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>> Mariam Durrani: Hello, and welcome to Policy and Advocacy in Action. A channel of NRCDV radio. My name is Mariam Durrani and today, we are exploring the themes in the paper "Colonization, Homelessness, and the Prostitution and Sex Trafficking of Native Women" by Christine Stark and Eileen Hudon, which discusses human trafficking of native women and girls in our times with particular attention to the historical context in the United States and the interconnection between trafficking and housing instability. Chris will discuss the findings with input from Jessica Smith, an advocate at Breaking Free in Minnesota.

I'd love for our audience to know a little bit more about both of you, Chris and Jessica, so Jessica, if you could get us started by telling us a little bit about yourself and your background and your expertise, that'd be fantastic.

>> Jessica Smith: Well, hi. My name is Jessica. I'm a survivor. I am Native American. I have been into the life before. I have been trafficked before, since I was a little girl growing up. I got out of the life six years ago, so that's how long ago, and now I work at an organization called Breaking Free in St. Paul to help women get out of the life of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking, so yeah. I'm glad to be here.

>> Chris Stark: So, my name is Chris Stark and I'm Anishinaabe and Cherokee. I'm a survivor of different kinds of sexual violence including being sex trafficked by family members and others from the time that I was a very young girl, which also included being used in pornography. I've been an advocate, activist, writer, and researcher for just a little bit over 30 years, around issues of sexual violence and sexual exploitation and I've been doing a lot of that work in the native community focused on issues of colonization and sexual exploitation the past maybe 15 or 18 years.

>> Mariam Durrani: Thank you so much Chris and Thank you so much Jessica. I'm so excited to have you both with us today. You're, I just can't even say enough about your incredible expertise. Thank you for sharing a little bit about you and who you are, so today we wanted to talk about some issues that were addressed in the report "Colonization, Homelessness, and the Prostitution and Sex Trafficking of Native Women", so that of course is the report that Chris, you wrote with Eileen Hudon and we want to talk about the

contemporary application as well. That report is phenomenal. If you haven't read it yet, you can access it on our website VAWnet.org and it covers the history of sex trafficking of indigenous women, the history of homelessness for native and indigenous women, contemporary sexual violence, homelessness, trauma, and also has some fantastic recommendations.

For both of you, we know that the rates of sexual violence against indigenous women are horrifically high, but this is actually nothing new. I just wanted to get started by asking if you can tell us about the history of colonization and sexual exploitation of indigenous women and girls and two spirit people.

>> Chris Stark: Two spirit for those who might not be familiar with that term is the term that's used often or by some native people to refer to LGBTQ and we use it interchangeably with LGBTQ so when we talk about the history of sexual exploitation and what we now call sex trafficking, we see it in the journals of Christopher Columbus, some of the first things that he and his men did when they landed in what we now call the Caribbean was to sexually enslave women and also girls trading concubines with the women and he writes about that dealers were going about the land looking for girls as young as 9 and 10 years old to sell them into sex trafficking, so right away from the very beginning of the colonization and the attempt at genocide of indigenous people on this land, we see this sex trafficking and the sexual exploitation, the sexual torture of indigenous women and girls happened at the very outset, and when you look at the history books, you can see it going right up the east coast and also the west coast as those were the first areas in what we now call the United States to be colonized and sex trafficking, prostitution if we use those two terms together was institutionalized immediately. It was brought over by European men as part of European culture to view women and girls in or view some women and girls in a way that they existed in order to be used sexually by men and we see that institutionalized as they furthered the colonization of this land and so, it was there from the very beginning and we are still dealing with the ramifications of that brutalization of the first indigenous girls that the Europeans had exploited. And one of the pieces also that goes along with that that's a little bit less known is that Europeans also brutally targeted two spirit people and that at least in some native communities or indigenous communities, two spirit or what we now call LGBTQ, they had revered places in the cultures as medicine people and the difference was viewed as something that made them special and powerful versus something that made that group of people degraded and less than, and so there's a lot of brutality that was inflicted against them as well.

