The Wicozani Instrument: A Measure of Overall Health and Well-Being


Introduction. Dakota Wicohan, a Native nonprofit, in partnership with the University of Minnesota Morris developed a brief strength-based measure of overall health and well-being. The Wicozani Instrument is grounded in Indigenous paradigms emphasizing relationality and interconnectedness of mental, physical, and spiritual health. While there is diversity among Native communities, the Instrument may appeal to many Native communities because health is defined from an Indigenous perspective.

Need. The decimation of Native culture and life ways, through colonization and assimilation policies and subsequent historical trauma1 have been linked to health disparities between Natives and the broader U.S. population23. Taking an Indigenous, rather than Western approach, to address health disparities can begin changing the current perception that Native identity is a risk factor for poor health.

The Measure. The Wicozani Instrument is a 9-item measure that is accessible to youth and adults. Results from two studies4 provide evidence of the instrument’s reliability and validity and the usefulness of assessing overall health and well-being from an Indigenous view. The Instrument has two subscales: 1) the Wicozani Self-Knowledge subscale (i.e., questions 2, 4, & 6), assesses an individual’s perception of their current wicozani; and 2) the Importance of Wicozani to Quality of Life subscale (i.e., questions 7, 8, & 9), is the antecedent subscale that assesses how important an individual’s wicozani is to their quality of life and was designed to capture an individual’s desire for overall health and well-being. Results found that participant scores were significantly higher on the Importance of Wicozani to Quality of Life subscale than the Wicozani Self-Knowledge subscale.

Benefits. The Wicozani Instrument:
- places power in the hands of the individual;
- values the individual’s ways of knowing;
- views the individual’s perspective as valid;
- changes the deficit-based narrative around Native health;
- provides individuals with the opportunity to:
  - create their own definitions and factors of health;
  - identify where they are at on their continuum of health;
  - take ownership over their health;
  - see themselves as healthy; and
  - build on existing areas of healthy behavior.

Use. Health professionals can use the difference between the two subscales to motivate behavior change by eliciting from the client why and how their wicozani is important to their quality of life and strategies they would like to engage in to increase their wicozani. This approach is in line with central tenants of motivational interviewing (e.g., raising awareness of the discrepancy between the goal and actual behavior, an emphasis on personal choice, facilitating change5).

Conclusion. Approaches that place Native people and their ideologies at the center of the solution, rather than on the receiving end of Western ideology and health care, support a movement of decolonization and reclamation of Native identity and epistemologies as strengths and facilitate effective approaches that align with community-defined health and well-being. To review the full article, please visit the below website and look at the 5th article under Volume 26, Issue No. 2 (2019).

https://coloradosph.cuanschutz.edu/docs/librariesprovider205/journal_files/vol26/26_2_2019_96_peters.pdf?sfvrsn=affe0b9_2

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The Wicozani Instrument

Please complete each question to the best of your ability.

1) How does someone know if their “Mind” is healthy? (your thoughts and emotions)

________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2) How do you rate your “mental health” (please circle)? (your thoughts and emotions)
   Extremely Poor   Below Average          Average   Above Average          Excellent
   1                2                    3               4                    5

3) How does someone know if their “body” is healthy?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4) How do you rate your “physical health” (please circle)? (your body)
   Extremely Poor   Below Average          Average   Above Average          Excellent
   1                2                    3               4                    5

5) How does someone know if their “spirit” is healthy? (your religious or spiritual beliefs)

________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

6) How do you rate your “spiritual health” (please circle)? (your religious or spiritual beliefs)
   Extremely Poor   Below Average          Average   Above Average          Excellent
   1                2                    3               4                    5

7) How important is your “mental health” to your quality of life (please circle)?
   Very           Neither Important       Very
   Unimportant    or Unimportant          or Unimportant    Important
   1              2                       3                      4                       5

8) How important is your “physical health” to your quality of life (please circle)?
   Very           Neither Important       Very
   Unimportant    or Unimportant          or Unimportant    Important
   1              2                       3                      4                       5

9) How important is your “spiritual health” to your quality of life (please circle)?
   Very           Neither Important       Very
   Unimportant    or Unimportant          or Unimportant    Important
   1              2                       3                      4                       5

How to Score (move the below information to the back of the page prior to giving to individuals):

The Wicozani Self Knowledge Subscale: Add questions 2, 4, and 6 and divide by 3.

2)____ + 4)____ + 6)____ = ____ / 3 = ___

The Importance of Wicozani to Quality of Life subscale: Add questions 7, 8, and 9 and divide by 3.

7)____ + 8)____ + 9)____ = ____ / 3 = ___