

## **SPECIAL COMMENTARY**

---

*This American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research Agenda has been developed by Dr. Bill G. Douglas, Director of Mental Health Data Analysis and Research of the Indian Health Service, pursuant to a Delphi process which involved Indian and research personnel across the country. It was developed to identify research topics for possible funding, with the primary criterion that the results yield clinical, program, or other benefits to improve the mental health of American Indian and Alaska Native people.*

### **American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research Agenda**

**Category I:** Better definitions of the nature and scope of mental health problems in American Indian and Alaska Native populations. These range from general descriptive data, which can be used to make comparative assessments within and between IHS service populations as well as with non-Indian populations, to specific kinds of problems and sets of issues.

What are the incidence and prevalence rates for mental disorders (as currently defined by DSM-III-R) in American Indian and Alaska Native populations, and how can these data be organized in such a way that meaningful comparisons, both between various aggregates of Indian populations and with non-Indian populations be made?

What is the incidence of physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect of children in American Indian and Alaska Native communities?

What are the significant cultural, social, and psychological factors, and their interactions, associated with suicide behavior in American Indian and Alaska Native populations?

How are American Indian and Alaska Native suicide completions associated with previous suicide attempts?

What is the incidence of childhood sexual abuse in male and female patients seeking mental health services?

- Duryea, P. E. (1979). *Psychosocial factors children perceive as prominent in the smoking decision*. Unpublished master's thesis, The University of Utah. Salt Lake City, UT
- Gholson, B. (1980). *The cognitive developmental bases of human learning: Studies in hypothesis testing*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Gholson, B., Levine, M., & Phillips, S. (1972). Hypothesis strategies, and stereotypes in discrimination learning. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 15, 423-446.
- Gholson, B., Phillips, S., & Levine, M. (1973). Effects of temporal relationship of feedback and stimulus information upon discrimination learning strategies. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 13, 425-441.
- Inhelder, B., & Piaget, J. (1964a). *The Early Growth of Logic in the Child*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Inhelder, B., & Piaget, J. (1964b). *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*. New York: Basic Books.
- Janis, I. L., & Mann, L. (1977). *Decision Making*. New York: The Free Press.
- Kolbe, L. J., Iverson, D. C., Kreuter, M. W., Hochbaum, G., & Christenson, G. (1981). Propositions for an alternate and complementary health education paradigm. *Health Education*, 12(3), 24-30.
- Lammers, J. W., Kreuter, M. W., & Smith, B. C. (1984). The effects of SHCP on selected aspects of decision-making among fifth graders. *Health Education*, 15(2), 14-17.
- Mann, L. (1971). Effects of a commitment warning on children's decision behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 17, 47-80.
- Oetting, E. R., Edwards, R., Goldstein, G. S., & Garcia-Mason, M. A. (1980). Drug use among adolescents of five Southwestern Native American tribes. *The International Journal of the Addictions*, 15(3), 439-445.
- Renaud-Salis, J. L. (1980). The decision-making system and process. *Bulletin Cancer (Paris)*, 67(4), 365-368.
- Rhoades, E. (1982). *Keynote address: Injury control and accident prevention*. All Indian National Conference: Official Program, Albuquerque, New Mexico, March.
- Schottstaedt, M. F., & Bjork, J. W. (1977). Inhalant abuse in an Indian boarding school. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 134(11), 1290-1293.

**What are the inter-relations and inter-dependence between alcoholism and suicide in American Indian and Alaska Native populations?**

**What is the incidence of childhood abuse in patients who attempt/complete suicide?**

**What is the prevalence of depressive symptoms in older American Indian and Alaska Natives?**

**How is depression related to chronic disease in older American Indian and Alaska Natives?**

**Category II: Assessments of the validity of the methods and materials used to evaluate psychiatric and psychological conditions to determine their appropriateness for use in cross cultural settings.**

**What particular psychiatric diagnostic criteria are appropriate for American Indian and Alaska Native populations in general? Do these vary by Tribe?**

**What are the most reliable (and cost-effective) means of screening for serious psychological dysfunction and major mental disorders in American Indian and Alaska Native communities?**

**How valid are existing standard psychiatric diagnostic instruments with Indian populations, and how should they be adapted for these populations?**

**How can norms be established for the appropriate interpretation of the widely used standardized psychological tests for American Indian and Alaska Native populations? Is development of specific tribal or language tests necessary?**

**Category III: Identification of significant predictors of positive mental health in American Indian and Alaska Natives populations.**

**What characteristics of childrearing in American Indian and Alaska Native populations are especially associated with a healthy outcome in children?**

**What are the differences in the mental health status of those American Indian and Alaska Native families that can**

be characterized as well functioning when compared with those that could be characterized as malfunctioning?

What are the differences between "healthy" and "un-healthy" Indian community functioning?

**Category IV:** Identification of significant predictors of mental disorder, psychological disruption or serious personal stress.

How and how much are the problems of American Indian and Alaska Native children related to problems of their families?

How likely are abused children to develop mental health symptoms requiring clinical intervention?

What is the natural history and outcome(s) of particular mental health problems in American Indian and Alaska Native populations compared with the results when they are identified and treated by mental health service providers?

**Category V:** Questions addressing the issue of "What Works?", in treatment and prevention particularly.

What types of treatment modes work for American Indian and Alaska Native patients, in what type of tribal settings, and why?

How effective are the various activities related to preventing mental illness in American Indian and Alaska Native communities?

What combinations of traditional and western medicine are most helpful in dealing with psychiatric conditions in American Indian and Alaska Native populations?

What impact do cultural factors have on the process of psychotherapy with American Indian and Alaska Native patients? Are some forms of psychotherapy better than others with specific groups?