

# **Indigenous Youth, Criminal Justice and Foster Care: A Scoping Review of Proactive, Preventative Initiatives**

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## **Abstract**

The present study explores what strategies and approaches are being utilized by Indigenous communities to lower the number of youths who are involved in the foster care and criminal justice system. The methodological approach that was used was a scoping review following the guidelines of Arksey and O'Malley (2005). The process of the scoping review involved developing a research strategy (research parameters) which included search terms, years of publication and databases. The first use of the research strategy involved a search on the academic databases from the Mount Saint Vincent University library, which yielded 0 results from the academic literature. The same research strategy was used for a second attempt, using Google Scholar (first 30 pages of articles) where results were yielded. From the results, the researcher organized and eliminated articles based on the articles "fitting" the research criteria, which in turn would answer the research question. Once completed, there were a total of 8 articles that were deemed relevant or "fitting" the research question, however the unintended result of the review, was not in the articles, themselves, but in what was missing. The scoping review process highlighted the need/gap that exists in academic literature involving Indigenous communities. Activities that happen in Indigenous communities are not translated into published reports or are not the object of academic research for reasons that remain unknown, but could be linked to mistrust, the effects of colonization and a westernized view on how Indigenous communities view the world.

The learnings from this process, indicate that there is a gap that exists between academics (what is considered "academic" research processes and what is considered knowledge) and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. Research that is done in collaboration with Indigenous people must be flexible in methods, but there must be recognition from institutions that Indigenous research methodology is truly research.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Indigenous peoples in Canada make up approximately 4.9% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2017) and this number continues to rise. Yet Indigenous adults are also overrepresented in the criminal justice system. In 2017/2017, Indigenous adults accounted for 28% of the provincial/territorial admissions and 27% of the federal admissions within the Canadian corrections system (Malakieh, 2018).

The population of “young” Indigenous people is increasing in size as well, according to the 2016 census of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). Indigenous youth (under 14) across the country make up approximately 29.2% of Indigenous people in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). Indigenous youth are also overrepresented in the justice system. In 2016/2017, Indigenous youth represented 37% of youth admissions to the Canadian corrections (Malakieh, 2018).

Indigenous youth are not only overrepresented in the justice system, they are also overrepresented in the foster care system. In 2019, 52.2% of children and youth under the age of 14 involved in the foster care system or residential care system are Indigenous (First Nations Child and Family Services, 2019).

With two systems (criminal justice and foster care) having an exaggerated overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth, it is crucial to explore these systems as intertwining entities. In particular, it is important to consider these problems from the perspectives of colonialist legacies, the social determinants of health, the lack of engagement or inclusion of indigenous communities and the need for research on proactive measures that are being undertaken at the community level, to deal with these issues. In particular, it is important to know what Indigenous communities, themselves, are doing to lower the number of youth who are involved in both systems.

In this respect, it is also important to be sensitive to Indigenous Ways of Knowing (Hart, 2007). Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous community are the centre of an Indigenous child/youth's life. Community is central in the Indigenous culture and the community knows what is best for the children/youth in their world. With Indigenous worldviews playing a role in the development of children and youth, it is also important to recognize that all Indigenous people are not homogenous and that Indigenous worldviews differ from Westernized views and that it must be taken into consideration in the research (Mead, 2002)

The present study explores what strategies and approaches are being utilized by Indigenous communities to lower the number of youths who are involved in the foster care and criminal justice system. It does so, from the perspective of an anti-colonial stance and through an examination of the Social Determinants of Health. The methodological approach that is used is a scoping review, following the guidelines of Arksey and O'Malley (2005).

As this thesis will outline, the scoping review process was not the appropriate process to answer a question which surveys the community-led activities that happen in Indigenous communities. For reasons which we will outline in the discussion section, these activities are often not studied, recorded or even acknowledged in academic research. These might range from a colonial legacy of mistrust, on the part of the communities, to a lack of understanding on the part of researchers about how Indigenous communities view the world. Furthermore, this thesis also illustrates that taking a Eurocentric approach to the research process will often not capture activities and approaches that themselves do not take a Eurocentric approach. In the case of this scoping review, what was demonstrated was that not all academic research methodologies will adequately capture the realities of the work that is being conducted within the Indigenous populations.

The implications from this process, indicate that there is a gap that exists between academics (what is considered "academic" research processes and what is considered knowledge) and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing.



## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### History of Indigenous People in Canada

- **Diversity in Canada**

Canada has a rich history of embracing people into its country from all corners of the world. According to the 2016 census, Canada is an ethnocultural mosaic with multiple ethnicities, beliefs linguistics and religious diversity (Statistics Canada, 2018).

In 2016, Canada had a foreign-born population of approximately 7,540,830 people that represented 21.9% of the total population. These statistics represent the fact that not only is Canada a country with many cultures, identities and beliefs, but it also has the highest proportion of foreign born population of the G8 countries (Statistics Canada, 2018).

Included in the 13 ethnic groups that have surpassed the mark of over one million people, are Indigenous people in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018).<sup>1</sup> Canada includes the Indigenous population as a minority ethnic group when conducting their regular “Canadian census.” Even though the Indigenous people in Canada have lived in what is now known as Canada for thousands of years before Confederation, the Indigenous population continues to be viewed as the “other” compared to Euro-Canadians.

- **Turtle Island and the History of Indigenous People**

Canada was once a land where the Indigenous person was the only inhabitant. The Indigenous people in Canada were on Turtle Island (the Indigenous name for North America)

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, the use of the term “Indigenous” will be used rather than other common terms such as First Nations and Aboriginal, as the use of the term Indigenous is now commonly used throughout historical literature and research in Canada. The term Indigenous is an inclusive term when speaking about Indigenous people in Canada and their own Indigenous nations.

long before settlers from Europe impeded the lifestyle that Indigenous Canadians had previously lived and passed on for thousands of years.