>> Mariam Durrani: Thank you for sharing that Chris. You know, I think that sometimes theoretically we may know how awful the treatment of indigenous folks was across the country, but we don't actually always talk about it, so thinking about war and displacement and trafficking, what was the resulting impact of this removal and replacement from the homelands and the reservations. What was the impact on indigenous people?

>> Chris Stark: Eileen Hudon and I write about that in the report at you referenced, where we talk about the homelessness for indigenous people began with of course with the attempt at genocide, the various ways that colonization encroached on our people, our land and our lives, but being placed on reservations and being taken away from the lands where our ceremonies were performed and where our ancestors are dwelling in the ground and being removed to these small locations where there was not an ability to often feed ourselves or feed ourselves well, so our entire culture, the economics, the political aspects, everything was really disrupted by taking the land and placing us on reservations, moving

us all over the place, moving us to different parts of the country and one of the things that Vine Deloria writes about is that ceremonies as being central to the culture of most people, central to indigenous people's ways of lives, ours is tied to the land and to the places on the land, and so we can't just pick up and move to another part, because maybe that mountain or that lake or whatever now, we're not there in order to perform that, and so all of those pieces then created this incredible instability which again we continue to see and Jessica will have a lot to say about the contemporary issues of homelessness and its relationship to sex trafficking of native women and youth.

>> Mariam Durrani: Thank you Chris. You know, I know you talked about the native connection to the land and often particular places, like a mountain or a lake and water, so when you think about the differences in culture of what you said, maybe the Europeans, the Spanish, other colonizers, how does that culture differ from other indigenous cultural values? What are the biggest changes?

>> Chris Stark: Again, we can't speak for all 500+ tribes and nations that exist now and then some of them were entirely wiped out, but what we see as core to Anishinaabe ways and core to a lot of other indigenous cultures is a view of women as being sacred. We're life givers. We have the ability to give life, and we're whole and we're complete in that way and so that's really revered and honored and then children as gifts from the creator and so women and children were typically or at least often not viewed as property and that's something was owned, managed and controlled by men. There was a lot more integrity and individuality given to women and children, so it was a very different viewpoint and then you come in with a Christian based ideology of these European cultures that viewed women and children as literate chattel, as property. Owned and controlled by men and there to better the lives of the men, and those differences and then the sexual conquest that went along with that European Christian viewpoint of women was really in opposition to many of the tribes that have been living here for many thousands of years and I just, it's very important for people to understand that because it's important for people to understand the truth of indigenous culture and values, but it's also important because when we're looking to make a way forward, because we're all here together now, there are other ways to live in which men are not being taught and then acting out brutal sexual behaviors towards women and children

>> Mariam Durrani: Thank you Chris. Something you mentioned in the report that I think is a really interesting and awful part of US history that we don't always discuss is the concept of native boarding schools. Native boarding schools really founded to eliminate those traditional native ways of life. Sever people from the land. Sever them from their customs and their culture, so what were some of the impacts of the boarding schools on native children and families, and of course tribes.

>> Chris Stark: Again that was, the boarding school situation started, I think in the late 1700's actually, when the first one was actually implemented. It may have been the early 1800's, but they were in existence at very early time in the construction of the United States, and I think people tend to know that hair was cut and languages were forbidden and the culture of the children and therefore of the tribe and the families was really assaulted in those ways, and then of course removing children from their families and their broader community is really devastating, but what a lot of people tend to not be as familiar with is the amount of sexual violence and physical violence that was being inflicted on a good number of the children in these boarding schools, so again introducing that kind of brutal ownership and violence into native cultures through often very young children. That has a long-lasting impact not just on the individual child that went through this, 50 or 100 or

150 years ago, but that of course carries forward intergenerationally. As someone is assaulted like that, they need to do the healing and the healing's not available because the culture has been displaced and so that just carries down. It doesn't mean that they were all sexually abusive to their children, but the harm that is caused by that goes forward in a variety of ways in a community and you can read more about that at the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation report which is online and they talk about medical experimentation being performed on Canadian first-nation children in these boarding schools. They talk about outright sex trafficking of native children in these boarding schools by priests, clergy, politicians, and businessmen and so again, when we look at the history of indigenous people and what has been done to indigenous people by European cultures, really we see almost the same thing happening now. Almost the same things being done in the same kinds of ways in our communities now.

