

THE SELF DEFENSE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES STUDY REPORT

**A JOINT EFFORT BETWEEN
THE SEXUAL VIOLENCE LAB
OF UNIVERSITY OF NORTH
DAKOTA & CULTIVATING
OPPORTUNITIES THAT LEAD
TO EQUITY (COLE) LAB OF
OKLAHOMA STATE
UNIVERSITY**

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COLE**



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WHO WE ARE AND OUR GOALS

The Sexual Violence Prevention lab then located at University of North Dakota, in collaboration with the Cultivating Opportunities that Lead to Equity (COLE) Lab at Oklahoma State University, gave Native researchers and college students a voice to make change in sexual assault programs.

This study is the largest sample ever - that we know of - of Indigenous college students.

The goal of this study was to understand what type of sexual assault prevention programs were acceptable, in other words what would be welcomed and culturally appropriate, to Indigenous college students.

SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND: WHY THIS TOPIC?

In comparison to other Americans, Indigenous Peoples are the most likely to experience sexual victimization among all racial and ethnic groups. The perpetrators are more likely to be non-Indigenous and there is more physical violence and injury to victims (Rosay, 2016).

National survey studies suggest at least 56% percent of Indigenous women and 27% of Indigenous men have experienced sexual victimization within their lifetime (Rosay, 2016).

Experiencing sexual assault can cause physical and emotional mental health problems; depression, suicidality, PTSD, substance use and many more symptoms and problems (Dworkin et al., 2017).

College students, a high-risk group, who experience sexual assault are more prone to dropping out, getting low grades and stopping work (Banyard et al., 2017).

There are programs that are designed to reduce sexual assault however they mostly did not include Indigenous Peoples in the development nor testing of the programs. So we do not know if they are effective or even acceptable Indigenous Peoples.

We think that creating culturally sensitive sexual assault prevention programs is crucial due to differences in historical trauma, colonization, the culture gap, and the typical erasure of Indigenous Peoples.



**NON-INDIGENOUS
PERPETRATORS ARE
MORE COMMON,
WITH GREATER
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE
AND VICTIM INJURY**


LIFETIME SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION RATES BY GENDER

56%

INDIGENOUS WOMEN

27%

INDIGENOUS MEN



**MOST SEXUAL
ASSAULT
PREVENTION
PROGRAMS DID NOT
INCLUDE
INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES**

WHAT WE DID

We wanted be considerate and learn what programs would be best - who and what would treat Indigenous communities in the most comfortable and appropriate ways?