There were multiple bands and nations who lived in stable relationships and sought to protect the environment and nature around them. This was the original Canada before European settlers (or newcomers) arrived at a land which they believed was a “new” discovery. From the time Europeans set foot on this territory, the history, life and treatment of Canada’s Indigenous population, was forever changed to the history we continue to learn about today.

- **Pre-Contact First Nations (Early First Nations)**

Turtle Island was a thriving spiritual and resource-rich natural world that was able to provide all necessities for First Nations who occupied this region for thousands of years (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013). A unique and advanced social organization was key to survival in Canada and, for thousands of years, First Nations people had a working social organization not only between the members of their own tribe (or group) but between other groups that occupied similar territories. The intricacy did not stop there. For example, the Huron-Wendat, had a three-tiered political system that included village councils, tribal councils and the confederacy council. All levels of the political system had to be in agreement in all decisions to be made. Discussions would continue until all levels of the Huron-Wendat were in agreement (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013).

The First Nations across the country all had one thing in common: hunting and gathering. Hunting was a primary source of food and for many groups, a lot of hunting and fishing was undertaken in the summer months, in order to have meat and clothing during the harsh winter that Canada experienced. Depending on the location of groups, different materials were used for hunting. For example, the Woodland First Nations and all of the northern region First Nation

groups used spears, bows, arrows and traps to obtain their meat source. All parts of the animal were used from the hunt, as First Nations highly respected the environment and the resources that the Earth provided. The meat was used for nourishment, as well as the fat from the animal was used in many capacities. The hides were used as clothing and housing material. Bones were sometimes used as hunting tools and other types of implements as needed (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013).

Plants were also a major source of food for all First Nations. Some groups had a more plant-based diet than others. For example, the Haudenosaunee lived mainly off of their crops (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013).

In this fashion, the Indigenous peoples of pre-contact Canada lived in harmony with their environment and in relative social and political stability. This soon changed with the advent of European settlement which changed the lives of Indigenous people in Canada. For the purpose of this thesis, the consequences of colonialism will be viewed through both the lens of the social determinants of health and also on the well-being of Indigenous people.

## **Indigenous Peoples in Today's Canada**

- **Census 2016**

In 2016, the census revealed that there were 1,673,785 Indigenous people in Canada (which they called "Aboriginal" in the survey). Thus, Indigenous people in Canada account for approximately 4.9% of the total Canadian population. Since 2006, the Indigenous population has grown over 42% due to three main factors: increased life expectancy, high fertility rates and the ability to self-report/self-identify as Indigenous on the Canadian census (Statistics Canada, 2017).

In today's Canada, there are approximately 91 different nations of Indigenous peoples, who can be divided amongst three main groups: First Nations, Métis and Inuit (Filice & Parrott, 2017). Each of these groups have had different historical experiences with the governments and people of Canada and have different cultural, religious and overall belief systems. Though, many commonalities can be found amongst the First Nations, Métis and Inuit, there are also many differences that must be taken into consideration when speaking, researching, supporting and working with the different groups.

- **Distribution of Indigenous People Across Canada**

Indigenous people in Canada can be found throughout the country. The majority of the Indigenous peoples reside in the western provinces of Canada. British Columbia has 17.7% of the total population, while Alberta has 14.0%, Manitoba 13.4% and Saskatchewan 11.7%. Approximately 24.2% of the Indigenous population of Canada are found in Ontario, while 9.5% live in Québec (highly concentrated in the Gaspé Peninsula area). The territories have approximately 2.1% of the Indigenous population, where they represent 32.1% of the total inhabitants. Finally, Atlantic Canada, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, are home to approximately 7.5% (Statistics Canada, 2017).

- **Current Indigenous Population in Canada**

The 2016 census of Canada showed that Indigenous populations are both young in age and continuing to increase (Statistics Canada, 2017). The average age is 32.1 years of age compared to a national average of 40.9 years of age for non-Indigenous people. The Indigenous First Nations population also has a high rate of people under the age of 14, sitting at approximately 29.2%, while the proportion of those 65 and older sits at 6.4%. The Métis people of Canada see a

similar trend with 22.3% of the population under the age of 14 while only 8.7% are over the age of 65. The Inuit population has the highest percentage of people under the age of 14 at 33.0%, while the age of people over 65 sits at 4.7% (Statistics Canada, 2017).

- **Current Indigenous Population on and Off Reserves**

The government of Canada recognizes people of Indigenous descent under three categories: “Registered Indian”, “Treaty Indian” and “Status or Non-status.” Those who are “Registered Indians” under the Indian Act may be eligible for a range of federal, provincial and territorial benefits, programs and services, for which Non-status, Inuit and Métis people are not eligible (Government of Canada, 2018).

In Canada, Indigenous people also continue to reside both on, as well as off, reserves. There are approximately 744,855 Indigenous people who are a “Registered Indian” or who have “Treaty Indian status”. Of those with “status” 44.2% lived on reserves while 55.8% lived off-reserve (Statistics Canada, 2017).

- **Indigenous Educational Levels**

Overall education levels in the Indigenous communities of Canada fall behind those of the general population. In 2016, only 10.9% of all Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 had a bachelor's degree or higher, in comparison to 28.5% of all those in the total population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). Furthermore, only 23.2% of Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 had achieved a high school diploma or equivalency certificate as their highest educational level, compared to 23.7% of the total population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). An additional 10.8% of all people in Canada had an apprenticeship or other trades certificate, while only 5.5% of Indigenous people had achieved this. Similarly, only 18.6% of Indigenous people 25 to 64 had

achieved a college diploma as their highest level, compared to 22.4% of people in Canada in the same age group. Finally, 30.9% of Indigenous people in the above age group have no certificate, diploma or degree, compared to only 11.5% in the overall population.

