

Facts

- The last census tells us there are 4,119,301 American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States and 562 federally funded tribes. Approximately 75% live outside the reservation, with about 55% now residing in metropolitan areas. Only about 25% live on reservations. Many have chosen to leave.

- In addition, reservations are not populated by just tribal members. As much as 45% of reservation residents are non-Indian. In fact, on 30% of the reservations, the number of non-members is equal to or greater than the number of tribal members. The incidence of inter-racial marriage is high. The Montana Supreme Court, in Skillen v. Menz, wrote, "...interracial marriages are a fact of life, and, as with other marriages, so are interracial divorces and custody disputes over the children of those marriages.

- According to the Dec. 7th edition of the Oregonian, federal statistics show that for years, the 1.5 million people who live on or near reservations have seen children die at about twice the national rate. Quoted in the article is Jon Perez, director of behavioral health at the federal Indian Health Service, who said, "What you have are developing countries right in the heart of the United States. Each has a history of neglect and a legacy of trauma that explains these disparities. We need this history not as excuses for the disparities but as a need to intervene."

The Minneapolis Star and Tribune, on April 25, 2004, offered the following statistics for one Reservation county:

*Cass County, where most of the reservation's people live, ranked last among 77 Minnesota counties in a 1999 government study that measured the health and safety of children.

*In 2002, Cass County had the state's highest percentage of children living in foster homes and other county-supervised care. Most of them were Indians from the reservation, taken away from their parents, or given up by them, because of abuse, neglect or delinquency.

*A statewide study of ninth-graders in the mid-1990s found that Cass County had the highest rate of heavy drug and alcohol use and the highest

rate of alcohol abuse within their families. The county also ranked first in numbers of people admitted to detoxification centers.

*Death comes earlier here. In Minnesota, Indians' average life expectancy is about eight years less than for the population as a whole.

According to one social service source quoted in the December 10, 1999 edition of the Native American Press, "Some of the mothers that are losing their children first became pregnant when they were only 12 years old. They often have more children with other men. These situations often lead to their older children being abused by the step-father, or the parents live-in relatives." The source also claimed that some Indian programs in Minneapolis actually try to help parents avoid county drug screenings.