



The purpose of this research update is to provide an overview of the key findings of a recently published review of the health impacts of Native “themed” mascots in the academic peer-reviewed literature. This review, “[Twenty Years of Research Into the Health Impacts of Native-Themed Mascots](#),” was published in the research journal [American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research](#) in March 2022.

Overall, the review finds that research into Native “themed” mascots, defined to include team names, images and logos, as well as related game-day and fan rituals, found evidence of detrimental impacts on the health of American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs).



METHODS

This review was conducted as a scoping review, which is used to clarify research questions and better define the state of research within a specific field and included a wide variety of research on the harmful impacts of Native “themed” mascots. These impacts can affect AI/AN health directly or through the social determinants of health which contribute to health disparities for AI/ANs.

THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

This review used the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) research framework, as adapted by Spero M. Manson for AI/AN Nations (NIMHD, 2017; Manson, n.d.), which outlines how a variety of social determinants at the individual, family, community, and population levels can impact AI/AN health disparities. The review documents research showing impacts harmful to the health of AI/AN individuals and communities as outlined in the research review (see Watt et al, 2022: 99-100) and detailed in the NIMDH framework mentioned above.

RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

The review analyzed research articles on Native “themed” mascots during a 20-year period from 1999 to 2019. Thousands of articles were screened for possible inclusion, and 26 articles fit within the review criteria and were included. Within the articles, 41 individual tests or studies were conducted. The review included studies involving AI/AN children, AI/AN adults, and a variety of racial/ethnic groups. Overall, the review revealed five main findings:

- 1 Over the past 20 years, research on Native “themed” mascots found that they cause direct health impacts, as well as impacts that contribute to overall AI/AN health disparities and have the potential to harm AI/ANs across their lifetimes. **The research found harmful impacts in three main categories:**
 - For AI/AN children, research on Native “themed” mascots was shown to result in **negative impacts to belief in one’s self and community** (Fryberg et al, 2008);
 - For AI/AN adults, research findings included **hampering AI/AN students’ ability to learn** (Castagno & Lee, 2007), **lowering American Indians belief in their ability to achieve future success** (Fryberg et al, 2008), and that AI/AN mascot opponents were subjected to **physical abuse and verbal aggression, including spitting and profanity**, more frequently than non-AI/AN opponents (Jacobs, 2014); and,

- For a variety of racial/ethnic groups, research reviewed found more **discrimination** in evaluations for hypothetical AI/AN candidates for scholarships and jobs (Gonzalez, 2005), more **stereotypical expectations** for what tasks a hypothetical American Indian would enjoy (Chaney et al., 2011), and, in response to the Native “themed” mascot issue, some expressed a **desire to “punish” American Indians** through the ending of AI/AN programs or through business boycotts (Steinfeldt et al., 2010).

These examples show the ways in which Native “themed” mascots can result in **negative impacts to the health and social determinants of health for AI/AN people.**

- 2 The vast majority of the research focused on multiple racial/ethnic groups found that non-AI/AN individuals, in particular White research participants and sports fans, express continued support for Native “themed” mascots. However, research has shown that **training interventions can help shift attitudes.**
- 3 The research has largely been undertaken in the field of psychology, with results focusing on impacts such as **discrimination, bias, and stereotyping**, and future research must continue to expand to include additional work in other fields and methods on the harmful impacts from these mascots.
- 4 This review found no support to the argument from mascot supporters that Native “themed” mascot opposition comes from a vocal minority of researcher-activists; rather, the review finds that the body of **research in the past 20 years has been authored by a wide array of researchers.**
- 5 The research finds that the harmful impacts from Native “themed” mascots are not limited to names and images and **also include harms caused by game-day and fan rituals.**

CONCLUSIONS

This is the first comprehensive review of the impacts of Native “themed” mascots that focuses on health impacts directly and/or through the social determinants of health. These findings add support to the growing voice that Native “themed” mascots are not just offensive; they cause harm to AI/ANs and Tribal Nations.

Unfortunately, Native “themed” mascots persist at the elementary and secondary, collegiate, and professional levels despite long-standing efforts to retire these harmful mascots by opponents. According to the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) National School Mascot Tracking Database, a total of 1,923 schools and 981 school districts still utilize Native “themed” mascot names, imagery, logos and rituals as of March 16, 2022 (NCAI, 2022). **This review of 20 years of research on Native “themed” mascots shows that the evidence is clear: these mascots harm AI/ANs, contribute to health disparities of AI/ANs and Tribal Nations, and their discontinuation is still urgently needed.**

VIEW THE FULL REPORT:



FOR MORE INFORMATION, EMAIL RESEARCH@NCAI.ORG.

TO REQUEST NCAI'S HELP AT THE K-12 OR STATE LEVELS WITH
“NATIVE” THEMED MASCOT REMOVAL, EMAIL MASCOTS@NCAI.ORG.

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