On a more positive note, education levels in the Indigenous community have seen significant increases from 2006 to 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017) However, while educational achievement continues to rise in the Indigenous population of Canada, the rates in this group are still significantly lower than those amongst the non-Indigenous population. Richards (2014) looked at educational obtainment (of children up to high school) in Canada. This author, found that there was a difference in the educational achievement gap not only between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in Canada, but between the Indigenous population itself. It was found that 63% of Indigenous people who took part in the provincial school system (off-reserve) completed a high school diploma. For Indigenous people who took part in the educational system on reserve, 41% completed high school diploma (Richards, 2014).

- **Inmate Population of Indigenous Canadians** <sup>2</sup>

Indigenous adults are also overrepresented in the Canadian corrections system and their number continues to rise. In 2006/2007, the number of Indigenous adults who were admitted to the correctional system was 21% for provincial/territorial and 19% for federal. Indigenous adults represented 30% of Canadian admissions to custody and 25% of admissions to community supervision in the provincial/territorial corrections system. Meanwhile, Indigenous adults accounted for 27% of custody admissions and 26% of admissions to community supervision at the federal level of Canadian corrections. More recently, in 2016/2017, while only accounting for

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<sup>2</sup> This section will speak only to the situation of adults, while later sections will speak about the incarceration of Indigenous youth

4.1% of the total population of Canada, Indigenous adults still accounted for 28% of the provincial/territorial admissions and 27% of federal admissions. (Malakieh, 2018).

Indigenous females are also admitted to the Canadian corrections system at a significantly higher rate than non-Indigenous females. Indigenous females accounted for 43% of the total female admissions in Canada, while non-Indigenous females accounted for 57% of the total admissions (Malakieh, 2018)

The rate of Indigenous admissions to the Canadian corrections system is also higher in the Western provinces of Canada than in other Canadian provinces. In Manitoba, Indigenous adults represent 74% of the total admissions to the Canadian corrections system. Reflecting similar statistics, Saskatchewan Indigenous adults represented 76% of all admissions to the Canadian corrections system (Malakieh, 2018).

- **Crime and Location of First Nations**

First Nations communities typically have a high rate of “Registered Indians” living on or close to reserves. This is important while considering the type of crime and the geographical location of a crime. In 1992, LaPrairie reviewed the relationship between status and geographical location of crimes being committed by Indigenous offenders. It was found that the location where an offense was committed was crucial to the response of the police and the criminal justice system. Thus, it was suggested that the location of crimes play a significant role in how the crime is treated. LaPrairie (1992) suggest that it may not be solely race related for the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system, but geographical location which leads to socio-economic status playing a key indicator. Typically, reserves and areas surrounding reserves, are of lower socio-economic status, thus Indigenous offenders differ slightly from other non-Indigenous offenders due to economic status of where they reside

(LaPrairie, 1992). LaPrairie (1992) suggest that a question arises whether all Indigenous people in Canada are equally as vulnerable to being involved in the criminal justice system, or whether it is more so the question of where the crime has taken place and what type of crime has occurred.

Violent offences are quite high in First Nations communities compared to non- first nations communities. Youth in First Nation communities are involved in more property crimes than non- First Nations communities (Wood & Griffiths, 1996). There was no difference in the amount of violent crimes that youth committed in First Nations communities versus non- First Nations communities. For youth, more crime is committed and youth charged in First Nations communities (Correctional Service Canada, 2013).

- **Indigenous Youth in Canada Today**

The Indigenous population of Canada continues to rise and is also very young. Since 2006, the Indigenous population across Canada has grown by 42.5%, which is over four times the growth of the rest of the population (Statistics Canada, 2018). The population of Indigenous youth in Canada, is also the highest growing population of youth in Canada. Between the years 2006-2016, the Indigenous youth (aged 15-34) population has increased by 39%, compared to non- indigenous youth at 6% (Statistics Canada, 2018). It is further estimated that approximately 38% of Indigenous children and youth live in poverty, compared to 7% of non-Indigenous children and youth (Government of Canada, 2019).

In Canada, the living situation of Indigenous families differs significantly from non-Indigenous families. Indigenous children and youth are more likely to live in multi-generational dwellings (17.9%) compared to non- Indigenous children and youth (9.5%) (Statistics Canada, 2018). As well, Indigenous families are more likely to live in crowded housing at 18.3% of the

population, compared to 8.5% of the non-Indigenous population in Canada. The family homes of Indigenous children, youth and families, are more likely to be in need of extensive repairs compared to non-Indigenous homes. Currently, 44.2% of Status First Nations living on reserve, are in need of extensive house repairs as well as 14.2% of off-reserve Status First Nations homes were in need of repairs, compared to 6.0% if non- Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2018).

Indigenous youth have higher rates of obesity compared to their non-Indigenous peers. Indigenous youth aged 15 and over are more at risk of experiencing food insecurity. Approximately 20% of youth 15 and over experience some type of food insecurity within a 12 month period (Statistics Canada, 2018).

Indigenous youth are also at a higher risk of poor mental health compared to their non-Indigenous peers in Canada. Currently, 11% of off-reserve First Nations youth report that they have a mood disorder, while 7.8% of Métis. As well, the rate of intentional self-harm is significantly higher for Indigenous children and youth aged 10-19 (Statistics Canada, 2018). An interesting statistics that has arisen from studies on mental health in the Indigenous communities found that Indigenous youth were more likely to report they had very good, or excellent mental health, even though they are more at risk for poor mental health and their rate of self-harm is higher compared to the rate for non-Indigenous youth, (National Collaborating Centre For Aboriginal Health, 2017). Self-reports suggested that 64.8% of Indigenous youth living on reserves felt they had excellent mental health, while 0.8% rated their mental health as poor (National Collaborating Centre For Aboriginal Health, 2017). Suicide rates among Indigenous youth are also amongst the highest within the youth population in Canada. Since it is difficult to confirm the exact number of suicides among Indigenous youth, from known data, it is estimated that the rate of suicide among Indigenous youth in Canada is 5-7 times higher than for non-

Indigenous youth (National Collaborating Centre For Aboriginal Health, 2017). Furthermore, the suicide rate amongst Inuit youth are even higher than for those in First Nations, at 5-25 times higher than the overall national average (National Collaborating Centre For Aboriginal Health, 2017)

The rate of completion of high school among Indigenous youth, continues to rise, even though it is below that of non-Indigenous youth. Between 2006-2016, the number of Indigenous group who complete high school, rose 10 percentage points (Statistics Canada, 2018).

