Native American Substance Abuse

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**Abstract**

Substance abuse disproportionately impacts Native Americans’ communities throughout the United States. Native Americans have a unique cultural history that has caused much trauma in the lives of many people within this cultural group. Past trauma still affects the current generation within the Native American cultural group. Counselors must understand why past trauma affects today's generation. When people struggle to overcome traumatic events, they often desire of a “mental escape” and turn toward alcohol or drug substances that they believe will relieve the pain temporarily. Counselors have an essential job of integrating Spiritual belief and using multicultural counseling methods to prevent such substance abuse within the Native American cultural group. Education and multicultural approaches can be beneficial when trying to assist with clients in breaking or preventing the addiction to drugs and alcohol. By analyzing the cultural history of Native Americans on what causes the trauma to lead to substance abuse, human service professionals can apply preventive methods to help clients and future generations.

Keywords: American Indian, evidence-based method, implementation, substance use, integrating, and multicultural counseling

Native American Substance Abuse

Native Americans endure significant struggles with substance abuse compared to other cultural groups. There is limited information regarding substance abuse, which are indicators of mental health disorders, and treatment needs for the Native American population. It is crucial to knowledge the cultural awareness of the Native American people to better support a community that still suffers from their cultural history. Many stereotypes continue with alcohol abuse or alcohol use disorders. Stereotypes concerning the problem of alcohol abuse, the nature of self-discipline in recovery, and awareness of the evolution of an alcohol use disorder continue to increase within the Native American cultural group (Lowe, Liang, Henson, & Riggs, 2016). Native Americans are one of the largest groups that suffer extreme stereotypes concerning their difficulties with alcohol use and awareness of alcohol abuse. For the Native American cultural group to have success with counseling, the counselor must apply multicultural counseling skills to help their Native American clients to overcome their substantial problems with alcohol. Along with counseling approaches to help support the Native American people, the religious and spiritual application can be used to heal a Native client as a whole better. By exampling Native American Culture, counseling, and spiritual application, counselors can use their skills to help and prevent future pain within many communities.

**Cultural Awareness**

Native Americans have a robust tribal culture. Compared to the eighteenth century, the American Indians population decreased by about 10% (Sue, 2019). The decrease in population numbers resulted in many Native people to remain living on reservations due to fear of western society culture views separating people from their tribal culture views. Many Native Americans identify strongly to their tribal cultural root; therefore, counselors need to assess the role in forming a client-professional relationship that incorporates the client's culture. Otherwise, the Native American client may experience a stiff resistance in developing a professional connection because they will be resident in discussing issues outside the setting of their tribe. During a counseling setting, the consideration of Native American's extended families should occur because the family can determine whether or not other persons' role has presented a dilemma within the Native American client (Sue, 2019). By including the extended family, the client can discuss issues that are bothering them about their position within the family. Native American parents have a higher likelihood to be perceived as indulgent compared to Euro-American cultures. A common practice within the Native American culture is that children often stay with other family members. Counselors should recognize the traditions and customs as behavior versus interpreting parents as having negligent parental acts. The Native American cultural group has higher rates of suffering from substance abuse. Counselors must complete a thorough screening to uncover issues that can be directly altered with the counseling process.

The applicability of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can examine the Native American trauma causes to different cultural circumstances with common responses to the extent of suffering. The guidelines provided by the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual allows professionals to example the degree of the trauma. An investigation was done among Native American communities to identify domestic abuse victims, adolescents' risk factors, and contributors try to approach any potential PTSD symptoms so researchers can become a salient component of local responses to traumatic events (Good & Hinton, 2018). Past trauma and withdrawal have caused PTSD to cumulate emotional and psychological hurt over a lifetime, and that pain has transferred across generations affecting Native American culture. Many Native Americans, (36%) lost their traditional language, which has caused the feelings of losing one's culture (Good & Hinton, 2018). Native American people have suffered from the mistakes of the past from White people. Many Native Americans still hold a distrust of the intentions of the dominant Caucasian people because of the historical suffering and loss they experienced (Sue, 2019). Generations of Native American people have suffered from stress, grief, cultural displacement, discrimination, and loss. By exploring significant aspects of local experience of trauma linked disorders, counselors can reshape the understanding of PTSD and other trauma-related disorders. Throughout the world, trauma and stress have caused much suffering that leads to PTSD. By educating the importance of history and ethnography to counseling sessions, PTSD healing techniques can reshape social settings, cultural traditions, and psychological methods.

