Prospectus:

Working Title

Transgenerational Trauma and Locus of Control as Predictors of Mental Health Help-Seeking in Alaska Native Communities

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General Psychology – Research
Prospectus: Transgenerational Trauma and Locus of Control as Predictors of Mental Health Help-Seeking in Alaska Native Communities

**Problem Statement**

A considerable number of studies, including literature reviews, meta-analyses, and books have consistently indicated that minority populations lack adequate and appropriate access to mental health services (Clement et al., 2015; Cheng, Cheung, Chio, & Chan, 2013; Rindell, 2011. Nam, Chu, Lee, Lee, Kim and Lee (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 14 psychological services help-seeking studies and found gender differences to be an important predictor variable (females are more favorable towards help-seeking), but also identified an interaction between gender and cultural background (Caucasian, Asian/Asian American). Other ethnic minorities (e.g., Latinos, Hispanic, African Americans) have been studied (Clement et al., 2015; Bruce & Thorton, 2004,), but little attention has been given to Alaska Natives (AN) and American Indians (AI) living in Alaska.

AN/AI persons (like some other ethnic minorities) have been studied as a group with greater risk for trans-generational trauma, i.e., family trauma that is repeated through generations (Freitas-Murrell & Swift, 2015; Maxwell, 2014; Phipps & Degges-White, 2014). This makes the need for access to mental health services more acute and also even more challenging to provide.

Some of the barriers to treatment are external, e.g., lack of availability (Maxwell, 2014; Clement et al., 2015) and lack of cultural competency (Cheung et al., 2013; Pembers, 2015). However, some of the barriers to treatment may
result from individual differences and demographics (Ayalon & Young, 2005; Cheng, et al., 2013). In addition to the Nam et al. findings of gender and cultural differences (2010), Cheng et al. (2013) also did a meta-analysis of collectivistic cultures regarding locus of control and coping, where acceptance was a common strategy in stressful situations as opposed to action-oriented behaviors found in more individualistic orientations. Additionally, the authors suggested that proxy control in collectivist cultures places control of an individual in lieu of him or herself in powerful others, which may cause depressive symptoms due to foregoing control to others. The authors also recognized the idea of self-construals (how one defines oneself as independent of, interdependent with or dependent on) and how they may affect psychological well-being (Cheng et al., 2013). Locus of control has been a variable of interest in many studies of access to and use of mental health services (Kuo, 2013). As a potential moderating variable between demographics, trauma and behaviors of help-seeking, this variable has been helpful for examining within group differences as well as differences across groups. Instruments and measures used to determine locus of control also use more individualized than collective terms, and could help inform more culturally oriented interventions. However, intensive study of this personality variable in AI/AN individuals has not yet been conducted.

In sum, very little research has been conducted on the relationship between trans-generational trauma and LOC in mental health services help-seeking by AI/AN persons. And, there is interest at the local, state and national level to improve quality of life for this minority population (Felitti et al., 1998).
Research Problem

A lack of research on access to and use of mental health services for the AN/AI population exists. This group is important to study, mirroring challenges minority groups experience (Kira, Omidy, & Ashby, 2014), particularly with regard to trans-generational trauma (Freitas-Murrell & Swift, 2015; Maxwell, 2014; Phipps & Degges-White, 2014). Additionally, specific individual differences like LOC (Ayalon & Young, 2005; Cheng et al., 2013) can impede the willingness to cope (Kira et al., 2014) or seek services for mental health issues.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this proposed study is to examine the predictive relationship of trans-generational trauma and LOC on help-seeking and use of mental health services in the AN/AI population. The predictors are LOC and trans-generational trauma. The outcome variables are help-seeking and use of mental health services. This quantitative study will use several existing, psychometrically valid measures to assess the relationships between the variables.

