



SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCHERS WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Domestic Homicide
Brief 8

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations presents its eighth brief, “*Suggestions for researchers working with Indigenous peoples.*” Within this brief, Cathy Richardson identifies and dispels myths about Indigenous people, and provides context for how to work collaboratively with Indigenous people when conducting research instead of making Indigenous people the topic of research.

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INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations (CDHPiVP) is conducting research on risk assessment, risk management and safety planning for domestic homicide focusing on four population groups: Indigenous; Immigrant and refugee; rural, remote and northern; and children exposed to domestic violence. The CDHPiVP is working with Indigenous groups across Canada to conduct this research.

We hope the work of the CDHPiVP can build on existing reports and initiatives that promote a better understanding of the history of abuse suffered by Indigenous people. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012) has included in its Calls to Action several calls related to domestic homicide and family violence victimization including:

36. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to work with Aboriginal communities to provide culturally relevant services to inmates on issues such as substance abuse, family and domestic violence, and overcoming the experience of having been sexually abused.

39. We call upon the federal government to develop a national plan to collect and publish data on the criminal victimization of Aboriginal people, including data related to homicide and family violence victimization.

40. We call on all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal people, to create adequately funded and accessible Aboriginal-specific victim programs and services with appropriate evaluation mechanisms.

41. We call upon the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal organizations, to appoint a public inquiry into the causes of, and remedies for, the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women and girls. The inquiry's mandate would include:

- i. Investigation in missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.
- ii. Links to the intergenerational legacy of residential schools.

The CDHPiVP project has made it a requirement that all researchers working on the project complete the “OCAP®” course offered by the First Nations Information Governance Centre. OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession) are standards that establish how First Nations data should be collected, protected, used, or shared (www.fnigc.ca).

While we strive to honor these principles, we believe that conducting research with Indigenous people also requires cultural humility, and an understanding of the context of the lives of Indigenous people in Canada, including the impact of colonization and subsequent policies that contributed to the attempted erasure of our Indigenous people such as Indian residential schools, sixties scoop, policies regarding status, etc. We have an obligation to be aware of this history, to acknowledge the truth and find ways to reconcile. Conducting research on Indigenous people will not lead to a positive way forward. Conducting research with Indigenous people which is done collaboratively and respectfully, hopefully will.

Cathy Richardson, a co-investigator to the project, has offered the following suggestions for researchers who wish to conduct research with Indigenous people.

Some points to remember when working with or conceptualizing violence against Indigenous women and men. It is important to remember that there are different perspectives within Indigenous cultures. The following framework may challenge prevailing western psychological constructs, many of which individualize social problems and hold victims accountable or blame victims for their own suffering or distort what that looks like. There are extensive references at the end of this article for those who want to do more in-depth reading.

1. Colonization and missionization were not benevolent. When analyzing perpetrator behaviour, we know that perpetrators are aware that their victims/targets will resist violence, so they seek to overpower the resistance in advance. This is what residential school was about... suppressing the resistance of Indigenous people so they would not be in a good position to protect their land (from land theft and mining). It was not about educating children or helping them. It was also about creating a servant class for the white upper middle- class population.
2. Understand that most perpetrators of violence towards Indigenous people are not sentenced, punished or rehabilitated (e.g. held accountable). In Canada, abusing priests for example, face a kind of impunity, similar to that of white male perpetrators who harm Indigenous women. Holly Johnson's stats on attrition show that less than 1% of perpetrators, when reported by women, receive sentencing. White people are less likely to receive sentencing than Indigenous people, who are often blamed for crimes they did not commit.
3. When the death of an Indigenous women is labelled as suicide, it could mean that the police choose not to investigate. There is a perception that in some of these cases, the police have not had a caring attitude about the victim and haven't done a thorough investigation (personal communication from Jessica Quijano, a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women outreach worker at The

Native Women's Shelter in Montreal based on meetings with police and debates on their practices).

