For Generations to Come: Research with Native American Youth

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Tribal Engagement

Important components include:

• Respecting tribal sovereignty & jurisdictional boundaries
• Understanding tribal history & tribal politics
• Identifying key collaborators
• Establishing a communications network
• Building & maintaining trust
• Involving the community in planning & decision making
• Evaluating throughout the research process
• Presenting results to tribal leadership & community
Historical and Contemporary Factors Influencing the Lives of Reservation-based Native American Youth: Non-Lethal Suicidal Behavior

- Reservation within county listed among 100 poorest and 10 least healthy in the US
- In 2010, after 6 suicides and 20 attempts in 5 months, tribal leadership declared state of emergency
- In 2011, collected data from youth ages 15-24 years of age (N=288) from two tribes on one reservation in the northern plains


Brockie TN, Dana-Sacco G, Wallen GR, Wilcox HC, Campbell JC. The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to PTSD, Depression, Poly-Drug Use and Suicide Attempt in Reservation-Based Native American Adolescents and Young Adults. American Journal of Community Psychology. Apr 2015; 55(3-4).
METHODS

- Obtained tribal resolution approving research project including specific agreements on data ownership and the review of materials to be disseminated
- Human subjects training & didactic training on research procedures
- Tribal Expert Consultants became co-investigators
- Moccasin Telegraph utilized for recruitment
- Anonymity—protecting individual & community identity
- Local cellular number
Methods

• Consultation with community members
• Ceremony with tribal spiritual leaders/significant community leaders
• Data collection by all Native team
• Started and ended each data collection day with prayer, smudge, and talking circle
• Smudge used for debriefing
• Offered tobacco, sweet grass, or sage to key community leaders
• Giving voice to Native Youth
Consent/Assent

Inclusion Criteria:
• 15-24 years of age
• Tribal member
• Live within 1 hour of the IHS service unit
• Parental/guardian consent if <18 and participant assent

Consent:
• 94 males
• 103 females

Assent/Parental Consent:
• 41 males
• 45 females
Constructs/Variables

Dependent Variables of Interest:
• lifetime suicide ideation
• lifetime suicide attempts

Primary Independent Variable of Interest:
• historical trauma (family history of a negative boarding school experience)
Constructs/Variables

Independent Variables:

- Communal Mastery
- Cultural Identity
- Childhood Trauma
  - emotional, physical, and sexual abuse
  - physical and emotional neglect
- Historical loss associated symptoms
- Perceived discrimination
- Exposure to Interpersonal Violence
  - Witnessing violence
  - Victim of violence
  - Learned of Violence
- Bullied
- DV Exposure (witness to violence directed at mother)
- PTSD Symptoms
- Depression Symptoms
- Poly drug use
  - Methamphetamine use
  - Prescription drug misuse
  - Inhalant use
  - Alcohol Use
  - Marijuana use
Assessing Distress

1. Answering some of the questions on this survey caused me to feel upset

*Overall, the average response for the first of these questions was 2.39 (SD=1.1) compared to Whitlock et al. 4.08 (SD=1.20)*

2. Answering some of the questions on this survey caused me to think more deeply about my life

*Overall, the average response for the first of this question was 3.44 (SD=1.1) compared to Whitlock et al. 3.0 (SD=1.24)*

“We started by praying for strength and good results from this important work. Feeling a part of the collective and putting our prayers together was the best way to prepare us for work in the community, grounding us in the life force beyond us as individuals.”
Reflections From the Field

“I was grateful that each session began and ended with a prayer and talking circle as many shared their stories of suicide and trauma.”
Reflections From the Field

“The benefits of involving the community were especially apparent during data collection; it was as if the research became theirs.”
Reflections From the Field

“Participants said having community members involved in data collection made them feel more comfortable.”
Reflections From the Field

“I can’t say enough about the importance of having the smudge available for debriefing; it was a symbol of positivity—it was calming and brought participants a sense of serenity and peace.”
Reflections From the Field

“Our team responded to participants in ways that were supportive and encouraging. We each had important roles. Having members of the community attending to relationships builds everyone’s strength and capacity to heal.”
“Many shared stories and had good comments about the study; they were so happy to be able to participate in research on a subject that has negatively impacted the community—this was an opportunity they never had before.”
Reflections From the Field

“We remember and acknowledge that this territory has many stories of peacefulness and disruption.”
LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

- Tribal resolution (tribal law) provides formal support & approval of research
- Tribal review & approval for all materials in lieu of Tribal IRB
- Respect for tribal sovereignty demonstrated by formally requesting permission to conduct research & following tribal protocols
- Tribal data ownership requires tribal approval of all research publications
- Acknowledge tribal differences is key to trust building
GINNYHAYATS

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