ADHD Within an Indigenous Cultural Context

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Dr. Christina Cruz is an Indigenous, licensed Clinical Health Psychologist at Sierra Vista Hospital Rural Health Clinic in New Mexico.

With beginnings in education, Dr. Cruz has delivered over 25 years of service within multiple AI/AN communities, demonstrating a life-commitment to traditional wellness and balance through partnerships within multiple Indigenous Nations and communities. Dr. Cruz specializes in evidence-based trauma therapy utilizing TF-CBT, ARC, EMDR and ACT, and practice-based evidenced Storying and Land-Based Wellness, bridging for culturally specific approaches with Indigenous populations, rooted in own Indigenous traditions.

This ultimately led to providing Behavioral Health Therapy with the Native American Health Center in Oakland, California, Natural Pathways Counseling, LLC in New Mexico as well as appointment as ICWA Tribal Representative.
Learning Objectives

At the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- Recognize how physical activities and cultural connectivity can improve attention and learning for AI/ANs
- List three practical therapeutic approaches for working with Native youth presenting clinically with ADHD.
- Acquire new knowledge in understanding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder within an American Indian and Alaska Native cultural context.
Questions for the Audience

Keeping in mind your own personal culture(s), how do you best learn?

What keeps you engaged and focused when learning something new?
Chiricahua Life Way

- Holistic view of wellness
- Go’zhoo: Beauty, balance, life-way, happiness, health
- Children 0 to 5 are closest to Ussen
- Elders are first teachers
- Productive/part of community
- Way of being in the world
ADHD Signs and Symptoms

EuroWestern Lens

• Individual diagnosis and treatment for disorganized functioning within systems
• Excessive fidgeting
• Difficulty remaining seated when required
• Feelings of restlessness (older youth)
• Inappropriate running or climbing (younger)
• Difficulty playing quietly
• Difficult to keep up with/"on the go"
• Excessive talking
• Difficulty waiting turns
• Blurting out answers
• Interruption or intrusion of others
ADHD Signs and Symptoms

Indigenous Lens

• Need for aligning teaching knowledge and skills with youth aptitude, interest, and purpose within family and community
• Addressing imbalance of relationships in community
• Disconnections from natural world and belonging in relationships
• Energy potential unmet
• Overstimulation
• Inconsistent guidance and structure for secure engagement and interconnectivity
Conflicting Values Regarding Education

- Low AI/AN acculturation (assimilation) correlated with stronger ADHD symptoms
- Dissonance navigating conflicting values between individual, family, community and systems
- Difficulty walking in two worlds by adults furthers confusion of youth
- Intergenerational transmission of values and cultural knowledge vs. academic instruction of EuroWestern curriculum
- Revitalization of Nations’ cultural knowledges
- Acculturation as genocide
- Address insider/outsider status and increase access to own Nations’ knowledge keepers
Land Based Wellness

- Relationship and interconnection is healing
- Rooted in place and histories of Indigenous peoples from those places
- Urban, rural, tribal differences and similarities
- Foster connectivity on lands, culturally specific afterschool and community programs, gardens, open spaces and outdoor education opportunities
Culturally Specific Teaching Strategies with AI/ANs for Improved Attention and Behaviors

- Experiential learning & thematic approaches
- Balance benchmarks with love of learning
- Provide frequent breaks, mindfulness, sensory area and physical activity for all students to reduce stigma
- Classroom instruction for Indigenous learning styles
  - Active engagement, global/overall picture, narrative/storytelling, oral/auditory learning, private group projects, circular communication, choices, cooperative learning, acceptance of differing conclusions
- Art and music for improved attention and focus includes sequencing, steps and skills
Culturally Specific Educational Accommodations for AI/AN Students Experiencing ADHD

- Community gardens and afterschool programs
- Daily breaks, grounding in dirt/earth and outdoors, planting/gardening at school
- Sensory items/fidget toys, engaging all senses
- Strengthen family partnerships with improved access to resources for basic needs
- Youth leadership and purpose
- Smooth transitions between schools/levels and supports
- End punishing removal of recess, gym and sports
- Strengthen community relationships with Indigenous agencies and elders
- Provide referrals to vetted cultural wisdom keepers and spiritual elders
References


First Nations Health Authority. FNHA-What-is-Land-Based-Treatment-and-Healing.pdf

References (Cont’d)


Presenter Contact Information

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