

# Indigenous people and their mental health

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



What specific methods can the Indigenous Peoples be provided in order to receive the correct form of mental health reconciliation? Allison FilionWilfrid Laurier UniversityCS-235Tammy Rowe – A2Dr. Hennebry170143710October 5th, 2018The topic that I chose to base my mini-literature review on is the mental health of Indigenous Peoples. I have chosen this topic as it is something that intrigues me; my interests include advocating for Indigenous Peoples and the inequality portrayed against them. Although reconciliation has been attempted, there has still not been a solid bond/apology made; I believe that the mental health of these individuals is very important to monitor – this community is at risk and they have been a minority for their entire existence. With the research I have done, I have been able to recognize the true importance of reconciliation for the Indigenous Peoples. The sources I have chosen and read have filled me knowledge that I have applied through this research assignment. I have found all of my sources using the Laurier Library databases; I ensured that they were all peer reviewed/scholarly and used various keywords such as: “ indigenous community, mental health, reconciliation”.

It is quite obvious that in the recent years, the Indigenous community has gotten a lot of recognition due to certain events that have sprung many controversies, arguments, and also protests. The impacts that the events have left on the affected communities are clearly negative; Nelson & Wilson (2017) acknowledge that Indigenous Peoples around the world suffer an extremely large burden of mental illness. Although people from all different backgrounds may develop mental health instability overtime, it is often seen that patients with mental health issues come from an Indigenous

nationality/background. Those who identify as First Nations often are given a lot harder of a time due to society's racist and stereotypical ways. In result of this, it is seen through various studies that only a small number of Canadians have said to have suffered from a mental illness while the rate of Indigenous Peoples was a lot higher (Government of Canada, 2006).

Although it may seem that there is an immense amount of options to deal with mental health, it is found that to enhance the mental health reconciliation efforts, the methods should be reconsidered to include various Indigenous conceptions in order to classify as "culturally appropriate" (Stewart, 2008, pp. 2). This means that the help offered has not necessarily done anything for those in need; studies have shown in recent years a high number of Indigenous Peoples with mental health issues (Nagel et al., 2009, pp. 2). When comparing all of my sources, I found connecting themes in regard to the type of help being provided. All of my sources came to very similar conclusions, stating that Indigenous peoples are not receiving the correct help – there is a better chance of them seeking help from family and friends rather than professionals (McCormick. 1997, pp. 173). In other words, the theme presented is based on the Western societies medicine; it is simply not helping the Indigenous People.

The issue is that the help provided to the Indigenous Peoples is not tailored to their cultural/societal norms; what helps the Western society may not necessarily have the same effects on another society. The sources have suggested that a more culturally appropriate approach to helping those with mental health issues would interest more Indigenous individuals and that the

professionals should instead attempt to refer their Indigenous patients to a more familiar source of help (McCormick, 1997, pp. 182). In order to begin the attempt to reconcile the mental health of Indigenous Peoples, they must steer themselves away from Western societies idea of remedy as it is not helping them. Another common theme that I was able to identify throughout the readings was the factor of colonialism. Nelson & Wilson (2017) found throughout their research that colonialism is one of the many determinants of the mental health of Indigenous Peoples.

The authors believe that there is an apparent correlation between the two factors. In Stewart's (2008) conclusion, the author states that " colonialism is a major health issue for Native clients today" (pp. 55). The Government of Canada (2006) also found data that supports the argument of colonization being a factor that affects the mental health of Indigenous Peoples as well as cultural oppression. Colonization is something that the Indigenous People had to live through, and still think of often. There has been attempts at reconciliation, but the Indigenous communities have stated that they need something stronger. I was able to identify the methodology used by the authors throughout my sources research. Both qualitative and quantitative data was used in different ways to prove their arguments. In regard to qualitative data, the naturalistic approach/perception (based on Corman (2005) principles) was portrayed throughout the research found.

In McCormick's study, the author used the approach as such; he based his research off of real life experiences. The author was able to conduct a study using various Indigenous university students; he was able to collect the

needed concrete data. As well, the Government of Canada conducted various surveys involving Indigenous Peoples in order to receive their data and come to some sort of conclusion by the end of their study. Stewart's data was collected by using that same method; the author gathered a number of individuals and interviewed them. On the other hand, Nelson & Wilson gathered their research/data using the information found from other sources — they did not conduct their own survey to find results. The previous finding could be seen as an inconsistency throughout the research. This method can be seen as cross-sectional; meaning that participants were studied at the same time. This method is cheap and easy to conduct; however, some disadvantages can include: not being able to easily establish time-order and there is a risk of non-response which can extend the studies timeline.

This method of study is very effective in terms of needing to answer the previously stated research question. I believe that the sampling frame used was fitting; however, I believe that the researchers could have been more specific as to whom they were handing the survey out to, their target. Positionality is also present throughout all of the studies; each participant has an individual experience that they share. The research may have a few gaps when considering the geographical scale of the information known. I believe that it is important to research and find out where the most affected Indigenous communities are; that way, it would be easier to provide specific help to those communities. We would be able to prioritize those who need it the most. I also noticed that the surveys/research met ethical standards; the participants identity was always kept anonymous, it was voluntary, and their privacy was respected. Being a part of the study is a huge risk for the

participants. Considering the topic and the history of Indigenous Peoples, it is very possible that if the identities were leaked, the participants would be exposed to possible physical/mental abuse, and it could worsen their mental health. The Indigenous community can be considered to be a vulnerable group as they are a minority in society, which presents many risks.

