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Best Practices in Counseling Native Americans

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Best Practices in Counseling Native Americans

What should counselors and psychologists do to make sure their work with Native Americans is culturally appropriate and effective? They should, among other things, build relationships with local Native communities, incorporate attention to spirituality into counseling, and reduce administrative obstacles to receiving care. These recommendations were among those made by mental health professionals who responded to a survey on best practices in counseling Native Americans in early 2011. The opinions of the survey participants provide useful information on how both Native and non-Native counselors and psychologists can improve their services for Native people.

Questions for the survey were developed based on issues identified from a literature search on counseling Native Americans (Gone, 2010; Gone, 2005; Herring, 1999; McCabe, 2007; Trujillo, 2000, etc.). The survey was pilot-tested with a group of Native American psychologists and counselors, and it was revised based on their comments. The final survey had 30 questions, including several closed-end questions and many open-ended questions. Participants in this study were mental health and related professionals who have extensive experience with Native Americans. Most of the respondents were members of the listserv of the Society of Indian Psychologists, and others were experts and specialists who were identified through a search of the literature on counseling Native Americans. The survey took about an hour to complete, and participants were offered a financial stipend to compensate them for their time.

A total of 68 people took the survey, which was administered via the internet; 57% were Native American and 43% were non-Native (White, African American, Hispanic, Latino, Asian, etc.). Survey responses were not analyzed separately for Native and non-Native respondents. Regarding gender, 68% were female and 32% were male. Regarding their profession, forty-two percent of the participants were psychologists, 27% were counselors, 16% were teachers, 16% were researchers, 10% were social workers, and 25% were another related profession (some respondents checked more than one profession so the total exceeds 100%). The majority of the participants (73%) reported that they worked in a counseling center or mental health clinic.

The participants' answers to the survey questions were analyzed to identify the most common responses. The results for several of the survey questions are summarized here (more results of the survey will be published later in this and other professional journals). An article with the complete