4. Indigenous people are your peers, your friends, your neighbours... we are all human beings with problems, so it is important not to "Other" us. We are also part of this research project. A helpful worldview includes the idea that "Just because people have problems doesn't mean there is something wrong with them". (The problems lie in the interaction between people and power abuses). As women researchers, we are not separate or different from the population who are being harmed, perhaps just lucky or fortunate to have more social supports.
5. In terms of the backlash by white conservatives against diversity and diversity-hirings, we find an ideology that says "I do not feel privileged, I am suffering too".... We say "just because you are not Indigenous doesn't mean you don't experience oppression and exclusion, just not the kind of oppression that comes from colonization.
6. Western psychology, psychiatry and the medical model are just perspectives on the world, they are not the final truth. There are other approaches including Indigenous worldviews, women's experience, narrative approaches, descriptions rather than labelling.
7. Understand the debates in the field. Feminists view violence against women as indicative of a lack of gender equality in society. Quebec Native Women frame it as a "family issue." (I believe they take this approach because they want to ensure that male perpetrators receive culturally-informed help.)
8. Don't over-focus on the idea of intergenerational transmission. Each person is unique and whether or not they will use violence or receive a diagnosis of PTSD depends on the quality of the social responses they received when they disclosed violence... not on the initial act

of violence itself. Also, not everything transmitted through the generations is negative, but there is a negative bias in this construct which comes from Bowenian family therapy.

9. Be careful to place and to understand all action and interaction in context. All behaviour becomes understandable in context... nothing is really dysfunctional, except perhaps the violence of people with power.
10. Be careful how you use the word trauma. Language-choice is a political decision. Trauma-talk comes from psychology and psychiatry and tends to replace other ways of talking about violence. We need to address the violence in the social world rather than focus on the victim as mentally ill.
11. Be careful in how you talk about Indigenous women (or women in general as perpetrators). Women who use violence and hurt their male partners are generally women who are completely isolated and have no one to “watch their back!”. Women’s prisons are filled with (Indigenous) women who were protecting themselves from violence and in the process their aggressor died. Therefore, it is really important to not mutualize violence and articulate the difference between violence and self-defence. Many Indigenous women are labelled as aggressors when they defend themselves.
12. Resilience is a popular term, often linked with theories of neuropsychology. Avoid using this term unless you can define it clearly and know the difference between who is resilient and who is not. If everyone is resilient, then it isn’t a helpful construct. The term resilience is acceptable to status quo organizations because it does not challenge existing structures and programs. It does not imply that the person did something to stop the violence. If someone leaves an abusive partner and lives on the street, are they resilient? If they use drugs to self-medicate their pain, are they resilient? Were the children who died in residential school not resilient? This discourse becomes opaque. This term has been critiqued as individualizing, as a neo-liberal, less threatening alternative to resistance and activism. Resistance involves any act which oppose violence, whether individual or collective, including “calling in” perpetrators and initiating change towards a gentler, non-racist, non-sexist society (see “the colonial code in the helping professions” (Todd & Wade, 1994). Critics ask if resilience should be a goal if it means stretching a person’s capacity to endure more violence? (see Bracke, 2016)
13. In reality, people do better when they have many, dignified social supports and positive social responses. We all do better when people believe us, help stop the violence, show us our value and assure us that it wasn’t our fault. This prevents an accumulation of shame and self-blame, which promotes well-being. Therefore, resilience is actually a group project rather than an individual achievement.
14. Don’t overgeneralize when you talk about Indigenous people. Remember there are hundreds of Indigenous linguistic groups in Canada. The term Indigenous, or Aboriginal; (less popular these days) lumps peoples together the way European lumps together Irish people and Turkish people. Try to use the specific tribal affiliation whenever possible, and the terms selected by the individual.
15. Understand the links between large body size and violence. Western medical model discourses underplay or ignore the links between largeness and having a history of violence, high stress or starvation, as in the residential school setting. From an epigenetical perspective, bodies are influenced by their history and not just about what we eat. There is a myth that obesity is an individual problem, based on poor food choices. There are larger cultural issues at play including poverty.