>> Mariam Durrani: I think that's such an important point Chris. Everything that you've shared has this really long lasting implications and I think sometimes those are just pushed to write history off as just being history, but violence is all interconnected. People who are harmed can often do harm and this is just a vicious cycle and healing is so complicated, especially when you talk about this complete removal of the customs, the culture, the native connection to land, so moving away from history, what are the contemporary ramifications of the history of sexual exploitation of indigenous women and girls and two spirit people?

>> Chris Stark: Jessica, do you want to jump in on this one?

>> Jessica Smith: Yes. Yeah, I just believe it's becoming something that people are, you know, that we are. That we are just homeless all the time. We are sex trafficked, and it feels like native women and children were just targeted, and it feels it's just a thing that people know that we're vulnerable. We're more vulnerable or more willing because of our history and our traumas and it feels like, that's how I feel about my trauma and life that I feel like it came from generational and that people already have me down as a target, you know, trafficked or when I was younger. Knowing that who my generation and what I came from are what it was, it's just like it's not-- it's just normalized now. When it should be. Especially with two spirit people, especially two spirit people. They're more vulnerable also, because they both go, and people just don't see the difference in them, you know. They just, it's just hard to explain. I'm sorry, but yeah. It's just normalized now.

>> Mariam Durrani: Yeah. Thank you for sharing that and your experience. I think it's just so connected to everything that Chris shared, but Chris, do you want to share more about the contemporary aspects of what sexual exploitation has led to?

>> Chris Stark: Sure. Jessica, do you want me to talk a little bit about the Garden of Truth? Do you want me to give a few-- just talk a moment about that and then you can just jump in wherever you want around that?

>> Jessica Smith: Sure.

>> Chris Stark: Okay. So, we MIWSAC and an organization called PRE, we did a report on the Garden of Truth for prostitution and sex trafficking of native women and in that, we see those contemporary ramifications of this history; the carrying forward of the kinds of attitudes that Jessica is talking about where native women and youth and two spirit people are often viewed by particularly white men as being targeted or as being this is what you exist for, and in the Garden of Truth, we interviewed 105 native women in

prostitution and trafficking in Minnesota and the rate of homelessness of either previous or current homelessness is 98%. 92% of the women wanted to get out immediately but were unable to do so. 72% had symptoms of disassociation. 52% had PTSD rates that were in the same range as combat war veterans and the majority of the women had been first abused as girls by an average of 4 perpetrators, so again we see exactly what Jessica's talking about is this idea that was brought forward by Christian beliefs that viewed native women as essentially as prostitutes or what the term was, squaws, at the time, and we see that being carried forward in the kinds of ideas that live in our culture today and then are acted out again on our women and children.

>> Jessica Smith: Yeah, and I have so much remembrance of that, because we are indigenous and that part of all that together, two spirit, women, children, our generation of that is just normalized obviously and with me being perpetrated by men when I was younger makes it normalized to me as a native woman. It makes it seem like it's normalized for me since I was young, so it starts with the children, the women and children because they see what other women going through. The children look up to their mom and their mom being trafficked, so that's what normalizes it, it's just normalized and that's how I feel about my situation and how out of the life and how I got in the life of being trafficked because I thought it was normalized because of generations, and my parents and my family and I feel like I didn't know because I was obviously adopted when I was younger, so a lot of that was different, but went back to my people and my tribe and I fell back into and thought that was normalized when I was around and everybody just felt like this is us and it's sad that we have to go through this, but our trauma behind it is very wrong, and it shouldn't be normalized.

