

1. Please provide your current professional position(s), and generally describe the nature and focus of your work.

Dolores Subia BigFoot, PhD  
Associate Professor  
University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center  
College of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics  
Center on Child Abuse and Neglect  
Director, OJJDP Tribal Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center  
Director, Indian Country Child Trauma Center

I provide policy, development, training, and technical assistance for clinical and cultural implementation for decreasing the effects of trauma responses in children, their families, and their communities, by working with tribes, tribal programs, state and federal agencies.

2. Please describe your educational background, including which degrees you hold from which institutions.

Pre-Doctoral Internship University of California-Irvine  
PhD University of Oklahoma  
Post-Doctoral Fellowship University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center  
Caddo Cultural Teachings Healer Pauline Tinhue Washington  
Cheyenne Cultural Teachings Cheyenne Chief John L. Sipe Jr, Standing Bird Family

3. Please describe any work you have done for Tribes of the Sioux Nation.

Currently I have two federal contracts to provide training and technical assistance to tribal grantees, including the Sioux Tribes located in North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Minnesota. Over the past several years in all the states noted, I have provided training and technical assistance on the effects of trauma on children and their families. I have provided training or technical assistance, either with policy development or application, either using the above identified federal grants or by invitation.

4. Please describe your expertise regarding historical trauma, including relevant publications (may be selective).

A 2017 publication, Cultural Trauma in American Indian Populations which I co-authored with Kathryn England-Aytes and Patti Jo King, describes the impact of cultural trauma across generations of American Indian families especially detailing the federal government policies which has undermined the integrity of the family and tribal communities (in Social Psychology, edited by Randal W. Summers).

I served from 2014 to 2016 on the US Attorney General's Task Force Defending Childhood Initiative supported by the Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Listening Sessions were scheduled at select locations, personal and professional testimonies were solicited at Hearings conducted across the nation with a report produced titled, "Ending Violence so American Indian and Alaska Native Children can Thrive," which was delivered to the US Attorney General. The consensus of this committee and production of the report was that historical trauma impacts all American Indian and Alaska Native children, that trauma exposure has bearing on all native children, and that the policies of the federal government has destabilized tribal relations and tribal sovereignty, whereas tribes cannot govern to provide protection nor provide for their vulnerable citizenship. There is a definite lack of trust in the legislation and policies governing tribal-state-federal relations.

I direct the Indian Country Child Trauma Center (ICCTC) which was established through a federal grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) in 2004 to 2008 to development culturally adapted evidence based treatments for American Indian and Alaska Native children and their families' exposure to trauma events or adverse childhood events that impact their ability to function productively. Since 2008, ICCTC has been maintained by other funding sources because of the need for resources of trauma, cultural trauma, historical trauma, and ways to help lessen or eliminate the impact of trauma and adverse conditions. All the work of the Indian Country Child Trauma Center has been to address historical trauma which negatively cultivates the next generation of children within tribal communities. Addressing current traumas cannot be adequately eliminated without acknowledging and recognizing the role historical trauma plays in tribal communities and how established policies and practices recreate limitations on sovereignty and self-governance, heighten trauma reactions.

Other publications include "Violence and the effects of trauma on American Indian and Alaska Native Populations (2009) and History of victimization in Native communities (2000).

5. Please describe the concept of historic trauma, including the kinds of actions (particularly actions by the federal government) that give rise to historic trauma for tribes (forced taking of tribal lands, loss of language and culture, etc).

Historical trauma is revisited each day with the policy of who is eligible for enrollment in a federally recognized tribe. It is an undeniable fact that there is no measureable method for a degree of Indian Blood but rather this arbitrary measure by the federal government to establish tribal census. Most tribes as a part of the colonization process assumed the requirement imposed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as determining tribal citizenship, resulting in tribal governments relying on enrollments, blood quantum and tribal membership, first as imposed and currently as a defense against non-Indians claiming fraudulent heritage (Mihe-suah, 1996; Allen, 1991). This is particularly true more recently since changes in the 1990 Census allowed

self-identification, resulting in a striking increase in U.S. citizens who identify as American Indian. Tribes are learning the cruel measure of what citizenship has reverted to when relying on the template constitution that appear at the time to build a tribal census. Children, families, and communities are experiencing stress and distress in navigating the requirement of tribal enrollment and other federally eligible resources that one who is enrolled in a federally recognized tribe would be allowed to access.

