

PLATFORM RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS: CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS

1.

THE GATHERING OF NATIVE AMERICANS INTERVENTION: CULTIVATING HOPE AND MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS FOR URBAN AMERICAN INDIAN ADOLESCENTS IN CALIFORNIA



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Purpose: Native American adolescents in the United States suffer from significant health disparities in depression, substance use and suicide. Research regarding culturally competent, community based, youth positive interventions that promote youth connection is needed to inform a response. The Gathering of Native Americans (GONA) is a strengths-based intervention intended to promote adolescent wellbeing and resiliency. Published research regarding its effects is extremely limited. Our evaluation of the GONA intervention in two California sites in 2012-2014 employs mixed-methods in order to answer the primary research question: Among adolescent Native Americans, what is the relationship between participation in GONA and resilience?

Methods: Surveys were collected from 241 11-17 y.o. participants (> 95% response rate) in the 2012-14 Oakland and Fresno GONAs. The surveys for this CBPR project were developed through collaboration with three Native American advisory councils who selected strengths-based (vs. risk-based) outcomes. Surveys were administered to participants pre- and post the 4-day gathering. Hope (modified Herth Hope Index or mHHI; range: 4-48), self-perceived connection to community, and self-perceived connection to family (each 4-point Likert scales) were employed to measure resilience. In addition, open-ended answers to two items were collected from youth post-intervention ("In what ways has GONA changed your point of view?" and "What has changed in your life or behaviors because of GONA?") We investigated the change in hope, family connection, and community connection within each of three cohorts using paired t-tests. Qualitative data for the open-ended questions were coded by three coders and analyzed thematically.

Results: The mHHI increased significantly for all three cohorts (by 1.1, 1.4, and 2.5 in 2012, 2013, and 2015, respectively; $p < .05$ for all). Likewise, family connection increased in all three cohorts (by 0.2 in all years; $p < 0.05$ in 2012 and 2013, $p = 0.059$ in 2014). Community connection increased very modestly each year (by 0.08, 0.039, and 0.015 in 2012, 2013 and 2014, respectively; $p < 0.05$ in 2012 and 2013 and $p = 0.057$ for 2014). Predominant themes arising from the qualitative data analysis included: increased sense of interdependence; increased interest in connecting with community ("I've become better aware of myself and how I fit into the community");

finding individual purpose ("It's a beautiful way to help us realize our priorities and ideals"); and increase in happiness "It has helped me open up and make new friends, and it's made me feel happier and more at peace."

Conclusions: Our findings suggest that the GONA intervention in Oakland and Fresno may be correlated with an increase in adolescent resilience as demonstrated by the intervention's effects on hope, family connection, and connection to community (sub-domains of resilience). Larger studies with long-term follow-up are needed to assess whether GONA may serve as an effective intervention for addressing disparities in health and wellness through the promotion of connection and resilience in this highly vulnerable population of youth.

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2.

IDENTIFYING SUPPORT SYSTEMS OF YOUNG WOMEN IN FOSTER CARE TO REDUCE RISKY BEHAVIOR: A MIXED METHODS SOCIAL NETWORK STUDY



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Purpose: Adolescents in the foster care system are more likely than their peers to use alcohol and other drugs and engage in high risk sexual behavior, such as unprotected intercourse. However, studies among foster youth suggest that positive peer influences, trusting relationships with adults, positive expectations about their future, and increased self-efficacy are protective factors that reduce their risk for poor health. The purpose of this study was to understand the context and qualities of foster youths' social networks to inform interventions aimed at bolstering social support to mitigate risk among this vulnerable population.

Methods: We conducted mixed methods social network interviews ($n=22$) with adolescent and young adult women ages 16-24 recruited from youth-serving agencies in the Allegheny County, Pennsylvania foster care system. Participants completed a computer-based survey via EgoNet software, identifying 25 alters (e.g. people) in their social networks and the connections between each alter. They further indicated whether they used drugs or alcohol with each alter, how each person made them feel, and the direction of support provided by or for each alter. Using a spring-embedded algorithm, network maps were generated, yielding information including network density (mean=0.32), the degree of centralization (mean=64%) and number of inter-alter connections (mean=95). We then conducted face-to-face, semi-structured qualitative interviews with the network maps as a