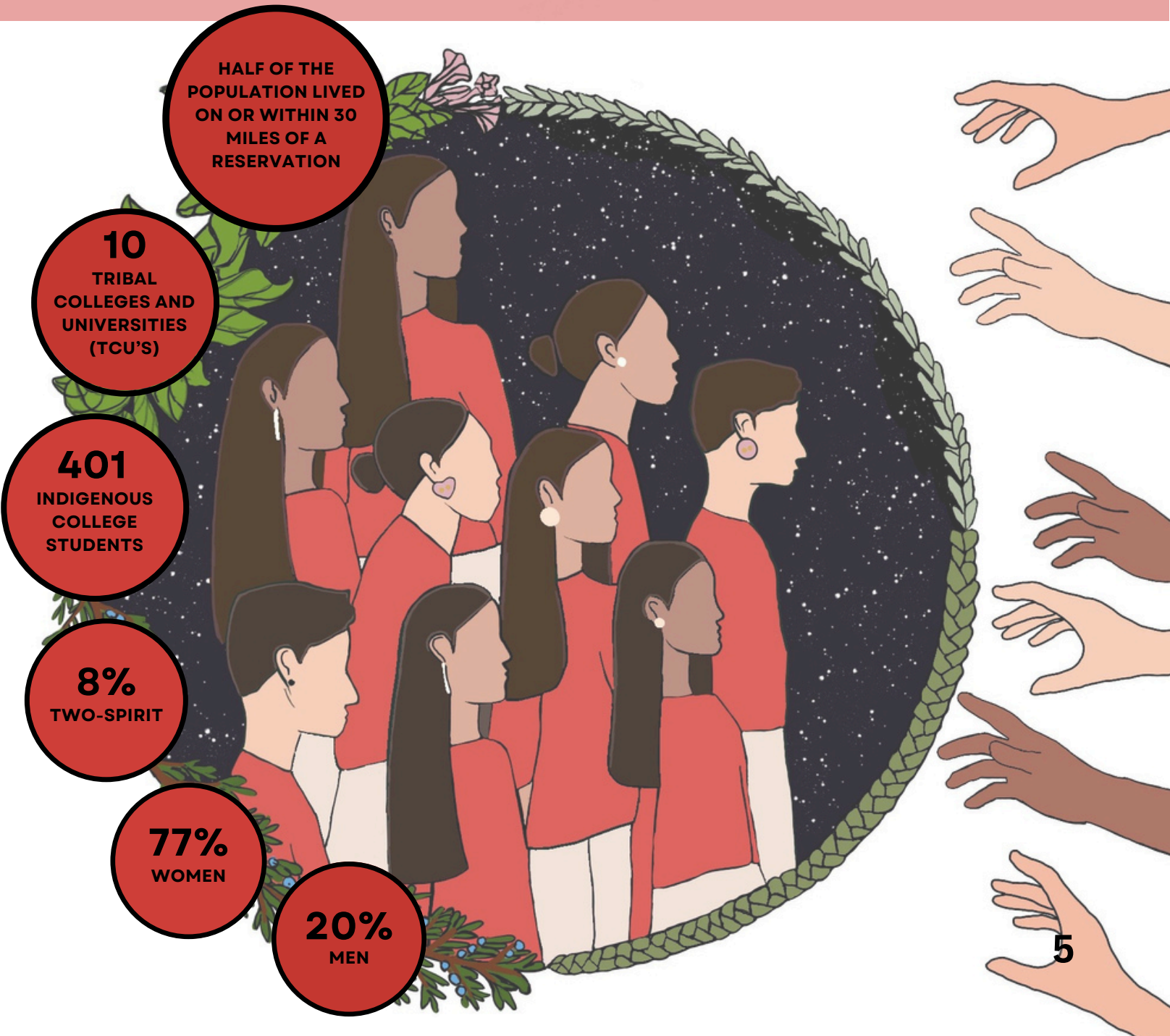
Thus, our first step in our research was to ask our Indigenous lab members their thoughts

They emphasized reaching out to multiple Indigenous communities, take whatever feedback was given, learn, and earn trust with the understanding that we are not there to take from them but to learn and use this data for good

Next, we conducted a quantitative survey from March 2021 through August 2021. Notably, recruitment occurred during the peak of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which disproportionately impacted Indigenous Peoples (Arrazola, 2020; Kelley, 2022).

We reached out to 10 Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) within the US. There were 401 Indigenous college students including women (77%), men (20%) and Two Spirited individuals (8%) who participated in the survey.

All participants were enrolled in school currently or in the last five years, over 18 years old, and identified as Indigenous. Half of the population lived on or within 30 miles of a reservation. Participants ages' ranged from 18-52 years old, and the average age of participants was 24. Participants came from all sexual orientations and income levels from urban areas and reservations across North America and including Hawaii.



