

## Traditional Medicine

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Ya ah tee,

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Dine (mom, sister, daughter, auntie, granddaughter)

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Tohtsohnnie, Bitahnii, Tsenjikinnie, Tsenjikinnie

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Daughter and grand daughter of medicine men/women.

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Psychiatric & Geriatric NP (20 yrs, I.H.S for 16 yrs)

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Traditional Counselor-Practitioner

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Launched the Office of Traditional and Cultural Services in Fort Defiance  
2005

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Secretary for the Dine Hataathlii Association of the Navajo Nation

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Assistant Professor teaching and conducting research at the University  
of Arizona



# Research Focus

- American Indian Resilience-Strength based models
- Hozho Resilience Model
- Health Benefits of American Indian Spirituality and Ceremony (Traditional Medicine).
- American Indian Mental Health

Highest  
Regard for  
the sacred

Traditional Medicine and  
Ceremony is sacred

American  
Indian/Indigenous  
Cultural Wisdom is sacred


Offer respect

Make offerings

Dress, speak, conduct  
oneself accordingly

Honor the rules

Authenticity



## What is traditional medicine

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It's a way of life

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It's an existing wellness system in AIAN/indigenous communities

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Practice and process of returning to a state of balance and wellbeing

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Divination, stargazing, crystal gazing, fire/charcoal gazing, spirit communication

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Ceremony/Ritual-singing, chanting, dancing

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Herbal medicine

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Cultural Wisdom

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Collective practices can be individual but often collective, family based activities

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Traditional Medicine integrates elements of the earth, people, spirits, sacred dieties/holy ones, animals and the entire universe

# Importance of Traditional Medicine

- Increasing interest
- AIAN Communities want it
- Researchers recommend it
- Effective and pre-existing healthcare system of AIAN/Indigenous people worldwide
- Is a culturally congruent, sensitive and tailored health intervention



Who is  
practicing  
traditional  
medicine

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Indigenous  
American  
Indian/Indigenous  
Elders, Adults,  
Adolescents,  
Children, Unborn

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\*\*Everyone,  
growing interest  
and practice  
among non-  
indigenous  
communities on  
the practice and  
benefits of  
Traditional  
Medicine.

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# Authenticity

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# Safety

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Are we ready to  
explore,  
measure,  
validate (possibly  
invalidate) and  
discuss the  
benefits of  
Traditional  
Medicine?

#### RISKS

- Cultural Appropriation
- Cultural Exploitation
- Disrespecting the Sacred
- Misinterpretation of the Sacred
- Misuse of the Sacred

#### BENEFITS

- Cultural Preservation
- Sharing Cultural Wisdom
- Promoting Cultural Wisdom
- Enhanced Health
- Culturally Relevant Wellness Practices/Interventions

# Lessons learned when integrating traditional medicine in an I.H.S Setting

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Not everyone believes in or respects Traditional Medicine. Definite points of convergence and divergence.

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Not everyone is invested in the success of an integrated program

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Pressure to “modify” the traditional medicine and ceremonies in the hospital settings—Be careful with this.

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Multidisciplinary Turf conflicts may be present/emerge

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Limited reimbursement/funding for the services

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Unnatural delivery of Traditional Medicine and Ceremony

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Need appropriate settings, offerings, access to fire, water, smoke –to ensure authentic and respectful delivery.

# Benefits of integrating traditional medicine in an I.H.S. setting

Patients & community members express much gratitude for the service.

Allows no cost access to traditional medicine

Cultural Education-Sharing of Cultural Wisdom Naturally Occurs

Enhances the cultural insights for all staff/participants

Natural cultural immersion when ceremony is practiced so enhances greater cultural understanding and sensitivity.

What do we  
need to move  
forward with  
promoting,  
protecting,  
preserving and  
validating the  
benefits of  
traditional  
medicine?

