



Indigenous Peoples, Healthcare, Mental Health, and Wellness

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Indigenous peoples comprise approximately 370 million the world's population, constituting one-third of the world's 900 million extremely poor rural people. These peoples suffer from disproportionately high rates of poverty, health issues, crime and human rights violations. As a result of these factors combined, indigenous peoples' life expectancy is up to 20 years lower than their non-indigenous counterparts. Their unique set of rights and responsibilities derived from historical ties and cultural distinctiveness have resulted in their denial of utilizing modern medicine or limits their accessibility to it. Poor nutrition, limited access to care, lack of resources crucial to maintaining health and well-being, and contamination of natural resources are also contributing to decreased life quality of indigenous peoples. The indigenous populations within countries is resulting in international issues pertaining to public health as epidemics from indigenous populations are increasing the spread of disease throughout a nation. The horrific conditions of the world's indigenous populations have been taken precedence in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The United Nations have worked towards promoting sustainable healthcare and sanitation initiatives with the goal of providing adequate healthcare services for all. Various UN system programs and initiatives have been put into place which many nations, including The Gambia, have taken advantage of.

In The Islamic Republic of The Gambia, 90% of their population are Muslims. However the majority of the ethnic population belong to eight different indigenous tribes: the Mandinka (about 41% of the population); the Wolof (15%); the Fula (19%); the Jola (10%); the Serahuli (8%); the Serer (2.5%); the Aku (0.8%) and the Manjago (1.7%). Illness and disease had ravished the population of The Gambia. Gambians suffer from tropical diseases, many of which are water borne and malaria is a great endemic heavily present in this nation. Modern medicine can

be found sporadically in villages but most are concentrated in the urban areas making them virtually inaccessible to the indigenous populations. Many religious beliefs prevent tribes from taking advantage of modern medicine. For example use of contraceptives is heavily frowned upon by most of The Gambia, a belief derived from Muslim background. This increases risk of spread of sexually transmitted illnesses and disease. Within these traditional societies, illness is often seen as intentional punishment or linked to the supernatural. Tribes view modern medicine as an ineffective way to relieve one of illness or disease. The Gambia has received aid from several NGO's in order to alleviate pressures on indigenous populations related to public health issues. In recent years, the government has introduced a campaign which has been accepted by religious leaders. It has been working with a NGO called Futures to deliver contraceptives to rural area which has been subsidized by WHO. The Gambia is of the belief that

With increasing support from governments towards the integration of NGO programs, public health issues specifically pertaining to the indigenous population will cease to exist. Initiatives which send indigenous peoples to school will allow children from indigenous backgrounds to become educated on the topic of health specifically and encourage the use of modern medicine to combat disease. Improving accessibility to healthcare services to rural areas, specifically villages and indigenous retreats, public health can be improved. Service initiatives launched by NGO's are required to initially improve healthcare standards for indigenous peoples, however government funding and support is also necessary in order to see significant improvements in public health. The Gambia would look favourably upon a resolution that includes initiatives to be implemented in nations with the ultimate goal of improving indigenous access and use of modern medicine and healthcare services.
