

Mental Wellness, COVID-19 Pandemic, and Indigenous Health Care Workers in British Columbia: Recommendations for Medium-Term Impact Management

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Abstract

Indigenous health care workers (HCWs) play a critical role in providing culturally informed health services. Their own wellness is indispensable for uninterrupted services. According to Statistics Canada (2021), 7 in 10 Canadian HCWs reported “worsening mental health” during the pandemic. It merits an investigation how Indigenous HCWs coped with the crisis and what kind of institutional support they had. This empirical study addresses the question as to what medium-term impact management strategies for mental health should be recommended to health care institutions in British Columbia (BC) to support their Indigenous HCWs. It recommends holistic and culturally relevant strategies in the medium-term timeframe for the optimal management of mental health.

Significance: The study addresses the critical gap in the literature on occupational health and clinical practice by focusing on Indigenous HCWs. In terms of conceptual contribution, it enriches the organizational justice framework by offering culturally-informed and Indigenous perspectives.

Methodology: Indigenous research methodology (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991) marked by “four R’s” (respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility) informs this study. The study is at the data collection stage through semi-structured interviews/ conversations with nearly 25 Indigenous participants. The thematic data analysis will be complete by October 2023, following which results will be disseminated with key stakeholders, including scholars at the ICARSS.

Funding: The BC Ministry of Health has funded this research.

Keywords: Indigenous health care workers, COVID-19 pandemic, mental health, organizational justice, British Columbia