

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



Promising Healing Practices for Interventions Addressing Intergenerational Trauma Among Aboriginal Youth: A Scoping Review

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Aboriginal, Indigenous, youth, intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, interventions, best practices, health

POPULATION GROUP

Indigenous youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Health and Wellness

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Canada

SOURCE

Academic Article (peer reviewed)

“According to the Canadian Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, the framing of issues facing Aboriginal youth must “move beyond the near exclusive focus on problems and begin to explore a more constructive approach, one emphasizing the contribution Aboriginal youth now make, and can continue to make to Canada’s future.”

1. What is the research about?

The destructive effects of colonialism on Indigenous peoples are wide-ranging. In Canada, Indigenous people continue to experience intergenerational trauma that has its origins in colonial actions and policies, including the Indian Residential Schools and the many injustices perpetuated by that system. Indigenous people experiencing intergenerational trauma are at-risk of poor health and wellbeing outcomes. Indigenous youth suicide, hepatitis and HIV/AIDS rates, substance abuse, and sexual abuse can all be linked to historical and intergenerational trauma. This study reviewed literature in order to identify promising healing interventions and practices that would work to address intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous youth.

2. Where did the research take place?

This study is an analysis of intervention programs in Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia.

3. Who is this research about?

The research is about Indigenous youth, aged 12-29.

4. How was the research done?

The authors conducted a systematic scoping review of intervention literature in order to answer this question: What recommendations exist for promising and/or best healing practices for interventions that address intergenerational trauma among Aboriginal youth in Canada?

This review included documents written in English between 2001 and 2011 from peer-reviewed and grey literature. Academic databases were searched, as well as the Canadian Health Research Collection and Canadian Research Index for grey literature.

Interventions were mapped according to the sex of participants, intervention location, health issues addressed, and type of intervention in terms of the Aboriginal Health Foundation pillars. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) identifies three vital elements for healing interventions:

1. Integration of an Aboriginal worldview throughout the planning, design and implementation of an intervention
2. Culturally safe healing environment
3. Healers who are competent to heal

The researchers categorized interventions according to the following typology:

1. Reclaiming history
2. Cultural interventions
3. Traditional therapeutic interventions
4. Western therapeutic interventions
5. Combined therapeutic interventions
6. Other

Sixteen documents were included in the final review, summarized and examined in order to identify promising practices and current gaps.

5. What are the key findings?

The review provided the following recommendations for providing intervention programming for youth:

- Tie interventions into existing mainstream health systems
- Assist mainstream practitioners to become versed in Aboriginal ways of healing
- Promote self-determination and autonomy in organizations governed by Aboriginal peoples
- Meaningfully engage Aboriginal communities in research
- Integrate Aboriginal worldviews
- Strengthen cultural identity as a healing tool
- Build self-determination of politically active Aboriginal organizations
- Reframe trauma as a challenge to be overcome as opposed to insurmountable
- Use Aboriginal-specific determinants of health
- Normalize holistic therapy as part of interventions

None of the interventions in this review incorporated all three pillars identified by the AHF, although the researchers note doing so may not be practical.

The research also provided a number of areas for further research, including a need for:

- comprehensive, evidence-based interventions;

- evaluation of the interventions;
- an examination of whether interventions can be successful without all three pillars proposed by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation;
- strategies to practically apply to existing frameworks for healing intervention design; and,
- improved evaluation techniques.

According to the authors, “interventions that incorporate an understanding of intergenerational trauma are more likely to be effective in fostering resilience, in promoting healing, and in primary prevention,” which will result in positive changes in peoples lives.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

The research demonstrates that there are multiple promising approaches to addressing intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous youth. The impacts of colonialism are still felt in Indigenous communities. Colonial practices, such as the Residential School System, and the Sixties Scoop continue to have an impact on the lives of Indigenous youth, despite not being experienced directly.

Programming to mitigate the effects of intergenerational trauma is important for the continued healing of Indigenous youth and their families in Canada.



Roy, A, Noormohamed, R, Henderson, R, Thurston, W (2015). Promising healing practices for interventions addressing intergenerational trauma among Aboriginal youth: A scoping review. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 10(2), 62-81.

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