

COMMENTARY
BY
ROBERT F. KRAUS, M.D. and THOMAS MILLER, Ph.D.

Dr. Dale Walker and his research group have moved onto the methodological and conceptual high ground with their long term longitudinal study of substance abuse in American Native adolescents and women. The low ground has been well traversed in recent decades; however, the research has been of uneven quality. Studies have tended to be descriptive and anecdotal utilizing small reservation populations and have been synchronic in nature. The Walker research will allow assessment of biopsychosocial determinants of substance abuse and other psychiatric disorders and will offer the opportunity to evaluate the relative importance of various risk factors and their evaluation and additive effect over time.

The Populations Under Study

The selection of 523 urban Indian youth and 274 urban Indian women to participate in the study was particularly fortunate and appropriate. In a recent review of Native American Youth and alcohol, Lobb and Watts (1989) point out that the literature on Native American youth alcoholism is in its infancy, although Indian youth are defined as a high-risk group which is quite refractory to treatment. The existing data base deals with traditional issues in substance abuse research with a base largely in anthropology and sociology but also deals with issues specific to native youth such as child abuse and neglect, school problems, family dysfunction, fetal alcohol syndrome, rural versus urban factors. The Walker research will deal specifically with 16 such factors.

With respect to Native American women (Roeske, Spurlock, Kramer, & Patterson, 1985), the literature on gender is sparse and essentially undefined. These women also constitute a high risk population. The data suggests a course of illness characterized by early onset, rapid progression, a high incidence of medical complications of alcoholism, and poor response to treatment. Descriptive studies suggest that there are significant differences between Native Americans and non-Native American women alcoholics (Hurlburt & Gode, 1984; Webster, 1983). These factors are only beginning to be explored among these patients.

The Cultural Issue

Cultural identification and participation is one of the factors addressed in this study. That the etiology, phenomenology, course, treatment

and outcome of substance abuse disorders are all effected by cultures is widely held by researchers both on the international scene and among Native Americans (Everett, Waddell, & Heath, 1976; Heath, 1983; Kraus & Buffler, 1979; McAndrew & Edgerton, 1969). Other researchers report that the claim that cultural differences override individual pathology and personality differences is not supported. Alcohol is seen as overriding cultural influences and differences. Native Americans were described as more similar to other alcoholics (even those alcoholics who were non-native) than they were to non-alcoholic cultural peers (Flores, 1983). This quantified, longitudinal study offers the prospect of a definitive assessment of this complex relationship.

The Treatment Issue

A variety of studies suggest that the response of American Natives to treatment for alcoholism is poor and that this is especially so when the treatment offered adheres to modern Western models. Modern healthcare has been introduced in the Third and Fourth World using European-derived models. It was anticipated that indigenous medical systems would disappear; interestingly, this has not been the case, especially where psychosocial issues are involved. Jilek (1993) has recently reviewed traditional healing in the area of substance abuse in various areas of the world. Developments among American Natives are of particular interest in light of the Walker research.

Since the 1960s, there has been increasing interest in Amerindian groups in the Alcoholics Anonymous program as modified in different cultures to be more culturally acceptable and appropriate (Jilek-Aall, 1981). The Inupiaq speaking people of northwest Alaska have developed an Eskimo Spirit Movement based on traditional values to support sobriety in the face of differential social pressures that are excruciating in their speed and intensity (Mala, 1984; Mala, 1985). The Sweat Lodge Ceremonial (Hall, 1986) has become a Pan Indian symbol of Indian efforts to preserve their culture and combat substance abuse. One of the most important Pan Amerindian movements in the last 100 years has been the steady development and spread of the Native American Church and its associated Peyote rituals (Aberle, 1966; LaBarre, 1969). An important part of the "Peyote Road" is temperance.

Also, since the 1960s, certain Amerindian dance ceremonials have experienced a resurgence. Among these are the Sun Dance (Jorgenson, 1972), the Winter Spirit Dance (Jilek, 1974), and the Gourd Dance (Howard, 1976). This longitudinal research offers the opportunity to understand and, hopefully, to augment and strengthen these important Indian initiatives.

