

Native American Culture Report

N432: Maternal-Newborn Care

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The Native American population is prevalent all throughout the United States. The Native American culture is a very diverse group (National Museum of the American Indian, 2025). There is no single Native American culture or language (National Museum of American Indian, 2025). Native Americans are their own person, but they belong to a tribal group as well (National Museum of American Indian, 2025). Most Native American individuals have stated that over the years, their culture and environment has shaped them into the person that they are now (National Museum of Indian Culture, 2025). The Native American culture is always growing and changing throughout the years (National Museum of American Indian, 2025). There are around 6.6 million people or 2.2 % of the United States that identify with the Native American background and culture (IWGIA, 2021). The majority of Native Americans reside in California and New York (IWGIA, 2021).

The religious beliefs of Native Americans are not grounded to just one religion (National Geographic, 2023). In 1978, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was put in place to allow Native Americans to have freedom of religion and to be able to practice that religion to be individualized or as a tribe (National Geographic, 2023). The Great Spirit is the main figure in the Native American religion (Justo, 2023). The Great Spirit is believed to guide and help protect all living things which include plants, animals, and people (Justo, 2023). The Great Spirit is seen as the creator of all life and the universe as well as the source of all living life (Justo, 2023). Native American woman who are in labor must be seen by a woman provider and they are not allowed to be seen by a male. This allows the woman to feel comfortable.

Native Americans believe spirituality plays a very big role in healing (Justo, 2023). Native American's spirituality is not separated from them, it is intertwined within their daily life, and they show this through their healing processes (Justo, 2023). They believe that nature and

the earth are medicine, and these practices are usually looked at as holistic and very natural (Justo, 2023). There are rituals where they will burn different herbs, and this will cause all the pain and negative energy to leave the person's body (Justo, 2023). Pain and suffering are not looked at as a weakness, it is actually looked at to make the person look stronger (Justo, 2023). This looks at treating the whole person, not just the body, and this includes treating the mind and mental health (Justo, 2023). Childbirth is a sacred and spiritual journey that is revolved around the Great Spirit (Justo, 2023). The postpartum period is a time for the woman to relax, unwind, and meditate to promote overall wellbeing for the mother and baby (Justo, 2023). There are a few rituals that will be performed during childbirth, and they are called smudging, herbal teas, storytelling, and different ceremonies (Justo, 2023).

Native Americans have individualized family structures that root back to certain traditional rituals and standards (Justo, 2024). Family structure in the Native American community have merged with preserving unity, kinship, and coexistence with one another (Justo, 2024). Like some other cultures, the Native American community will live with one another for most of their life and move on when a person of the family gets married (Justo, 2024). This structure can help a new mother have extra assistance with taking care of the baby due to the family all living within the same house. Family structure of the Native American population is a very close-knit dynamic and they will help their elders as a full-time job if needed (Justo, 2024). Woman, most of the time, will stay home and take care of the children, cook, and clean the home while the men will go to work to support their family (Justo, 2024). The elders of the family will help take care of the children as well.

Native American culture varies in dietary plans. Most indigenous individuals' practice using environmental foods for nutrition (National Indian Council, 2025). There are 7 pillars of

food sovereignty and these focus on food for people, build knowledge and skills, work with nature, value food providers, localize food systems, put control locally, and food is sacred (National Indian Council, 2025). The diets of Native Americans contain more complex carbohydrates like beans, potatoes, peas, and whole grains, and fewer fats like meats, dairy products, and oils (National Indian Council, 2025). They will usually eat more foods that are harvested locally which include seeds, nuts, corn, beans, Chile, squash, wild fruits and vegetables, and fish (National Indian Council, 2025). In the postpartum period, it is an essential ritual for a postpartum mother to nourish her body with foods that will help her get stronger. Some will eat fish bone broth for the collagen that is in this food and some women will not eat red meat for weeks after giving birth to support balance (Justo, 2023). This specific diet can be attainable in the hospital, but this nursing student is unaware if hospitals have fish bone broth. This can also be brought in by the family if needed.

Native American communication norms are rooted towards respect for each other, reflection, and community wellbeing (Justo, 2023). Females are allowed to speak for themselves, and woman are not enforced to go through communication without their husband present. Nonverbal communication is very important in the Native American culture (Justo, 2023). As nurses, we can use nonverbal communication techniques to help the patient understand the things that are going on as well as making them feel safe. Silence is another part of communication that is crucial for the Native American population (Justo, 2023). Silence is a way to show respect and to show emotion when words are not enough (Justo, 2023). Silence is shown in times of grief and sorrow to pay respect to person who they might be grieving (Justo, 2023). It is crucial to know that when a person is silent or using nonverbal communication, it is not always because of disrespect. This can be a way that someone shows respect.

Childbirth provides adverse outcomes in all cultures, ethnicities, and religions but these negative adverse effects are more prominent in the Indigenous people who are in the more isolated or rural communities (Hayward, 2021). There is a shortage of maternal medicine providers that prevent indigenous women to receive adequate maternal healthcare (Hayward, 2021). This lack of access to healthcare can cause women to feel mistreated during childbirth (Hayward, 2021). There is a policy in Canada where after 36 weeks' gestation, the community will separate the women from their home to prepare for labor and delivery in an unfamiliar environment (Hayward, 2021). Being unsupported and alone during the labor process causes unnecessary stress on the mother and the baby (Hayward, 2021). A few ways to implement change for this issue is to use Indigenous doulas, birth attendants, and midwives (Hayward, 2021).

There are a few ways that nurses can use interventions to help maximize a mother's experience during the labor process. As a nurse, we can ask our clients rituals or spiritual processes that can help the laboring mother feel more comfortable. We can allow the patient to have their choice of female or male nurses/providers if they are comfortable with that. Another intervention that we can do for these patients is to have someone from their church or tribal group to promote ease and calmness of the patient during the labor process. As nurses, we need to have cultural humility. This forms trust and intentional relationships between patients and the medical team (Durham et al., 2023). Cultural humility will help the nurse understand what makes the patient feel more comfortable during a scary and stressful situation (Durham et al., 2023).

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