

RESEARCH CONNECTION

Healing journeys: Shared insights from Indigenous men in Brandon, Manitoba

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Why this research is important

Colonialism has, in large part, contributed to trauma among Indigenous people. Mental health is not an Indigenous term; it was developed by Western medical professionals. What may seem like symptoms of mental health in Indigenous communities may also be legitimate responses to trauma, poor living conditions, and other inequities. Understanding the complex nature of Indigenous peoples' healing journeys is vital to address the mental health disparities between Indigenous peoples and their non-Indigenous counterparts. This research focuses on understanding well-being and the healing process from the perspective of Indigenous men, rather than focusing on mental health problems from a Western perspective.

What you need to know

Understanding Indigenous men's healing journeys is critical to moving beyond deficit-focused research on substance use and suicide among Indigenous men. Little attention has been given to Indigenous men's experiences of healing and barriers to healing. Men involved in this collaborative research project described their healing journeys as non-linear processes of resilience, hope, and cultural reclamation constrained by experiences of systemic racism and internalized oppression.

How the research was conducted

The project used the community-based participatory research method to strengthen community partnerships with Indigenous co-researchers. Indigenous researchers led four two-hour sharing circles with Indigenous men. Seven men, including the co-researchers, shared their stories within the sharing circles. To conduct the research in a good way, ceremonies and traditional teachings were offered as part of the sharing circles. Following the sharing circles, five individual interviews were conducted with Indigenous men.

What the researchers found

The main themes that emerged throughout this project in regards to the men's healing journey are included below. Planning for the future, raising children, and "walking the good path" gave Indigenous men a sense of hope on their healing journeys. Men identified constraints to living a good life; specifically, they struggled with losing relationships and a sense of belonging in an attempt to live a life free from drugs and alcohol. Ceremony provided a safe space for men and strengthened cultural connections with other men and their communities. The men in this collaboration identified a scarcity of cultural role models as a barrier in their healing journeys. The men also internalized oppression and racism, which acted as a barrier to seeking external support in an urban setting.

How this research can be used

The stories shared in this project will be used to educate Western service providers about the barriers faced by Indigenous men when seeking help. Inequalities in service provision and systemic racism continue to undermine the efforts made by Indigenous communities on their path to wellness. Providing people with a safe space to ask for help and the provision of culturally sensitive help could facilitate stronger relationships between Indigenous people and Western mental health services. Indigenous men found healing through ceremonies and, if available, Indigenous role models. These resources need to be recognized and supported as an essential parallel system of care.

About the researchers

Margaret de Jager is currently a student in the Psychiatric Nursing program at Brandon University. She gained her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Saskatchewan in 2015. Her primary focus as a research assistant has been with Indigenous men's mental health. As a future nurse, a researcher, and a

community member, her goal is to reduce the stigma around mental health and make appropriate services more accessible.

Jason Gobeil is the Aboriginal Community Coordinator for the City of Brandon.

Frank Tacan is a Dakota knowledge keeper who works at the Brandon Friendship Centre and facilitates cultural ceremonies in the broader community.

Keywords

Healing journey; mental wellness; community-based participatory research; Indigenous men

Acknowledgements

In the spirit of humility, we acknowledge that by naming Jason Gobeil and Frank Tacan as authors, we also recognize that the information shared within this research connection is not theirs alone. Indigenous teaching and knowledge sharing is a collective practice involving knowledge keepers, ancestors, families, and communities. We are grateful for the trust and sharing that has informed this research process. We thank the research participants for sharing their time and stories.

This research project has been approved by the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee. Funding was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canada Research Chair Program. Research Connection is a periodical publication intended to provide information about the impact of Brandon University's academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary is supported by the Office of Research Services and by the Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, Faculty of Education.

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