

The declining health of American Indian victims of domestic violence

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Here's the plan for today...

First, we'll talk about the problem

- The declining health of victims is overlooked, particularly among American Indian populations

Why this matters

- Poor health of victims impacts people's **quality of life** and is **expensive for you** (a.k.a. “taxpayers”)

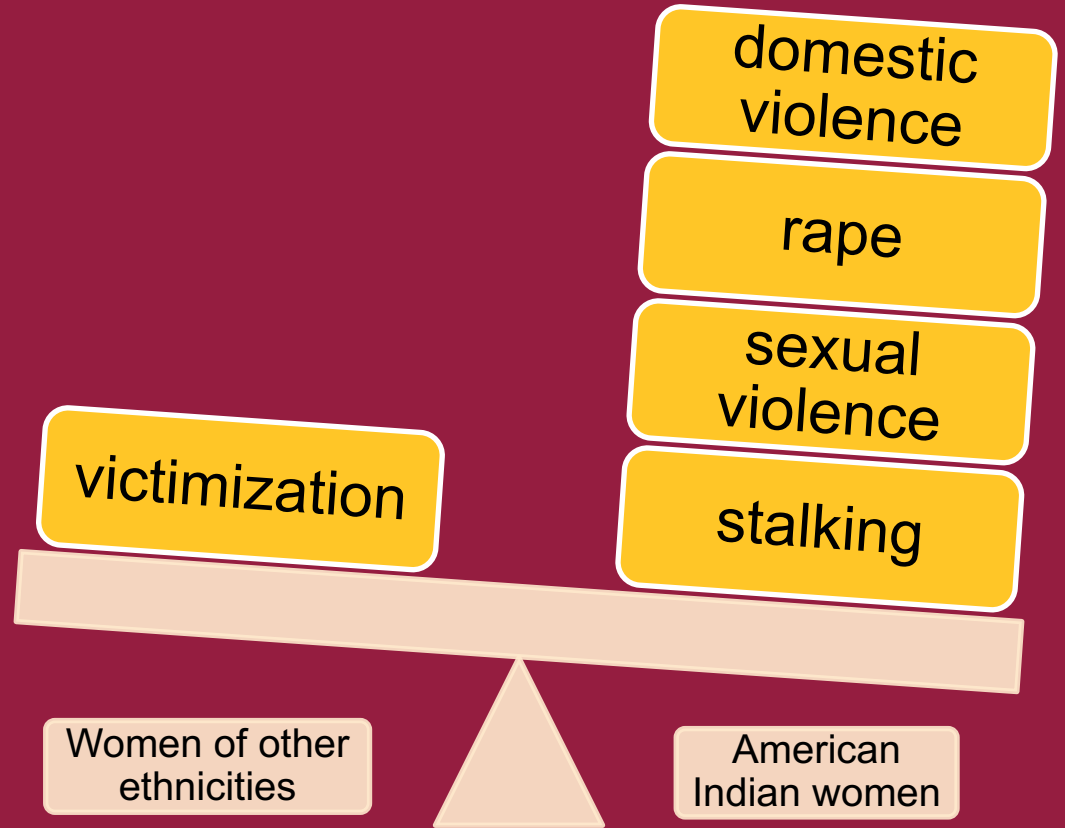
Some solutions (a.k.a. my research)

- Identify health care problems and needs among victims

... particularly hard-to-access American Indian populations
- Partner with agencies to solve these social problems

The problem

American Indian women are at the highest risk of victimization compared to other ethnicities



**And many American Indian women are
murdered and missing.**

And many American Indian women are murdered and missing.

On some reservations, Native women are murdered 10 times the national average.

Poor health is a consequence of victimization

- Physical health consequences
 - headaches, migraines
 - nausea
 - sleep loss or excess
 - appetite loss or excess
 - cuts, bruises, broken bones, loss of limbs or even life
- Psychological health consequences
 - PTSD
 - paranoia
 - panic attacks
 - nightmares
 - flashbacks
 - trust issues



The domino effect of victimization

- Victims often experience “double victimization”
 1. Victimized by the crime
 2. Then by the CJ sytem

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- I contend that victims actually experience “triple victimization”
 3. Long-term consequences, including health

Why this matters

**When people's
health declines,
their quality of
life declines too**

unhealthy
self-coping

depression

commit
crime!

more
victimization!