Practitioners, Healers,  
Herbalist, Medicine  
Men/Women,  
Spiritualist, Visionaries

Leaders who support  
and advocate for the  
vision

Protection of  
Traditional Medicine

Preservation of  
Traditional Medicine  
(share, publish,  
internet, technology)

Persistent Advocacy for  
Traditional Medicine

Dissemination of the  
Cultural Wisdom  
(specifically to AIAN  
communities)

Outcomes Research

# Belief and Confidence in our Cultural Wisdom

Heal and shift away	See and honor	Integrate	Remember	Seek
Heal and shift away from the shame associated with our culture, our past, our historical trauma.	See and honor the beauty in our culture	Integrate our culture into every aspect of our lives	Remember.....we've forgotten and have lost so much	Seek the cultural wisdom

# Sharing the cultural wisdom

## Practicing

Practicing the elements of cultural wisdom

## Sharing

Sharing the cultural wisdom through practice, storytelling, research, dissemination, presentations, publications, apps, vlogs, blogs

# What are some barriers to receiving, teaching, practicing Traditional Medicine

- Few individuals possess the knowledge
- Much of the knowledge has transitioned to a more contemporary and integrated/inter-tribal practice
- Some of us (especially younger generations) lack the knowledge about Traditional Medicine
  - Don't know it exists
  - Don't know how to access it
  - Don't know the cultural etiquette to seek it and participate in it
  - Seek it in a contemporary manner (internet, apps, google, youtube).
- Levels of Acculturation-Biculturalism
- Adoption of more western approaches to health and well being

# Measuring Emotional Distress and Inflammation before and after a Dine' Ceremony

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UA CDA Award

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18 months of discussion/collaboration with the Navajo Nation before  
NHRRB approval.

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UA IRB Approval

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DHA/DMMA Approval

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Chapter Approval

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Hospital Board Approval

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Hospital Executive Approval

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Collaboration between UA, Tsehootsooi Medical Center, Center for  
Shamanic Education and Exchange.

# Project Done on the Navajo Nation in 2017

- [https://www.dropbox.com/s/awqe9828uc3jxrh/Navajo\\_FINAL\\_CUT.mp4?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/awqe9828uc3jxrh/Navajo_FINAL_CUT.mp4?dl=0)

# Study Design: Quasi-Experimental Pilot Study

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**Purpose:** examine symptoms of emotional distress and inflammation [CRP] in Diné (Navajo) adults who participate the Diné Hóchxó'íjí ceremony.

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**AIM1.** Evaluate changes in emotional distress and inflammation pre & 30 days post the Hóchxó'íjí

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**AIM 2:** Determine the relationship between emotional distress and inflammation pre and 30 days post the Hóchxó'íjí

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## **Recruitment:**

N=25 adult Diné participants, 24 with data at both pre and post assessments

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Age: ages of 18-84 w/ symptoms of emotional distress.

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**Method:** A pretest-posttest single group design. Each participant served as their own control. Summed scores of the PROMIS ED-D-SF8b and concentrations of salivary C-Reactive Protein (CRP) levels were compared.

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# Results

**Data Analysis.** Wilcoxon signed-rank test used to evaluate pre/post changes. Correlation between change scores were assessed using Spearman's rho.

Symptoms of emotional distress were reduced 30 days post in 24 participants, statistically significant.

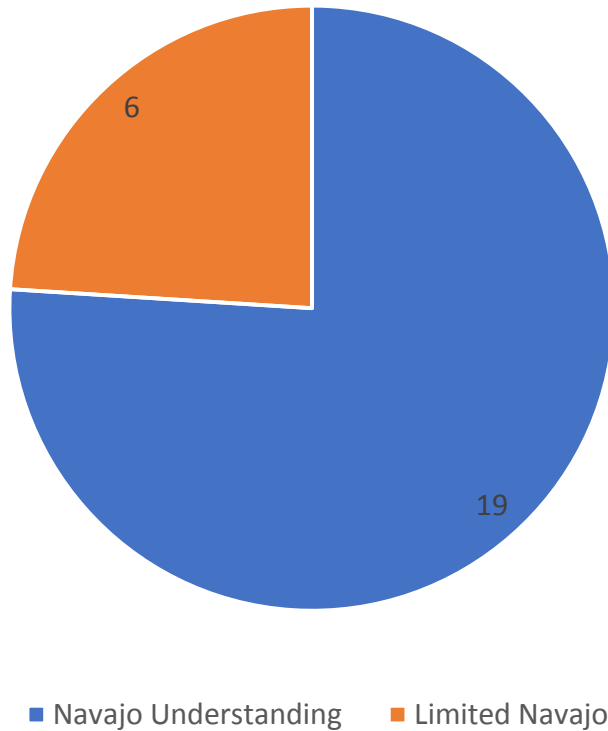
14 of 23 CRP levels were decreased 30 days post ceremony, though not statistically significant.