In today's society, there are many causes of trauma for the Native American people. One article, Taking Back the Fire: Schooling experiences of Central California Indian people across generations, discuss the differences with the Native American educational policies and programs (Williams & Tracz, 2016). A study conducted was used to collect data from several generations of Central California Native Americans to document their schooling experiences through interviews. The interviews presented insight on how the perceived role of education was for the Central Valley Native American tribes. The analysis of the collected information indicated; the initial immersion in traditional language, cultural knowledge seems to have improved resilience with ancestors, and Native American boarding school occurrences for interviewees ranged depending on the traditional context. The potential benefits of culturally understanding schooling were designed to improve present and future generations of the Central California Native youth. Many can learn through the mainstream culture of the fragments that remain from the Native American people. The historical mistreatment the Native American people suffered from the dominant society has remained susceptible, but by distributing their educational beliefs in the interest of improving the well-being of future generations for the Native American people. The Central California Native American people desire to collaborate with other cultures to help enhance the lives of all children. Many interviewees were not pleased with the schooling experience from government boarding, public, and missionary school from the past; however, numerous people agreed that schooling is essential in improving lives. The barriers that the interviewees expressed was that while discrimination and racism have lessened, the potential of teachers or curriculum is still feared.

**Substance abuse**

Native American communities have experienced more significant rates of alcohol, drug misuse, and alcohol-related mortalities. However, the Native American community has less access to proper treatments for overcoming substance abuse compared to other persons within the U.S population (Moore, Aarons, Davis, & Novins, 2015). A study was conducted to identify evidence-based treatments (EBTs) methods for the issue regarding substance abuse, there were no systematic assessments on the understanding and attitudes toward evidence-based treatments with clinical administrators and clinicians working in helping programs for the Native American people. The limitations of the article are the understanding of how providers in programs are assisting Native American communities with problematic substance use of EBTs (Moore, Aarons, Davis, & Novins, 2015). The growth of EBT in substance abuse programs for treatment has increased to focus on pharmacologic EBTs. However, the psychosocial treatments were proven to create more positive attitudes related to the treatment option for pharmacologic — the traditional methods of incorporating Native American programs observed only rare usages of EBTs. There are several modified interventions shown effective within the Native American population. There are structural barriers such as low funding and work labor that lacked proper training to deliver the EBTs that causes limitation on the ability of the programs to implement, identify, and maintain the use of treatment (Moore, Aarons, Davis, & Novins, 2015). The barriers cause difficulties in guidance on how to evaluate cultural appropriateness with EBT of a community and problems with the adaption process of interventions concerning the compromise of one's therapeutic benefits.

The Native American cultural group has experienced significant inequalities to access to proper mental health care in regards to substance misuse (Rieckmann, Moore, Croy, Novins, & Aarons, 2016). The long-term concerns of the disparity of health care regarded the Native American people in rural areas because of the lack of staff, organization training, and beliefs toward evidence-based treatment for substance dependency. The researcher explored the correspondence between a Native American client's openness toward using evidence-based treatments (EBTs) to implementing programs located in rural areas. The results revealed that there was significantly less probability of a Native American Client to have proper staff for assistance such as traditional healing experts, nurses, or conventional providers to consult strategic planning cultural activities with the services. There was more considerable openness toward EBTs related to a more extensive clinical staff, having addiction providers, being led by supervisors who observed the rift in access to EBTs, and working with essential providers to increase access to assistance (Rieckmann, Moore, Croy, Novins, & Aarons, 2016). Many programs of early intervention assistance reported less openness for clientele. Researchers believed their study provided personal and program level information to use to understand better changed in quality and access for Native Americans over some time.