The rate of youth homelessness is also disproportionately higher amongst indigenous youth, especially women, than for non-indigenous youth (Higgit et al., 2011; Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation, 2001; Canada Housing and Renewal Association et al. 2002). .

Overall, indigenous youth face barriers that non-Indigenous youth face everyday. They are more likely to experience disparities in mental health, housing, poverty and education, which has the potential to increase the risk of incarceration (Statistics Canada, 2018).

### **Indigenous Youth in Foster Care**

In Canada, there is an overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in foster care and/or residential care. Foster care and residential care are separate placement conditions that both display an overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in Canada. Foster care is defined by the Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal (2019) as care within: “.... a private home approved by child welfare services for the placement of children and includes kinship care.” Residential care is defined as a placement which: “.... includes out-of-home placement in a facility such as a group home or treatment centre.” Residential care is provided for children who are experiencing problems, including behavioural and adjustment issues, and who cannot function in a family setting. (Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal, 2019). Residential care and foster care fall

under an umbrella that is called Out-Of-Home Care, which includes foster care, kinship care, residential care, child welfare placements leading to adoption, reunification and transition to adulthood. However, for the purposes of this section, foster care and residential care will be the only type of out-of-home care that will be explored through the lens of the criminalization of Indigenous youth.

In Canada, 52.2% of children and youth under the age of 14 who are in foster care are Indigenous (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2019). In Ontario, Indigenous youth represent approximately 3% of the youth population, yet they represent approximately 9% of the youth admissions to residential care in that province (Ontario Ministry of children, community and social service, 2016; Youth Justice Services Division, 2015). It is difficult to determine just how many Indigenous youth are in foster care, however alongside the estimate of the number of Indigenous children and youth involved in the foster care system from First Nations Child and Family Services, a recent federal government estimate suggest that 14,970 out of 28,665 children and youth under the age of 15, who are involved at some level with the foster care system, are Indigenous (Government of Canada, 2019).

There is evidence that racial disparities often occur in the placement of minority children in the child welfare system, and that these are also linked to wider socio-economic conditions. A study by Kahn and Hansen (2017) found that Black and Hispanic children are found in foster care at higher and disproportionate levels compared to non-Black or non-Hispanic children. Kahn and Hansen offered two opinions regarding why children of color are represented disproportionality and experience negative effects at a higher degree compared to their counter parts: 1. racial disparities based on social determinants of health, such as poverty and 2. Disparities arise from

biases. Kahn and Hansen view these two options not as separate ideologies or opinions, but rather as being complementary to each other.

As a response to the overrepresentation and consequences of Indigenous youth in the care system, in 1993, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples set out a list of recommendations. Recommendation # 5 D (Gilchrist & Winchester, 1995):

That only Aboriginal foster parents be utilized for Aboriginal children and youth. These alternative care givers must be trained through Aboriginal family law, culture and protocols.

And that in the mainstream system where children and youth are placed in non-Aboriginal facilities more stringent screening and extensive cross-cultural training for foster and adoptive parents is crucial. And that the above measures be in addition to uninterrupted contact with their extended family and cultural background.

- **Victimization**

There is evidence that being involved with either the foster care system or residential care system as an Indigenous youth, leads to higher victimization for Indigenous youth (Department of Justice, 2017). Approximately 40% of Indigenous youth self-report that they have been victimized in the form of childhood sexual and/or physical maltreatment before the age of 15, compared to only 29% of their non-Indigenous counterparts. (Department of Justice, 2017). It is suggested that an overwhelming proportion of Indigenous children and youth experienced neglect and that was the reasoning for being placed in the foster care system (Department of Justice, 2017). The Department of Justice Canada has recognized and reports about Indigenous children and youth overrepresentation in the foster care system as a type of victimization.

An interesting aspect on their reporting is that they do not look at victimization that occurs during an Indigenous child or youth's placement in the foster care system, but only what victimization occurred previously, to then result in the children and youth being placed in the system. The Department is clear in their report that there is still a general lack of statistics and knowledge on the victimization of Indigenous children and youth.

Dr. Cindy Blackstock (2018), in her piece to *The Conversation*, discusses her work in reducing the number of Indigenous children and youth involved in care. She likens the placement of Indigenous children in residential schools and the Sixties Scoop to the current foster care issue in Canada. Dr. Blackstock states her belief that the foster care crisis is truly political and stems from long-standing issues within Canadian politics. She questions why the process for helping families and children to overcome this crisis is taking so long and why it is underfunded. Dr. Blackstock explains how the crisis with Indigenous children and youth involved in care can be aided by changes to the overall system that Indigenous people live with. It is suggested that by funding schools, education, health and water, the number of Indigenous children and youth in care will be reduced. She reiterated that the majority of the crisis is created by politics and the government should take accountability (Blackstock, 2018).

The situation of Indigenous people in Canada can be better understood through the examination of the Social Determinants of Health that Mikkonen and Raphael (2010) lay out for those living in Canada. As well, to further understand the situation of Indigenous people in Canada, examining the Indigenous Social Determinants of Health (Reading & Wien, 2009) which were developed from an Indigenous lens, is critical.

## **Social Determinants of Health**

- **Euro-Canadian Perspective on Indigenous People**

One can better understand the situation of Indigenous people in Canada, by examining their life conditions through the lens of the social determinants of health. In Canada, health inequalities exist between people from all walks of life and are often based on social injustices. In writing about health inequalities, the World Health Organization's Commission on Social Determinants of health (2008) quoted in their report the following: "social injustice is killing people on a grand scale".