The high cost of poor health

- Medical care costs...outpatient care, pharmacy charges, inpatient care and ER visits
- Short-term disability, workers' comp, loss of productivity at home and work

= \$\$\$ billions!

And with nearly 3 million American Indians in the U.S., this is an important population to learn about.

One solution...

The poor health & healthcare of victimized American Indian women



Page, AZ



My work with American Indian women in Page

- Domestic violence shelter & services
- 85-90% clientele Navajo women
 - Navajo Nation is massive



What are the **health needs of American Indian women victimized by domestic violence?**

Victimized American Indian women have many health needs

- 97% needed help with their **mental health**
 - mental health counseling
 - emotional help
 - help dealing with upsetting feelings
 - handling stress in her life
- 69% needed help with **health issues**
- 75% needed help with **substance abuse**
- 68% needed help with **abuse-related injuries**



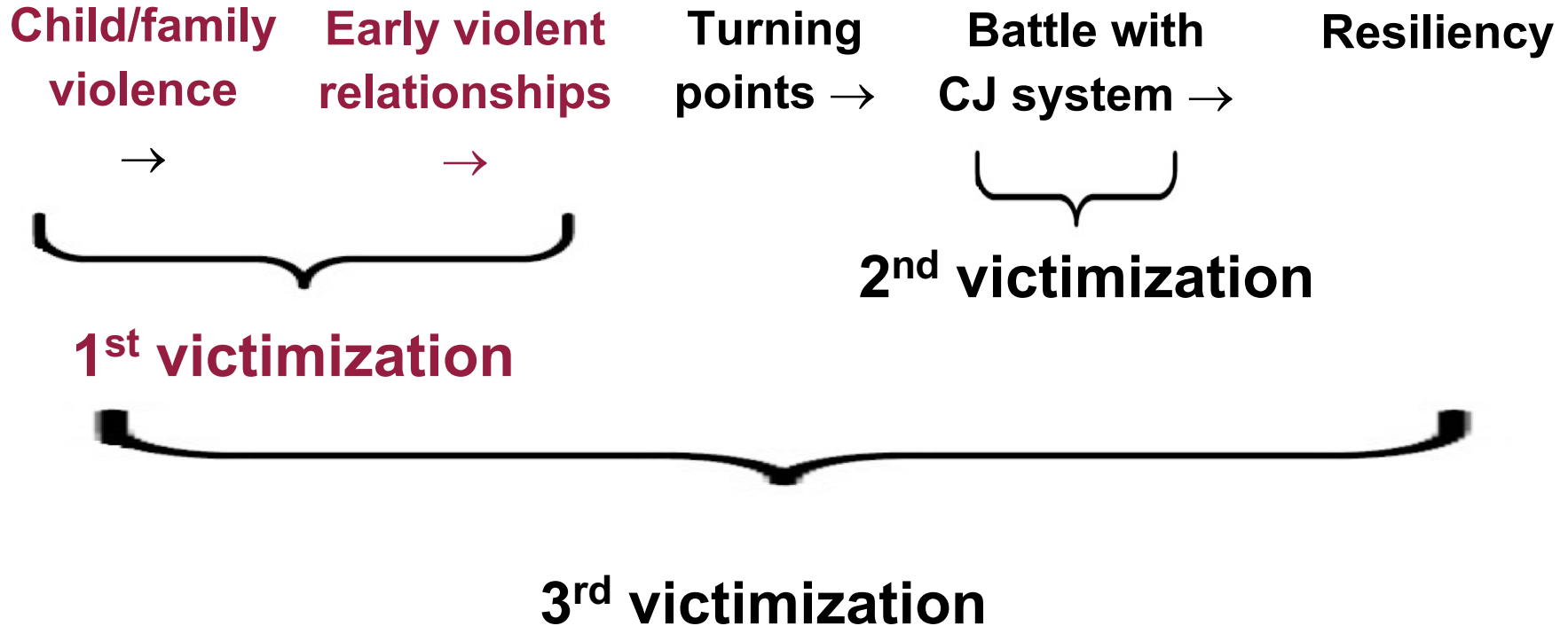
That glimpse into AI women's health problems led to my in-depth interviews to learn more

