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CULTURAL DYNAMICS, SUBSTANCE USE, AND RESILIENCE AMONG AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE EMERGING ADULTS IN URBAN AREAS



Ryan A. Brown

Alina I. Palimaru

Daniel L. Dickerson
Inupiaq

Kathy Etz

David P. Kennedy

Benjamin Hale
Navajo

Carrie L. Johnson
Wahpeton Dakota

Elizabeth J. D'Amico

SUMMARY

Emerging adults between the ages of 18-25 are usually developing a sense of identity - deciding what they value in their lives, their life goals, what they want out of relationships, and how they approach making decisions, including the choice of whether to use substances. American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people living in urban areas (away from tribal lands or reservations) can feel, at times, distant from their social and cultural connections due to the effects of historical trauma, including discrimination, a history of one's ancestors being forcibly displaced, and the brutal genocide and cultural erasure that many experienced. These traumas can cause some AI/AN

emerging adults to lose their sense of cultural connection and identity, and may lead to some filling this void in their lives with substances like alcohol, marijuana, and opioids (such as painkillers).

We held focus groups with 90 AI/AN people from different tribes to get their thoughts on how AI/AN emerging adults understand their culture and identity in the urban setting. Many said that the urban setting can feel culturally isolating, and that AI/AN people

often experience discrimination. AI/AN emerging adults expressed that culture was a source of strength and resilience for them, and that specific

HIGHLIGHTS

“ We have to be able to stay inclusive in our drive, in our traditional ways ... because those are the core teachings that keep us healthy, keep us connect[ed] or make us even want to reach out to who are my ancestors... ”

cultural values and traditions—such as mindfulness and connection to nature—were associated with good health.

Participants in the focus groups emphasized the many ways that AI/AN cultural identity and traditional practices can be

protective against substance use during emerging adulthood.

Read the full article at tacunaproject.org/pressreleases. For more information about the TACUNA project, scan the QR code.



HIGHLIGHTS

“ I did a search and talked to other relatives and found out, yeah I am Native... I started going around the community and being part of the events, it made me like a lot happier and gave me a bigger sense of belonging as well. ”