Trauma is not an unknown condition. Around the world each generation, each community, each family has different degrees of exposure to traumatic events. However, the systematic methods of policy and practices instituted by the federal government utilizing federal programs, state programs, church programs, and education systems has undermined the fabric for cultural, economic, social, and political resiliency of tribes.

Sherman Goose, a Cheyenne Elder, stated in an interview, that the government used four methods of oppression, first, the bottle, then the Bible, if those didn't work, then removal of children, if those three didn't work, then the fist (or might) (Oral History Collection, Oklahoma History Society Archives, 1993).

Nearly five centuries after the arrival of European colonists, the impact of their objectives, which relied upon the harsh interpretation of civilization and assimilation, can still be felt within tribal communities; and contemporary experiences of American Indians continue to be informed by these enduring, inconsistent, and oppressive policies. It is important to understand the unique role that historical trauma, resulting in unresolved grief, and cultural decimation have played and continue to play across generations, for American Indian children, their families and communities.

It is impossible to capture and adequately explain the complex nature and extent of devastation experienced by American Indian/Alaska Native families since the "discovery of the New World" (BigFoot & Braden, 2007; Weaver, 1998). From the 1490's to the 1890's, "Europeans and white Americans engaged in an unbroken string of genocide campaigns against the American Indian people of the Americas" (Stannard, 1992, p. 147); however the political, social, and economic policies of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century did not offer much change for the Indigenous people. Instead, several generations of American Indian and Alaska Natives were the recipients of oppressive, ill-informed, deceitful, strategically planned, and violent assaults (EchoHawk, 2012) resulting in extraordinary levels of decreased capacity leading toward more traumatic reactions and lessening self-governance.

Trauma and violence among American Indian and Alaska Native populations are significant and emerging topics of research with several meaningful books, dissertations, and peer-reviewed articles recently published their exposure to trauma due to colonialization, racism, out of home placements, education system and loss of language, substance abuse, and other destructive behaviors (Abadian, 2000; BigFoot, 2000; Boyd-Ball, 2006; Braveheart, 2004; Byers, 2006; Deters, Novins, Fickenscher, & Beals, 2006; Duran, 2006; Ehlers et al, 2006; England-Ayes, 2014; Evans-Campbell, Lindhorst, Huang, & Walters, 2006; Hamby, 2005; Harwell, Moore, & Spence, 2003; Kaufman, Beals, Mitchell, LeMaster, & Fickenscher, 2004; McCabe, 2007; Oetzel & Duran, 2004; Rivers, 2005; Saylor & Daliparthi, 2006; Strickland, Walsh, & Cooper, 2006; Walker, 2006; Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004; Whitbeck, McMorris, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2002; Witko, 2006). Other outlets such as national centers, professional

associations, and agencies have focused on the connection between trauma, violence, wellbeing, self-regulation, self-governance, mental and physical health among American Indians and Alaska Native communities (Indian Country Child Trauma Center ([www.icctc.org](http://www.icctc.org)); White Bison ([www.whitebison.org](http://www.whitebison.org)); National Indian Child Welfare Association ([www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org)); National Congress of American Indian Suicide Summit ([www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org)), Circles of Care and Native Aspirations (SAMHSA.gov); Indian Health Service Director's Initiatives (www.IHS.gov) and Association of American Indian Physicians ([www.aaip.org](http://www.aaip.org)).

The vulnerability to trauma, historical and current, is related to the damaging social conditions and multiple marginalization's facing American Indian/Alaska Native people (BigFoot, 2000; McCabe, 2007; R. Robbins, personal communication, September 10, 2007; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001;). Vulnerability to trauma was created under conditions of poverty, historical trauma, and cultural hegemony adding susceptibility for the layers of violence now well established in tribal communities both as modeling from the dominate oppressive culture and from the tendency of oppressed people to react toward their peers negatively when faced with threats, uncertainty, and unpredictability. When tribal communities work diligently to overcome violence reactions, they tend to drawn heavily on their traditional teachings and ceremony, and understandings of the world of relationships, that to the earth, the water, the sky, the people, and the to the spirit.