- Semi-structured interview questions
- Women asked to tell “their story” in their own words
- $n = 12$ (so far); 100% participation rate
- Lasted 1 to 3 hours

Findings reveal there is a clear domino effect of victimization, I call it **triple victimization**

- Recall that “double victimization”
 1. Victimized by the crime
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Women's lifelong journey to be resilient



1st victimization: by the family

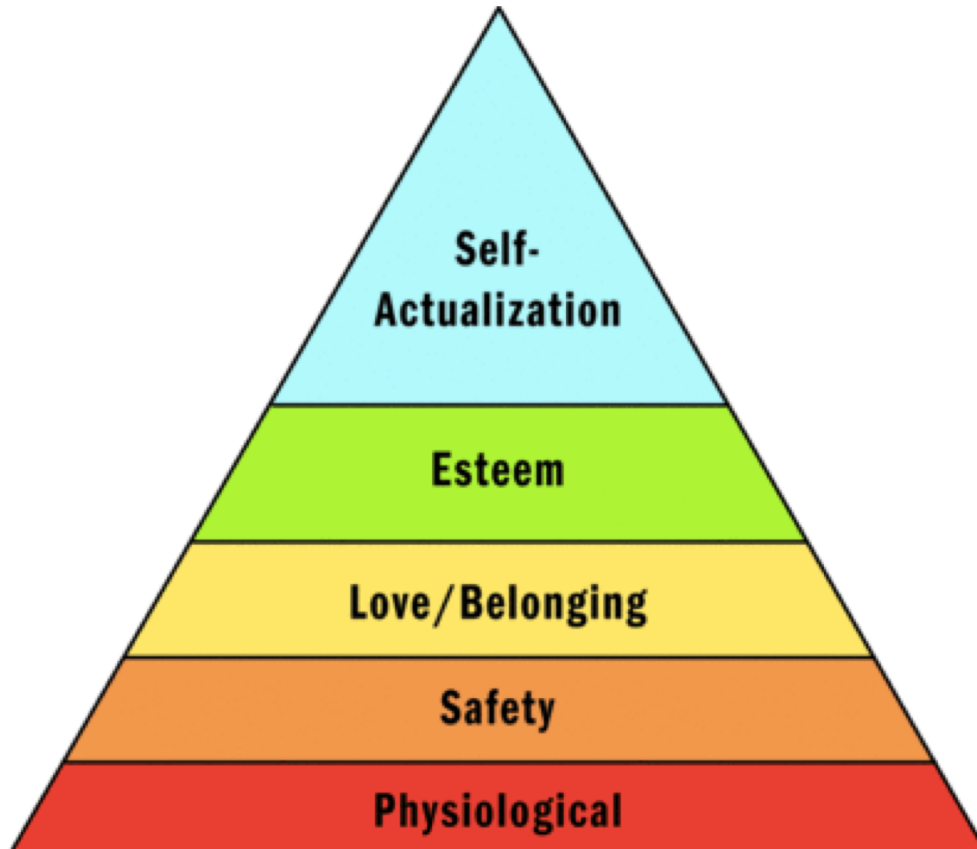
- Witness and experienced abuse
- Basic needs unmet: hunger, shelter, sleep, safety
- Feelings of anger, depression, helplessness, fear & shame
- Loose family ties

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“I remember being scared a lot”

“When you see it as a child, that violence, you know, it sticks with you.”



