



winter 2024 press release

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY AMONG A SAMPLE OF URBAN AMERICAN INDIAN / ALASKA NATIVE EMERGING ADULTS

Daniel L. Dickerson
Inupiaq

Elizabeth J. D'Amico

David P. Kennedy

Ryan A. Brown

David Klein

Kathy Etz

Carrie L. Johnson
Wahpeton Dakota

George Funmaker
Ho-Chunk/Dakota

Virginia Arvizu-Sanchez
Tongva, Kumeyaay, Apache

Nipher Malika

SUMMARY

Within urban areas, where over 80% of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people live, connecting with other AI/AN people may be challenging. In this article, published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, we assessed the association between social connections and depression and anxiety among 150 urban AI/AN emerging adults from twenty different states. We asked them about general characteristics of their social networks, the quality of their relationships, and cultural characteristics of their social networks. They were also asked if their social network members drank alcohol heavily, used cannabis

frequently, and/or used other drugs including opioids.

Urban AI/AN emerging adults who had more social contacts around the same age reported significantly less anxiety. Those who had more social contacts whom they sometimes/often argue or fight with were more likely to report greater depression and anxiety. Those with more social network members who ever lived on a reservation/Rancheria/tribal land/tribal village reported significantly less depression whereas those with more social connections who lived fifty miles away or more reported significantly more depression. We did not find associations with the individual's mental health and

their social contacts' heavy drinking, regular cannabis use, or other drug use behavior. Results were similar regardless of participant's gender identification, sexual orientation, or sex assigned at birth.

We learned valuable information that helps explain how social networks affect mental health and well-being of urban AI/AN emerging adults. Findings can lead to new strategies to help this population experience less depression and anxiety through their social contacts. For example, discussing what it is like to be AI/AN in urban areas may help AI/AN emerging adults connect more with their culture, protect themselves from depression and anxiety, and capitalize upon their resiliency and strengths.

For more information and links to other articles about the TACUNA project, check out our website, www.tacunaproject.com/pub-media, or scan the QR code.



Research funded by a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, UH3 DA050235 as part of the NIH Helping to End Addiction Long-term (HEAL) Initiative: Preventing OUD in Older Adolescents and Young Adults (ages 16-30).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Having social contacts around the same age may decrease anxiety
- Having less supportive social contacts may increase depression and anxiety
- Having more social connections who have ever lived on tribal on lands or who live closer may decrease depression levels