#### *The Indigenous People of Great Turtle Island*

The Indigenous Peoples of the Great Turtle Island were vibrant, productive, creative citizens of their world existing in tribal groups or loose affiliations with regional and cultural connections as well as differences. They were not benign, benevolent citizens but existed within complex, highly organized, contemplative, and competitive societies. They established and understood boundaries and respectful dialogue. Yes, they fought for territory, principle, property, people, religion, or prowess. The interchange between tribal groups spread over large territories allowing for seasonal conflict or parlay, renewal ceremonies and clemency, or alliance building or migration. Social order was maintained by belief systems handed from one generation to the next and by respect for lineage and the relationship with kin, animals, elements, nature (water, fire, food), and the spiritual world.

The world of the Great Turtle Island existed not as a fantasy or mythical sphere but as a connection to an ecology that allow the Indigenous people to balance any destructive activities (fires, tornadoes, floods, etc.) with productive methods. As participants in the dynamic cultural settings that formed the infrastructure prior to "discovery of the New World," life was not without drama, conflict, violence, and chaos. Unfortunately the societal, political, economic, and cultural infrastructure that maintained the Great Turtle Island was disseminated by the progressive determination of colonialists, pilgrims, pioneers, settlers, and the new democracy whose ideal was freedom for all but limited and not inclusive of the indigenous people already occupying the land. Elimination of indigenous people's right began from all sections of the continental US.

Wanting gold, copper, water, silver, lumber, oil, farm land etc., the government was committed to serving the individual and corporate exploiters of the land's natural resources (Beck, Walters, & Francisco, 1977). Deception by the means of unequal trade was used by Europeans to cheat American Indians.. The exchange of inexpensive European manufactured goods, weapons, and liquor for the extension of European land rights (Heldman, 1973) was commonplace. The guns

traded to the American Indians were generally of poor quality (Heldman, 1973) and the liquor was used to impair judgment. Mancall (1995) reported “ever since the rise of the rum trade, which began as an offshoot of the West Indies sugar business in the 1650s, traders had hauled distilled spirits to American Indians. Although they watered their wares, traders still sold liquor that had sufficient punch to intoxicate Indian drinkers” (p. 426).

#### *Diversity of Cultures and Shared Beliefs among Indigenous People*

Historically and culturally, the Indigenous People of the New World consisted of numerous separate and diverse groups, some connected by alliances or language, but each having their own beliefs, customs, rituals, ceremonies, and territories. Most possessed creation stories that spoke of their origin and their way of life. Within their stories passed from generations to generation, they were taught how to treat each other, their relationships to the land and the other creations (animals, earth, sky, water, etc), their sources for food, shelter, guidance, and good favor and the purpose of their journey in this world. They knew about the seasons, especially to be respectful of the seasons that brought either the blessings or demise. If one disrespected water then one could drown or be pulled under by the spirits below the water. If one disrespected the wind, those spirits could carry one away and leave orphans of ones’ children.

Tribal groups view themselves as being unique and separate with some shared values when regional affiliations have been established. For example, the Iroquois Confederacy has six tribes with common features, but has maintained their separate identities, separate lineage, and separate names. New Mexico has 21 Pueblo groups with each having separate governing bodies but similar cultural practices. In the southeastern part of the U.S., tribal stomp dances are a cultural practice among several tribes while there is a significant difference in the songs, order, leadership, family position, and location. Some tribes, such as the Western Delaware Tribe of Oklahoma (Lenape), have reconnected with people from their original homelands (e.g., Canada and northeast coast of United States) and reintegrated traditional ceremonies into their culture (e.g., Fullmoon women’s ceremonies). However the distance, water and respect for the land remains central and essential for creating the safe conditions for renewal and healing. When there is not land nor water, then renewal and healing is not possible.

Values different among tribal groups but most would agree that cherishing family relations, both formally and informally, acknowledging the importance of land and water, beliefs about generosity and sharing, valuing of elders and wisdom, respect for nature and nature’s ways, and the interdependency among members. Shared values were necessary especially for survival since survival depended on trust and sharing of resources.

6. Please describe in general the kinds of impacts historic trauma may have on subsequent generations (physical and mental health).

#### Historical Trauma and AI/AN Tribes, Families, and Individuals

Historical trauma involves exposure of an earlier generation to a traumatic event that continues to affect the subsequent generations (Cole, 2006). Braveheart (2004) indicated that:

Historical trauma is cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences. The historical trauma

response is the constellation of features in reaction to this trauma. The historical trauma response may include substance abuse as a vehicle for attempting to numb the pain associated with trauma. The Historical Trauma Response often includes other types of self-destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts and gestures, depression, low self-esteem, anger and difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions. Associated with Historical Trauma Response is historical unresolved grief that accompanies the trauma; this grief may be considered impaired, delayed, fixated, and/or disfranchised (Braveheart 1999a and b, 1988; Braveheart-Jordan 1995) (p. 7).