Maslow's (1943) A Theory of Human Motivation

1st victimization: by the domestic violence

- psychological
- physical
- stalking
- sexual
- financial
- pregnancy
- isolation



survival mode

1st victimization: by the domestic violence

Abuse of children:

A client's child told her: “ ‘I learned really fast not to ask for you, because he [abuser] would pick me up and scream at me, and shake me, and hit me.’

And, you know, no mother ever wants to hear that.”

1st victimization: by the domestic violence

Forced sex:

“He’d gotten really drunk one night and said, ‘We’re married, I’m your husband, that’s your job.’

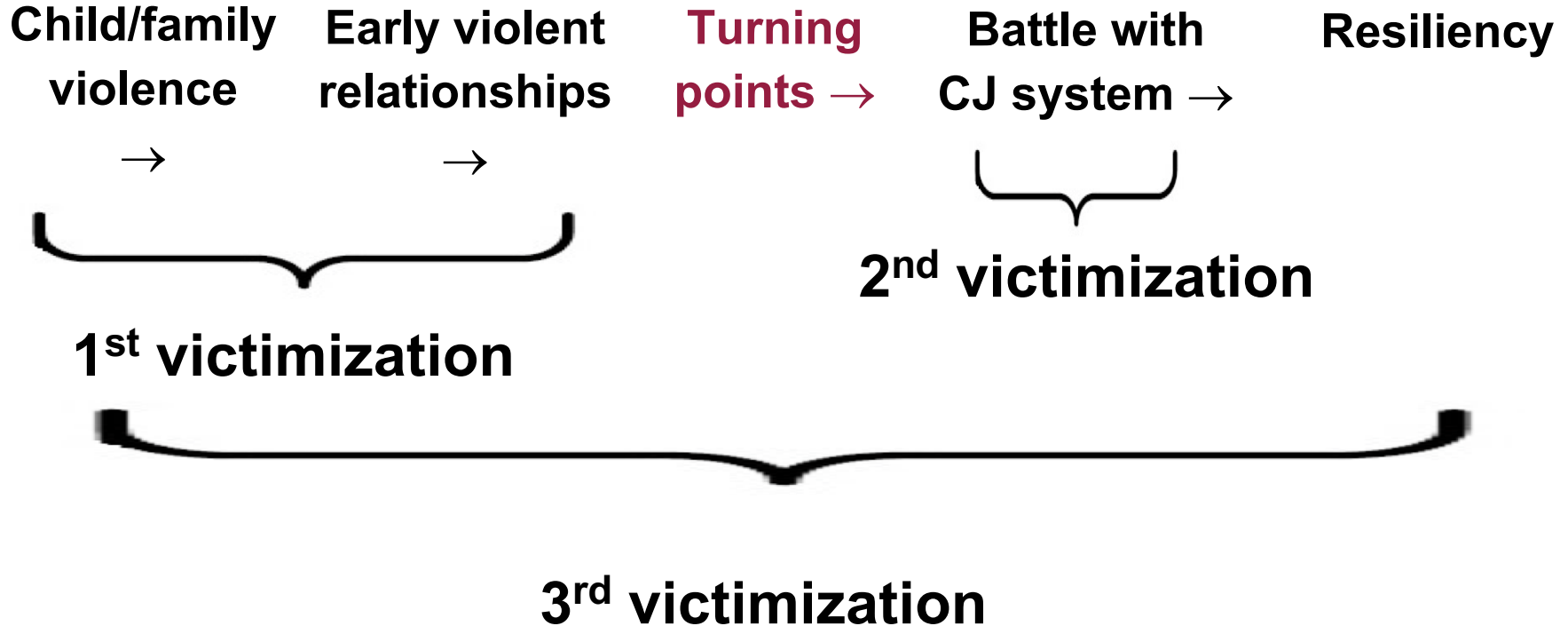
You don’t get a choice.”

1st victimization: by the domestic violence

Abuse is all encompassing:

“When you’re in it [the abusive relationship], it’s immersed around you.”

Women's lifelong journey to be resilient



Turning point

A time at which a decisive change in a situation occurs, especially one with beneficial results.