The Methodological Issue

The complex, quantitative, longitudinal model developed by Walker and his associates makes possible the understanding of human development in terms of person versus environment reactions. Human behavior, including substance abuse, is the sum of a series of adaptive or maladaptive responses to specific contextual demands and opportunities. Recent research in the area of drug and alcohol abuse and other deviant behaviors has emphasized the need for analysis of interrelationships between social environment and individual level development (Sampson & Lamb, 1992). Longitudinal data are commonly "clustered" along a number of dimensions. Individual measurements over time may be "nested" in a particular individual. In turn, the individual may be "nested" within a hierarchy of social groups of increasing complexity (Johnstone, 1994).

The breadth and complexity of data collected longitudinally from a large community sample of American Native families opens the door to a more sophisticated understanding of the role of multiple risk factors, both individual and social, and their evolution and interactions in producing substance abuse.

Robert F. Kraus, M.D. & Thomas Miller, Ph.D.
 Department of Psychiatry
 University of Kentucky Chandler Medical Center
 Annex 2, Room 206
 Lexington, KY 40536-0080

References

- Aberle, D. F. (1966). *The Peyote Religion among the Navajo*. Chicago, Aldine Publications.
- Everett, M., Waddell, J., & Heath, D. (1976). *Cross-cultural approaches to the study of alcohol: An interdisciplinary perspective*. Conference on Alcohol Studies and Anthropology. Chicago, Aldine Publications.
- Flores, P. J. (1983). *Alcoholism treatment and the relationship of Native American cultural values to recovery*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Arizona, Tucson.
- Hall, R. (1986). Alcohol treatment in American Indian populations: An indigenous treatment modality compared with traditional approaches. *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 472, 168-178.
- Heath, D. (1983). Alcohol abuse among north American Indians. In R. G. Smart, et al (Eds.), *Research advances in drug and alcohol problems*. New York, Plenum Press.
- Howard, H. (1976). The plains Gourd Dance as a revitalization movement. *American Ethnologist*, 3, 243-259.

- Hurlburt, G., & Gode, E. (1984). Personality differences between Native American and Caucasian women alcoholics: Implications for alcoholism counseling. *White Cloud Journal*, 3(2), 35–39.
- Jilek, W. G. (1974). *Salish Indian mental health and culture change*. Toronto, Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- Jilek, W. G. (1993). Traditional healing against alcoholism and drug dependence. *Zeitschrift. Fuer Ethnomedezian Und Transkulturelle, Psychiatrie*, 17, 145–160.
- Jilek-Aall, L. (1981). Acculturation, alcoholism and Indian style. Alcoholics Anonymous, *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, Supplement No. 9*, 143–158.
- Johnstone, B. M. (1994). Sociodemographic, environmental and cultural influences on adolescent drinking behavior. In R. A. Zucker, J. Howard, & G. M. Boyd (Eds.), *Development of alcohol problems: Exploring the biopsychosocial matrix of risk* (pp. 169–204). Rockville, MD., National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Research Monograph 26.
- Jorgenson, J. G. (1972). *The Sun Dance religion*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Kraus, R., & Buffler, P. (1979). Sociocultural stress and the American Native in Alaska: An analysis of changing patterns of psychiatric illness and alcohol abuse among Alaska Natives. *Culture Medicine and Psychiatry*, 3, 111–151.
- LaBarre, W. (1969). *The peyote cult*. New York, Schocken Books.
- Lobb, M., & Watts, T. (1989). *Native American youth and alcohol*. New York, Greenwood Press.
- Mala, T. (1984). Alcoholism and mental health treatment in circum-polar areas: Traditional and non-traditional approaches. In R. Fortuine (Ed.), *Circumpolar Health*, 84, (pp. 332–334). Seattle, University of Washington Press.
- Mala, T. (1985). Alaska Native grass roots movement: Problem solving utilizing indigenous values. *Arctic Medical Research*, 40, 84–91.
- McAndrew, C., & Edgerton, R. B. (1969). *Drunken comportment*. Chicago, Aldine Publications.
- Roeske, N., Spurlock, J., Kramer, R., & Patterson, M. (1985). "Minorities" in: Towards the new psychology of men and women. Special issue, *Journal of Psychiatric Education*, 7(1), 63–70.
- Sampson, R., & Lamb, J. (1992). Crime and deviance in the life course. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18, 63–84.
- Webster, L. (1983, February 6–8). *Alcohol and drug abuse among Indian women and youth in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan, working with adolescent alcohol and drug problems: Assessment, intervention, and treatment* (pp. 33–35). Conference paper, Madison, Wisconsin, 135.