

Research Snapshot

Use of traditional healing practices in two Ontario First Nations

What is this research about?

Colonization has caused a loss of traditional beliefs, knowledge, and practices (such as traditional healing practices or THPs), for Aboriginal People in Canada. THPs have been shown to help Aboriginal People connect with their culture and cope with dispossession, assimilation, and social marginalization. To support cultural continuity and choice in health care, it's important to understand who uses THPs and who does not, as well as their reasons for not using them.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers combined data on two First Nations communities collected through two wellbeing surveys: The Mental Health and Well-Being Survey (MHWB), and the Consumer Journey (CJ) Study.

In total, 613 participants completed the MHWB survey. Of this, 334 were randomly sampled for the MHWB survey, 226 were MHWB volunteers, and 53 were CJ volunteers. About 57% were female, 47% were married or living with a partner, and 66% identified as First Nations.

What did the researchers find?

Overall findings on the use of THPs:

- 15% used both TMs and TH, 15% of them only used TMs, 3% only used TH.
- 63% did not use either.

What you need to know

There is limited research about traditional healing practices (THPs), such as traditional medicines (TM) and traditional healing (TH), for the Canadian population of Aboriginal People.* And the research that exists is outdated and non-generalizable.

Researchers used existing survey data to better understand the use of THPs in two First Nations communities in Ontario. They found that 63% did not use either and, of those who didn't use THPs, more than half said they would like to use them. Common reasons were that they did not know enough about THPs, and how and where to access them.

- Most people who used TH also used TMs.

Comparison of people who use THPs and those who didn't:

- People who only used TMs were more likely to be male, younger, and less educated.
- Those who used TMs and TH were more likely to identify as a First Nations person.

* The term Aboriginal is being used instead of Indigenous, use of terms has changed since the time in which the article was written.

- Those who used TMs and TH had a greater sense of historical loss.
- Those who used a TH were more likely to have anxiety. They were also more likely to have better self-reported spiritual health.
- People who wanted to use TMs or TH had thought about historical losses.
- They also had more symptoms associated with historical loss, more childhood adversities, and worse self-rated mental, emotional, and physical health.

Among those who were interested in using THPs, reasons for not using them were that they didn't know enough about them, or they didn't know how or where to access them.

Limitations and next steps

The survey questions didn't ask about specific practices (such as ceremony, herbs, or the sweat lodge) or who provided the help during the practices (such as medicine person, elder, or spiritualist).

They also didn't ask when the THPs were used (such as last year or throughout the participant's lifetime). Also, it isn't possible to generalize the study findings to other Aboriginal communities because the data used

How can you use this research?

This research can provide some insights for organizations that offer healthcare services to First Nations people. It can also facilitate conversations with First Nations people who might be interested in using THPs but may not know enough about them and how to access them.

looked at two First Nations communities at one specific point in time.

About the researchers

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