Women's turning points

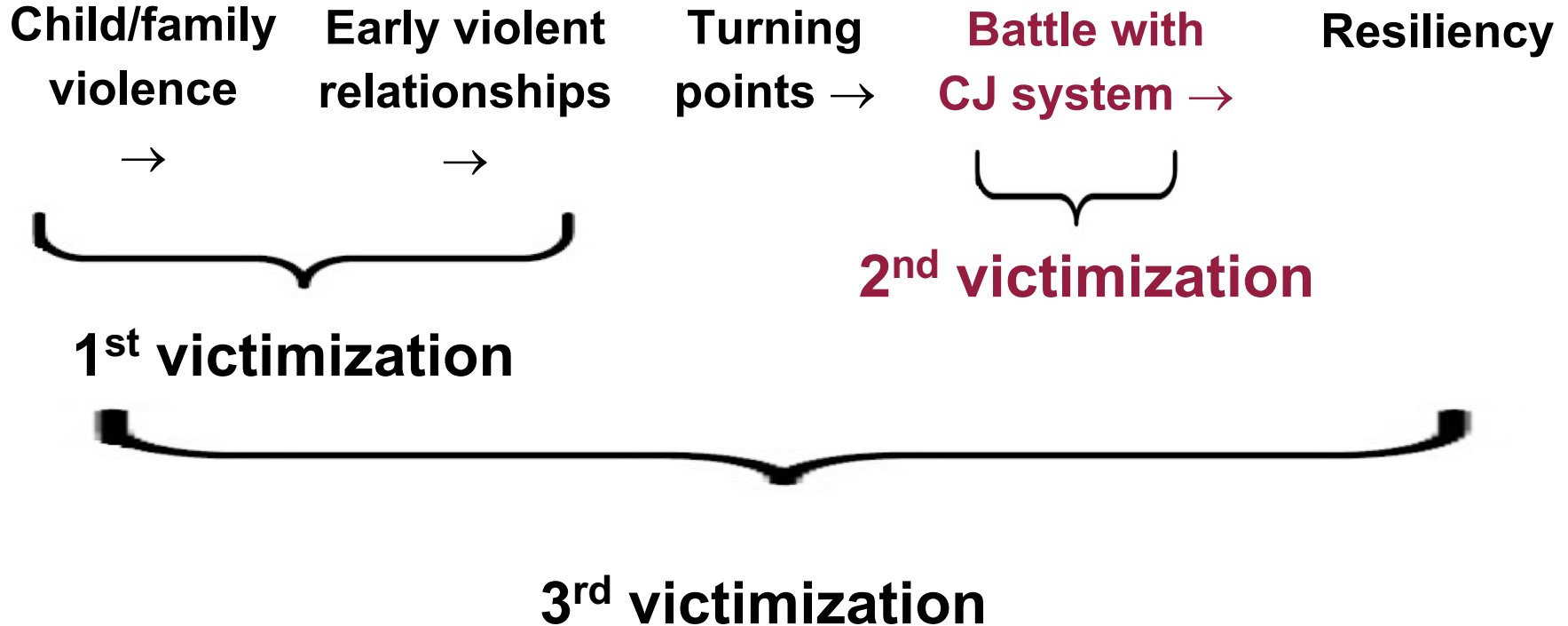
- Related to their children
 - realizing children witness abuse
 - seeing daughter run with knife to save her life
 - finding out boyfriend molested daughter
- Related to the behavior of their partner
 - finding out about other woman
- Related to themselves
 - husband attempted murder

**And turning points lead to
healthy coping behaviors**

Healthy coping behavior

- Counseling
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Running/walking
- Journaling
- Mindfulness
- Religion/prayer

