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Resilience at St. Labre: Childhood Adversity, Spiritual Well-Being, Employment, and Resilience in a Multi-Ethnic Rural Population

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Introduction

Native Americans are the original people from the vast region of North America. The trauma of Western colonization wounded generations (Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999) and poverty has resulted in some of the harshest living conditions facing any ethnic group in the United States (Belcourt-Dittloff, 2006). Yet many have overcome poverty, oppression, and the confinement to reservations and maintain full-time employment.

The present study examined and compared a rural sample of Native Americans and Caucasians. Trauma experienced during childhood, along with spiritual well-being, employment, and resilience are described and compared.

It was hypothesized that protective factors promoted resilience within these individuals, which encouraged a successful future.



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Methods

Participants

Participants included 161 adult male and female employees of St. Labre Indian School and its affiliates in Southeastern Montana

- 88 (54.7%) were Native American
- 73 (45.3%) were Caucasian
- 72.7% were male
- 27.3% were female

Instruments

• An **Employment Survey** which included items about age, gender, and employment.

• An **Adverse Childhood Experience Rating Scale (ACE)** is a 10-item self report measure of perceived childhood maltreatment and family dysfunction (e.g., physical and sexual abuse, neglect; Felitti & Anda, 1998).

• The **Spiritual Well-Being Scale – Short Version (SWB-6)** measures religious and existential well-being on six items using a 6-point Likert continuum; higher scores indicate higher well-being (Ellison, 1982; Bufford, 20xx)

• The **Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)** is a 25-item scale that measures the ability to cope with stress and adversity (Connor & Davidson, 2003)

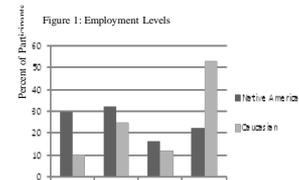
• Data were gathered in April of 2011 at St. Labre Indian School in Ashland, MT.



Results

Employment Survey

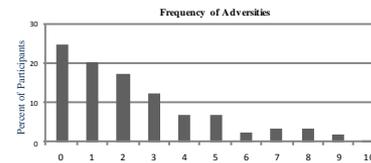
- A crosstabulation of employment data is reported in Figure 1.
- A Chi-Square was significant ($t_{(1,3)} = 17.39; p \leq .001$); Caucasians tend to hold the higher positions at St Labre.



Note: L1-no degree or skills required; L2- requires minimum skills but no degree; L3- larger skill set but no degree; L4-degree required.

Adverse Childhood Experience Rating Scale (ACE)

• A mean of 2.95 adverse experiences was endorsed by the Native American group (SD = 2.616) and a mean of 1.78 adverse experiences was endorsed by the Caucasian group (SD = 1.78).



• 34.5% of Native American population experienced 4 or more adversities while 15.1% of the Caucasian population experienced 4 or more.

• This difference is significant ($F_{(1,155)} = 9.772; p = .002$). Native American participants experienced various adversities at about double the levels of their Caucasian counterparts.

Spiritual Well-Being – Short Version (SWB-6)

- St. Labre employees were found to have relatively high levels of Spiritual Well-Being ($M = 5.293, SD = .858$).
- Existential Well-Being was positively correlated with resilience ($r = .234; p = .003$)
- Spiritual Well-Being was positively correlated with employment satisfaction ($r = .254; p = .002$).
- Days absent from work ($r = -.176; p = .029$) was negatively correlated with employee satisfaction

Results, cont.

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)

- CD-RISC scores were as follows: Native Americans ($M = 78.33, SD = 15.429$); Caucasians ($M = 77.53, SD = 10.342$).
- Analysis of variance found no difference between racial groups ($F_{(1,159)} = .141; p = .708$).
- Despite undergoing a variety of adverse experiences, St. Labre employees were found to have normal levels of resilience ($M = 78.0, SD = 13.3$).
- A stepwise regression showed that time on the job, existential well-being, and years of unemployment, in that order of significance, all predicted resilience. Results accounted for 16.1% of the variance on the CD-RISC: 1) time on the job ($R = .252; R^2 = .064, F_{(1,149)} = 10.12; p = .002$); 2) EWB ($R = .353; R^2 = .125; \Delta R^2 = .060; F_{(1,148)} = 10.52; p < .001$); years unemployed ($R = .422; R^2 = .178; \Delta R^2 = .053; F_{(1,147)} = 10.62; p < .001$). ACE did not contribute additional significant variance.

Discussion

- Native American participants were exposed to significantly more childhood adversities than Caucasian participants.
- Native Americans also reported lower levels of education and lower employment status compared to their Caucasian counterparts.
- However, Native American employees were similar to normal samples in terms of their resilience and spiritual well-being. This is an interesting outcome, as it reveals the Native Americans within this sample apparently are more resilient than we might expect.
- Because the data are correlational, it is not possible to make causal conclusions. However, job stability is the most powerful predictor of resilience. Because St. Labre provides a stable work environment, supplementation of achieving college advancement, encouragement of spiritual participation, and honors cultural beliefs, it is tentatively concluded that St. Labre itself is one protective factor providing the emergence of resilience.

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