Maltreatment of American Indian Elderly

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NIEJI
Honor ~ Respect ~ Dignity
National Indigenous Elder Justice Initiative

Background

There are seven types of elder maltreatment according to the National Center on Elder Abuse (2019), including physical, emotional/psychological, sexual, financial/material exploitation, neglect, self-neglect, and abandonment. Elder maltreatment exists when someone the elder has a relationship with (their spouse, sibling, child/ren, friend, or caregiver) mistreats them.

The American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population over age 65 is expected to triple by 2060 (AOA, 2019). AIs/ANs ages 85 and older in 2050 are projected to be 900% of the 2010 population (Vincent and Velkoff, 2010). This expected growth in older adults leaves this population vulnerable to elder abuse and/or neglect. Currently there is limited literature and national data on elder abuse and neglect among the AIs/ANs. National studies provide no information about AIs/ANs and indicate there is not enough data to analyze if any comment is made at all (Acierno, Hernandez, Amstadter, Resnick, Steve, Muzzy, & Kilpatrick, 2010; Laumann, Leitsch, Waite, 2008). This lack of data indicates the need for national evaluation to determine risk indicators of abuse in tribal communities. The National Indigenous Elder Justice Initiative (NIEJI) Program began the Native Elder Maltreatment Survey (NEMS) to determine an estimate of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation concerns in tribal communities.

Methods

The NIEJI NEMS (NEMS; Jervis, Fickenscher, Beals, & Shielding American Indian Elders Project Team, 2014) study began in 2017. This poster examines self-identified AI elderly older than 50 years of age. IRB approval and tribal resolutions were obtained before beginning data collection. Participants were recruited from their local tribal elder service programs and given a structured interview about elder abuse and neglect behaviors. All data were collected in tribal communities through face-to-face or telephone interviews. Interviewers were given training on gathering data, confidentiality, and mandatory reporting.

The NEMS was converted to a Scantron-based survey with software developed to read the data into SPSS software. Data was scanned into an SPSS data file and saved on a secure server located at the NIEJI office. The tribes own their data and analysis was provided by authorized NIEJI staff. Surveys were numbered for ease of data entry, but no personal identifiers were on the survey. Analyzed data were returned to the tribe with a comparison to aggregate data from all tribes participating. The data for this project is the aggregate of all tribes that participated in the NEMS.

- A total of (N=373) participated, 33% male and 67% female.
- Ages ranged from 50-101 years, with a mean of 67±8.4 years
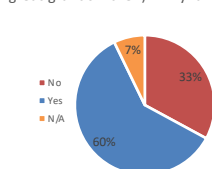- 27 tribes are represented.

Results

Data was analyzed to show the types of abuse occurring in all participating tribes. Although this is a small sample of the 573 federally recognized tribes, this will begin to address the paucity of data on elder abuse and neglect in Indian Country. Subscales included the Hwalek-Sengstock Elder Abuse Screening Test (H/S EAST); Native Elder Life Scale (NELS) – Financial Exploitation (FE); NELS-Neglect (N), NELS-Psychological and Physical (PP), and Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS).
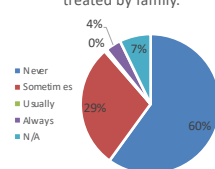
NEMS Subscale

Subscale	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach α
H/S EAST	5.65	2.39	0.698
NELS-FE	29.00	10.80	0.741
NELS-N	11.40	5.60	0.640
NELS-PP	7.30	2.60	0.435
CTS	0.08	0.47	0.295

Abuse by Gender

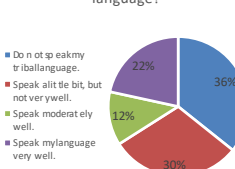| Risk of Abuse	Gender %	
	Male	Female
Someone has threatened me to get me to do something	9.6	11.3
Someone hurt me to get me to do something	0.9	2.5
Someone threatened an animal to get me to do something	1.7	0.4
Someone threatened a child to get me to do something	1.8	2.9
Someone has kicked, bit, hit me with a fist within the past year	2.6	3.3

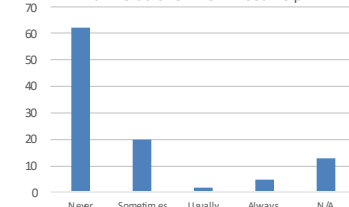I babysit children (grandchildren/great-grandchildren) in my family.
No 33%, Yes 60%, N/A 7%

My feelings are hurt by how I am treated by family.
Never 60%, Sometimes 29%, Usually 0%, Always 4%, N/A 7%

How well do you speak your tribal language?
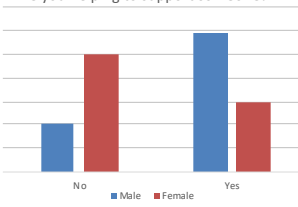Do not speak my tribal language 36%, Speak a little bit but not very well 30%, Speak moderately well 12%, Speak my language very well 22%
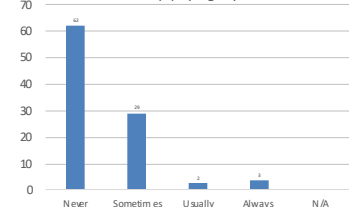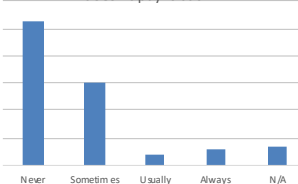

I am left alone when I need help.

Are you helping to support someone?

I need help paying my bills.

My family borrows money from me and doesn't pay it back.

Conclusion

- Participants were predominantly female, Single/Not Married/Widowed/Separated, and >50% completed high school/GED.
- The majority were between 59 and76 years old.
- More females than males indicated vulnerability to abuse in almost all abuse categories.
- 34% were retired; 28% were currently employed full time.
- Older adults indicated that their tribal identity, values, and practices were very important
  - 36% do not speak their tribal language
  - 30% speak limited sentences.
  - Most spoke English very well.
- The most commonly endorsed items concerned
  - "helping to support someone" (49.5%).
  - "family borrows money and doesn't give it back" (41.7%).
- Conversely those quite uncommon were:
  - "threatened with knife or gun in the past year" (1.3%).
  - "kicked, bit, or hit with a fist in past year" (3%).
- About 1 in 4 adults reported being left alone when they needed help.
- 1 in 12 adults indicated someone had taken personal property without permission.
  - 1 in 6 indicated family takes their possessions without permission and sells or pawns them.
- 1 in 7 indicated they have run out of food or medication due to family use of money for something else.

References

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Acknowledgements

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