

## Bullying in Indian Country

### Consequences of bullying

Violence among young people, including bullying, is more than just individual aggression. It is learned behavior that happens within the context of the larger society and community. Many things influence bullying behavior, including school and community climates; family dynamics; a dominant society that glorifies violence; and, in Indian Country, historical trauma. We have some research on bullying and its effects in the general population, but the research of bullying's effects in the Native population is nearly non-existent. What we do know from research in the larger population, and anecdotally from Tribal communities, is that bullying is prevalent, varies from community to community, and has short- and long-term consequences. We know that some of these consequences can be very serious. In one study, being bullied in childhood was correlated with later suicide attempts and deaths by suicide for girls, but not boys.<sup>1</sup> In another study, boys identified as having been bullied were at increased risks of suicidal thoughts and attempts in young adulthood.<sup>2</sup> Though we don't know if bullying causes suicidal behavior, we do know that both victims and bullies are at higher risk than their non-victimized and non-perpetrator peers.<sup>3</sup>

*Bullying, youth violence, and suicidal behaviors are interrelated parts of community violence that plague American Indian and Alaska Native communities.*

Bullying affects those who bully, those who are bullied, and those who witness bullying. Its effects on victims can be devastating, as youth who are bullied generally show higher levels of insecurity, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and unhappiness. It can also have devastating effects on youths who bully others. They are more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs in adolescence and as adults, get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school. They engage in early sexual activity; have criminal convictions and traffic citations as adults; and higher rates of abuse toward their romantic partners, spouses, or children as adults. Children

There are few statistics on bullying specific to tribal schools, but bullying, youth violence, and suicidal behavior are interrelated parts of community violence that plague American Indian and

<sup>1</sup> Klomek, AB; Sourander, A; Niemelä, S; Kumpulainen, K; Piha, J; Tamminen, T; Almqvist, F; and MS Gould, "Childhood bullying behaviors as a risk for suicide attempts and completed suicides: a population-based birth cohort study," *J Am Acad Child Adolescent Psychiatry* (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Copeland, William E.; Wolke, Dieter; Angold, Adrian; and E. Jane Costello, "Adult Psychiatric Outcomes of Bullying and Being Bullied by Peers in Childhood and Adolescence," *JAMA Psychiatry* (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Kim, Y. and B. Leventhal, "Bullying and suicide: A review," *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, 20(2) (2008) 133–154.

Alaska Native communities. Although we don't have studies about the extent and consequences of youth violence and bullying in tribal communities, we do know what helps youth and communities build resilience; thereby, counteracting the impact of bullying and community violence.

## What to do about bullying

Addressing bullying in Indian Country starts with raising awareness and strengthening protective factors that build resilience. Collaboration with existing community resources is an important aspect of bullying prevention in tribal communities. Further, school-based anti-bullying best practices are applicable in Indian Country.

### Awareness

**Lateral violence.** One of the consequences of oppression and historical trauma is lateral violence. Lateral violence happens when people who are victims of dominance, turn on each other rather than confront the system oppressing them. Lateral violence occurs when oppressed groups or individuals internalize feelings, such as anger and rage, and manifest them through other behaviors, such as gossip, jealousy, putdowns, and blame.<sup>4</sup> Adult bullying behavior can also be a manifestation of lateral violence. In addition to raising awareness about youth bullying, communities may also want to raise awareness about lateral violence, its relationship to historical trauma, and steps people can take to counteract it.

**Awareness of bullying and its consequences.** If bullying is seen as a rite of passage, or "kids being kids", it may be appropriate to develop an awareness campaign defining bullying, its consequences, and what to do about the issue. To develop strategies appropriate to your community, start with an assessment of the issue, using the Community Readiness Assessment (CRA) to measure the level of awareness about bullying. Another assessment strategy is conducting parent and student bullying surveys in collaboration with the school. This strategy raises awareness and can also provide pre- and post-readiness scores that can be used to measure the effectiveness of programming. It's important to be aware that the target of an information campaign is not youth. The goal of an awareness campaign is to raise community awareness about the consequences of bullying, the extent of bullying in the community, and how to deal with it. Raising awareness on this level builds support for activities that increase resilience and for school-based, anti-bullying policies and compliance with those policies. Appropriate activities may include one-on-one conversations, providing educational workshops, hosting wellness and culture camps for youth, sponsoring walk/runs, and conducting media campaigns. A comprehensive approach to bullying prevention is the most effective strategy. Children who witness bullying are more likely to have increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs; mental health problems, including depression and anxiety; and miss or skip school.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> "Lateral Violence Law & Legal Definition," US Legal, accessed April 24, 2014, <http://definitions.uslegal.com/l/lateral-violence/>.

