

RESEARCH CONNECTION

A warrior's red road - Indigenous men connecting to culture

By Stephanie Spence, Jason Gobeil, Candice Waddell-Henowitch, PhD, Rachel Herron, PhD, Jonathan Allan, PhD, & Marti Ford



Why this research is important

Indigenous people in Canada and elsewhere bear the brunt of health inequalities, high rates of incarceration ([Dennison et al., 2014](#)), lack of programs and services ([Ball, 2009](#)), and intergenerational trauma ([Prehn & Ezzy, 2020](#)). Health interventions are often framed in a Western medical lens; however, in Indigenous communities, culture has been framed as a solution. There is a growing body of research on the importance of cultural connection, teaching, and ceremony, particularly in relation to Indigenous health and well-being. Sacred teachings, ceremonies, and cultural values have been linked to healing, resilience, and positive mental health outcomes ([Tuck & Anderson, 2014](#)).

What you need to know

We engage with Indigenous and spiritual leaders through community-based action research to deliver and evaluate land-based cultural practices by hosting a program that helps connect Indigenous men to their inherent rights of traditional hunting, harvesting, and drum making. We hope that this research will assist local Indigenous organizations in securing sustainable funding and resources to continue to support Indigenous men in healing and wellness through land-based learning.

How the research was conducted

The overarching goal of this research was to follow a group of Indigenous men and boys as they went through the process of creating traditional drums. From 2020–2021, the group engaged in a traditional hunt, dressing the animal, preparing the hide, creating the drum, and awakening the drum. Through sharing circles, individual interviews, observation, and photovoice, we were able to evaluate the positive impact groups such as this have on the health and wellness of Indigenous men. The voices of seven participants, one Indigenous leader, one spiritual leader, and five researchers were included in the results of the study.

What the researchers found

Through the participants, we determined that creating a sustainable and successful land-based program requires two main components: (1) culture, ceremony, skill, and knowledge sharing; and (2) honoring relationships to land and natural resources. Although having access to land is a valuable entity for land-based programming, it is also extremely important for Indigenous men's organizations to be able to build and use the resources on that land to create and maintain ceremony space and gather resources. Members of the group are knowledgeable about different activities performed within the group. Still, it is also essential to have spiritual advisors to provide teachings on the ceremony and culture involved in the different activities. The participants explained that the program was pivotal in (1) supporting community, social, and family connections; (2) creating a place to heal through brotherhood, encouragement, and reassurance; (3) strengthening land-based knowledge through teaching, learning, and ceremony; (4) fostering a sense of purpose; and (5) awakening Indigenous pride.

How this research can be used

This research illustrates the holistic impacts of land-based learning for Indigenous men. The information in this report can be used to inform investments and initiatives in Indigenous men's health. Supporting and funding Indigenous organizations and programs to provide land-based initiatives through financial contributions, as well as ensuring sovereignty over the land in which the programs can occur, promotes the health and well-being of Indigenous men and their families.

About the researchers

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Publication based on this research

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