Historical trauma has impacted AI/AN tribes, AI/AN families (clans, bands, societies), and AI/AN individuals. The effects of historical trauma on tribes included the loss of vast number of people who were annihilated during colonization and the loss of self-governance (Cole, 2006) and the prohibition of language, dismissal of spiritual/healing practices, removal or relocation by individual or community, or limited or no access to public or sacred places (BigFoot & Braden, 2007). The amount of destruction to each tribe differed in that those who were colonized first being heavily affected (such as those on the east coast), whereas those more resistive and less accessible (such as the Navajo) to the colonizers were left more intact (Cole, 2006).

The effects of historical trauma on the AI/AN family (clans, bands, societies) included colonization by a dominant force that was patriarchal and patrilineal (Cole, 2006). In most cases misogyny (hatred or prejudice against women) and the impairment of parenting skills (Cole, 2006) was largely due to the removal of adults from their role as caregivers through the boarding school movement (Colmont et al., 2004). Cole indicated that such breakdowns in family relationships can be seen in the high level of child abuse and domestic violence in AI/AN families. For instance, there is approximately one substantiated report of a child victim of abuse or neglect for every 30 AI/AN children (National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, 2002). In addition, AI/AN children are one of the two most overrepresented groups in child protective services and are represented at twice their proportions in the census populations in the foster care system (Hill, 2006).

The effects of historical trauma on the AI/AN individual may include the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Cole, 2006). Cole emphasized the complexity of the impact of historical trauma on the psychological well-being of American Indians:

The most frequent co-morbid diagnoses with PTSD, outside of other anxiety disorders, include depression and substance abuse. A full evaluation must account for these diagnoses. In the area of substance abuse, the use or abuse of substances can be seen as self-protective. This may be a way to avoid and numb the emotions and recollections of trauma. As such, substance abuse interferes with treatment and healing. In the AI community, recollection must include an understanding of the historical trauma, its effect on one's tribe and family, and the continuing effect today. In addition to the historical trauma, the individual's specific traumatic events must be explored (p. 124-125).

Although historical trauma has not yet been consistently found to be a precursor to traumatic stress disorders, it creates a major pathway in which the members of that culture are at greater risk of experiencing psychological disturbances, becoming less able to draw on the strengths of their culture, family, or natural network for social and emotional support (BigFoot & Braden, 2007). For example, research has linked historical trauma to psychological disturbances among

American Indian and Alaska Native populations. In a study by Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, and Adams (2004), it was found that alcohol abuse was strongly associated with historical trauma and that alcohol might serve to reduce intrusive thoughts or feelings and to numb reminders of historical trauma and may represent anger manifested in self-destructive behaviors.

### *Oppression and Hegemony*

Oppression and hegemony are related concepts. According to Chase-Dunn (1994), hegemony is “a form in which dominance is obscured by achieving the appearance of acquiescence to this whole as if it were the natural order of things. So dominance is less visible when we speak of hegemony...hegemony is an internalized imposed order but has been transformed into an intersubjectively constituted reality” (p. 366). Euro-American ideology has penetrated and in significant ways sought to replace American Indian and Alaska Native traditional ways and knowledge without given recognition or awareness to the lost, loss of language, loss of governance, loss of connection to the land, loss of culture. Once military might was lessened toward American Indians and Alaskan Natives, the effort of formal education, formal religion, and replacement by elected governance began which completely changed the original order of the American Indian self-governance and sovereignty both individually and nation. Using methods of seemingly benign but subtle coercion, certain subset of the tribal community became those individuals who became conditioned to believe that the new education order, the structured religions, and the seemingly democratic systems were of much higher order of function than what was currently in place. By convincing tribal leadership and other influential tribal members to accept the new approaches, they did not recognize nor were they aware that their decisions would lead to servitude under the federal and state governments. They did not know the extent of the oppression that would occur as a result of the changes in lifestyle and culture. That is, oppression is implicit in terms of hegemony. McCabe (2007) found that current problems among AI/ANs are connected to historical and contemporary traumas. In particular, McCabe stated that “psychology as a profession has failed them [AI/ANs] and is even perceived as an agent of social control and hegemony” (p. 148). The profound influence of oppression and hegemony cannot be ignored when speaking about mental health and AI/ANs.

