



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

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## OJJDP's Program of Research for Tribal Youth

by Cynthia Fung and Phelan A. Wyrick

Since 1999, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Tribal Youth Program (TYP) has funded tribal programs, training and technical assistance, and research and evaluation projects to help improve juvenile justice systems and delinquency prevention efforts among federally recognized American Indian tribes.<sup>1</sup> This Fact Sheet summarizes OJJDP's tribal youth research activities, which are designed to provide empirical evidence about juvenile justice and delinquency prevention policies and practices and their impact on tribal youth.

OJJDP adheres to three principles that serve as the foundation of these research and evaluation activities. These principles require that research and evaluation projects for tribal youth provide practical results that are locally relevant; include local community members in the decisionmaking and implementation of the projects; and acknowledge and respect local customs, traditions, values, and history. OJJDP's program of research for tribal youth includes the following initiatives.

### Participatory Evaluation of the Tribal Youth Program

TYP provides funds directly to tribal communities to develop programs that help prevent and control juvenile delinquency, including violent crime, and improve tribal juvenile justice systems. The Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) in Okemos, MI, in partnership with the Native American Institute at Michigan State University in Lansing, is helping five tribes evaluate the programs they have developed with their TYP funds. Each site is assembling a program assessment team (PAT) that will

include local stakeholders in developing and carrying out data collection, analysis activities, and evaluation reports. MPHI will provide training and technical assistance to PATs to facilitate evaluations of their tribal programs. MPHI also will analyze each site's juvenile and tribal justice systems and TYP activities within those systems, and analyze the relationships between the tribal government and county, State, and Federal government agencies as they relate to juvenile justice responsibilities and operations.

### Delinquency and Juvenile Justice in One American Indian Nation

New Mexico State University in Las Cruces is conducting a study that uses the unique historical, cultural, social, and legal aspects of one tribal nation in the Four Corners area of the southwestern United States to look at delinquency and the legal processing of juveniles over the past 11 years, taking into account changes in tribal resources, such as the opening of a casino on the reservation. The project will work with tribal members to develop a model for ongoing delinquency research in this and other tribes of the Southwest.

### Culturally Appropriate Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

The College of Menominee Nation in Keshena, WI, is working with Menominee organizations to develop, demonstrate, and evaluate a culturally appropriate, community-based, family-centered approach to juvenile justice and delinquency prevention. Researchers are developing a needs assessment, an evaluation design, and a delinquency prevention and juvenile justice improvement guide for other tribal groups. The project focuses on integrating health and social services and helping the Menominee Nation and other tribal organizations institutionalize this integration process. Service providers will be trained to design, implement, and evaluate delinquency prevention programs for tribal youth.

<sup>1</sup> Federally recognized Indian tribes include Alaska Native tribal governments. Under current law, the terms "Indian tribes," "tribal," or "tribe(s)" mean "any Indian tribe, band, nation or other organized group or community, including Alaska Native village or regional or village corporation as defined in or established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act . . . , which is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians" (Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2000).

## Assessing Gang Activity in the Navajo Nation

The Navajo Nation Judicial Branch in Window Rock, AZ, is conducting the first comprehensive assessment of gang activity by a tribal government. The study is using a mixed research design of quantitative and qualitative assessments, with close community involvement at all stages. Official court data, followup surveys, and gang member interview protocols have been reviewed for an initial assessment and community members are helping researchers understand the nature, extent, and causes of Navajo Nation gang violence. Researchers hope to discover approaches to dealing with gangs that can be adapted by other tribes.

## Youth Gangs in Indian Country: Profiling the Problem and Seeking Solutions

Building on the Navajo Nation's youth gang study, researchers at California State University in Sacramento are using ethnographic observation and interviews with community members and gang members to document and profile the youth gang experience in up to six rural and urban tribal sites across the country. Researchers are interviewing professionals who work with gang-involved youth to learn about external influences on tribal youth gangs, such as the involvement of off-reservation gangs. The project will produce an inventory of policies and practices used at the sites to prevent and intervene with youth gangs and will examine recommendations made by community members to improve present procedures.

## Tribal Youth Field-Initiated Research and Evaluation

Field-initiated research allows researchers in the field to identify the areas and topics they believe need to be examined. The tribal youth field-initiated research and evaluation program supports projects that focus on and address alcohol and substance abuse, child abuse or neglect, and indigenous approaches to juvenile justice. OJJDP will award three to five grants in spring 2001.

## Indian Country Youth Gang Survey

In 2001, OJJDP's National Youth Gang Center in Tallahassee, FL, added an Indian country supplement to its ongoing annual National Youth Gang Survey of law enforcement officials. This component is assessing the prevalence, composition, and activities of youth gangs in federally recognized tribes that are not traditionally included in the national survey. Preliminary results are expected at the end of 2001.

## Longitudinal Study of Tribal Youth Risk and Resiliency

OJJDP also has developed a new project that will include a specific cultural focus to assess the complex relationships among culture, community, family, individual youth, and the development of delinquency. This study will enhance understanding of risk and protective factors that influence delinquency and resiliency within the cultural and historical context of tribal youth. The findings will have direct implications for prevention activities with at-risk tribal youth and intervention activities with juvenile offenders. In addition, the study will contribute to the development of effective and culturally appropriate research approaches with tribal populations. OJJDP will competitively select a grantee in 2001.

## For Further Information

For more information, contact Phelan A. Wyrick, Program Manager, Research and Program Development Division, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 810 Seventh Street NW., Washington, DC 20531, [wyrickp@ojp.usdoj.gov](mailto:wyrickp@ojp.usdoj.gov) (e-mail).

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*The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.*

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