Women's lifelong journey to be resilient



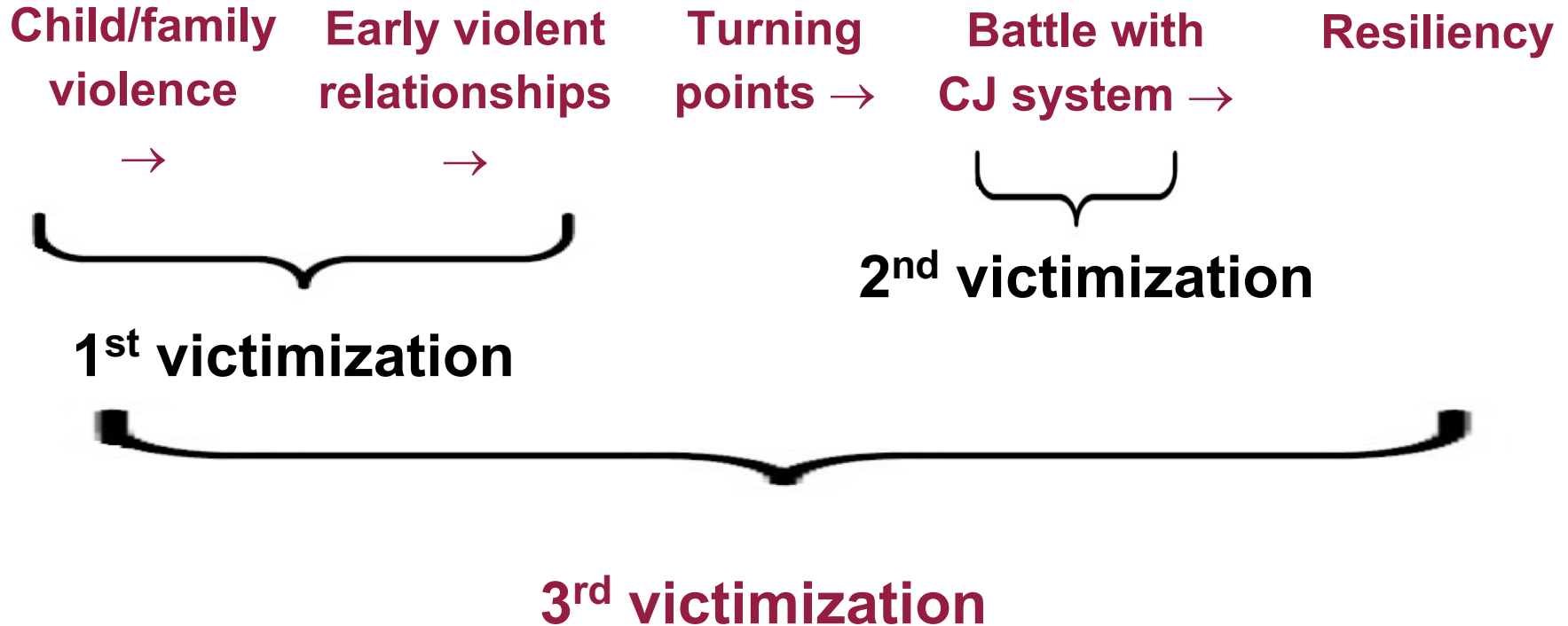
2nd victimization: by the CJ system

- If even called, police were slow to arrive & often mediated couple
- Defense attorney told client:
“It’s not about fairness or justice, it’s about who you know.”

2nd victimization: by the CJ system

“I had a real arrogant lawyer and he looked at me and he said..., ‘If it was me, the first time that happened I would have left.’ A man. A white man. Who had his PhD in law, had been a lawyer, real arrogant. I’m sure. I’m sure **you** would have. But I was a 21 year old girl. You know? And that’s making me feel worse. About my decisions. About myself. Basically calling me stupid. And here’s somebody I paid \$14 grand to protect me. On a side note, my whole entire journey has been harder than hell.”

