

Teaching Healthy Relationships to High School-Aged Native Youth: An Investigation Into Culturally Relevant Curricula

Abigail McKenna, University of Iowa
Southern Plains Tribal Health Board



EVALUATION OF CURRENT CURRICULA

Program Title	Description	Scope of Implementation	Cultural Components	Evaluation of Program Outcomes
Native Stand 2.0	A comprehensive, 18 session sexual health curriculum designed for high school Native Youth. The curriculum is composed of six units, with the first three being most relevant to the prevention of relationship violence. The program begins with a unit aimed at relationship-building with a variety of icebreakers. Unit two considers culture when it comes to wellbeing, followed by a third unit discussing healthy relationships and goal setting. This program is free, and all lesson plans are available on Healthy Native Youth's website.	48 trained sites with 92 implementations, in 16 states predominantly in the Western United States. •33% classroom setting •44% after school setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sacred circles •Medicine Wheel •Traditional healing, with an emphasis on balance and cultural practices that promote wellbeing •Elder knowledge •Tribal relationships •Storytelling <p>There are also several opportunities for facilitators to adapt stories and traditions from their own tribe or community.</p>	<p><i>"It's just amazing, the conversations that these youth are having...they're really not scared to talk about it. They just need a place to do it."</i> – Robby Bill, Program Facilitator</p> <p>Based on pre and post questionnaires, there was a 20% increase in students aged 15 years or older who reported that they have "had a conversation about sex with friends"</p> <p>Reported emotional abuse by intimate partners in the past year decreased by 3.1%, while reported physical abuse remained the same.</p>
Respecting the Circle of Life	A program designed for Native youth ages 11-19, with an emphasis on STI/HIV and pregnancy prevention. The curriculum also teaches skills in goal-setting, communication, and sexual decision making. This program is designed to be delivered in a camp format, made up of 8 2-hour sessions paired with a 2-hour session to be done with a trusted adult at home.	RCL was embedded into a 2-week summer basketball camp for students on a rural reservation in Arizona.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening rituals at the beginning of each session and closing rituals at the end of each session • Value-based discussions • Trauma-informed perspective 	<p>Evaluation has shown increased condom-use self-efficacy, as well as increased communication with parents about sexual health.</p> <p>A research gap was identified for evaluation specific to youth engagement in healthy relationships.</p>
Gender Matters for Native Youth	A sexual health curriculum with a focus on gender-based violence, exploring gender norms, and healthy relationships. Additionally, the program covers STI and unplanned pregnancy prevention. The program is designed for youth ages 14-18. An adaptation manual allows for this program to specifically support Native youth.	No publicly available data regarding the scope of implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-western views on gender • Two-spirit identities • Storytelling and talking circles • Smudging as an opening ritual • Historical trauma • Resiliency factors • Support from community elders 	<p>Gender Matters and its adaptations have not been evaluated amongst Native populations.</p> <p>In a 2016 evaluation of the program at-large, youth reported higher levels of knowledge of birth control and contraceptive use. However, no evidence of change in gender role beliefs and attitudes towards risky sexual behavior was found.</p> <p>Overall, additional research is needed to evaluate program efficacy and create generalizable results.</p>
Ogitchidag Gikinooamaagad Peer Education Program	A program using a variety of methods including but not limited to art, ceremonies, acting, and song to teach skills in consent, healthy relationships, HIV/STD prevention, and pregnancy prevention. It is designed for students ages 12-18.	In 26 years of this program, approximately 1000 youth have been trained as peer educators. Additionally, many adolescents participated in the associated Ikidowin Youth Theatre Ensemble.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of dreams • Smudging • Cultural identity/tribal affiliation • Decolonized beauty • Participation in a spiritual ceremony • Medicine wheel • Communication as a Native value • Artistic expression related to creation 	In an evaluation using pre and post-program survey results, the amount of youth who stated that they had a clear idea of how far they would be willing to go in a situation where someone wanted to have sex with them increased from 81% to 86%. Additionally, the number of students who reported being fairly comfortable/comfortable saying no to someone wanting to have sex increased from 80% to 93%.
Tribal Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP)	A series of grant programs funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau with the U.S. Department of Health and Service's. Office of the Administration for Children and Families. These programs must educate Native youth on abstinence and contraceptive use for the prevention of STIs and pregnancy. They must also educate youth on at least 3 of their mandated subject areas, with one of these areas being healthy relationships.	In 2019, \$3.28 million dollars was distributed amongst 8 different tribes/tribal organizations. These projects serve a total of 1,750 Native youth throughout the nation.	Each of these projects have elements that are culturally-specific. As these programs are more tribe-specific, curriculum is designed to be relevant to the needs and practices of that particular community. Programs must be supported by "practice-based evidence" which can come from experiences, practices, or traditional customs in a culturally-specific context.	The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is in charge of evaluating each grantee's PREP program. They collect data on structure, cost, attendance/reach, participant demographics, and measures of participants' behavioral intentions and perceptions of the program they have been a part of.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