Canada may be one of the richest countries in the world, yet Canada ranks on the lower end of developed countries in providing a social safety net for its people (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). Due to Canada's wealth and power, Canada is able to mask the reality of many of the people who identify themselves as Canadian and who suffer poverty, social exclusion, discrimination, erosion of employment quality, adverse mental health outcomes and youth suicide (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010).

Mikkonen and Raphael (2010) describe 15 social determinants of health which affect Canadians: Aboriginal status; gender; disability; housing; early childhood development; income and income distribution; education; race; employment and working conditions; social exclusion; food insecurity; the quality of the social safety net; the quality and access to health services; unemployment and job security; stress, bodies and illnesses. In the following are the most relevant social determinants to the situation of Indigenous people.

- **Social Determinant of Health: Income and Income Distribution**

Income may be one of the most important social determinants of health for Canadians. Income directly shapes many of the social determinants of health, such as overall living conditions, which in turn have a great effect on mental health, physical health and health

behaviour. These in turn then shape patterns of physical activity, tobacco use and excessive/overuse of alcohol, issues that are very prominent in the Indigenous communities of Canada.

Unfortunately, Indigenous people in Canada receive lower incomes when employed. According to Mikkonen and Raphael (2010), Indigenous males off-reserve made 58% of the amount of income that was earned by non-Indigenous men. For females, the numbers were slightly less divergent, with Indigenous females making 72% of what non-Indigenous females were making in the year 2001. Indigenous men on reserve, made only 40% of the income of non-Indigenous males, while Indigenous females made approximately 61% of the earnings of non-Indigenous females.

Income is also directly related to the services that are available in the community. The lower the income of the people in a specific community, the fewer important services there are, in that community. Mikkonen and Raphael (2010) reiterate the fact that Canada only provides free education until the grade 12 level and does not provide much support for those who are seeking a post-secondary education. Therefore, those coming from a low-income community, will most likely not have the funds or opportunities that other Canadian have, to secure post-secondary schooling. As well, child care, housing, recreational opportunities and retirement savings are directly the responsibility of the individual with little to no governmental support.

Income further affects Indigenous people when it comes to material and social deprivation (Mikkonen & Rapheal, 2010). The more deprivation an individual or family suffers, the less likely they are able to obtain or afford the basic prerequisites of overall health status. Food, clothing and housing are the basics which determine overall health status. When these are not being provided or sustained, the individual or family suffers on many levels of overall health.

Deprivation of the necessities of health also affect the social outcomes of an individual. For example, those who suffer from deprivation of the necessities, suffer from social exclusion as it is more difficult to participate in cultural, recreational and educational activities and over time, social exclusion lessens the ability for people to live a full-filled healthy life (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010).

- **Social Determinant of Health: Employment and Working Conditions**

A group's overall health is also directly related to their unemployment rate. For Indigenous people in Canada, the unemployment rate is significantly higher than the unemployment rate of non-Indigenous Canadians. In 2011, employment rates for non-Indigenous people aged 25-64 was 75.8%, while the employment rate for Indigenous people was 62.5% (Statistics Canada, 2015). Breaking down employment rate further, First Nation status people between the ages of 25-64 had an employment rate of 57.1%, Inuit people had an employment rate of 58.1% and Métis people had an employment rate of 71.2%.

- **Social Determinant of Health: Education**

In Canada, people of Indigenous status have lower levels of education compared to non-Indigenous Canadians (Richards, 2014). As previously stated, only approximately 63% of Indigenous people who seek education outside of a reserve, obtain a high school diploma. Those who seek education on reserve, have a lower rate of educational obtainment at approximately 41% (Richards, 2014). Indigenous youth males and females also scored lower on literacy and numeracy tests compared to non-Indigenous youth. (Statistics Canada, 2016).

However, the educational results among Indigenous communities are also gendered. Indigenous women are more likely to receive a university degree compared to the same aged males at 12%

and 7% (Statistics Canada, 2016). Moreover, Indigenous female youths who obtain a high school diploma, are more likely to attend post-secondary education compared to their male counterparts.

The benefits of education within the Indigenous community are apparent: Indigenous female youth who earn a post-secondary education, were more likely to be employed, while better-educated Indigenous youth of both genders have higher rates of employment, higher income and overall higher level of health. Indigenous female youth education levels continue to rise compared to older Indigenous females (Wilson & Macdonald, 2010).

With education levels, on average, being lower for Indigenous people, education also plays a significant role in the overall health status of Indigenous people. Overall health does not just include physical health, but also includes mental and social health.

- **Social Determinant of Health: Food Insecurity**

Food security affects the mental and physical development of individuals. Early childhood development is directly impacted by food intake (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). Food insecurity has been found to predict developmental trajectories for young children as well as youth. These trajectories include academic performance, weight and height and social skills (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). The effects of suffering from food insecurity, could be viewed on children in the United States as early as in kindergarten, reflected in their lower mathematic, reading and higher BMI scores. Those suffering from food insecurity had a higher BMI, and a decline in social skill scores compared to children who were not suffering from food insecurity (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). These factors were seen to continue into youth and adulthood. Indigenous people in Canada suffer a higher rate of food insecurity, than the average non-Indigenous Canadian, especially those who live in remote communities, Skinner, Hanning,

Desjardins and Tsuji (2013), report that 33% of Indigenous people suffer from some type of food insecurity, compared to 9% of non-Indigenous people in Canada. As well, 24% of Indigenous families had a compromised diet (reduced quality and/or quantity) compared to 8.4% of non-Indigenous families (Skinner, Hanning, Desjardins & Tsuji, 2013). Food insecurity in the Indigenous communities of Canada has been associated with low levels of academic achievement, high levels of poverty, multi-child households, labour force participation, reliance on social assistance/ welfare and female lone-parent household (Skinner, Hanning, Desjardins & Tsuji, 2013). Food security challenges are especially unique for those living on reserves and in remote communities compared to Indigenous people who reside in more urban areas (Skinner, Hanning, Desjardins & Tsuji, 2013).

