“Documenting Resilience Stories: Promising Research with Urban American Indian Elders”

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Overview

- Define resilience within American Indian health promotion and public health interventions
- Identify protective measures of family, culture and storytelling
- Describe the benefits of digital storytelling in documenting life narratives
What does American Indian resilience mean to you?
Resilience Defined

- “An ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.” (Merriam-Webster 2013)

- “…dynamic process that enables the individual to respond or adapt under adverse situations.” (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans 2012, p. 2)

- “Resilience is the capacity to adapt successfully in the face of threats or disaster.” (This Emotional Life PBS)

→ Resilience is used in biological, physical and social sciences and in organizational theory and education.

Why are there Health Disparities among American Indians?

- Researchers have provided biological, psychological, and sociocultural explanations for the disparities faced by American Indians.

- Recent research has explored the impact of historical trauma, loss, grief, colonization, genocide, and forced assimilation on American Indian well-being.

- Researchers have suggested that the multiple traumas experienced by American Indians are passed down generationally because these past experiences have not yet been grieved.

Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Brave Heart, 1999, 2003; Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, & Altschul, 2011; Duran, 2006; Duran & Duran, 1995; Gone, 2007; Whitbeck, Walls, Johnson, Morrisseau, & McDougall, 2009
Resilience Research: Focusing on Individual-Community Strengths

- **Resilience:** The concept of resilience in public health research includes individual internal characteristics and external support from family and community.

- **Cultural Resilience:** For American Indians and other ethnic groups, the role of culture is a strength.

- **Culture:** Shared rules, beliefs, attitudes and practices, which shape our interpretation of life events
**Protective Factors in Resilience: Self, Family, Culture**

- **Intergenerational memories:** The family holds values, customs, traditions and memories that guide a person’s actions throughout their lives.

- Family/community transmit cultural identity to their children and future generations.

- **Culture** is a key factor in developing personal resilience. 
  - Family, mentors, and kin/clan network guide a person to develop self-esteem, self-reliance, confidence and efficacy by modeling cultural appropriate behaviors via storytelling and ceremonies.
“Do You Know?” Scale

- Scale asks children 20 questions
  - Do you know where your grandparents grew up?
  - Do you know where your mom and dad went to high school?
  - Do you know where your parents met?
  - Do you know an illness or something really terrible that happened in your family?

- The more children knew about their family’s history (ups & downs) the more they were resilient: the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem and more successfully they believed their families functioned.

- **Strong intergenerational self:** Children know they belong to something bigger than themselves.

- **Sense-making:** The building of a narrative that explains what the group is about

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/fashion/the-family-stories-that-bind-us-this-life.html?_r=1&
Narratives of Resilience

- **Resilience**: “First is confronting the historical trauma. Second is understanding the trauma. Third is releasing the pain of historical trauma. Fourth is transcending the trauma.” (Brave Heart, M. Y. H., Chase, J., Elkins, J., & Altschul, D. B. 2011)

- Research indicates that historical trauma becomes even more painful when it seems to be forgotten, trivialized, or denied: “conspiracy of silence.”

- Sharing stories is a traditional native practice that provides a vehicle for learning and healing.

- Narratives grounded within a strengths-based perspective emphasize how family members are successful in overcoming difficulties and remaining strong in the face of traumatic circumstances or change.

“If you don’t know your past, you don’t know your future.”
Public Health Research on Resilience in American Indian Communities

- Resilience and American Indian adolescents
  - Measures variables of **school success** (LaFromboise et al., ’06; Whitesell et al., ’09)
  - Positive relationship among **enculturation and resilience** in addition to familial, communal and school influences among reservation adolescents (LaFromboise et al., 2006 and 2010)
  - **Social Support**, rather than enculturation, influences resilience in urban American Indian adolescents (Stiffman et al.2007; Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans)

**Results:** A prominent sense of culture in family and community could serve as positive force for reservation-dwelling American Indians.

**What's in the heart--Children of the 7th Generation"**
Resilience and Elders

Wisdom of the Elders: Healing With The Heroes Journey Model

- To recover the loss of cultural traditions and family structure across generations, Wisdom of the Elders, Inc. (WISDOM) has produced the Discovering Our Story Project, and is sharing video-recorded stories of resilient Native Americans.

- Resilience is embedded in the culture.

- Cultural Resilience is a construct that originated from the traditional life ways of Native American people and provides the theoretical basis for the strength and resilience found in Native cultures.

Resilience Model

- Draft -

Overcoming stressors

Narratives

Future generations

Culture

Family

Individual
Resilience research among American Indians is an emerging field.

Current/past research has focused on a deficit model.

There are few studies on resilience, American Indian elders, and urban AI populations.
Documenting and Promoting Resilience in Urban American Indians

- Co-PIs: Agnes Attakai and Kerstin M. Reinschmidt
- CAIR pilot research uses community-based participatory research (CBPR) principles to document stories of resilience among urban American Indian elders at the Tucson Indian Center (TIC).
- Defining resilience from the perspective of urban American Indian elders
- Developing a resilience curriculum for youth and families based on the elder digital stories
Methodology – CBPR

- Developed a partnership between UA MEZCOPH and TIC
- Formed community advisory board (CAB): MEZCOPH, TIC, AI elders
- Conducted 1 focus group with 15 AI elders
- Held CAB member training: Human Subject Protection, qualitative analysis
- Conducted 13 elder interviews
- Transcribe 1 focus group and 13 elder interviews; code for themes
- Create digital stories based on elder interviews
- Review digital stories with elders
- Conduct focus group on developed digital stories
- Develop 12 bi-monthly workshops from qualitative interview themes
- Pilot test and evaluate workshops at TIC
Community Advisory Board

- Our CAB holds monthly meetings at the Tucson Indian Center
- Topics covered during meetings include
  - Project updates
  - Demonstration and explanation of digital stories
  - Discussion about CBPR
  - Reciprocal relationship building
    - UA staff will assist CAB members with projects (i.e. family history books, family digital stories)
Focus Group Interview

- Held one 2-hr focus group with 13 females and 2 males, age 55+, who self-identified as American Indian
- Participants were given a $25 gift card
- Focus group was voice recorded and transcribed
- Two coding workshops were held and attended by UA staff, 1 elder, and 1 TIC staff member
- Our team is in the process of coding the transcription to finalize themes that will contribute to digital stories and workshops
11 females and 2 males, age 55+, were interviewed. Interviews lasted 1-3 hours. Participants were given a $25 gift card. Interviews were video recorded and/or voice recorded. UA staff are editing the stories. UA staff will work with participants to create a digital story.
Sample Questions

- What do you think of when you hear the words “historical trauma”?
- How have your ancestors’ experiences with historical trauma or historical cultural shock impacted your community (or communities you have lived in)?
- What are some examples of community resiliency that have helped your urban community face the challenges related to historical trauma or [term suggested by elder]?
- How important are spiritual resources in coping with life’s challenges?
Some Themes Heard in Interviews

- Sense of loss and removal from family
  - Adopted, sent to boarding schools/Mormon foster programs

- Prayer and God are central to getting through hard times (i.e. leaning on a higher power)

- Importance of role models

- Self-advocacy of individuals
  - It is up to individuals to make a better life for themselves.
Some Themes Heard in Interviews

- Prayer and God are central to getting through hard times (i.e. leaning on a higher power).
- Family is a very important strength. There are differences, but they pull through challenges together.
- Participation in social networks
  - Volunteer, help with family, help at schools, in community
- The Tucson Indian Center is a key resource in many elders lives (i.e. programs for families and youth, sobriety)
DIGITAL STORY

Short Clip
References

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