

Research Design Proposal

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I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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Abstract

Trauma exposure related to historical trauma, community violence, and structural inequalities is common among Native Alaskan youth and contributes to substantial mental health and academic disparities (Brave Heart et al., 2011). Trauma-informed interventions are increasingly being used in school counseling settings, yet little research has explored trauma-informed interventions perceived cultural relevance or effectiveness among Native Alaskan youth. Building on Gameon and Skewe's (2020) systematic review of trauma interventions in Native communities, this qualitative phenomenological study proposes to explore Native Alaskan students' accounts of their experiences with trauma-informed interventions provided in school counseling settings. The study aims to better understand student experiences with cultural relevance, relational safety, and impacts on emotions and academics after receiving trauma-informed interventions. Methods will include semi-structured interviews and member checking procedures to increase trustworthiness. Focusing on Indigenous student voice, this project will help address gaps in the literature surrounding culturally responsive trauma-informed practice in schools. Results could impact school counselors' use of culturally grounded interventions with students while increasing multicultural competence and ethical, socially just practice that centers Indigenous identity and notions of healing that are informed by community.

Literature Review

Native Alaskan youth have an elevated risk of being exposed to traumatic events such as community violence, historical loss and trauma, family alcohol/substance abuse, and community suicide rates (Gameon & Skewes, 2020; Gone & Trimble, 2012). Historical loss or trauma is described as the wounds of years of emotional and psychological hurt and damage across generations as a result of colonization and forced assimilation into the dominant culture and is believed to be the primary source for many mental health problems among Indigenous people (Brave Heart et al., 2011). Exposure to trauma within Native communities has been correlated to depression, anxiety, and school disengagement (Gameon & Skewes, 2020; Whitbeck et al., 2004). Behavioral problems, absenteeism, and lowered grades are common presentations of these issues within schools (Gameon & Skewes, 2020).

Trauma-informed care (TIC) has become increasingly popular in both education and mental health settings. According to SAMHSA (2014), TIC programs include five basic elements: safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural responsiveness. School-based trauma-informed interventions have been found to reduce trauma symptoms, increase emotional regulation skills, and produce positive academic impacts among ethnically diverse students (Overstreet & Chafoules, 2016). However, according to Gone and Trimble (2012), the majority of studies supporting evidence-based trauma-informed treatments have been implemented on samples that are mostly not of Indigenous descent. When using these treatments with Native Alaskans, cultural validity and relevance may be a concern (Gone and Trimble, 2012).

Gameon and Skewes (2020) suggest that while there are some trauma interventions currently used with Native communities that appear promising, few are evaluated rigorously or

are grounded in Indigenous cultural beliefs. They argue for further inclusion of traditional healing methods, community values, and tribal leadership (Gameon & Skewes, 2020). Gone (2013), adds that trauma interventions designed to be Indigenous-culture centered and grounded in Indigenous worldviews will be more effective than interventions adapted from Western models. A majority of literature assesses quantitative evidence of symptom improvement or attendance after intervention (Overstreet & Chafoules, 2016). Student voice is limited in this area of research, which is significant due to school counselors' need for trust and cultural knowledge when working with Native students (Howell et al., 2019).

Problem Statement. There is a gap in qualitative literature about Native Alaskan youth's perceptions of cultural relevance and effectiveness of trauma-informed interventions offered at their schools. While research on trauma-informed interventions highlights the need for cultural grounding (Gameon & Skewes, 2020; Gone, 2013), little research examines Native Alaskan youth's experience with school counseling that includes trauma-informed interventions.

Purpose of the Study. This qualitative study seeks to understand Native Alaskan student perspectives on culturally relevant trauma-informed intervention practices. Grounding research within student voice creates space for culturally responsive practices that align with Indigenous values and traditions. The significance of this study centers on how school counselors provide trauma-informed care within rural and tribal communities that require culturally relevant services.

Method

Research Questions

1. What are Native Alaskan students' experiences with trauma-informed interventions in school counseling services?
2. How do Native Alaskan students feel these interventions are culturally relevant or culturally mismatched?
3. How effective do Native Alaskan students feel these interventions are in providing emotional support, healing, and motivation for academics?

Importance of Research Questions

These questions allow Indigenous student voices to be centered when discussing trauma-informed practices. Native Alaskans have a historical distrust of Western institutions (Gone & Trimble, 2012), therefore student lived experiences will help illuminate how schools can provide counseling services that are culturally safe, respectful, healing, and motivating.

Research Design

The research will be conducted using a qualitative descriptive field design. Semi-structured interviews will be used with Native Alaskan middle and high school students who have received trauma-informed counseling interventions. A qualitative approach was chosen because it will allow for an understanding of effectiveness, personal meaning, cultural significance, and lived experience. The study will use a phenomenological strategy of inquiry to explore and understand the meaning of students lived experience with trauma-informed interventions, which is consistent with Indigenous ways of research by emphasizing narrative and relational construction of meaning (Pidgeon & Riley, 2021). Trustworthiness will be addressed through member checking, allowing participants to verify interview transcripts and

discuss emergent themes. The study will also include a cultural consultant or tribal liaison to support validity and credibility.

Contributions to the School Counseling Field

Findings will inform school counselors' ability to modify interventions in order to be more congruent with Native values such as tribal identity, storytelling, and honoring Elders, land, and history. The data could have the potential to influence counselor-training coursework, supervision, and school counseling-related policies.

Integration

Galatians 6:2 states “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” One way we can do this is through trauma-informed, culturally responsive counseling. Addressing traumatic stress gives Christians an opportunity to walk alongside Native Alaskan students in a way that helps alleviate intergenerational and current trauma. According to McMinn (2011), Christian counselors should acknowledge God’s redemptive work within culture, and practice cultural humility and spiritual competence because culture matters to God. Acknowledging and understanding Native Alaskan students’ traumatic experiences allows counselors to enter into the pain alongside them. This research study promotes valuing Indigenous student voices and appreciating traditional healing methods.

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