- **Social Determinant of Health: Stress, Bodies and Illnesses**

The social determinants of health, as well as continued stress from the negative effects of colonization, also influence the rate of disease among Indigenous people, including youth (Czyzewski, 2011). For example, infectious and chronic disease rates in this country are significantly higher among Indigenous than non-Indigenous people. This also includes children and youth. For example, childhood obesity is highly prevalent among Indigenous youth, along with those diseases that are associated with childhood obesity, such as type 2 diabetes and mental health problems (Willows, Hanley & Delormier, 2012).

In order to fully understand why Indigenous people, suffer from disease and illness at a higher prevalence than non-Indigenous people, their inequalities in overall living conditions must be considered. It must and should be examined through the lens of genetic and non-medical determinants (Willows, Hanley & Delormier, 2012). Disease and illness are impacted by individual, community and societal levels which then directly affect the other social determinants

of health such as early childhood development, income and education (Willows, Hanley & Delormier, 2012).

- **Social Determinant of Health: Race**

Racial discrimination and the inherent stress from being treated differently has also been shown to affect the overall health of an individual. Williams and Mohammed (2009), found that perceived racism also negatively affects an individual's health, even if socio-economic status is controlled. Early death among the Indigenous population has been associated with racial disparities over time. With racism highly prevalent among society's social structures, it is difficult to eliminate race as a factor in one's overall health (Williams & Mohammed, 2009).

- **Social Determinants of Health: Aboriginal Status**

The effects of all of the above, are cumulative. This results in Aboriginal status also being named as a social determinant in itself. Mikkonen and Raphael (2010) include "Aboriginal Status" as one of their many social determinants of health, which acknowledges the fact that there is a significant difference in the health outcomes of Indigenous Canadians and non-Indigenous Canadians.

## **Social Determinants of Indigenous People's Health**

While Mikkonen and Raphael (2010) describe social determinants from a Euro-Canadian perspective, Reading and Wien (2009) have proposed a new conceptual framework to help further understand the interconnectedness between the social determinants of health, health dimensions and potential trajectories of Indigenous people's health over the life course. Reading and Wien (2009), use the general social determinants of health and apply them to the Indigenous

person's overall health life course. They also look at the social determinants of health from a spiritual dimension.

Reading and Wien (2009) look at the social determinants of health of Indigenous Canadians through three different lenses/frameworks: *Proximal determinants* of health, *Intermediate determinants* of health and *Distal determinants* of health. The *proximal determinants of health*, as described by Reading and Wien (2009) are those determinants that have immediate impact on one's physical, emotional, mental or spiritual health; for example employment. *Intermediate social determinants* of health are those services and institutions that are responsible for those proximal determinants of health. Examples of an *intermediate determinant of health* is the health care system. *Distal determinants of health* are the constructs of both the *proximal* and *intermediate determinants of health*. *Distal determinants* embody political, economic and social contexts in which create the platform for *proximal* and *intermediate determinants of health* (Reading & Wien, 2009). Of all of the social determinants of health, *distal determinants* have the most profound effect on Indigenous overall health as they encompass political, economic and social contexts that construct the intermediate and proximal social determinants of health (Reading & Wien, 2009).

- **Indigenous Social Determinants of Health: Proximal**

Reading and Wien (2009) list the following proximal Social Determinants of Health which have a direct impact on the physical, emotional, mental or spiritual health of Indigenous Canadians: ***Health Behaviours, Physical Environments, Food Insecurity, Employment and Income, and Education.***

- ***Health Behaviours***

Health behaviours affect Indigenous people throughout their lifespans, starting with their development in the womb. The most relevant health behaviours that affect overall health include misuse or overuse of alcohol, as well as excessive smoking (Reading & Wien, 2009; Millar, 1992) These health behaviours also affect prenatal care as it has been found that drinking and smoking during pregnancy has been linked to poor physical, emotional and intellectual development among Indigenous children (Reading & Wien, 2009; Chan, Keane & Robinson, 2001).

Yet, the health behaviour that is having the most detrimental effects on Indigenous youth and adults is the lack of exercise and poor diet. This combination is the primary reason for the epidemic of Type II diabetes among the Indigenous community (Reading & Wien, 2009; Campbell, 2002; Hanley et al., 2000).

- *Current Tobacco Use of Youth in the Indigenous Population*

Tobacco use in the Indigenous community is quite prevalent, as it is used as a spiritual aspect of Indigenous culture. However, the use of tobacco and cigarettes among Indigenous youth is significantly higher than in the non-Indigenous population. A study conducted among the Oji-Cree Sandy Lake community, found that approximately 82% of the adolescent participants (10 years of age -19 years of age) were daily tobacco/cigarette smokers (Retnakaran, Hanley, Connelly, P. Harris, & Zinman, 2005). The study also found a dramatic increase of smoking behaviour among adolescents ages 12-15. Retnakaran, Hanley, Connelly, P. Harris, & Zinman (2005) concluded that smoking behavior in Indigenous youth, had an impact on their overall cardiovascular health and the rate of diabetes in adulthood. More importantly, the study found that smoking behavior had an effect on other social determinants of health, such as

addiction behaviours, which the study also found may have an effect on the amount of crime committed in an area.

- *Current Alcohol Use of Youth in the Indigenous Population*

Alcohol misuse in the Indigenous community is an issue that has been studied for decades. Researchers have linked high levels of alcohol misuse to Colonialism, as the Indigenous people in Canada did not have access to alcohol until European settlers arrived (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013). The heavy rate of alcohol consumption among Indigenous, off-reserve adults is approximately 35.2% (5 drinks or more on one occasion, at least once a month) (Statistics Canada, 2015). The rate of heavy alcohol consumption among Indigenous youth aged 12-24 off reserve is approximately 40.4% (Statistics Canada, 2015). Cheadle and Whitebeck (2011) conducted a wide range study of 727 Indigenous youth aged 10-17 across eight different reserves in Canada and the United States that shared a common language and culture. Using data previously collected by Whitebeck, results indicated that 20% of adolescents began drinking at the age of 11-12 and another 20% began drinking shortly after. Indigenous adolescents who began drinking at the age of 13 and under, were at a significantly higher risk of problem drinking. Multiple stressors, such as perceived discrimination, were found to be the cause of early heavy drinking.

