

An Overview of Suicidality in American Indians and Alaska Natives

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Abstract : global suicide rates have decreased in recent decades, rates in the United States have increased by 35.2 percent since 1999. American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) have the highest rates of suicide in the U.S., with approximately 22 suicides per 100,000 people as of 2019. AI/AN have experienced significant historical trauma resulting in disproportionate rates of substance abuse and mental disorders. This literature review aimed to identify the demographic and clinical risk and protective factors for American Indians and Alaska Natives and provide an overview of suicidality in this population. The literature reflected varying definitions of suicidality depending on region, with some AI/AN tribes conceptualizing suicide through a spiritual framework, while others defined suicide in the biomedical sense. Furthermore, AI/AN adults and adolescents experienced higher rates of suicidal ideation when compared to other racial groups. Religious preference, sexual orientation, prior suicidal behavior, psychiatric admission, history of abuse, substance abuse, family history of mental illness, family history of substance abuse, family history of suicidal behaviors, domestic violence, and trauma were discussed as factors related to suicidality. Recommendations included increasing access to and utilization of mental health and medical services, culturally adapting suicide prevention programs to AI/AN communities, increasing support for LGBTQ+ AI/AN, providing opportunities that reinforce ethnic identity, and post-hospitalization follow-up care. The following databases were utilized to obtain peer-reviewed articles for this literature review: Complementary Index, Academic Search Premier, Science Direct, PsycInfo, Social Sciences Citation Index, PsycArticles, PubMed, EbscoHost, and PsycBooks. Articles that examined Native populations outside of the United States did not cite a primary source and/or were published before 1990 were excluded.

Keywords : alaska native, american indian, protective factors, risk factors, suicidality, suicide

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