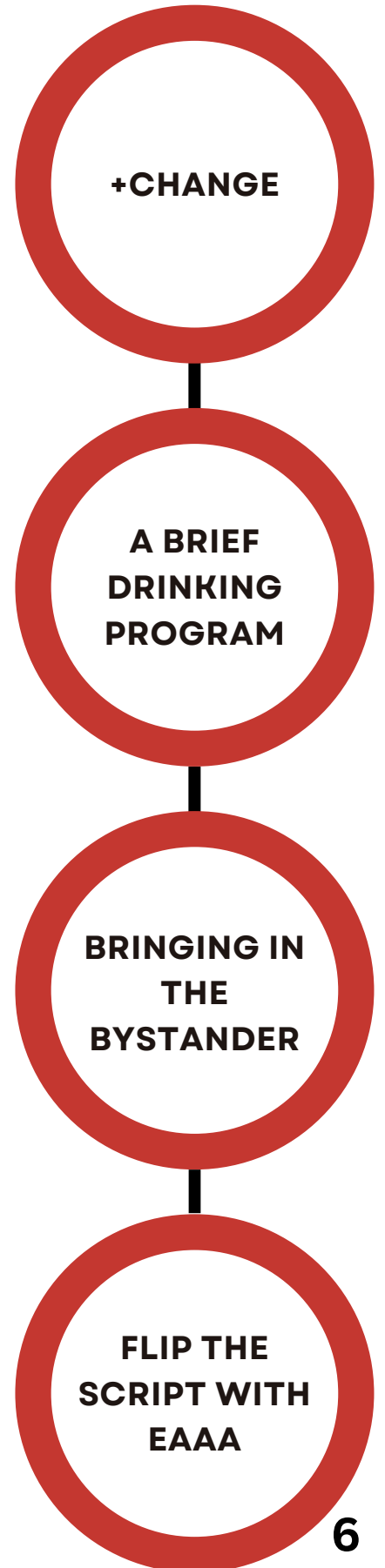
To understand what programs might be acceptable, we created brief, standardized descriptions of four different existing programs that have worked for college students in other studies.

The four programs we described to participants were: Flip the Script with EAAA, Bringing in the Bystander, a Brief Drinking Program, and the Sexual Assault Risk and Alcohol Use Reduction Program (now called +Change).

We asked participants which programs they found acceptable via structured and open-ended questions. We asked things like, what are they willing to try and not try, what would they recommend to their friend, what type of preferences do they have when it came to the gender of the instructor and the setting of the program.

We also did qualitative interviews with 14 Indigenous college students to learn about these topics more in depth. Even though they completed the survey, 32.8% reported they did not trust researchers.

FOUR PROGRAMS THAT HAVE WORKED FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS



OUR FINDINGS

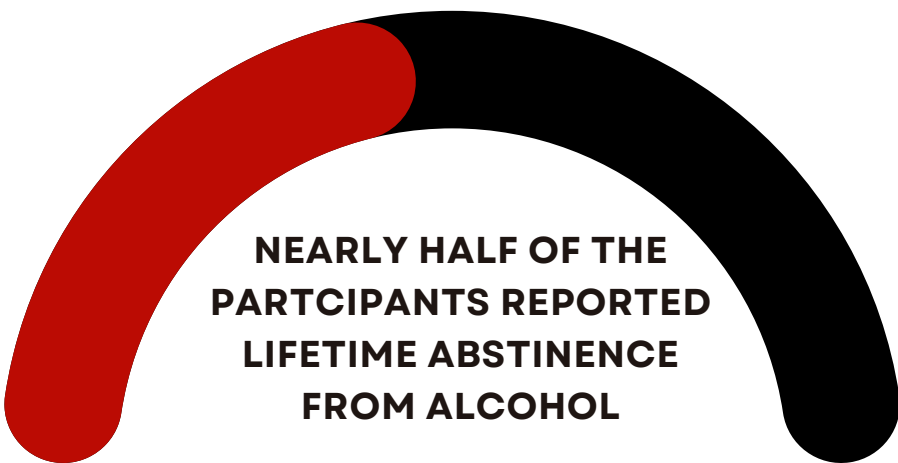
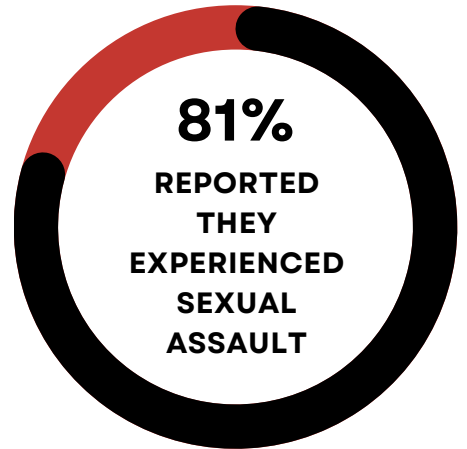
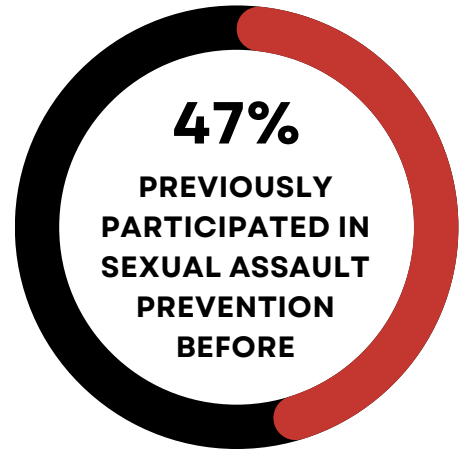
We found that self-defense is *very* culturally acceptable within Indigenous communities. Indeed, many had previously participated in some kind of self-defense (40%) or sexual assault prevention (47%). This is consistent with the long history of Indigenous resistance.