>> Chris Stark: So it's my situation too. It was intergenerational and it was a family involvement with a few members in the family being perpetrators, but when you have that continuing throughout the family and you have such an amount of control over the family and then there's the domestic violence, there's incest, there's all of these other forms of sexual violence that they're all the same. You can't separate them. You can be like, "well, last night it was incest and tonight it's sex," you know what I mean? They're all intermingled and we saw that so much with the Garden of Truth too, especially the incest, the childhood sexual abuse is really being at the base, the center of that and then also really high rates of domestic violence which would cause women to get into prostitution or trafficking. It would make them more vulnerable to that, or they were actually being bought and sold by boyfriends or husbands and so like Jessica was saying, it's just this kind of swirling motion that has been going on in our communities and we're still trying to find the balance and find the healing despite all of these generations of violence.

And I think it's so important for people to understand that the vast majority of perpetrators, whether it's domestic violence, rape, murder or prostitution and sex trafficking, the vast majority of perpetrators against native women and children are not native men. It's like what we found in our report, Garden of Truth, it was primary white men and then secondarily African American men, so that's also important to put out there because otherwise people bring some sort of previous racist ideas about native men as well. Not that there aren't native men involved in being sexually violent, but it's important for people to understand that again this is still being perpetrated by people outside of our community, primarily.

>> Mariam Durrani: Yeah, that's a super important point, Chris, I think it just highlights everything that you've already shared, that this is history just repeating itself and what Jessica shared, it just becomes the norms and it's awful, but it's really hard to untangle

when it's been as you said swirling around forever and just a cycle that continues.

Something that came up for me, Chris you mentioned the Garden of Truth. You mentioned incredibly high rates of homelessness for native women and youth and two spirit individuals, so could you talk a little bit more about the intersection of homelessness, the contemporary homelessness intersecting with sexual exploitation?

>> Chris Stark: Yeah. I can talk about it, but Jessica, do you want to talk about that first, since you've been doing that outreach and stuff?

>> Jessica Smith: Yeah. So, about the homelessness and being homeless, and dealing with sexual exploitation, it actually combines because being homeless, you're more vulnerable, especially [indiscernible] for me, it's just like people in the community, in how we're just vulnerablized and we're homeless and we are addicts and all that stuff combined, it seems like because we're out in the streets, we're vulnerable. That's how we survive, and people, the white man, they know that. The person, whoever is the perpetrator knows that. They know the history, I feel like half the time, or if they don't, they figure it out. Just again homeless more vulnerable, especially with no housing. Being vulnerable in the streets and feeling like that's all you can do to survive where it's normalized because that's all with know. That's the hard part and being out in the outreach and seeing women out there and they're vulnerable and they want to get out of the life, but it's so hard, especially when I see women out there in the streets. They want to get out, but it's so hard, because they don't know what normal is, because that's their normal, so when they're out there, people don't understand that this is not where they want to be. This is not that they chose this life. It feels like it's been chosen for us, and so we really dig deep and get the culture and get back into our culture ways and native ways to help them heal. There's no other way right now. I feel like housing is a big step in healing and getting out of the life of prostitution. Just healing and our culture ways.

>> Chris Stark: Yeah. Yeah, and I know I think that there's been more attention brought to the situation in Minneapolis and St. Paul because of the murder of George Floyd and what-- so, I'm going the sum this up and hopefully get it pretty accurate, but with we've had these homeless encampments for the past roughly year and a half or two years and that started along the Hiawatha Wall, and that was a primarily native camp of tents and then what happened after that was sort of disbanded and people were, at least some people were found homes, but then what happened with the pandemic and then with all of the chaos and the protests and then burning and the rioting of the aftermath of the George Floyd murder of which a lot of that burning of the buildings was done by people who were part of white supremacist movements. Anyway, there was another homeless camp and multiple homeless camps that have sprung up in Minneapolis and St. Paul and just listening to sort of this situation and the stories of what the women and youth have been going through at these camps and like Jessica's been talking about in being targeted. It has just been horrific to see what has happened to particularly native women and youth and also African American women and youth who are out in the streets and more vulnerable in these camps.

