

# Qualitative Analysis of Discrimination Experiences Faced by Urban-Dwelling American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN)



PRESENTER:

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**BACKGROUND:** AI/AN have a unique history of colonization and discrimination. Although some of the worst abuses are in the past (e.g., the Trail of Tears and forced colonial education) remnants of colonization, ongoing discrimination continues today (Skewes, M. C., & Blume, A. W. 2019).

AI/AN are commonly faced with stereotypes, including assumptions that AI/AN are alcoholic, “casino-rich,” and promiscuous (Robertson, D. L., 2015). There is also a sense of invisibility - that AI/AN do not exist, e.g., in their advocacy and representation in the media. The problems that AI/AN face are often dismissed by society, at large. This sense of invisibility may lead to a loss of cultural identity and self-understanding (Leavitt, P. A., Covarrubias, R., Perez, Y. A., & Fryberg, S. A., 2015).

## METHODS

1. N = 240
2. Urban-dwelling adult AI/AN (mean age = 43.56; sd = 15.14; range = 18-75; 155 female, 84 male; 114 have a college education, 124 have a high-school education; 156 live at or below poverty level, 29 have incomes at or above poverty level).
3. Participants were asked to recount an experience of discrimination; responses were transcribed and analyzed through a deductive coding process using Dedoose software. A team of 6 researchers coded excerpts of the stories. Each coder was trained, with kappa coefficients of .68 - .87.
4. There were 41 different codes related to the act of discrimination. These included how the speaker felt or acted, how third parties responded, and how the experience changed the speaker’s perceptions of the world and of others.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

**Interpersonal discrimination:** unfair/biased treatment towards individuals or groups due to their phenotypic characteristics or race (Shavers et al., 2012)

### Act of Discrimination:

**Physical Threat:** the act of discrimination was physically violent, aggressive, or threatening.

**Social Threat:** labels or statements that indicate a negative attitude or stereotypes. Anytime the participant felt treated unfairly or harassed. This excludes physical threats.

### Responses:

**Negative - Avoid Flight:** the speaker felt fearful, upset, nervous, sad, miserable, embarrassed, disgusted, etc.

**Negative – Fight Approach:** the speaker felt angry, hostile, mad, irritated, pissed off, etc.

**First Person Speaker: Interpersonal Perceptions:** how the speaker felt in relation to others, either the offender or even people in general. The speaker feels and communicates feelings of being invalidated, excluded, invisible or discounted, harassed, judged, targeted or singled out, etc.

**Resilience -** The speaker referencing how they adapt in the face of trauma, adversity, tragedy, threats, or other significant sources of stress; bouncing back from difficult experiences.

American Indian participants reported on instances of discriminatory **social threat** and **physical threat**. They commonly faced discriminatory experiences in **public** and **professional environments** (i.e., school/work). Responses varied from feelings of **anger** to **sadness** or **embarrassment**, and some participants reported increases in **resilience**. Most chose to **confront** their offender, but many also opted to **avoid confrontation**.

**Physical Threat -** “I got attacked by a dog”. “He had a dog and he let it loose and he was like ‘red meat’.”

**Workplace Discrimination -** “She said that I was just trying to use that as an excuse to get a job. And because I was a minority she had to give me a job”.

“The owner hired me, but he had an assistant...He flat out told me, ‘You know what? I don’t think that you’re culturally fit here.’”

**Low Enforcement -** “My mom, she was also handcuffed, but they let her go, cause she said that she knew her rights and that she would get a hold of everybody that she had to -- the ACRU -- other parties, due to, you know, being treated uncivil, unjust.”

**Interpersonal perceptions & Negative Avoid/Flight-** “Based on my appearance, he assumed that I had money because I might be from a tribe affiliated with casinos... I felt like that was an unfair treatment of me based on who I am. That was really sad and upsetting.”

**Historical Traumas -** “Back then, there was, you know, that occupation where the natives fought against the government again back in the 70s ...they didn’t like it because us natives were going to start standing up for us and, you know, all through the years they used to be, you know, hateful and racist to us.”