Research conducted surveillance health movements of substantial differences in the impact of substance abuse within the Native American people. The evidence-based treated found significant improvement treatment options regarding substance use issues of Native Americans, either by limiting intake or breaking the addiction altogether (Novins, Croy, Moore, & Rieckmann, 2016). By analyzing the awareness of EBTs substance misuse programs designed for treatment, Native American communities can receive assistance to help improve their way of life. The methods used had data showing the first national examination of tribal substance misuse treatment plans. There were one hundred ninety-two programs completed surveys from clinicians and clinical administrators. Many participants had interrogated their awareness of attitudes, medications, and psychosocial to evidence-based treatments. The most common executed psychosocial EBTs were medications with 43.3%, Relapse Prevention Therapy with 66.8%, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy 82.2%, and Motivational interviewing 68.6% (Novins, Croy, Moore, & Rieckmann, 2016). The largest EBT used a combination of different programs. However, one of the two EBTs from Motivational Interviewing and Relapse Prevention Therapy are concerned to be culturally appropriate. EBT information and use are essential in substance misuse treatment plans helping Native American communities that have previously estimated. Nevertheless, various users of the EBTs proceed to have concerns regarding the cultural appropriateness, which restricts one's dissemination more.

There are several adverse effects caused by substance abuse. One article discusses the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) among youth to identify the several risky behaviors and the association with mental illness. The researchers conducted a study to examine the relationship between risky behaviors, types of exposures to adverse childhood experiences, and results of reservation Native Americans with mental health issues (Brockie, Dana-Sacco, Wallen, Wilcox, & Campbell, 2015). In 2011, the collected data from web-based questionnaires that were conducted anonymously from Native American people ages 15-24 years analyzed the correlation between six ACEs. The six ACEs examined were: neglect both emotionally and physically, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, witness to violence, and for those some teenagers, ages 18-19 years, the combined of historical loss connected symptoms to the four risk behavior/mental health outcomes: post‐traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) indicators, poly‐drug use, depression signs, and attempted suicide. The researchers found that 78% of the tested sample had one or more ACE incidences reported, with 40% having two or more reported occurrences (Brockie, Dana-Sacco, Wallen, Wilcox, & Campbell, 2015). The combined result of the ACEs was significant for the four results with each extra ACE boosting the probabilities of suicide attempts (37 %), multiple drug use (51 %), PTSD traits (55 %), and symptoms of depression (57 %) (Brockie, Dana-Sacco, Wallen, Wilcox, & Campbell, 2015). To approach the culturally relevant results with children and adolescent intervention methods for interventions for reservation‐based groups, it is essential that counselors create, examine, and review longitudinally evaluate.

**Counseling Approach**

Multicultural counseling is necessary because it allows the counselor to conduct two assessments; one assesses the extent manner of acculturations on the client's cultural identity, and the other allows the counselor to gain the understanding on the influences of substance abuse to the Native Americans culture. To improve the process of forming a positive counselor-client relationship, the counselor must learn which tribe the client associates with and possible affiliation of the client's tribe such as state, federal, or community acceptance. Counselors gain insight into a client's perspective when they learn about the client's experiences and placement within their society. When counselors assist Native American clients with prevention or treatment of substance abuse, it is essential to improve the historical trauma responses and to encourage a reattachment to the client's traditional Native traditions. Applying historical trauma responses into the client's sessions can serve as a protective agent to limit future substance abuse (Hays & Erford, 2018). The center focus on helping clients heal from historical trauma and improving the next generations is one method of intervention. By emphasizing traditional culture, counselors can help decrease substance abuse within the cultural group.

