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My current research focus is centered on the development of a drug and alcohol prevention interventions for Native youth rooted in harm reduction approaches and Indigenous cultural values, as well as HIV/STI prevention intervention research for racial and ethnic minority youth. Drug and alcohol use as a risk factor for drug harm among youth populations continues to be a social problem for all races and ethnicities, including Native populations. Unfortunately, many interventions developed and tested for youth populations do not include or honor Native worldviews or experiences. My research explores and Indigenous healing strategies, harm reduction practice, and evidence-based research as the basis for drug and alcohol interventions specific to Indigenous youth and their communities.

Research Experience

In 2006 while completing my MSSW at Columbia University, I served as a New York City site coordinator for the HONOR project. The HONOR project, housed at the Indigenous Wellness Research Institute at the UW School of Social Work, was a national survey with six nationwide partners examining the impacts of historical trauma, stress, and discrimination on the health of Native LGBTQ and Two-Spirit individuals. In this role, I coordinated New York City data collection activities in partnership with an assistant coordinator, conducted outreach and screened potential participants, and conducted individual interviews with study participants.

Next, while working for the National Native American AIDS Prevention Center in 2011, I served as project manager for the NAEHCR (Native American Engagement in HIV Clinical Research) project. The pilot project aimed to increase engagement and participation of Native-identified participants in HIV clinical trials in a culturally respectful manner. The Division of AIDS, National Institute of AIDS and Infectious Disease (NIAID) at NIH funded the project, and I was responsible for collecting mixed methods data from three urban Indian communities (Chicago, IL, Baltimore, MD, and Dallas, TX) and trained NIAID-funded HIV clinical trial staff located in each of the three cities.

In 2015 during my first year of doctoral studies, I served as a research assistant for the Vr2L 2Spirit (Virtual Two-Spirit) study. The study relied on virtual web technology (i.e., Second Life) in the design of an HIV prevention intervention for adult Native men who have sex with men. The intervention is culturally grounded and promotes HIV risk and harm reduction strategies. I assisted with cultural adaptations of HIV risk and prevention messaging, incorporated Indigenous teaching and protocols into western information.

Additionally, in 2016 I served as a research assistant for the MyPEEPS (Male Youth Pursuing Empowerment, Education and Prevention around Sexuality) Mobile study, which is a theoretically driven, multi-ethnic efficacy study that integrates theories of racial identity and development, minority stress, and stigma management in a smartphone app. The app employs games and activities to educate on HIV/STI prevention and substance use/misuse for young men who have sex with men (13-18 years of age). The intervention is predicated on the heavy usage of smart phones among young people, which can provide a viable platform to educate on HIV risk behaviors while promoting sexual health. I assisted with study recruitment, produced marketing/outreach materials, conducted individual interviews, and delivered community information sessions.

Most recently, in 2018 I received a 1-year NIH Research Supplement to Promote Diversity award to continue working on an individual-level research agenda as part of the larger parent study, MyPEEPS Mobile. My focus was on the development of methods to increase Native youth participants in the study. This included developing study recruitment operating procedures, producing marketing/outreach materials, and delivering community information sessions. This funding also allowed me to complete my general exam and advance to candidacy in January of 2019. The title of my general exam, *Systematic review of harm reduction interventions addressing contextual vulnerabilities to drug harm among youth and young adults 12-19 years of age*, was submitted to the Journal of Substance Use and Misuse in Spring of 2019 and is currently under review.

Future Directions

My current potential for assuming leadership roles in the area of research, advocacy, and policy development while in a doctoral program is exemplified by assisting with two research projects using cutting edge technologies to prevent HIV/AIDS and reduce substance use disorders, the Vr2rL 2Spirit and MyPEEPS Mobile studies. My future plans are to continue pursuing deeper understandings of healing and wellness among marginalized population using both Indigenous and western research methodologies, in order to advance the health and wellness of those most in need. Specifically, identifying culturally relevant prevention interventions that honor both community-based wisdom and evidence-based practices.