>> Jessica Smith: Yeah, the encampments for sure, I feel like we are targeted there, especially because the high rate of native women and children being homeless. Traders and pimps and [indiscernible] they know where to go. They know that this is where they're going to be. They're going to be up all night. Let's just go over there and they know they get what they want, because we're so vulnerable and we don't have a place for home and our own bed at night, so we're more vulnerable and seeing these women out there is so

heartbreaking. You know, we have a girl in one of our homes that came from the encampments and she told me her experience there and how vulnerable it is to be out there and people just know that she's a target and how not safe it is for these women and children and even men too that we're just a target out there and it's been very not safe. We need more people to come protect them and make sure they are safe and sorry, but the outreach, you see a lot of native women out there in Minneapolis and St. Paul, mostly Minneapolis being addicted, being homeless and being vulnerable and not safe, and these men know that this is going on. They know to just pull up over there in a car and they know what to do, and they will get the younger ones first, and then the older ones, because they are vulnerable and the younger ones are way more vulnerable, so just hearing the experience from one of the girls, she is a youth native coming from the encampment, it's very said, because it seems like people were trying to separate people. The natives over here, the blacks over here, and it was not safe, because if one person wasn't that-- looked native, they were not mentioned to be native. That's how she felt, and she told me a little bit about that and all indigenous, we're all colors, a different color, but we are still the same and there is a lot of sex trafficking out there with the native girls and she was in the encampments for 60 years, so just imagine all the trauma she's been through and being normalized to that and being in a tent is normal for her, and it should never be, but that's what our generations and all that trauma is like, "we're just normal. This is just normal. We'll get through it," but we really need that cultural behind it. Cultural, all that healing and all that-- if there was more culture healing, and people and there was more harm reduction, I feel like people really understand this more and hear us through and being a survivor and working at it survivor places way more comfortable for women to come and just feel like they're not judged, so we need more places that are survivor-led, and more housing that people have been through the same stuff and we understand not just going to school and we really need more people out in the streets to see this.

>> Mariam Durrani: Thank you Jessica. I think it's so important. You highlighted so many threads of what's happening right now. The crisis of homelessness and housing instability and used to worsen the vulnerability of people who are homeless or housing unstable and just continues to worsen. We haven't really talked today about how we're in a pandemic and that's affecting everyone across the country in different and awful ways. The effects are really felt by indigenous folks everywhere and the idea of being in an encampment where you're so vulnerable to everything that comes with being homeless and housing instable and then sexual violence is just awful. So, Jessica, I know you started to get us there. I just wanted to point out this quote that I really love from the report that Chris and Eileen wrote. "More awareness, research, creation of effective services and public policies are needed to right the wrongs inflicted on native women and therefore native communities. Prostitution and sex trafficking were not part of indigenous cultures before European contact." So, I need for us to get into it Jessica, thinking about survivor-led solutions, survivor responsive solutions, so what are some of your recommendations and solutions? And that's either of you. Feel free to chime in.

>> Jessica Smith: I just feel like we need more people who have been through life, obviously survivor-led is very important. I feel like the place I work at, we're all survivor-led and it feels like more women are willing to come and not feel judged when they come into our organization. More people need to be in outreach and understand what's going on and this world and this pandemic and all this stuff that's going on around them, even people that live life in encampments should be aware of what's going on and not just mental. I just feel like the encampments and being a survivor. Us going out there, people really need to get out there and see that this is real life and they probably did not know that this is serious until the pandemic and George Floyd and now all these tents are out and people don't see

all these homeless. They see homeless people, but they don't see them-- they don't know who is homeless until they see these encampments and tents and they were like, "Wow, this is a lot of people." Now they want to help., you know? It's been like this for so many years, but it takes a whole pandemic or something to happen for somebody to really see us through with things like even if we go out there to the capital or whatever we do, it seems like nobody will understand unless we all come together as one and show them that this is real. Just like MMIW, that was never a task force until they fought and showed that this is serious and the cold-case office in Bloomington, all that stuff is like now they're finally recognizing that this is true. This is real. This is not just a thing that we're just talking about. It's real life.