- Make curricula more affirmative, inclusive, and representative of LGBTQ+2S youth
- Decrease use of gendered language surrounding who perpetrates and who experiences intimate partner violence
- Use digital technology as a mode of delivery
- Address increasingly relevant issues related to healthy relationships included by not limited to: historical trauma, suicide, sexting and cyberviolence
- Collection of more extensive demographic information for evaluation, in order to gain a greater understanding of socio-ecologic factors that influence health outcomes

CONCLUSION

As Native people across the country continue to experience high rates of relationship violence, early primary prevention through the form of comprehensive sexual education is increasingly necessary. There are many programs that have been developed, each with different goals, modes of implementation, and unique expression of cultural values and traditions. Future efforts should focus on evaluating programs for efficacy, with consideration to the diversity that exists within Native communities. Additionally, the federal government, tribal governments, and non-profit tribal organizations should increase collaboration in an effort to expand the reach of programming to serve more Native students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Michael Logan, Project Director at Southern Plains Tribal Health Board for his mentorship. Additionally, I would like to extend gratitude to program staff at Southern Plains Tribal Health Board, including Marifrances Montell, Gary Piercey, Amanda Moore, and Chris Tallbear. Finally, a huge thank you to all our workshop leaders and members of the 2023 Lewis Scholar cohort for sharing their knowledge and experiences!

REFERENCES



Scan here to learn more about each of these programs!

INTRODUCTION

Native high school students currently experience high rates of intimate partner violence, especially when compared to all students throughout the United States. According to the CDC Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System report of 2021, 18.3% of Native high school youth reported being forced to have sexual intercourse. This trend continues into adulthood, with 57.7% of AI/AN women and 51.1% of AI/AN men reporting that they have experienced intimate partner violence. The prevalence of intimate partner violence victimization of Native individuals is a complex issue, with roots in historical oppression and patriarchal colonialism. To better understand how stakeholders can effectively intervene, I chose to investigate existing health curriculum models aimed at high school Native youth. I examined the strengths of current programming, with consideration to trauma-informed and culturally relevant teaching. Finally, I explored considerations for future program development.