**Social Stigma-** “I was young, and my mom and dad were arguing, and my dad said there’s nothing worse than a fuckin’ Indian...”

**Interpersonal Perceptions -** “The person that was asking for orders just kept acting like they didn’t see me and XXXX standing there, and they kept bypassing us. And then when there was no other person behind us, they just left the window and didn’t even -- like, ignored us totally.”

Codes	Prevalence (out of 240)	%
<b>Act of Discrimination</b>		
Social Threat	226	94.17
Physical Threat	31	12.92
Other	26	10.83
<b>Time of Discrimination</b>		
Time of Discrimination - Childhood	75	31.25
<b>Location of Discrimination</b>		
School/ Work	97	40.42
In Public	92	38.33
Private Residence	23	9.58
<b>Reaction to Discrimination</b>		
Confront/ Directly Addresses Discrimination	114	47.50
Avoid Confrontation/ Avoid Escalation	93	38.75
Identity Concealed or Disclosed	24	10.00
Spoke To Authority	23	9.58
Inward Suppression of Negative Emotions	22	9.17
Psychological Symptoms	19	7.92
Redirect Attention/ Move Past	14	5.83
<b>Coping AFTER Situation</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>15.83</b>

Codes	Prevalence (out of 240)	%
<b>Emotions / Emotional Coping</b>		
Negative - Avoid/ Flight (Fear, sadness, embarrassment)	111	46.25
Negative - Fight Approach (Anger)	105	43.75
Surprise/ Shock/ Stunned/ Amazed	27	11.25
Positive	10	4.17
<b>Interpersonal Perceptions</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>51.67</b>
<b>Offender Identity</b>		
Teacher/ Boss/ Law Enforcement	77	32.08
Peer/ Friend	54	22.50
Stranger/ Unknown	53	22.08
Service Provider	48	20.00
Family Member	14	5.83
<b>Offender Response/ Persists</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>31.25</b>
<b>Reference of Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>67.92</b>
<b>Resilience</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7.92</b>
<b>Third Party Response</b>		
Positive (Support/ Validate)	36	15.00
Negative (Invalidates or Escalates)	19	7.92
No Response	16	6.67



## DISCUSSION

- Research studies focused on discrimination including Latinos, African Americans, and American Indian participants shared common themes such as being harassed by police, assaulted, experiencing implicit bias by healthcare providers, receiving poorer service, etc. (Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Shavers et al., 2012).
- The current data provides insight regarding the ways in which AI/AN may be discriminated against, the types of offenders they encounter, and how they react to the discrimination.
- The current study indicates discrimination may trigger a variety of emotions including sadness, anger, shock, etc.
- Emotional reactions following discrimination led to speakers seeking help from family and friends (in an effort to cope) rather than mental health professionals (Carter & Forsyth, 2010).

## GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

There is a dearth of knowledge regarding the lived experiences of urban-dwelling AI/AN. Additionally, there is a lack of insight into the most salient types of discrimination faced by AI/AN. Finally, few empirical studies have associated specific types of discrimination with specific types of emotional responses.

## LIMITATIONS

1. Since the coding was performed manually, the wrong code may have been applied to an excerpt due to various reasons, or no code was applied by mistake. We used inter-rater coding to address mistakes through agreement among raters.
2. Qualitative research possesses inadequate justification of the procedures used, lack of clear analytical procedures, and the findings of this kind of research are a gathering of personal opinions that are vulnerable to researcher bias (Noble, H., Smith, J. 2015).
3. The level of kappa that should be adequate for health research is debatable (McHugh M. L. 2012).

## IMPLICATIONS

- The findings from this study can broaden people's understandings as to how discrimination impacts AI/AN and their worldview.
- The data helps establish a sense of empathy for the victims of discrimination on an individual level, and provides logistical thinking.
- Understanding the discrimination experiences of AI/AN can help the efforts of community members, policymakers, and clinicians to prevent discrimination and mitigate its negative effects.

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