

Evaluation of the 2020 Asian American Drug War Healing Circles

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BACKGROUND & NEED

In 2018, in response to the absence of spaces for people of color who use drugs to have open and honest conversations, gain harm reduction skills, and reflect on their relationships with drugs, the Center for Political Drug Education developed the Asian American Drug War Healing Circles

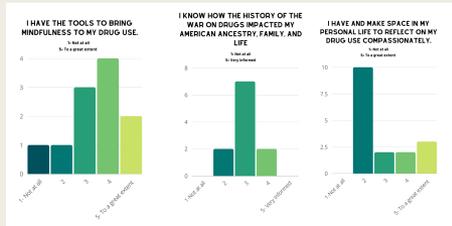
COMMUNITY PARTNER

The Center for Political Drug Education serves and transforms the lives of intergenerational communities who have been impacted by the trauma of the War on Drugs through political education, skill-building, and community building.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Drug War Healing Circle is a culturally-informed, harm reduction based, and community driven response to address the disconnection, silence, and intergenerational trauma caused by the Drug War in the Asian American Diaspora.

Pre-survey data was collected from eleven respondents to understand their existing knowledge, awareness practices, and skills.



4 weeks after the completion of the 2020 Healing Circle intervention, 30-minute in-depth interviews were conducted with 3 participants over Zoom to understand what aspects of the intervention were most meaningful and impactful for their healing journey.

OUTCOMES

The following themes emerged from the interview data:

Culturally-Safe and Relevant

- ***"Asian American Identity and expectations can be traumatizing especially when drugs enter our lives which can threaten the achievement viewed as necessary to be respectable."*** -Interview Participant
- ***"I am always having to put on a "game face" around other Asian Americans."*** -Interview Participant
- ***"In the breakout room with [anonymous] we were discussing the stigma our communities have with drugs. We found similar experiences and perspectives. Hearing that from someone else was reassuring that I wasn't the only one. That's something that a lot of people need to hear"***. -Interview Participant

Political Drug Education

- ***"The moralistic imprinting from the Drug War in my family shaped my personal identity and took reconciling."*** -Interview Participant
- ***"It was liberatory to understand why there is so much stigma."*** -Interview Participant

Contemplative Practices

- ***"The relationship framework allowed myself to acknowledge more choices were available."*** -Interview Participant
- ***I was able to be more present to "why I want to do this."*** -Interview Participant
- ***"I recognized what the drug does for me could be a clue for what is missing from my life in general."*** -Interview Participant

A non-judgemental and compassionate attitude

- ***"I was able to Inquire more honestly because no one is listening with the expectation of changing and looking for what is wrong with me."*** -Interview Participant

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interventions aimed at reducing negative consequences with drugs are successful when they focus on the whole-person healing. Mindfulness and contemplative reflection have shown to be beneficial for preventing addiction and relapse, but require stigma reduction in order to be culturally appropriate for communities who have been most impacted by stigmatization and criminalized by the War on Drugs.

LESSONS LEARNED

While the absorption of knowledge and frameworks can be liberating, intellectual understanding by itself does not lead to transformation. For changes in our daily life to occur, knowing has to leave the mind, and be sensed in the body. Interview data suggested that there was a lack of integration of contemplative practices into daily life to support healing and movement towards wholeness.

Future interventions will focus on facilitating an experience of digesting knowledge and practicing a sensed knowing.

Oh, and get IRB approval!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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