SCOPE OF IPV IN AI/AN COMMUNITIES

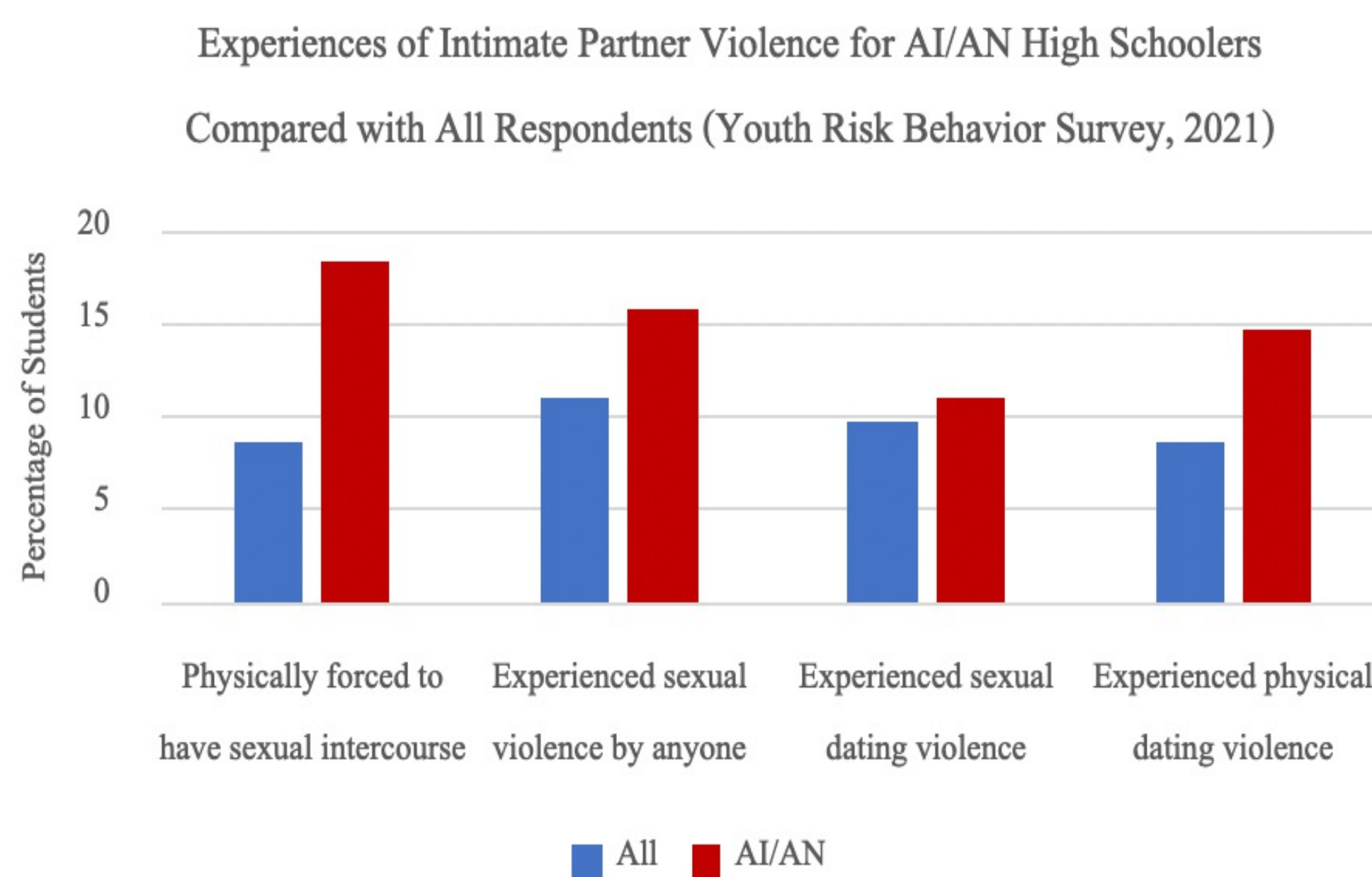


Table 7
Lifetime and 12-month Prevalence of Contact Sexual Violence,¹ Physical Violence, and/or Stalking by an Intimate Partner by Race/Ethnicity² — U.S. Women, National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2016/2017 Annualized Estimates

Race/Ethnicity ³	Lifetime			12-Month		
	Weighted %	95% CI	Estimated Number of Victims ⁴	Weighted %	95% CI	Estimated Number of Victims ⁴
Hispanic	42.1	(38.2, 46.1)	7,618,000	7.2	(5.4, 9.6)	1,304,000
Non-Hispanic						
Black	53.6	(49.7, 57.5)	8,234,000	12.3	(9.7, 15.3)	1,883,000
White	48.4	(46.8, 50.1)	39,422,000	6.0	(5.2, 6.9)	4,850,000
Asian or Pacific Islander	27.2	(20.3, 35.5)	1,903,000	--	--	--
American Indian or Alaska Native	57.7	(45.4, 69.1)	457,000	--	--	--
Multiracial ⁵	63.8	(56.5, 70.5)	1,372,000	17.4	(12.6, 23.6)	375,000

Abbreviation: CI = confidence interval.
¹ Contact sexual violence includes rape, sexual coercion, and/or unwanted sexual contact.
² The American Indian or Alaska Native designation does not indicate being enrolled or being affiliated with a tribe. Persons of Hispanic ethnicity can be of any race or a combination of races. Of the total analysis sample (n=27,571), 0.20% are females who did not provide sufficient race/ethnicity information for weighting, so their data values were imputed.
³ The Multiracial category indicates two or more races.
⁴ Rounded to the nearest thousand.
⁵ Estimate is not reported; relative standard error > 30% or cell size ≤ 20.