Self-reported psychological, physical and behavioral outcome variables post ceremony:

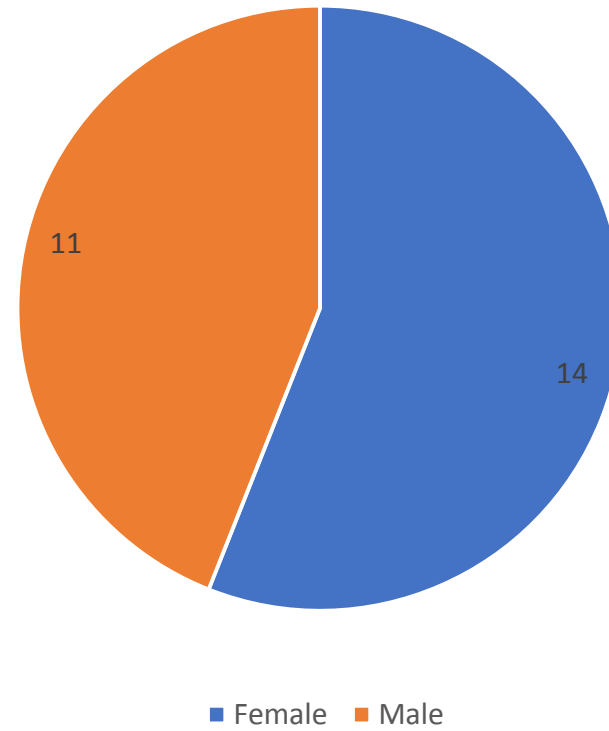
- improved sleep
- Improved family relationships,
- ↑ hope
- ↑ coping
- ↑ pain management, less pain
- ↑ energy.
- ↑ improved outlook on life
- Increased activity
- Collective/Family healing occurred

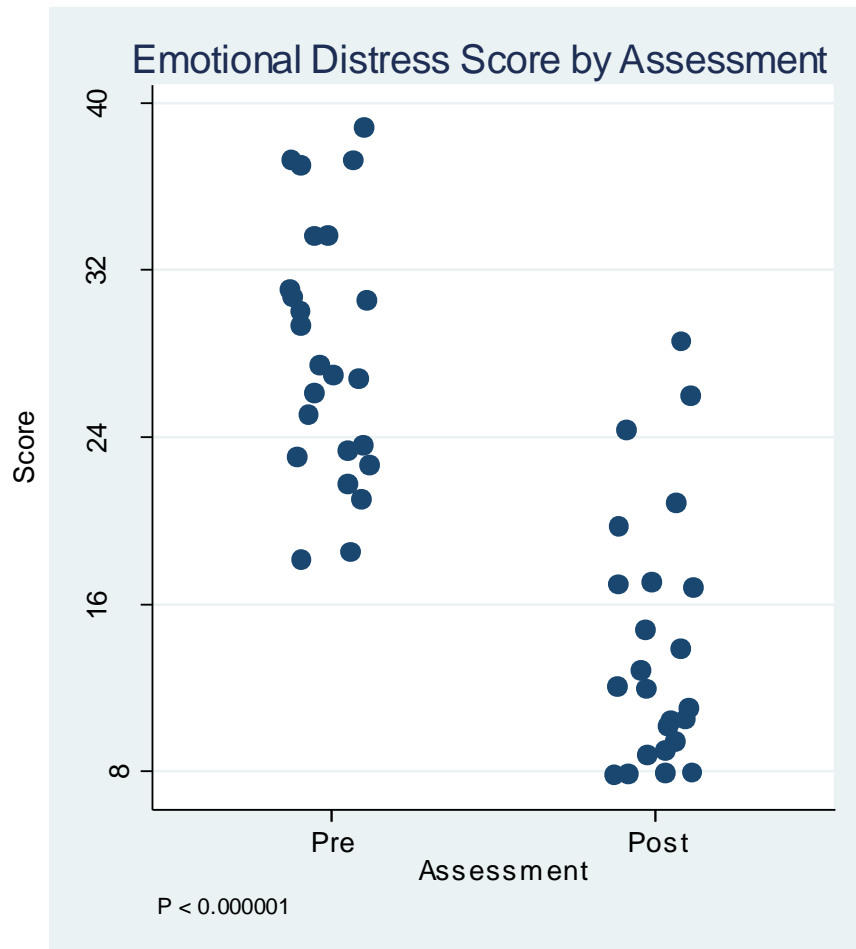
# No difference in results related to gender and language fluency