>> Chris Stark: Yeah, and it's amazing how like you're talking about, Jessica, this is becoming more visible and it's just amazing that it's so in this day and age we can have indigenous women, we can have African American women, white women who are being exploited out on the streets or being exploited in other ways; be murdered and dumped in neighborhoods and there's really, at the blip I can think of six or seven mostly-native, African American women who have been murdered and their bodies dumped in my neighborhood and there's no outcry. There's no-- really there might be a little article in the paper and that's it. The neighbors don't respond to it, and this, I'm on the edge of-- I live in a community of color, but I'm on the edge of a upper-middle-class white area where two young native women's bodies have been dumped and there was no reaction from the community at all, so it is really astonishing how this continues on, but like Jessica said, awareness is starting to be raised around it.

I would really like to emphasize what Jessica said and that is the need for survivor-led and also for culturally appropriate and specific services for native women and youth who are being exploited and the other thing I want to say as well is I don't want people to leave this thinking that with a sort of victim-view of native people in the sense that there is a ton of amazing things going on in native communities of revitalizing language and ceremonies and native culture being restored and come back which of course is being done by native people, and the power and the beauty and the strength of native cultures and native ceremonies, that's what brought by far, the most healing that I have received throughout my lifetime. That's what kind of gave me "life" again, and so I just want to kind of also put that out there because native ways and native people, we're still here and we still have our cultures going forward, despite everything that we've been through, and they're very beautiful and powerful and wonderful ways of living.

>> Mariam Durrani: Thank you so much for that, Chris. Such an important point. Anything else, Jessica, that you want to add to remind our listeners of?

>> Jessica Smith: Yeah. I just want to remind them that we are all the same. We just want to put out there that this is what's going on. We just want people to know the truth behind all this, that we're not just a topic. It's real and we want them to know the background of it, and we're not just making this stuff up, and that we are very powerful and then come from a very powerful culture, and that our culture is very keeping within, in that we more outreach especially what Chris said about getting out the [indiscernible] and getting our lives back, feeling like life's back. The music, the pow wows, all that, the ceremonies. We all [indiscernible] come back to our native ways. It's very powerful within our [indiscernible] I just feel like they need more cultural housing, healing, harm reduction and give people a chance before they just end-- just don't [indiscernible] at all. The need to see what we've been through and what's the best way to heal then. That's the best way.

>> Mariam Durrani: Thank you, Chris. Thank you, Jessica. You know, I thank you so

much for everything that you've shared. I always hope anyone that finds a report like the Colonization report that Chris and Eileen wrote or the Garden of Truth or the other points that you mentioned, Chris or even just stumbling upon this podcast will really be a helpful step in starting to educate folks on the horrific history that has happened to the indigenous community and really reflect on what's happening currently and how it's a never-ending cycle that really needs to be broken and how we need to do exactly more of what both of you have mentioned so, I just wanted to thank you again for your time, for your expertise. Thanks for your attention today. I hope their wisdom and expertise gets shared far and wide. Thank you for your work and I know we'll continue to be in touch. So, thank you both.

>> Chris Stark:     Okay. Thank you.

>> Jessica Smith:    Thank you.

>> Mariam Durrani:   Bye.

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Thank you for listening to our broadcast today and to our two guests, Chris Stark and Jessica Smith. To learn more about the reports mentioned today, visit [VAWnet.org](http://VAWnet.org). To hear more NRCDV podcast and to access additional resources, visit [NRCDV.org](http://NRCDV.org). You can follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at NRCDV.

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