Early onset drinking behaviour has a great effect on other aspects of an adolescent's life, such as greater life impairment, educational obtainment, social problems, lifetime psychopathology, nicotine dependence and illicit drug use (Cheadle & Whitebeck, 2011; Chou & Pickering, 1992; Sartor et al. 2006; McGue et al. 2001). These pathways, as well as many others, lead to a trajectory of youth-patterned illegal activity, that could potentially lead Indigenous youth to be involved in the Canadian corrections system.

- ***Physical Environments***

The quality of physical environments are also considered a primary influencer of the health of a population (Reading & Wien, 2009). The historically discriminatory treatment of Indigenous people has led to the establishment of many physical environments that are detrimental to Indigenous health. Currently in Canada, there is a housing shortage for Indigenous people and a poor quality of existing homes (Judd, Griffith & Fautsman, 2004). Overcrowding is a significant issue amongst the Indigenous community. This is largely due to the lack of affordable housing in Indigenous communities (for example, on reserves). Along with a high number of people living in individual homes, there is also a lack of proper ventilation in many of the homes, that results in mould. This mould has an effect on the physical health of the people in the home as many Indigenous children who live in crowded homes, have health problems, including severe asthma and allergies (Reading & Wien, 2009; Lawrence & Martin, 2001; Strachan, 2000). As well, lack of affordable housing, proper housing, social services and infrastructure, has an effect on Indigenous adults and youth who live in urban areas, as there is high number of Indigenous people who are homeless (Christensen, 2017).

The proximal social determinant of health of the physical environment, also includes poor waste management, inadequate sanitation, unsafe water supplies and lack of general community resources. Together, these aspects of the physical environment jeopardize the overall health of Indigenous people throughout their life course (Reading & Wien, 2009; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2003).

- ***Food Insecurity***

Food insecurity is also considered an issue related to the physical environment for many Indigenous people who live on reserves, remote rural areas or a combination of the two. The cost

of healthy and nutritious foods is unfortunately not available to many Indigenous people who live in poverty. The cost of transporting healthy food to remote, rural areas is quite high, thus the prices of these foods become out of reach for many Indigenous families (Reading & Wien, 2009; McIntyre, Connor, & Warren, 2000; Chan et al., 2006). This is an issue that is quite prevalent for Indigenous people who live on reserves, but it is also an issue for those who live off reserve. Indigenous individuals and families who live off-reserve are three times more likely to be living in households that are experiencing a degree of food insecurity compared to non-Indigenous Canadians (27% compared to 10%) (Reading & Wien, 2009; Collins, 2009). Food insecurity is a direct consequence of the proximal determinant of health of living on a lower income.

- ***Employment and Income***

The level of employment and income, as stated previously, directly affects the overall health of Indigenous people in Canada. This disadvantage emerges and is manifested in the current high rate of unemployment, scarce economic opportunities, poor housing, low literacy and educational attainment and meager community resources (Reading & Wien, 2009; O'Donnell, V & Tait, 2003; First Nations Centre, 2004); ITK, 2004). Poverty is linked to social exclusion, low social cohesion and increased crime (Reading & Wien, 2009; Wortley, 2003).

Employment and income can also have a direct impact on an individual's sense of belonging in a community, as social class levels in communities tend to divide people into groups that distinguish from each other economically. Furthermore, people who are unable to participate in institutions patronised by the majority, tend to be socially excluded. Social exclusion is different than social isolation. Social isolation is the non-participation of an individual, whereas social exclusion is social isolation that occurs due to reasons (i.e social) out of the control of those who are affected (Barry, 2002) Unemployed individuals are often

socially-excluded, as the key components of social-exclusion revolve around the relationship between unemployment, poverty and social isolation (UNDP, 2006). The sense, or physical act, of social exclusion, prevents Indigenous people from pursuing an education or training, which is directly linked to poverty levels. Poverty creates a lack of control for those who are suffering from a lack of income. This lack of control over one's life and health results in Indigenous people and families suffering from anxiety, insecurity, low self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness. These psychological stressors can be linked to violent behaviour and acts among Indigenous children, youth and adults. Along with addiction and poor parenting, psychological stressors around income often lead to poor mental health, increased susceptibility to infection (diabetes and high blood pressure as well) and depression (Reading & Wien, 2009; Wortley, 2003; Galabuzi, 2004; Daniel et al., 2004; Iwasaki, Bartlett & O'Neil, 2004; Iwasaki, Bartlett & O'Neil, 2005; Kirmayer, Brass & Tait, 2000; McEwen, 2007; McEwen, 2006).

- ***Education***

Education is a component to Socio-Economic Status and also influences one's physical environment. Inadequate education influences income, employment status, as well as one's understanding of health and healthy food choices (Reading & Wien, 2009). Low paying jobs in the Indigenous community are reflected in the insufficient education that many of them receive. This then continues the cycle of social exclusion, social deprivation and poverty (Reading & Wien, 2009; Condon, 1990). The lack of opportunities in relation to education, highly affects those who do not choose to proceed with their high school education or a post-secondary education of any kind (i.e: college, technical etc.). Approximately 50% of the Indigenous youth in Canada do not obtain a high school education. Not obtaining a high school education greatly affects one's chance at receiving employment and their income levels, which in turn affect

poverty levels and has been found to have physical and mental health consequences later in life (Reading & Wien, 2009; Dennis, 2004; Smylie, Williams & Cooper, 2006).