Most of our sample had personally experienced sexual assault – 81%. And most had experienced sexual assault (including during childhood) more than once – 78%.

We found that Indigenous Peoples at white institutions were more likely to report being assaulted than those attending tribal colleges; likely due to being disconnected from their community bonds.

We found very few gender differences overall, meaning Indigenous college men were just as interested and willing to engage in sexual assault prevention as Indigenous college women and Two-Spirited individuals.

Participants reported low levels of alcohol or substance use with nearly half of the sample reporting lifetime abstinence from alcohol.



When asked to rank programs, the Sexual Assault and Alcohol Risk Reduction program was the #1 choice. This program was ranked first by 36% of the sample – the other programs were ranked 1st by between 16.7 to 26.2% of the sample, indicating no one program was the overwhelming favorite. Considering ratings of acceptability, 95.3% of the sample said they thought Flip the Script with EAAA was acceptable. Participants also found the other programs highly acceptable – between 71.4 to 85.5% found the other programs acceptable. Finally, we asked participants whether they would be willing to participate in each program. Not willingness ranged from 28.2 to 39.2% per program.

Overall, we take this to mean that Indigenous college students are willing to try many different strategies to prevent sexual assault.

Considering program characteristics, many noted that they would prefer women program providers (86%), Indigenous providers (66%), and for the program to be provided on tribal lands or within their community (63%).

We also asked participants about 20+ different program features including whether the program was culturally adapted. We found that participants highly valued programs that included these features: guaranteed privacy and confidentiality, learning physical self-defense, evidence of effectiveness/research support, and how to understand risky situations.

Considering interview data, participants described high levels of resilience in spite of being very aware of systemic inequities against Indigenous Peoples and their own individual trauma histories. Many saw a connection between substance use and sexual assault.

Many participants describing connecting with their communities to build resiliency. Participants discussed activities, like connecting with Elders, participating in powwows, ceremony, beadwork, dancing, as important for connection and resiliency.

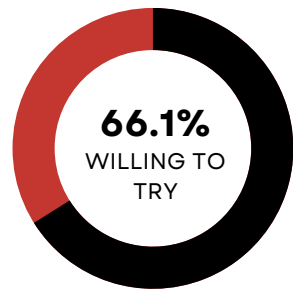
#1

ranked program was the Sexual Assault and Alcohol Risk Reduction Program

FLIP THE SCRIPT



SEXUAL ASSAULT AND ALCOHOL RISK REDUCTION



MOST VALUED PROGRAM FEATURES



LOOKING FOWARD

We found that Indigenous college students are willing to engage in many different strategies to reduce sexual violence for themselves and their communities. Within Indigenous communities we learned that Indigenous men recognize violence as a problem; in contrast to findings with non-Hispanic White populations.

The online, combined, sexual violence and substance use reduction program was most preferred but any of the tested programs were acceptable in large numbers. The COVID-19 pandemic affected our recruitment and outreach procedures. The earned mistrust of researchers in general may also have affected findings; 32.8% of the sample said that they do not trust researchers.

We hope these findings help tribal communities identify sexual assault prevention programs they may wish to implement. We also hope our findings help communities and scholars consider how to make sexual assault programs more culturally acceptable and accessible.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY

[Program descriptions and other study information](#)

[Free full text of the research paper](#)

[Webpage with study materials and scientific papers associated with this report](#)

[Anderson Sexual Violence Prevention Lab Website](#)

[COLE Lab Website](#)



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