



# Enculturation: A Potential Protective Factor Against Suicidal Ideation in American Indian/Alaska Native Young Adults



Adam T. Nordwall, Victoria M. O’Keefe, M.S. LaRicka R. Wingate, Ph.D.

## BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012)

- American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) ages 15-34 years old have suicide rates that are more than 2.5 times higher than national average (30 per 100,000 vs. 12.2 per 100,000).
- Suicide - 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for AI/AN ages 15-34
- Previous research has found the following factors in regards to suicide:
  - Risk factors
    - Loss of traditional values - acculturation
  - Protective factors
    - Development of cultural programs to promote enculturation (Muehlenkamp, Marrone, Gray, & Brown, 2009)

## PURPOSE

- The current proposed study will examine whether enculturation and participation in cultural activities are negatively associated with suicidal ideation in a sample of AI/AN college students
- Previous research has not studied the college aged population, the proposed research will explore the those ages 18 -34.

## MEASURES

### PARTICIPANTS

- 200 self-identified AI/AN students at Oklahoma State University (OSU) ages 18-34
- Recruited through OSU online SONA system
- Online study with questionnaires
- Compensation: course credit

### MEASURES

- **Demographics Questionnaire**
  - Age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, tribal affiliation, and family income
- **Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977)**
  - Depressive symptoms experienced by an individual over the past week
- **Native American Acculturation Scale (NAAS; Garrett & Pichette, 2000)**
  - Assessment, identity, language, friendship, behaviors, attitudes, and generational/geographic background
- **Participation in AI/AN Cultural Activities Questionnaire**
  - Asses enculturation; the degree to which an individual participates in cultural activities
    - How often do you participate in tribal ceremonies?
    - Have you received your Indian name? Y /N
    - Have you gone through a coming of age ceremony? Y / N
- **Hopelessness Depressive Symptom Questionnaire-Suicidality Subscale (HDSQ-SS; Metalsky & Joiner, 1997)**
  - Assesses suicidal ideation over the past two weeks

## STATISTICAL ANALYSES

- Hierarchical regression analyses
  - Acculturation predicting suicidal ideation after controlling for depressive symptoms
  - Enculturation predicting suicidal ideation after controlling for depressive symptoms

## EXPECTED RESULTS

- It is expected that enculturation will significantly negatively predict suicidal ideation after controlling for depressive symptoms
- It is expected that acculturation will significantly positively predict suicidal ideation after controlling for depressive symptoms

## IMPLICATIONS

- If enculturation is identified as a negative predictor of suicidal ideation, it may be a protective factor in targeted age groups of 18-34
- AI/AN suicide prevention programs can help increase cultural identity and participation in cultural activities
- Information gained about the role of enculturation on suicidal ideation may lead to program development that can focus on instilling culture as a potential protective factor against suicidal ideation among AI/AN young adults.
- The use of enculturation may not only save the lives of a highly at-risk population for suicide, but it will also implement the rebirth of cultural identity and pride.
- Individuals who exhibit high levels of acculturation will also exhibit higher levels of suicidal ideation .

## CONCLUSION

The proposed research will provide further detail into the effects of acculturation and enculturation on college aged individuals from AI/AN backgrounds. Possible implications of the effects of enculturation may provide the necessary information for development of programs focusing on preventions, interventions, and treatments. The onset of programs that encourage cultural teachings (enculturation) will allow natural cultural protective factors that are expected to decrease suicidal ideation, protecting this high-risk population. These protective factors have been supported with different age groups amongst AI/NA populations. However, such research has not been developed in the the 18-34 age group of college students.

Please direct all correspondence to LaRicka R. Wingate, Ph.D. at [laricka.wingate@okstate.edu](mailto:laricka.wingate@okstate.edu)

