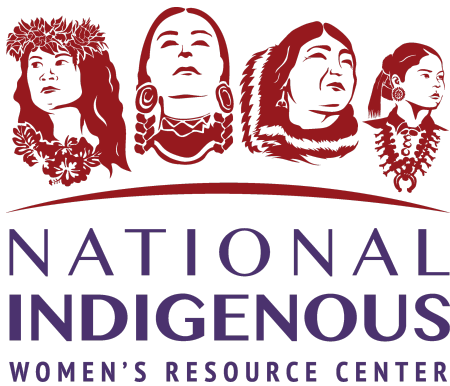


Lateral Kindness:

Moving Away from Lateral Violence to Lateral Kindness

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With the continuously changing needs within our Indigenous communities and the movement to end violence against Indigenous women, families, and relatives, NIWRC will continue to uplift and seek guidance from our communities to guide NIWRC's research priorities for many years to come.

Introduction

Identifying the need for resources addressing lateral violence came from NIWRC's Research Priorities Survey Representing Community Voice. The survey aimed to uplift Indigenous community voices, desires and needs for research resources and aid in developing NIWRC's Research priorities. Lateral violence appeared as a topic within NIWRC's Research Priority, Ending Violence and Abuse. Lateral violence can be a difficult, taboo, and controversial topic to discuss.¹ However, it is important for lateral violence to be labeled as a specific type of violence and encourage open discussion by calling someone in using humanity and patience to explain the misconduct and problematic behavior.⁴

This Research Note will discuss:

- 1 What is lateral violence?
- 2 Where does lateral violence come from?
- 3 How do we move away from lateral violence toward lateral kindness?

What is Lateral Violence?

Lateral violence can also be referred to as “horizontal violence” or “violence against your own.”^{1,2} It is a term that describes aggressive or damaging actions towards individuals and communities occurring within oppressed societies.^{1,2} Common behaviors identified with lateral violence include “bullying, gossiping, feuding, shaming and blaming of other members of one's own social group”², sabotaging, intimidation, accusations, enforcing social hierarchies, gossiping, and social/cultural exclusion.^{1,2}

When thinking about lateral violence, it is understood that lateral violence is not just physical harm but a complex and deceitful cluster of behaviors that affect and have a significant impact on our Indigenous peoples and communities.² Lateral violence has effects and consequences on a person's holistic physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, as lateral violence can occur within psychological distress that includes “shame, guilt rejection and reduced self-esteem,” having self-doubt, chronic anxiety, and sleep challenges.^{1,2} Lateral violence is toxic to and within our Indigenous communities. As one of many examples, lateral violence has been a contributor and barrier to acculturation for the continuation of Indigenous cultures, traditions, and ceremonies.¹ Within Indigenous workspaces, community members who are survivors of lateral violence have reported feelings of distress, unsupported, lower sense of well-being, and lower self-esteem.¹ The “biggest killer of

a person's spirit” is the action and problematic behavior of gossip or gossiping.²

Where Does Lateral Violence Come From?

Lateral violence is commonly recognized, contributed to, and a product of internalized historical and modern-day structures of oppression.¹ Structures of oppression, such as colonialism and white supremacy, contribute layers of historical oppression complexity, such as oppressive lived experiences, historical and contemporary loss, cultural disruption and distortion, and dehumanizing beliefs and values^{1,3} that all Indigenous communities have endured.¹ Studies conclude lateral violence within Indigenous communities is a common social issue and calls for concern as harmful to the well-being of Indigenous communities and a “destroyer of Indigenous culture and life.”^{1,2}

Studies suggest factors that activate lateral violence behaviors are “colonization, oppression, intergenerational trauma, and present-day racism (both interpersonal and institutional/systemic),” which commonly direct anger and violence among and towards Indigenous peers and community members as opposed to the oppressors or the colonizers.² In the design of the structures of oppression or oppressive systems, blame and harm are geared towards individuals and away from colonial systemic harm and violence. The traumatic and oppressive sites of boarding or

residential schools are suggested as the emergence and primary cause of lateral violence, thus providing a model for the reproduction and continuation of lateral violence within Indigenous communities.^{1,2} The internalizing of oppressive messages or information and behaviors “forced into the minds of Indigenous peoples over multiple generations of colonial rule is at the root” of the behaviors of lateral violence.² To combat the internalization and continuation of lateral violence structured and forced by oppression, a pathway to move away from lateral violence is lateral kindness.

How do we move away from Lateral Violence toward Lateral Kindness?