16. Stay away from forgiveness discourses. TRC-style government apologies can be important but they put the onus on the residential school survivors to accept the apology. There is a two-part process in apologies. If a perpetrator says “sorry”, the victim is expected to accept the apology and forgive. If she does not, she is then seen as the perpetrator and the perpetrator becomes the victim. This does not help the victim in their recovery. Offering forgiveness is a personal choice and should not be imposed by others.
17. Understand that Indigenous people want some stolen land to be returned. Being an ally will mean supporting this... this will involve huge social restructuring. There are “we should all live together in peace discourses” that relate to the general society, but, at the same time, Indigenous nations want self-governance as well.
18. When applying a certain theory, or assessment tool, look to the Daubert scale (a scale which discusses the reliability of the tool in certain conditions). Most assessments are not measured for Indigenous people or non-white people. Most say “do not apply this tool under conditions of stress”, which is when most assessments are applied.
19. We need to stop reframing feminine Indigeneity as being the problem contributing to the missing and murdered Indigenous women situation. The problem is the number of men who are willing to harm Indigenous women in Canada.
20. Always be on the lookout for, and ready to contest, victim-blaming in all its forms.
21. Be wary of popular education and anti-oppressive approaches where a so-called expert claims to educate the unenlightened. Indigenous people have critical analysis of the world already and don't need university-educated people to tell them what is what and how to think.
22. If you want to help Indigenous people who are street-involved (most often due to violence), you must support safe injection sites. More than 10,000 opioid-related deaths occurred in Canada between January 2016 and September 2018 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2019). Safe injection sites are crucial.
23. There are social classes in the Indigenous community. Many Indigenous people are educated and work in the mainstream, as well as in their communities.
24. Violence is not caused by anger or alcohol. Lots of people can be angry, or drink, and they never hurt anyone. One might say they are part of the weaponry, but they are not the cause. They may make things worse. However, people who use violence have a violence-problem and alcohol treatment does not necessarily stop people from using violence.
25. Be wary of deterministic theories. Just because a person experiences violence does not mean they will copy that. It depends on other aspects, such as the presence of social safety. However, the opposite is true, and many people who do use violence were abused or attacked at one time or another. Be discerning in your analysis and avoid generalizations.
26. Learn about how to create culturally safe environments and documents. See the Indigenous Ally Toolkit developed by Concordia University. https://segalcentre.org/common/sitemedia/201819_Shows/ENG_AllyToolkit.pdf

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Catherine Richardson / Kinewesquao has a Ph.D. in Child and Adolescent Psychology and is currently the Director of First Peoples Studies at Concordia University. She is a co-founder of the Centre for Response-Based Practice and teaches about recovery from violence in the context of social work and counselling. She has twenty-three years of experience as a therapist, including offering support to the survivors of residential schools in Canada. She is an international trainer of response-based practice.

Catherine works in the area of systems reform and decolonization. She trains child protection social workers as well as other professionals in how to respond with dignity to victims of violence. She offers professional supervision and is involved in a number of research projects related to structural and interpersonal violence and Indigenous emancipation. Catherine is a co-investigator on the Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations project and the winner of the 2019 Indigenous practice award of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association.

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CDHPIVP PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

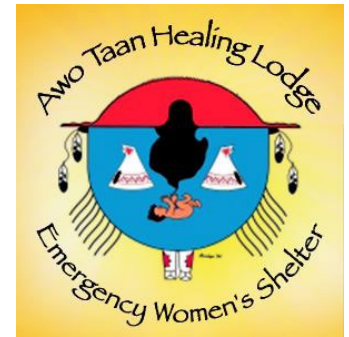
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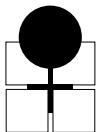
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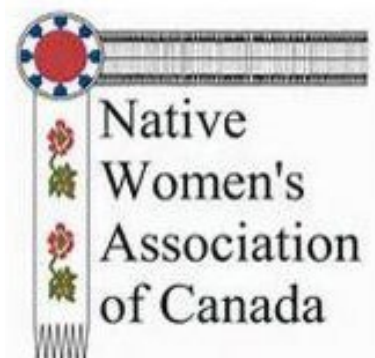


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