### Defining Trauma with American Indian/Alaska Native Populations

Trauma symptoms impact a person’s emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and psychobiological domains (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006; Shalev, Yehuda, & McFarlane, 2000).

According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) (2005), trauma is a unique individual experience associated with a traumatic event or enduring conditions, which can involve an actual death or other loss, serious injury, or threat to a child’s well-being. However, BigFoot and Braden (2007) reported that “this definition is of limited usefulness within AI/AN communities since it does not take into account the cultural trauma, historical trauma, and intergenerational trauma that has accumulated in AI/AN communities through centuries of exposure to racism, warfare, violence, and catastrophic disease” (p. 19). It is evident that being familiar with the impact of historical trauma when conceptualizing AI/ANs is important.

### How Trauma is Experienced among American Indian/Alaska Natives

Trauma among AI/ANs is experienced as (ICCTC, 2007):

A single event (car accident; rape);

Prolonged experience (historical events such as the removal from home lands experienced by AI/AN; ongoing sexual abuse);

Cumulative effects (high rates of violence and exposure to violence such as domestic violence and neighborhood violence);  
Personal events that impacts several generations (boarding schools, massacres, forced relocation; early losses);  
Violent deaths (homicide, suicide, unintentional injury; and  
Multiple victimization (two or more different types of victimizations).

7. How would the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline across Lake Oahe immediately harm the Tribe and its members from the standpoint of historic trauma – even before any oil spill takes place?

When the 9/11 Twin Towers came down, the people in Oklahoma City were highly traumatized. Citizens of Oklahoma City and the surrounding communities across the state were re-traumatized by the images and constant reporting of what happen on 9/11. They were no-where near where New York City is located, however, they became anxiety, re-experienced feelings and thoughts about what happened on April 19, 1995. In fact each time there is an image on television or a retelling, though no real threat, the heightened feelings of anxiety, depression, feeling out of control, unable to function, and other conditions of dis-empowerment occur. There are national monuments to the events that occurred on both those dates which acknowledges the stress and distressed that occurred and continue to occur with an emphasis on the country's ability to overcome. Empowerment is recognized as an important part of dealing with trauma and moving toward healing. There are no national monuments to the Lakota or Dakota people that acknowledges their struggles to survive, much less an acknowledgment of what they are enduring. Each time a perceived or actual threat occurs, the people of Standing Rock will be impacted by the lack of empowerment and inability to govern for themselves. The Sioux people are a disciplined people, they have practiced self-disciplined and self-governance for generations prior to an electoral process of government. This is evident by their ceremonies and their teachings with are conveyed by their communal living. People do not function adequately when experiencing traumatic reactions, even perceived threats can trigger re-traumatization. The people in Oklahoma City were not remotely physically threaten by the 9/11 attack, however they perceived being threaten and that trigger many post-traumatic stress reactions. Standing Rock has been continuously under threat, danger, violence, confrontation, and dis-empowerment for several months, however historically they have been under threat, danger, violence, and dis-empowerment for generations.

8. Conclusion – Is it your professional opinion that the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline under Lake Oahe would cause irreparable harm to the Tribe and its people?

In those critical situation where vulnerable people are under constant threats or evolving threats, it will have a highly negative effects on their emotional and physical health and their overall wellbeing. When water and land are the livelihood of a culture, damage to those resources irrevocably change the meaningfulness, the methods, and the practices associated with the land



and water. How can one have the same meaningful water offerings that have occurred for generations, if the water is no longer available in the same manner or in the same way as before? The threat of livelihood for the Standing Rock reservation are as real a threat toward livelihood as those impacted by the 9/11 or the Oklahoma City acts of terrorism. Those were external threat; however the federal government is maintaining a constant threat of terror toward the Standing Rock Tribe and its citizenry. Individuals and their communities who live under constant threat, as the people of Standing Rock are, have a higher potential for developing diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, addictions, or other poor life outcomes. When the government system in place that is supposed to be the protector but continues to be the oppressor and instigator of violations of tribal sovereignty, than individuals who are citizens under that sovereignty would find it impossible to gain a sense of safety and security.