

Canada's residential school effect on the first nation survivors



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6000 children dead. Culture, beliefs, norms, value were all stripped away in the long past of the Indigenous People of Canada. Did the Federal government truly contribute to the First Nation survivor depression?

Unnecessary measures were taken when the Federal government decided to assimilate the Indigenous people of Canada through Residential Schools, in an attempt to take away their culture and "kill the Indian in the child."

(McDougall)

This also relates to the abuse in residential schools as the teaching staff were easily infuriated and irritated with the non-English or French speaking children, they released all their anger on them. Residential schools had the most negative impact, contributing to the depression of the First Nation survivors and not only did Residential schools include factors of abuse and assimilation, but it led to the Residential school Syndrome, which was a disorder found amongst the First Nation Residential School survivors.

"When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly impressed upon myself, as head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men." (Joseph) This quote was expressed by the first Prime Minister of Canada, John A. Macdonald in 1879- a year after he was elected the second time. This demonstrates a Canadian perspective on how the First Nation people were viewed back then, and how colonization or assimilation

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was thought to be the most effective method to completely demolish the 'Indian in the child' through Residential Schools.

This system of assimilation was originally coined by Christian churches and the Canadian government in 1880 and was organized to colonize the First Nation children into the more dominant Euro-Canadian culture and in the process, isolating them from the impact of their homes, cultures, tradition and families. The quest to culturally colonize these children began upon the arrival at the schools: their hair was cut, and they were stripped of their cultural attire while given new uniforms and new names. The Christian missionary staff spent time and attention on religious teachings while diminishing the First Nation Religion. It was forbidden in these schools for the children to speak their first language and they often found themselves culturally lost when they went back home for short visits.

" Being Educated in white schools was a painful experience for me like for most Indian kids. I have therefore given a lot to do with our difficulties in your schools." (Frideres, 104)

The Residential schools did not only result in assimilation but maltreatment as well. While some staff tried to be good instructors and parental models, the institutional setting and tremendous amounts of work clouded even the best of intentions. Usually impatience and correction led to uncontrolled punishment, including physical abuse. In some cases, children were either heavily beaten, chained and even confined. (McDougall)

Sue Caribou a Residential School survivor stated in an interview that she contracted pneumonia at least once a year, like clockwork. The recurring illness evolved from her childhood years at Canada's Residential school.

She was snatched from her parents' house in 1972 at only seven years old. " We had to stand like soldiers while singing the national anthem, otherwise, we would be beaten up", she recalled. (Montreal)

Many of the staff were sexual predators and a lot of students were sexually abused.

Caribou stated that Catholic missionaries physically and sexually assaulted her until 1979 at the Guy Hill Institution, in the east province of Manitoba. She also stated she was called a " dog", was forced to eat rotten vegetables and was forbidden to speak Cree, her native language.

" I was thrown into a cold shower every night, sometimes after being raped", the frail 50-year-old indigenous mother of six said, matter-of-factly. (Montreal)

This revealed the harsh treatment which was faced by such young children. When statements of sexual abuse were reported- by students, parents or sometimes even the ' respectable' staff- the response by the government and church officials were insufficient and the police were rarely contacted. Even if government or church officials decided the report was worthy, the response was almost always to simply fire the guilty and in some cases the perpetrator was allowed to continue working at the school causing an

endless cycle of even more abuse which led to lead to many sicknesses and a mass increase of Indigenous child deaths.

The dark past of these schools in Canada has shown the public the negative aftermath of Residential Schools on the First Nation or Indigenous survivors.

Caribou then states that “ Remains were found all over the fields. But numbers do not reflect the reality. Many of my friends committed suicide after their release.”

She continues to say, “ My children taught me how to read and write. I've been a housekeeper all my life because of my lack of education and poor health” (Montreal)

This quote shows just a bit of an insight as to what the Residential schools caused even after they were closed.

Many cases showed that many children reported with psychological, physical, and sexual abuse during the time of their attendance at residential schools, and many of those now-adult survivors showed continuity in the negative impact of their experiences. (Brasfield)

This continuing negative impact has gained the term of ‘ residential school syndrome’ which is quite similar to post-traumatic stress disorder and even share criteria that the person has gone through some degree of trauma and that his or her reaction was either frightful or powerless.

“ The residential school syndrome diagnosis is different from that of post-traumatic stress disorder in that there is a tremendous cultural impact and a

nagging tendency to abuse alcohol or other drugs that is associated with harsh outbursts of anger. The residential school syndrome diagnosis also highlights depression and possible deficient parenting skills.” (Brasfield)

Research has proven that there are higher suicide rates in the Indigenous community compared to that of the ‘ White-Canadian community’. This also proves that First Nations people are more likely to contemplate suicide and statistics have shown that, “ among young First Nations males there was a suicide rate of 126 per 100, 000 people which stands in contrast to the rate of 24 per 100, 000 among non-aboriginal males. The increased rates were also seen among females: young First Nations females died by suicide to the rate of 35 per 100, 000 people, while non-aboriginal females had a rate of just five per 100, 000.” (Shulman)

“ Across the country, suicide and self-inflicted injury is the main cause of death for Indigenous people below the age of 44.” (Randhawa)

This further explains the negative outcomes of Residential Schools on the mental and emotional health of that of the Indigenous people, compared to that of the Euro-Canadians.

The Federal government played a huge role contributing to the depression amongst the First Nations through Residential schools. Based on factual evidence in the paragraphs before about assimilation, abuse and the depression state , a conclusion has been drawn stating that whether or not residential school syndrome describes the children traumatized by the Residential school system or those in power who created the likelihood of such trauma, children were damaged, now-adult survivors are continuing to <https://assignbuster.com/canadas-residential-school-effect-on-the-first-nation-survivors/>

battle damage. To ignore the existence of the damage is to ignore these now-adult survivors the prospect of repair and reimbursement. Without help, residential school syndrome will continue to repeat through a series of more generations resulting in an increase of suicide rates due to depression within the First Nations community.

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