

## PREFACE

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This issue summarizes 17 years of research conducted by the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University on drug and alcohol problems among American Indian youth. The work of the Center has been twofold: (1) to maintain an accurate record of the trends in substance abuse in this population and (2) to pursue various avenues of research aimed at understanding the origins, nature, and consequences of the behavior. It is hoped that by bringing this body of research together in one source, a greater understanding of the problem can be achieved by those in the research, treatment and prevention fields. This issue focuses on the work of the Tri-Ethnic Center and therefore does not include a comprehensive review of the literature on Indian adolescent substance abuse problems. Providing this was simply outside the scope of what could be accomplished here; however, this information is available in a number of other places.

Throughout this issue, ethnic glosses are used to describe groups. Though all ethnic glosses are bound to be inaccurate and incomplete — and particularly so when they describe broad ethnic groups — it is necessary to use simplified terms in order to communicate, even though it is known that these terms could be questioned. Trimble (1991) has discussed the problem of ethnic glosses in detail, and his paper is well worth perusing. Bea Medicine has commented specifically on the ethnic glosses used to describe American Indians and how acceptability of different terms has varied over time (1981). These papers make it clear that there is no easy answer. Any term used is bound to be “wrong” to some extent, and the appropriateness and acceptability of various terms must change over time. The problem of temporal utility occurs because, when an ethnic gloss is applied to a group that is a victim of prejudice and injustice, whatever term is selected as appropriate gradually becomes “infected” with residual prejudicial meanings and becomes unacceptable. Various groups within the affected ethnic group will find the term unacceptable and will suggest alternatives. The suggested alternatives often incorporate political meanings or purposes depending on the group proposing the term. A new term gradually achieves consensus and it then becomes the appropriate gloss. The new term then starts to accumulate negative associations until it becomes necessary to start again.

In this report the terms “American Indian” and “Indian” are used, for they are currently accepted by a reasonable number of people. “Anglo” is used to describe the rest of the sample because this term is the one most often applied to people who are not Indian or not obviously members of another minority ethnic group. Many of those to whom Anglo is applied object to its use, but it is as fair to apply this

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term used by Indians as it is for Anglos to apply the term Indian without further qualification.

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## References

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Trimble, J. (1991). Ethnic specification, validation prospects and the future of drug use research. *The International Journal of the Addictions*, 25(2A), 149-170.