

Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2019-2020

TARA WHITE, PHD IN HEALTH

The experiences of Indigenous health care professionals in three health professions across Canada

Description of Research

My doctoral thesis research aims to answer the following question: *How do Indigenous Peoples experience working within three professions (occupational therapy, medicine, and nursing) in Canada?*

Due to differing worldviews and cultural ways of being and doing, Indigenous health care professionals may experience a divide between their own belief systems and the systems involved in practicing health care in a Westernized society¹. My doctoral thesis work is part of a larger national qualitative study exploring the experiences of professionals who may experience marginalization due to Indigeneity, racialization, ethnicity, social class background, disability and/or LGBTQ identity. The three professions (occupational therapy, medicine, and nursing) chosen for this study all benefit from professional autonomy and high levels of social status, relying on licensure and lengthy accredited formal education programs to establish jurisdictional claims and socialize new members. Each of the three professions has its own self-governing body and code of ethics, though they differ in size, gender distribution, and hold varying positions of authority and power. Despite their differences, all three of these professions have been actively seeking to reduce inequities in the workplace experienced by Indigenous peoples (?). It is a critical step to explore social processes at play in the professions for Indigenous Peoples, highlighting how even in workplaces committed to social justice, processes of social exclusion may still be operative.

Participants for this research will be recruited through various professional Indigenous associations for each profession, as well as through personal and professional networks of the team. The study methods will be guided by Indigenous epistemologies and employ various Indigenous methodologies which may include storytelling sessions and talking circles. The methodology for this research will be further solidified upon consultation with the above-mentioned groups. I will be drastically modifying the interview guide utilized in the overall national project to better align with Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing; creating a conversation atmosphere as opposed to a formal interview. This will be completed once receiving feedback from the collaborating organizations to ensure it is culturally appropriate for Indigenous professionals.

My thesis will explore the following objectives:

1. *How everyday work experiences of Indigenous professionals are shaped by their Indigeneity;*
2. *How the social processes of inclusion and exclusion influence their practice;*
3. *How professional context shapes experiences of belonging and marginality;*
4. *Recommendations from Indigenous professionals to improve social inclusion in the workplace.*

Research Outcomes

I am currently in the process of reading for my comprehensive exams, and plan to begin writing in Winter of 2021. These outcomes described here are just a starting point and will likely change as my project moves forward.

The health care system is a colonizing institution, with a long history of doing harm within Indigenous communities, which has resulted in scepticism and reluctance for Indigenous peoples to seek care². Indigenous health care professionals are uniquely positioned due to their lived experience related to their own Indigeneity and their education in and first-hand experience with health systems. They will be able to speak to some of the challenges they face as well as provide suggestions for how to transform health care settings and their specific professions into spaces that invite and encourage Indigenous perspectives. This research will offer concrete recommendations emerging directly from Indigenous professionals in the workforce about how their perspectives and experiences can inform a more culturally safe space for Indigenous peoples to work, and ultimately seek care. Not only do I hope to improve theoretical understanding of processes of social inclusion and exclusion, as well as professional closure, but I also have the pragmatic long-term aim of increasing the representation of Indigenous Peoples in the health professions.

Knowledge Sharing

- Accepted to present at the National Gathering of Graduate Students (NGGS) in May 2020 (cancelled due to COVID)

Completed Project Deliverables

- Successful completion of course work required for the PhD in Health Program at Dalhousie University

Forthcoming Project Deliverables

- Completion of my comprehensive examinations (anticipated start January 2021)
- Begin to develop my PhD proposal for defense once my comprehensive examinations are complete (Spring/Summer 2021)

Activities Outside of Your Research

- Submitted a first author manuscript to Social Science & Medicine as part of a scoping review led by the Wabanaki-Labrador NEIHR Team
 - White, T., Murphy, K., Branje, K., McKibbin, S., Cunsolo, A., Latimer, M., MacMillan, L. J., Sylliboy, J., & Martin, D. (2020). How has Indigenous health research changed in Atlantic Canada over two decades? A scoping review from 2001-2020. *Social Sciences & Medicine*.
- Submitted two non-peer reviewed publications to the Occupational Therapy Now Practice Magazine
 - White, T. (2020). Recapping the Indigenous health in the time of COVID webinar: Implications for occupational therapy. *Occupational Therapy Now*, 22(5), 28-30.
 - White, T. (2020). Opening my eyes to my Indigenous heritage: my story of becoming an occupational therapist and Indigenous researcher. *Occupational Therapy Now*, 22(6), 9-11.
- Had two conference presentations accepted, however both were cancelled due to COVID-19.
 - Beagan, B., Sibbald, K. & White, T. (2020). “Equity and inclusion among occupational therapists: The toll of marginalization”. Accepted to the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists Conference (CAOT), May 6 – May 9, 2020 in Saskatoon, SK. [Cancelled due to COVID-19]
 - Murphy, K., White, T., Branje, K., MacMillan, J., Cunsolo, A., Latimer, M., Sylliboy, J. & Martin, D. (2020) “Trends in Indigenous health research in Atlantic Canada: A scoping review”. Accepted to the Crossroads Interdisciplinary Health Research Conference, March 13 – March 14, 2020 in Halifax, NS. [Cancelled due to COVID-19]
- Completed two guest lectures on Indigenous health and wellbeing
 - Invited Speaker, COMM 4511: Health Communication; Theory and Practice. School of Communication Studies, Mount Saint Vincent University, Forthcoming October 2020
 - Invited Speaker, OCCU 6003: Advanced Practice Issues. School of Occupational Therapy, Dalhousie University, May 2020

Future Plans

In order to prepare and move my PhD thesis work forward, I am planning to begin relationship building with the organizations listed above whom I hope will be able to collaborate with me on various aspects of my project (participant recruitment, the development of talking circle questions, as well as other considerations). I am currently a member of the Occupational Therapy Indigenous

Health Network and, as a result, I have gained valuable friendships and mentors within the last year. Further, I am currently working on various papers with three different research teams to continually work on my writing as I prepare to write my comprehensive exams in January of 2021.

References

1. Martin D. (2012). Two-eyed seeing: A framework for understanding Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to Indigenous health research. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 44, 20-42. Retrieved from:
<http://cjr.archive.mcgill.ca/article/viewFile/2348/2342>
2. Allan, B. & Smylie, J. (2015). First Peoples, second class treatment: The role of racism in the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples in Canada [PDF]. Wellesley Institute and Well Living House. Retrieved from: <http://caid.ca/FirPeoSecClaTre2015.pdf>