Throughout my research, I came across various scientific methods/theories that the authors used to help conclude their arguments/findings. McCormick (1997) explains throughout his research that he believes that the studies overall implication provides the reader with an empirical basis of knowledge. The previous statement allows the reader to understand that this is the reality, it is uncovered, and we are aware. I found that Nelson & Wilson (2017) and Stewart (2008) had both similar arguments as well as similar information provided in the articles. They both proposed a similar paradigm; they explained that colonialism is one of the main reasons for the higher rate of Indigenous Peoples mental health issues. When Stewart (2008) states: “ a postcolonial paradigm would accept knowledge from differing cosmologies as valid in their own right”, the author is explaining that, in a way, healing others using a Western perspective brings back their memory of colonialism.

As well, Nelson & Wilson (2017) mention that the paradigm of Indigenous Peoples culture tends to assume that there is an important impact on the mental health that supports the authors original idea of imbalanced power. On the other hand, McCormick does not mention any specific paradigms; this can be seen as a gap/inconsistency of the research done. Nagel et al. do not mention paradigm in their article either; although their article is mainly

based on Indigenous mental health training. The scientific reasoning of the authors could be seen as inductive; this means that they made observations, sorted the data, and then made a consensus based on whether or not there was a pattern.

Another theory detected throughout some of the readings were epistemologies; how we know what we know. The included epistemologies were able to help me as well as the authors themselves find the research that enabled us to know more about the topic. Nelson & Wilson (2017) mention that, “ research into the mental health of Indigenous populations, in Canada as elsewhere, has been undertaken by settlers using colonial and non-Indigenous concepts and epistemologies”. On the other hand, Stewart (2008) explains the reasoning for their theory of research by stating. Another reason for using a narrative approach for this research question was the conception of narrative inquiry as a “ relational methodology”, where epistemological implications of Native ways of knowing for academic interest, demonstrate how Indigenous epistemology can influence knowledge and practice in research.

The sources that I have found do not include information on the specific Indigenous communities around Canada; in fact, they only mention Indigenous Peoples as a whole. I believe that it is important to specify which community is most affected, where the help is being distributed, etc. Many communities have been left out of the articles research due to the fact that studies have not been narrowed down to a specific geographical area. This gap causes the information to still be valid, but not accurate. In order to

provide accurate and complete information, the researcher must conduct a survey that includes all of the details; thus, meaning that instead of just choosing a group of Indigenous Peoples, they should have chosen one individual from each Indigenous community. This would have provided the researcher with concrete data.

Throughout the research done in hopes to answer my research question, I learned a lot about my topic of Indigenous People's mental health. I realized that multiple authors have drawn similar if not the same conclusions. I believe that it is so important to educate one another on the current and past relationships with Indigenous Peoples and the rest of the world. They are a minority who continuously struggle; not enough people are aware of the racism that is still occurring today. Oppression is real as well as their effects; abuse can be very harmful to one's mental health. The different authors used various methods of research studies which enabled a lot of information to be provided.

Although my greatest takeaway from the research would be the fact that colonization was the main reason for such a high rate of mental health issues for Indigenous Peoples, I also believe that the authors' solutions were very helpful as well and contributed to my gathered knowledge. I am happy with the fact that people are realizing that something is not working, and we need to mend the way we provide mental health care to Indigenous communities. However, I do believe that we must figure out what specific kind of help the Indigenous Peoples need. It is not sufficient to state that they need a different sort of counselling; we must dig deeper with trial and error until the



question is finally answered. In order to answer my research question, I believe that the gaps and inconsistencies must be noticed by researchers; they will then be able to conduct the specific studies needed to find exactly what methods will end up helping the reconciliation of Indigenous Peoples mental health.

#### Bibliography:

1. Government of Canada. (2006). The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada 2006. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/reports-publications/human-face-mental-health-mental-illness-canada-2006/mental-health-2006.html>
2. McCormick, R. M. (1997). Healing through interdependence: The role of connecting in First Nations healing practices, *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 31, 172-184. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ555251.pdf>
3. Nagel, T., Thompson, C., Spencer, N., Judd, J., & Williams, R. (2009). Two-way approaches to the Indigenous mental health training: Brief training interventions. *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 8, 135-141. doi: 10.5172/jamh.8.2.135
4. Nelson, S. E., & Wilson, K. (2017). The mental health of Indigenous peoples in Canada: A critical review of research. *Social Science and Medicine*, 176, 93-112. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.01.021

5. Stewart, S. L. (2008). Promoting Indigenous mental health: Cultural perspective on healing from Native counsellors in Canada. *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education*, 46, 49-56. doi: 10.1080/14635240.2008.10708129