youth-Incarceration.pdf>, *Native Disparities in Youth Incarceration*, page 1

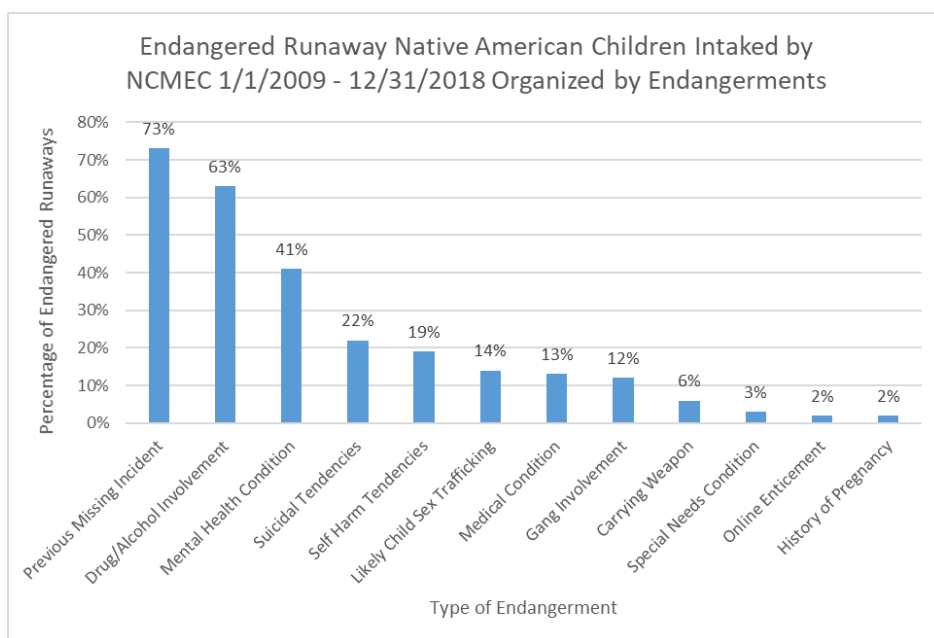
the information provided to NCMEC.

### **Financial Support During Missing Incident**

During a missing incident, Endangered Runaway children were most likely to seek shelter or financial support from a friend, romantic partner, or some other type of peer (14%). Four percent were supported by a family member. Two percent were supported by their mother, and 1% were supported by their father. Three percent had access to money and/or stole money prior to their missing incident. One percent reportedly sold drugs during their missing incident, and 1% were victims of sex trafficking, exchanging sex for money or a place to stay.

### **Endangerments - All**

This report analyzed the prevalence of 12 different endangerments among Native American Endangered Runaway children reported missing to NCMEC during this period of time. The vast



majority (91%) of these children had at least one reported endangerment. These children had an average of three endangerments.

### **Endangerments - Drug Usage**

Over half (63%) of Native American Endangered Runaway children were reported to have used drugs or

alcohol. Of the children who used drugs, they used an average of two types of drugs.

Marijuana (46%) and alcohol (36%) were the most commonly used. A minority (14%) of Endangered Runaway Native American children used methamphetamines as well.

### **Endangerments - Mental Illness, Self-Harm, and Suicidal Tendencies**

Forty-one percent of Native American Endangered Runaway children had at least one mental illness diagnosis. Children with a reported mental illness diagnosis had an average of two.

The five most commonly reported mental illness diagnoses for Native American Endangered Runaway children were Depression (20%), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (11%), Anxiety (9%), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (9%) and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (5%).

Twenty-two percent of Endangered Runaway children had suicidal tendencies, and 19% had self-harm tendencies.

### **ABDUCTOR INFORMATION**

In cases of abduction, there were 183 known abductors involved. The clear majority (90%) of these cases were classified as Family Abductions, while a minority (10%) were classified as Nonfamily Abductions.

A plurality (42%) of these abductions were carried out by the child's mother, followed by over a quarter (27%) that were carried out by the child's father. Other relatives made up an additional 18% of abductors. A majority (63%) of these abductors were Native American, with an additional 11% of the abductors being White. There were 15 cases that involved more than one abductor.

Acts of violence played a role in some of these abductions. Eleven percent of Family Abductions involved violence. It was most common for the perpetrator to become violent towards the child's mother (13 cases). Violence during Family Abductions could also involve violence toward the child (seven cases), violence towards the father (two cases), violence toward another relative (four cases), destruction of property as a means of intimidation (2 cases) and driving a car in a reckless manner to intimidate someone (two cases).

Twelve Nonfamily Abductions involved violence. Violence toward the child was most common (five cases). Violence during Nonfamily Abductions could also involve violence towards the child's mother (four cases), destruction of property as a means of intimidation (three cases) and driving a car in a reckless manner in order to intimidate someone. (four cases).

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This dataset represents children belonging to a variety of regions, age groups, and life experiences. There were 125 tribal affiliations reported. These children were reported missing from 43 states, and 52 reservations. A majority (92%) were not reported missing from tribal territory at all.

Despite this diversity in locations and experiences, there were some notable trends within this snapshot of the population. Children had a mean age of 14. Twelve percent of cases included reports of victimization by abuse. A majority of children were recovered after 48 hours, and children had a mean missing duration of two months.

A majority of these children were missing from care, and 8% were missing from tribal territory. Children missing from care were most often Endangered Runaways and had a longer mean missing duration than all Native American children. Children missing from tribal territory tended to be younger (11-years-old as the mean age versus 14-years-old as the mean age for all Native American children). They were more likely to be victims in Family Abductions than children not reported missing from tribal territory.

In cases where a child was abducted and the child's abductor was known, most abductors were the child's mother. Acts of violence played a role in some abductions of Native American children, but violence was more common during a Nonfamily Abduction than during a Family Abduction.

A majority of these children were Endangered Runaway children, and 8% of Endangered Runaway children reportedly expressed dislike of their placement, and 8% believed they were in a dating relationship with adults. A majority had a previous missing incident reported, and a majority used alcohol or drugs. It was also common for Endangered Runaway children to have a reported mental health condition, self-harm tendencies, or suicidal tendencies. During a missing incident, Endangered Runaway children were most likely to seek shelter or financial support from a friend, romantic partner, or some other type of peer.