<sup>5</sup> [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)

## Bullying prevention approaches

### Protective factors

**Wellness achieved through cultural knowledge and values.** Culture as a protective factor has been shown to be effective.<sup>6</sup> The provision of cultural knowledge is defined as implementing *culture-based interventions*. Because there are many different tribes and cultures, it is impossible to have one approach for all. However, successful approaches incorporate cultural components that encourage caring, supportive relationships with one or more adults; create opportunities for youth to feel useful and contribute to their community; set clear positive standards for behavior; and help youth feel competent.<sup>7</sup> Activities that have worked in tribal communities include culture camps or fish camps; teaching traditional singing, drumming, and dancing; promoting traditional values; teaching subsistence activities; developing youth councils; and conducting media campaigns.

Elements that contribute to the success of prevention efforts that encourage protective factors in Indian Country include:

- Involving Elders in the oversight panel, youth activities, and meetings;
- Providing life skills training and other youth development activities;
- Engaging youth in culture-based activities, such as drumming and culture camps; and
- Involving tribal leaders in bullying and suicide prevention at local, state, and national levels.

*Culture as a protective factor has been shown to be effective. The provision of cultural knowledge is defined as implementing culture-based interventions.*

**Community resilience.** There is developing research about community resilience that suggests the importance of community, family, and general Native cultural values as being critical elements in the resilience and well-being of youths.<sup>8</sup> These protective factors were identified in a study on resilience in American Indian families:

- Sense of belonging
- Spirituality
- Language
- Extended family and friends
- Maintaining culture-based practices, knowledge, and skills
- Humor

<sup>6</sup> Pu, Jia; Chewing, Betty; St Clair, Iyekiapiwin Darlene; Kokotailo, Patricia K.; Lacourt, Jeanne; and Dale Wilson, "Protective Factors in American Indian Communities and Adolescent Violence," *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, Vol. 17 (2013).

<sup>7</sup> Sanchez-Way, R. and S. Johnson, "Cultural Practices in American Indian Prevention Programs," *Journal of Juvenile Justice*, vol. VII, number 2, (2000).

<sup>8</sup>; LaFromboise, Oliver, & Hoyt, "Family, Community, and School Influences on Resilience Among American Indian Adolescents in the Upper Midwest" *Journal of Community Psychology*, 34 (2), 193-209 (2006); Fleming and Ledogar, "Resilience, an Evolving Concept: A Review of the Literature Relevant to Aboriginal Research", *Pimatisiwin*, Summer: 6(2): (2008)

## School-based, anti-bullying strategies

Findings from a recent study identified these strategies as the most effective elements of bullying prevention programs<sup>9</sup>:

- School climate training
- Consistently applied school bullying and discipline policies
- Use of parent training activities, meetings, and information on bullying
- High levels of playground supervision
- Use of consistent disciplinary methods in schools
- Classroom management strategies
- Classroom and school-wide rules related to bullying
- Training of teachers sufficiently in terms of time and intensity
- Multicomponent prevention approaches

## How to ensure success in your bullying prevention measures

**Coordination of prevention efforts.** Most effective bullying prevention is school-based. To successfully combat bullying, it is important to collaborate with schools. Collaborations can also contribute to sustainability. Schools and other state and local agencies may have resources to share or might want to partner in grant writing and fundraising. Community organizations that work with youth outside of the school, such as Boys & Girls Club; 4-H, afterschool, cultural programs; and church groups, may be good resources for curriculums and information on bullying prevention. Collaboration with agencies that work with youth to increase awareness and community-wide, anti-bullying strategies can increase the effectiveness of tribal bullying prevention programs.

**Evidence-based interventions (EBIs).** EBIs that have been successful in tribal communities include:

- American Indian Life Skills Development Curriculum;
- Question, Persuade, and Refer;
- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training;
- Second Step;
- Reconnecting Youth; and
- Project Venture.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ttofi, Maria M. and David P. Farrington, "Effectiveness of School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying: A Systematic and Meta-Analytic Review," *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, vol. 7 (2011)