There is an overwhelming number of Native Americans that suffer from substance abuse. With a wide range of intervention methods to prevent future drug problems or alcohol dependency with the youth, counselors can potentially save many lives by studying the effects of developmental causes. With the overview of the article, readers learn methods to prevent substance use among Native American adolescents by providing program development that focuses on cultural group adolescents, background epidemiological, and recommendations of prevention strategies into counseling practice (Lowe, Liang, Henson, & Riggs, 2016). Substance abuse, such as misuse of alcohol, is one of the most critical health concerns facing Native American communities. The United States Department of Health and the human services field has identified the harmful consequences that affect societal and individual levels of Native American cities are caused by historical trauma, either directly or indirectly. The past trauma surrounding alcohol consumption of Native American people have devastated a cultural society group by directly attributing alcohol use. While alcohol has damaged many Native communities, there is a sizable population of Native Americans that refuse to drink. Unfortunately, alcohol use is widespread with the Native American youth and continues to progress into other primary drug use choices. The United States estimates that there is 2.5 million single race within the Native American population and 4.1 million people with a combination of one race with the Native American ethnic group (Lowe, Liang, Henson, & Riggs, 2016). Epidemiological analysis indicates a significant level of normative underage substance use with a small minority of teenagers considered as heavy substance users. The youth of Native American communities tend to start alcohol and drug use at a very young age and have higher rates of polysubstance use. Substance initiation in Native American populations typically happens between 10 and 13 years of age, and some people reported starting using different substances as early as five or six years of age (Lowe, Liang, Henson, & Riggs, 2016).

The adverse effects that the Native American people suffered held the long-lasting impact on Native culture lifestyle. There are five periods that formed much of the trauma for the Native American: 1600-1840s the removal period ("The only good Indian is a dead Indian"), 1860-1920 the reservation period ("Kill the Indian, but save the man"), 1930-1950s the reorganization period that allowed schools on the reservations, 1950-1960 the termination period that created relocation programs designed to produce sociocultural integration to stop dependency of the federal government (results were massive sale of parcels of native property and increased poverty), and 1975-present the self-determination period that increased tribal sovereignty then later Native activism known as "Red Power" (Hays & Erford, 2018). Counselors need to do two early assessments when working with Native American clients. The first assessment is to examine the extent of acculturation within the client's cultural identity, and the second assessment is to understand the influences of oppression within one's current experiences. Counselors can work with their clients to discuss the implications of spirituality, values about contrasts and balance, tradition, and communication style.

**Religious and Spiritual Application**

Spiritual integration is crucial because it allows counselors to care and assist clients by serving the whole person, such as physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of a person. Spiritual engagement tends to enhance recovery from past traumas. By integrating spiritual beliefs into counseling, clients shift their focus away from the stressors in their life to living in the present moment. Results showed specific improvement in clients health when spiritual practices were integrated (Puchalski, 2004). To the degree that any trauma has caused can worsen with stress, to that amount evoked by the relaxation acknowledgment gained from spiritual integration can create a favorable effective treatment.

Integrating religion into professional practice takes recognition of training literature that can indicate spirituality problems within a client during a counselor setting. By identifying potential barriers to incorporate spirituality into strategies for overcoming challenges for clients, counselors can alter integration methods to serve their clients better (Adams, Puig, Baggs, & Wolf, 2015). Often the obstacles of not being able to integrate faith during a counseling setting successfully are due to lack of information, personal interest, relevance, and strategies on educating the awareness of how God can assist His people in overcoming the greatest of challenges. Delphi mythology focuses on increasing use in counseling and psychotherapy. Researchers can increase the counseling and psychotherapy by an open-ended questionnaire that was designed to gain the client's opinions on a particular inquiry topic. The researchers used the results of the questionnaires to compiled and assessed by a group of expert researchers to explore and develop the different views points to create follow-up survey, and all data were collected to be analyzed and provide feedback. By using the Delphi method, the counselor was able to develop several advantages to apply with their clients such as, gaining a deeper understanding of different struggling issues to reflect upon, creating a geographical diversity within clientele, and eliminating common problems that are associated with lack of anonymity and conformity (Adams, Puig, Baggs, & Wolf, 2015). Counselors can increase awareness of the client's sense of self and curriculum recommendations for the client to implement within their lives to build a better future.

**Conclusion**

Native American people have struggled with their historical culture’s past that lead to current day struggles with substance abuse. By knowledge the need for cultural awareness of the Native American people, a positive movement can occur to indicate better treatments, as well as preventives, to serve better a cultural group that still suffer from their cultural history. To have more success in counseling with Native American clients, counselors should apply multicultural counseling skills, and integrate the spiritual application to better support a client as a whole, mental, emotional, socially, physically, and spiritual. By applying the needed skills from counselors, they can create a future of less pain for many Native American communities.

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