Language



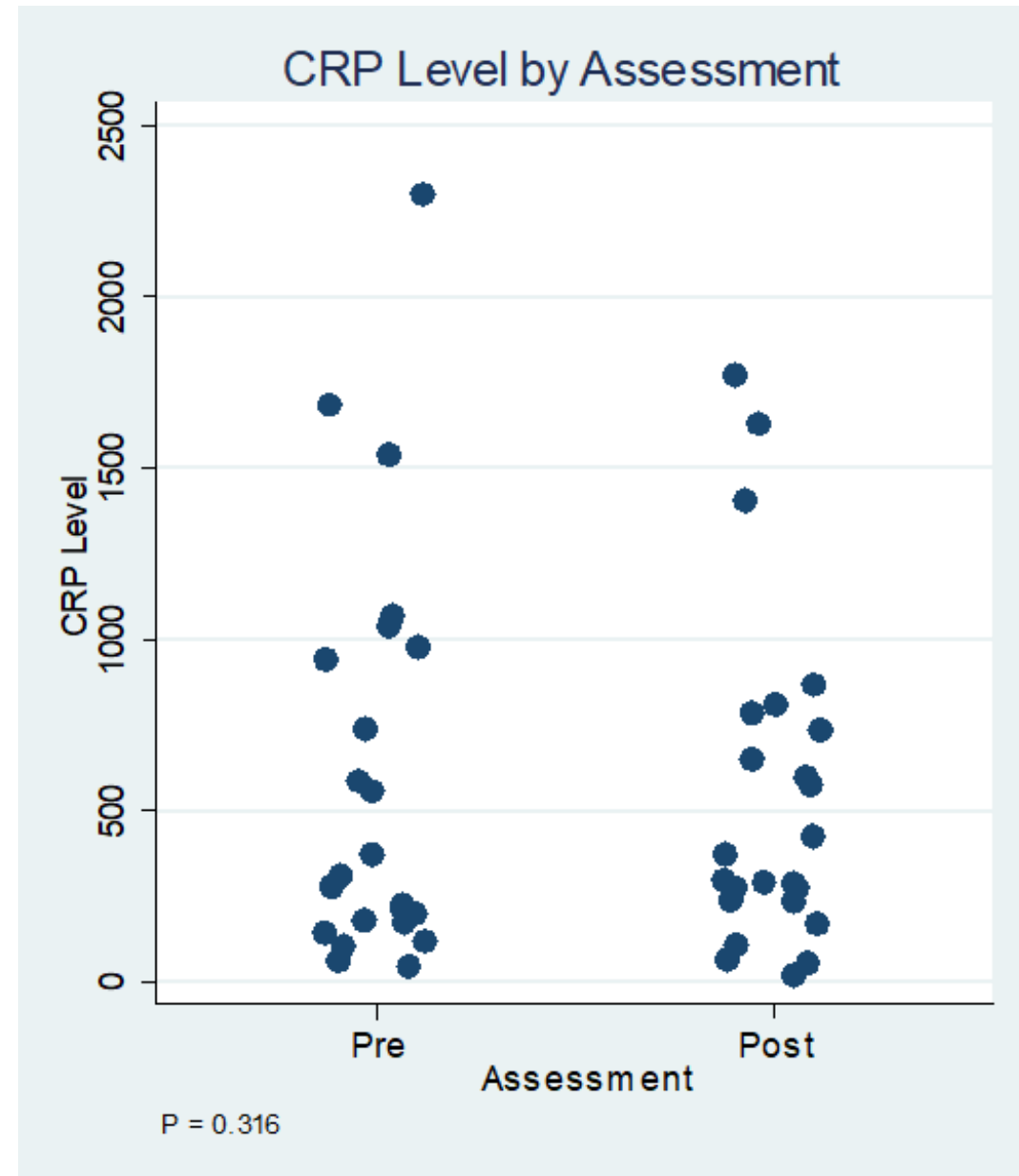
Gender





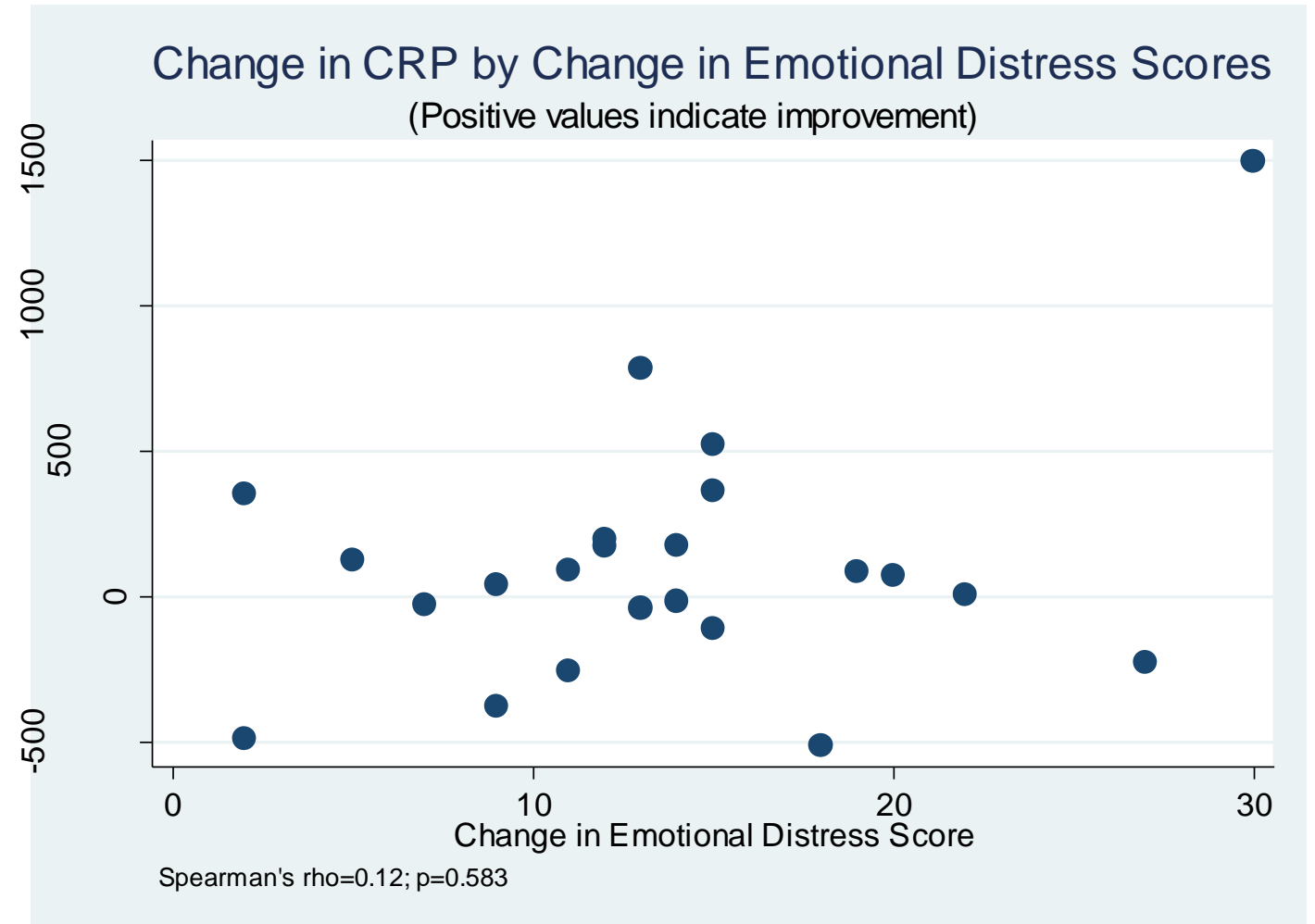
Emotional distress scores improved from pre-assessment to post-ceremony(30 days post ceremony) assessment for all participants.

No significant  
change in CRP  
levels.  
CRP levels  
improved for  
14 of the  
participants



Change in CRP  
was not  
correlated  
with  
improvement  
in Emotional  
Distress.

Change in CRP



# Current Research on the Benefits of Traditional Medicine

Herbal Medicine Studies

Talking Circles

Storytelling

Sweatlodge

Ceremonial Study

# Lessons Learned after the Ceremonial Project

Research Protocols/Processes/Requirements make this type of work challenging.

- \*\*CWD is so very important...

Healer Incentives

Supplies for the ceremony

Atypical research process

Patience is essential

Honoring the request of the community

- Ensure healer is authentic, don't share name of ceremony, ensure ceremony is authentic

Data Ownership—Data Belongs to the Tribe

# Beauty of Traditional Medicine

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- Not just beneficial to the patient
- Reciprocal in Nature-Benefits the environment (water, air, earth, fire, plants, animals)
- Benefits all who participate, family and even the healer
- Respect is embedded into all the practices
- Deep meaning & symbolism associated with Traditional Medicine
- Integrated with spiritual beliefs
- All part of the lifeway
- Nurtures the mind-body-spirit of individuals, families, communities

Ahee'hee