Women's lifelong journey to be resilient



3rd victimization: by the long-term health problems

- Survivors of domestic and family violence experience **chronic stress**
- **And chronic stress can “wreck havoc on your mind and body”**
- Therefore, domestic and family violence victims experience **high levels** of physical and psychological health problems

Physical Health Consequences

Physical Health Consequences

- headaches, migraines
- nausea / upset stomach
- broken bones
 - nose, cheeks, teeth, jaw, sprained wrists
- bruises & black eyes
- break out in sweat when think of abuse
- chills
- hot face
- heartbeat fast when think of abuse
- jumpier / more easily startled
- not drinking water / eating food
- weight gain & loss
- constipation
- body aches

- lost kidney
- hair falling out
- smoking
- parasites
- STD
- stress during pregnancy
 - preterm labor pain
 - baby with kidney disorder
 - miscarriage
 - abortion

Psychological Health Consequences

Psychological Health Consequences

- Trouble sleeping
- Nightmares
- Feeling sad most of the time / depression
- Too many thoughts
- Helpless
- Scared
- Cry a lot
- Emotionally numb
- Relive the trauma

- PTSD

******Stress******

- Anxiety
- paranoia
- panic attacks
- trust issues
- Blackout / daze off
- Memory loss / confused
- Anger
- Suicidal

**When we are stressed, our bodies
release a hormone called cortisol**

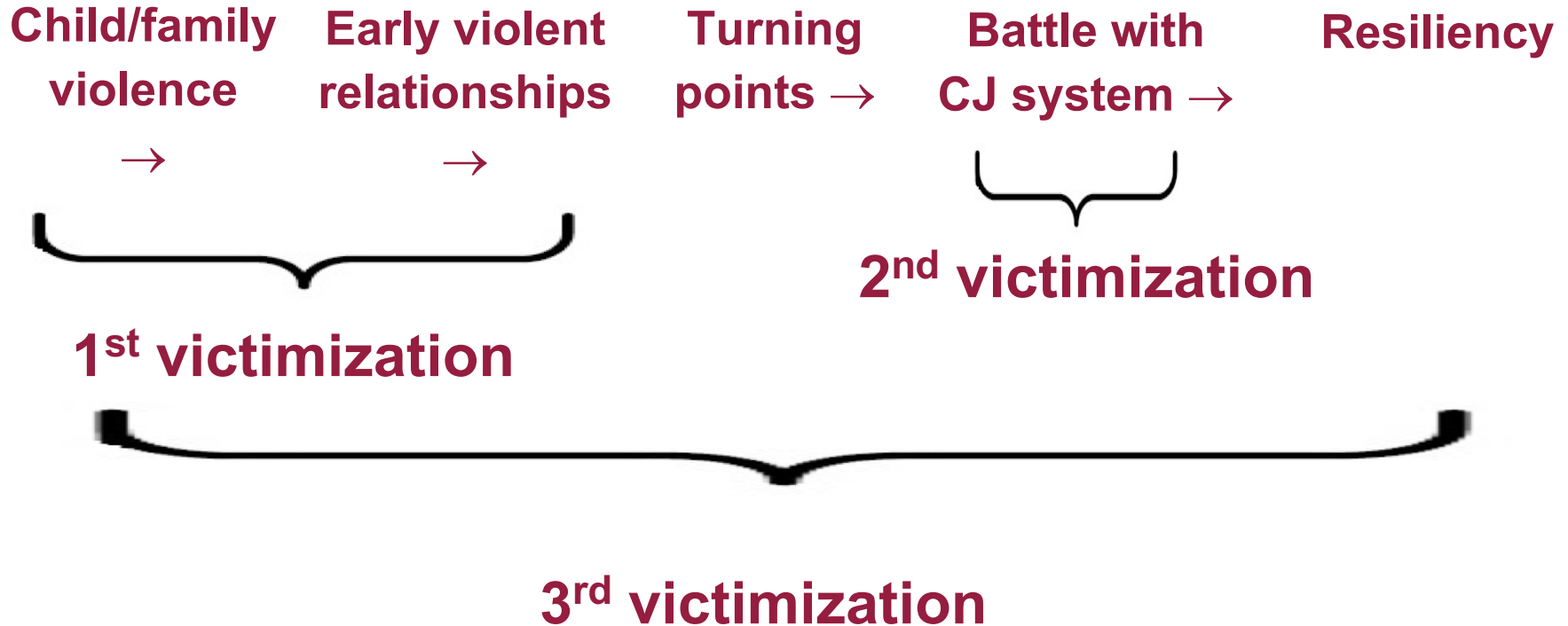
Cortisol is “public enemy #1”

Scientists have known for a long time that **elevated levels of cortisol** reduce learning, memory, lower immune functioning and bone density, and increase weight gain, blood pressure, cholesterol, heart disease, and on and on...