To move toward lateral kindness, it is suggested to move within these three steps;

1 Labeling, naming, and identifying lateral violence

2 Self-determination

3 Individual Actions

These steps are suggested to provide space for Indigenous strength, resilience, resistance to oppressive structures, and healing.

Labeling, Naming, and Identifying Lateral Violence

Labeling, naming, and identifying lateral violence provides the foundation and space for facilitated discussions, understanding within empathy, developing potential solutions to move away from destructive behaviors, actions of prevention, and healing.^{2,3} Naming lateral violence provides empowerment, hope for social and behavioral changes, self-relief, and individual self-determination.

Self-Determination Indigenous Tribal Nations and Communities

Indigenous communities are leading the road to social change to lateral kindness, as each Indigenous community can act and develop the best ways for kindness and kinship in the resistance of colonial-induced lateral violence to take back Indigenous ways as power. Our communities are providing space, and we can make our own decisions for the well-being and healing of each community.²

Individual Actions

What Indigenous peoples can do as individual actions:



Understand one's historical and cultural colonialism (personally and within the community). And how colonialism continues in one's daily life. This knowledge is considered a powerful tool in personal and communal efforts to battle lateral violence.²



In the spirit and practice of decolonizing oneself from internalized colonialism, towards reclaiming strength, power, resilience, and Indigeneity through

exploring and understanding one's own traditional worldviews and ways of knowing and being.^{2,3}

"Traditional Knowledges" are the most proficient and effective healing methods for Indigenous Peoples³



Provide peer support and foster the creation of safe healing spaces and environments for each other, in which psychological and emotional rest to recover and express feelings and emotions through grieving, compassion, and self and collective healing is offered.^{2,3}



Practice self-awareness and recognize one's participation in behaviors, actions, and language that could be or is considered lateral violence.² The practice of self-awareness is also the practice of resistance through acknowledging the long-standing colonial practices and not replacing or reproducing these behaviors and actions. Through this resistance, creating one's environment provides growth and transformation to disrupt existing and future reproduction of colonized behaviors and actions.³

Conclusion

In the spirit of cultivating and encouraging spaces of growth and transformation to counter harm, discrimination, injustices, and narrow-mindedness, labeling lateral violence and making the space for discussion by calling ourselves and/or someone in rather than calling someone out would be recommended as a best practice. Understanding lateral violence, common behaviors are “bullying, gossiping, feuding, shaming and blaming,” sabotaging, intimidation, accusations, enforcing social hierarchies, gossiping, and social/cultural exclusion are all existing examples of harmful behaviors, keeping in mind that any actions that are aggressive and/or damaging in nature are considered lateral

violence.^{1,2} Within the vein of oppressed-oriented historical traumas endured by Indigenous Communities, studies suggest boarding or residential schools are the genesis and the model of perpetuation to reproduce lateral violence behaviors within Indigenous Communities.^{1,2} Moving from lateral violence toward lateral kindness is encouraged through Indigenous Tribal Nations' self-determination and individual actions of kinship, togetherness, empathy, dignity, growth, and development for safe and healing spaces and environments. Implementing lateral kindness takes work and practice of decolonizing oneself, courage, patience, and willingness to explore knowledge growth.

Feedback

We would love to hear from you!

Want to provide us with anonymous feedback for this resource? Let us know how we did, how, and if this Research Note was useful to you, others, and Indigenous Communities!

Please visit this [Research Note Feedback Form](#) to provide your feedback! *NIWRC does not collect any personal identifying information. The feedback is anonymous without collecting IP addresses or other personally identifiable information.*

Endnotes

1. Jaber, L., Stirbys, C., Scott, J., & Foong, E. (2022). Indigenous women's experiences of lateral violence: A systematic literature review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 24*(3), 1763–1776. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221077316>
2. Bailey, K. A. (2020). Indigenous students: Resilient and empowered in the midst of racism and lateral violence. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 43*(6), 1032–1051. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1626015>
3. Findlay, D. (2023). Gathering our medicine: Strengthening and healing kinship and community. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples, 19*(2), 356–365. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801231168178>
4. "Call-ins are agreements between people who work together to consciously help each other expand their perspectives. They encourage us to recognize our requirements for growth, to admit our mistakes and to commit to doing better. Calling in cannot minimize harm and trauma already inflicted, but it can get to the root of why the injury occurred, and it can stop it from happening again". D. B. (PACes C. (2019). *Speaking up without tearing down (tolerance.org)*. PACes in Education. <https://www.pacesconnection.com/g/aces-in-education/blog/speaking-up-without-tearing-down-tolerance-org>.

Acknowledgments

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