Being Male in Indian Country: The Risk of Trauma, PTSD and Alcoholism

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June 3, 2008
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Definition

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that a person may develop after experiencing or witnessing an extreme, overwhelming traumatic event during which s/he felt intense fear, helplessness, or horror.
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Trauma

A trauma is an intensely stressful event during which a person suffers serious harm or the threat of serious harm or death or witnesses an event during which another person (or persons) is killed, seriously injured, or threatened.
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Trauma Types

- Abuse: mental, physical, sexual, verbal (i.e., sexual and/or violent content)
- Catastrophe: harmful and fatal accidents, natural disasters, terrorism
- Violent attack: animal attack, assault, battery, domestic violence, rape
- War, battle, and combat: death, explosion, gunfire
The literature reveals that traumatic events – the etiological stressor central to the diagnosis of PTSD -- are not random, vary in frequency across population subgroups, and are related to the conditional risk for this disorder.
American Indian Vietnam Veterans Project

- Congressionally mandated replication of the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (Kulka et al, 1989)

- Department of Veterans Affairs-sponsored, cross-sectional study of 621 American Indian Vietnam theater military veterans
American Indian Vietnam Veterans Project: Design

- Two reservation-based, tribal communities: Southwest and Northern Plains
- Representative samples of tribally enrolled, male, Vietnam theater military veterans, residing within or near (50 miles) of reservation boundaries
Across the state, more and more Alaska Natives are killing themselves and damaging their loved ones, deciding that life is no longer worth cherishing. Almost always, alcohol is their final companion.

A generation of despair
Representative samples of tribally enrolled, male, Vietnam theater military veterans, residing within or near (50 miles) of reservation boundaries.

The chart shows the prevalence of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) among different groups:
- **Southwest**
- **Northern Plains**
- **Hispanic**
- **Black**
- **White**

The chart compares the lifetime prevalence (yellow line) and current prevalence (purple line) of PTSD among these groups.
Percent Using Any Services (Biomedical or Traditional)

- Help with ADM Problem
  - Northern Plains: 20%
  - Southwest: 30%

- Help with Physical Problem
  - Northern Plains: 50%
  - Southwest: 50%
AI-SUPERPFP

- 5 year, $7.2 million NIMH-sponsored study
- Large community-based investigation of the epidemiology of major mental illness employing DSM-IIIIR and DSM-IV criteria
- Multi-method approach to estimating service utilization patterns and rates
Enrolled members of a Northern Plains and a Southwest tribe who were 15-54 years old, lived on or within 20 miles of their reservations (N=3,180)

Stratified random sampling of tribal rolls by age (4 categories) and gender (2 categories)

Data collected between 1997 and 1999
Lifetime exposure to at least one traumatic event reached 69.8% among American Indian men.
The National Comorbidity Study estimated the lifetime prevalence of exposure to any trauma for US men at 60.7%.

Australian National Mental Health Survey using methods akin to the NCS, reported remarkably similar lifetime rates: 64.6% for men.
A generation of despair

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In AI-SUPERPFP, 9.6% of men were diagnosed with lifetime DSM-IV PTSD.

The Detroit Area Survey estimated the lifetime prevalence of DSM-IV PTSD at 9.5% for men.
The NCS estimated that 5% of men qualified for a DSM-III-R PTSD.

The earlier Epidemiological Catchment Area Survey found that less than 1% of men had experienced PTSD in their lifetimes.
Alterations in central and autonomic nervous system function and hormonal dysregulation are associated with trauma, which, in turn, increase risk for CVD.

It may be that high rates of trauma exposure contribute to the increasing prevalence of CVD among American Indian men: their leading cause of death.
Similarly, trauma is closely linked to pain; a relationship verified in our own work among Native people.

Pain affects help-seeking behavior, adherence to treatment recommendations, and speed of surgical recovery, all often compromised in American Indians.
New Lines of Inquiry

- And trauma is associated with the onset as well as progression of diabetes

New Lines of Inquiry

- Real-time, interactive videoconferencing offers effective means – clinically and fiscally -- of bridging treatment gaps in geography and cultural.

- Home-based telecommunication technologies, promise more continuous, responsive care.
American Indian Veterans
PTSD Clinics
Program Need

- Approximately 60% rate of PTSD among Lakota military combat veterans, 3 times that of their White counterparts

- Local stigma and poor confidentiality

- Inadequate clinical expertise among IHS personnel
Program Need

- VA facilities 180-300 miles distant and lack transportation
- Distrust federal government
PTSD Services

- Weekly clinics offering initial assessment, medication management, individual and group psychotherapy
- 10 active; 6 more to be implemented July 2008
- Community liaison (TeleHealth Outreach Workers)
- Different models and partnerships
Relevant Publications


The deadly brew of alcohol and despair has devastated Alaska Natives. But now people are reaching out to one another in a sobriety movement that is slowly gathering strength. **A growing revolution of hope**