Extra cortisol is bad for your health.

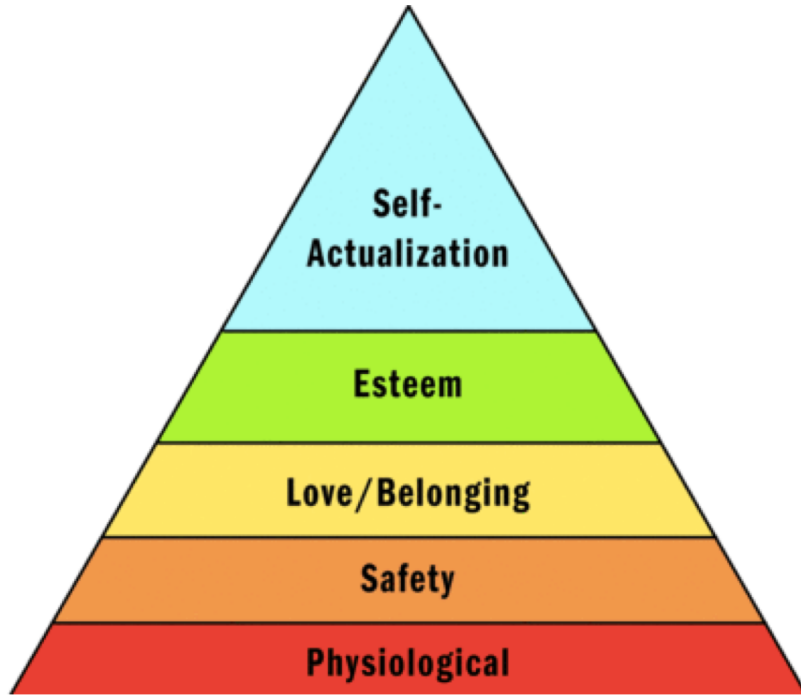
And survivors of domestic & family violence
have a lot of it.

Women's lifelong journey to be resilient



Resiliency

- **The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness**
- **The ability to spring back into shape; elasticity**



Maslow's (1943) A Theory of Human Motivation

**So what happens to
people who do not
“self-actualize”?**

**Ending on a
positive note!**



**Given the poor health of victimized American Indian women,
Another Way is proactively doing something about it.**

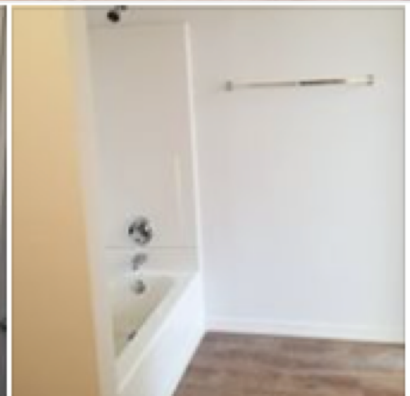
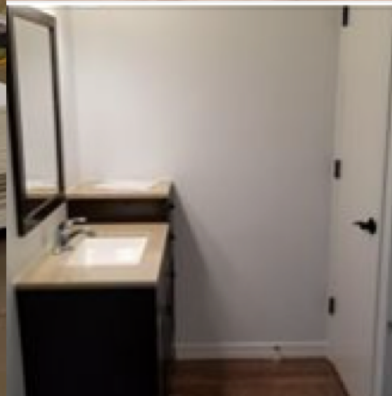
They built a *greenhouse*...



**Another Way also built a *health studio* for
clients...**



**And Another Way completely
remodeled the clients' shelter...**



In sum, victimization leads to poor health.

Particularly among hard-to-access populations, like American Indian survivors.

And so it is a natural partnership for a criminologist/victimologist to join SIRC.

Thank You!

