



Examining Historical Trauma in Current Native American College Students

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Introduction

Results and Conclusions



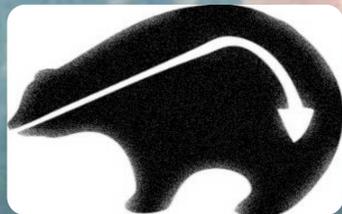
The common experience of historical loss or historical trauma by the American Indian/Alaska Native populations (AIAN) is defined as the collective effects of trauma across the lifespan and generations due to unresolved grief (Brave Heart, 1998; Cain, 1999). Historical trauma comes from the loss of Native American lives, culture, and land as a result of European invasion. The effects of the unresolved grief perpetuate a cycle continuing in every generation and the mental, emotional and physical effects are detrimental. Within the literature, evidence suggest unresolved grief causes historical trauma in American Indian/Alaskan Native populations and symptomatology include low self-esteem, victim identity, depression, internalization of ancestral suffering and others (Brave Heart 1998). Limitations to existing work include the lack of studies on historical trauma within present AIAN populations. Furthermore research on the effects of historical trauma in AIAN is needed. This study is the first step in examining historical trauma in current AIAN populations and predictors. This study models Cain's (1999) work on historical loss thoughts and historical loss feelings.

Questionnaires Used

- Historical Loss Scale (Whitbeck, 2004)
- Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1996)
- Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck, 1993)
- Cope Scale (Carver, 1997)
- SOFI Scale of Compassion (Kraus & Sears, 2009)
- Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003)

Research Goals

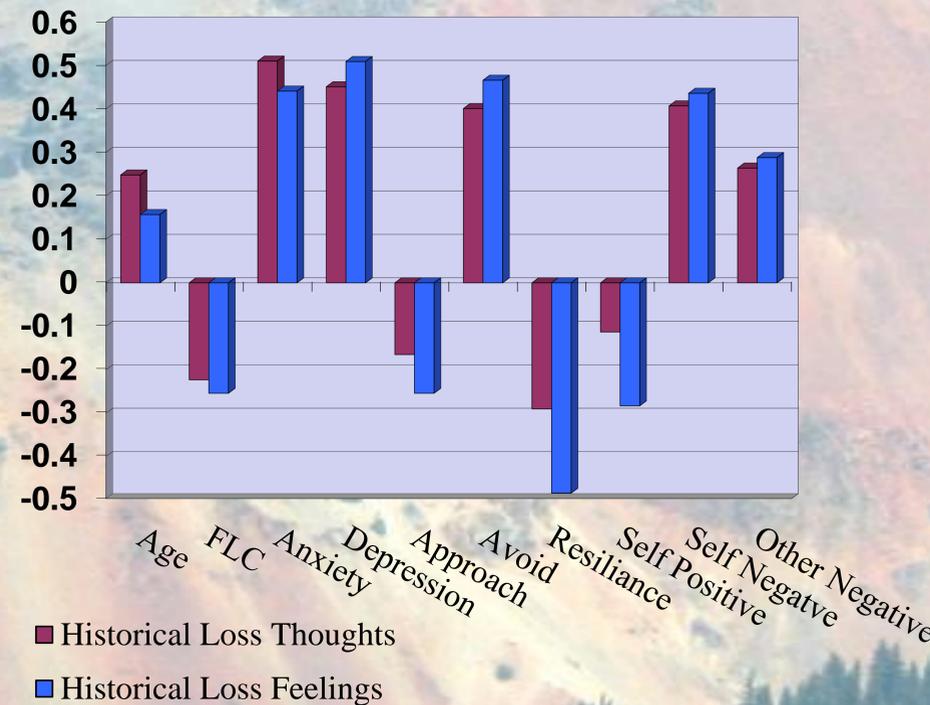
- Examine historical trauma within current Native American college populations.
- Analyze the impact that historical trauma has and the implications for students experiencing historical trauma.



Sample Questions: Circle how often you think of these losses.

LOSSES	Several Times a Day	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
The loss of land	1	2	3	4	5	6
The loss of language	1	2	3	4	5	6
Losing traditional ways	1	2	3	4	5	6

Figure 1: Correlations with Historical Loss and Historical feelings



Methods

70 self-identified American Indian/Alaskan Native undergraduate students attending Fort Lewis College took surveys in a classroom setting. Efforts were made for diversity within Native Americans tribes by recruiting students from Native American Indian Studies 100-level courses and from the Native American Center on campus.

There were 36 female and 34 male participants. Ages ranged from 17 to 38 with a mean age of 22.16 (SD=4.52).

Findings support the literature that AIAN populations at Fort Lewis College do, in fact, experience historical trauma. Our average on the Historic Loss Thoughts scale was 45.21 (SD=14.67) and the adult average was 21 years old. Results are similar to Cain's 1999 findings of 43.00 (SD=14.30) with adults averaging 41 years of age. Clearly this generation of Native Americans also experience significant impacts of historical trauma.

We found students who experience historical loss are more likely to suffer with significantly higher levels of depression ($r=.50, p=.00$) and anxiety ($r=.44, p=.00$). Levels of historical loss are also related to an increase in negative feelings toward self ($r=.41, p=.001$) and lower levels of resilience ($r=-.49, p=.00$). Historical loss was not correlated with SES or drug and alcohol use (all $p>.05$).

An Independent t-test revealed no gender difference between men and women experiencing historical loss thoughts $t(60) = .04, p=.97$.

Native American students who have lived and/or currently reside on a reservation were shown to have higher rates of thinking about historical loss $t(60) = 2.795, p= .007$.

Findings support research that historical trauma is still present within AIAN populations and the effects include higher levels of depression and anxiety.

Future studies may include identity issues including the "Invisible Indian" (Fryberg, 2010) and addressing schema related problems in order to create treatments that begin healing processes.

References

- Cain, M. J. (1999). An examination of the psychological and cultural factors related to alcohol use in American Indian people. (Doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University).
- Brave Heart, M., Yellow Horse, & DeBruyn, L. M. (1998). The American Indian holocaust: Healing historical unresolved grief. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, 8(2), 60-82. Retrieved from <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.opac.fortlewis.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psych&AN=2001-03444-004&login.asp&site=ehost-live>
- Whitbeck, L. B., Adams, G. W., Hoyt, D. R., & Chen, X. (2004). Conceptualizing and measuring historical trauma among American Indian people. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(3-4), 119-130. doi:10.1023/B:AJCP.0000027000.77357.31
- References for all scales available upon request.