Significance

This study will assist in obtaining baseline information regarding the variables that may allow AI/AN groups to improve help-seeking behavior. Generalizability and comparative studies may lead to subsequent studies as in the studies on other cultures (Kira, et al., 2014). The information found in this study will contribute to filling the research gap regarding an understanding of these constructs for the chosen population, as well as adding to the literature on mental health services help-seeking.
The results will support Walden’s University’s wish to address diversity and multiculturalism (Walden, 2013). Other groups may be inspired to follow the model used in this study to examine these and other variables in this minority population. Subsequent studies may also assist other cultures in better understanding the psychological barriers to help-seeking. It is hoped that these results will contribute to improved access to, availability of, and culturally appropriate mental health services for the AN/AI population.

**Background**

Trauma and stress may have a negative consequence regarding help-seeking in AI/AN groups (Kira et al., 2014; Wright & Wright, 1991). Attitudes and beliefs may negatively affect help seeking, Felitti et al. (1998). Some studies may study a couple variables, as in Jones-Saumty, Hochhaus, Dru, & Zeiner (1983) study on LOC and alcoholism. Some studies focus on trauma in its many degrees (Kira et al., 2014), but may not address trans-generational or historical trauma, or how externality may negatively effect help-seeking behavior (MacDonald, 1971). The following articles support the information gathered so far as well as those found in the Reference section:


**Framework**

Help-seeking (and self-help groups) is a major framework in this study. Help-seeking is defined as a person’s recognition of the need for professional assistance, stigma tolerance in seeking professional help, openness to dealing with an individual’s problems, and confidence in the ability of the professional to be of assistance (Nam et al., 2010), and may be influenced by culture and gender differences as well as LOC. However, Freitas-Murrell and Swift (2015) addressed treatment experiences and cultural background with AN samples. The authors found that Caucasian samples were more likely to have more variance in areas of
identification and treatment use and help-seeking, whereas AN/AI groups did not. Additionally, the AN samples who identified more with the mainstream culture were more comfortable seeking professional assistance (Freitas-Murrell & Swift, 2015).

Transgenerational trauma theory (TTT) (Maxwell, 2014) may include all areas in an individual’s life that may be affected by historical or transgenerational trauma. Areas of trauma from one generation to the other may be biological, cultural, sociological, and cultural. Freitas-Murrell & Swift (2015) also suggested that more research is needed on historical factors and how it may affect help-seeking behaviors. Maladaptive behaviors may emerge because of TT and may affect psychological well-being (Phipps & Degges-White, 2014). Maxwell (2014) also noted that mainstream mental health and child welfare systems that carry with them assimilative practices that may be injurious to native families and children regarding cultural continuity of his or her culture. Currently, measures may not be able to capture how and why assimilative processes are inherent in the variables, and may be beyond the scope of this study.

**Research Questions**

1. Does LOC and transgenerational trauma predict attitudes towards help-seeking?

2. Does LOC, transgenerational trauma, and attitudes towards help-seeking predict use of services in AN/AI persons living in Alaska?
Nature of the Study

This is a non-experimental, correlational study using psychometrically valid measures to examine predictive relationships among the variables. The measures under consideration are described below. Convenience sampling strategies will be used by contacting local tribes to distribute invitations to potential participants (Knight, Roosa, and Umana-Taylor, 2009), and both web-based and paper-and-pencil versions of the questionnaires will be available.

Possible Types and Sources of Data

The Multidimensional Trauma Recovery and Resiliency Scale (Phipps & Degges-White, 2014) or the PTSD Symptoms Scale–Self-Report (Boney-McCoy and Finkelhor, 1996) will be used to test for transgenerational trauma. The Internal-External (I-E) scale by Rotter (1966) will be used to assess LOC. Help-seeking will be assessed using Ayalon and Young’s (2005) 24 item questionnaire called the Inventory of Attitudes toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS; Mackenzie, Knox, Gekoski, & Macaulay, 2004). The researcher will also collect self-report data on frequency of intention (“how many times in the last year did you consider seeking professional assistance for relationship or mental health issues?”); and frequency of contact (“how many times in the last year did you contact professional assistance for relationship or mental health issues?”).

Possible Analytical Strategies

Survey research is best suited for correlational and predictive analyses like Multiple Regression (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2013). The researcher plans to examine
descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the predictors and dependent variables to choose the most appropriate multivariate technique.
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