

The Mental Health of Indigenous People During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Scoping Review

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Abstract : Indigenous Peoples have faced unique barriers to accessing and receiving culturally safe and appropriate mental health care while also facing daunting rates of mental health diagnoses and comorbidities. Indigenous researchers and clinicians have well established the connection of the current mental health issues in Indigenous communities as a direct result of colonization by way of intergenerational trauma throughout Canada's colonial history. Such mental health barriers and challenges have become exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, access to mental health, cultural, ceremonial, and community services were severely impacted and restricted; however, it is these same cultural activities and community resources that are key to supporting Indigenous mental health from a traditional and community-based perspective. This research employed a unique combination of a thorough, analytical scoping review of the existent mental health literature of Indigenous mental health in the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside narrative interviews employing an oral storytelling tradition methodology with key community informants that provide comprehensive cultural services to the Indigenous community of Toronto, as well as across Canada. These key informant interviews provided a wealth of insights into virtual transitions of Indigenous care and mental health support; intersections of historical underfunding and current financial navigation in technology infrastructure; accessibility and connection with Indigenous youth in remote locations; as well as maintaining community involvement and traditional practices in a current pandemic. Both the scoping review and narrative interviews were meticulously analyzed for overarching narrative themes to best explore the extent of the literature on Indigenous mental health and services during COVID-19; identify gaps in this literature; identify barriers and supports for the Indigenous community, and explore the intersection of community and cultural impacts to mental health. Themes of the scoping review included: Historical Context; Challenges in Culturally-Based Services; and Strengths in Culturally-Based Services. Meta themes across narrative interviews included: Virtual Transitions; Financial Support for Indigenous Services; Health Service Delivery & Wellbeing; and Culture & Community Connection. The results of this scoping review and narrative interviews provide wide application and contribution to the mental health literature, as well as recommendations for policy, service provision, autonomy in Indigenous health and wellbeing, and crucial insights into the present and enduring mental health needs of Indigenous Peoples throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords : indigenous community services, indigenous mental health, indigenous scoping review, indigenous peoples and Covid-19

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