Education provides greater opportunities for Indigenous youth (Lochner, 2007) Education has been linked to reducing crime levels. According to Groot and van den Brink (2010), education is a strong element in the preventing people from committing crimes. From an economics perspective, youth who go to school or engage in part time work, are less likely to partake in criminal behaviour (Groot & van den Brink, 2010). Lochner (2007), explains that from a monetary perspective, youth who stay in school tend commit less crime as they foresee the monetary wages they will receive in the future, Lochner (2007) also adds the perspective of patience to the conversation of education and crime. Youth who are more patient, tend to stay in school longer as they are able to see the future benefits, which will reduce crime. Youth who are less patient, will commit crimes at an earlier age and not seek out a higher level of education. However, risk averse youth are more likely to commit crimes, even with an education, therefore crime levels among youth are related to not only education levels, but environment.

- **Indigenous Social Determinants of Health – Intermediate**

The most influential intermediate social determinants of health for the Indigenous population are: the *accessibility to health-care systems* and *educational systems*, a combination of *community infrastructure, resources and capacities*, *environmental stewardship* and *cultural continuity*.

- ***The Accessibility to Health-Care Systems***

Canada is one of the few countries in the world with an advanced universal health care system. However, in order to make full use of the system, Canadians must have physical,

political and social access to those services that are provided. Unfortunately, this is typically not the case for many Indigenous people in Canada (Cardinal, Schopflocher, Svenson, Morrison, & Laing, 2004; Newbold, 1997). The focus of the overall health system is on preventing and treating communicable disease. This treatment is an issue for all Canadians. However, despite the mandate of this health care system, Indigenous people still suffer mortality and morbidity at an increasing rate, due to chronic illness, mainly as a result of accessibility issues.

Firstly, access to services is directly affected by whether or not doctors, dentists or nurses are available in the area. For example, in Northern Canada, Indigenous people have limited access to both doctors as well as nurses. Furthermore, Indigenous people also rely on nurses at a much higher rate than other Canadians, due to limited access to doctors. Moreover, Indigenous Canadians who live on-reserve have significantly more difficulty accessing health-care services due to the long wait lists. Many of those who live on reserve are also limited in what services they are able to access, due to services not being covered, nor approved, by the federal Non-Insured Health Benefit plan. Finally, Indigenous people also report that if they receive health care, it is neither adequate nor culturally appropriate (Reading & Wien, 2009). Services are limited or denied to Indigenous people due to a health-care system that does not typically consider the differences in culture or language of Indigenous Canadians, as well as the differences in social and economic determinants of health which are affecting many Indigenous Canadians (Archibald & Grey, 2006; McCormick, 1995/1996; Browne & Fiske, 2001; Smye & Browne, 2002; AFN, 2005). Thus, compared to other Canadians, Indigenous people in Canada report having more unmet health care needs. (Reading & Wien, 2009).

- *The Quality and Accessibility of Education*

Access to education also continues to be one of the most prominent issues that affect the lives of Indigenous people in Canada. Education has a profound effect on overall health of Indigenous people. It directly affects income, employment and living conditions. Indigenous parents who are well-educated not only earn a higher income, which in turn improves the proximal determinants of health, but, as well, the need, want and value of education is also passed on to the children of the better-educated (Korhonen, 2006; Ronson & Rootman, 2004).

One important aspect of the education system that has demonstrated “return on investment” for Indigenous children are preschool programs, as early childhood education has been found to mitigate some of the effects of conditions which can limit optimal child development, into adulthood (Tsey, 1997). Yet, even with all of the support for preschool programming, childhood educational programs for Indigenous children and youth, continue to be underfunded (Graham & Power, 2004).

Unfortunately, the current educational systems that are in place in Canada continue to pay little or no attention to those social determinants of health that may act as obstacles for Indigenous youth and children to succeed at their education (Reading & Wien, 2009; Greenwood, de Leeuw, & Ngaroimata Fraser, 2007). In Canada, public education is funded provincially, whereas schools on reserves are federally funded. There continues to be a shortfall in the amount of money the federal government provides for education on reserves compared to off reserve. In 2012/2013 the funding gap between provincially funded schools and reserves was 595 million dollars. On-reserve schools had an average funding of \$14,500 per student under the federal formula, whereas students in Ontario under the provincial rules, funding would range from \$21,000 to \$25,000 per student (Education S, 2016). With improper funding, it becomes

difficult to obtain teachers, safe structures, warm schools and opportunities for children and youth to excel in their educational journey.

- ***Community Infrastructure, Resources and Capacities***

The Assembly of First Nations deems that the level of economic development in a community is a key determinant of health (AFN, 2017) However, when a community has limited infrastructures and resource development plans, it creates deprivation and limited opportunities which, in turn, not only affects overall health but further increases marginalization, economic insecurity and negative behaviours, such as crime. When a community is experiencing under-funded programs and little to no economic growth, community-level stress and paralysis can occur (Reading & Wien, 2009; Folke, Carpenter, Elmqvist, Gunderson, Holling, & Walker, 2002).

- ***Environmental Stewardship***

Another intermediate social determinant of health that is beginning to be recognized is environmental stewardship. Environmental stewardship is defined by Bennett et al. (2018) as:

Local environmental stewardship is the actions taken by individuals, groups or networks of actors, with various motivations and levels of capacity, to protect, care for or responsibly use the environment in pursuit of environmental and/or social outcomes in diverse social-ecological contexts.

The environment was once a major factor in the health of Indigenous people, prior to the colonization of North America. Now, Indigenous people have a much different relationship with their environment which once provided power and livelihood and now provides little to no power for those living in the traditional territories. Currently in Canada, there is contamination of

wildlife, fish, vegetation and water on reserves that has forced the Indigenous people in Canada further from the environment, which once allowed them to flourish (Reading & Wien, 2009; Adelson, 2005). In Canada, there is a serious threat to the waters. A serious threat is pollution that directly affects vegetation, wildlife and people who use the water as resources. Wastewater, industrial discharge and urban runoffs have been deemed the largest factor in polluting the bodies of water that surround Canada. As well, pipeline incidents and transportation mishaps account for high levels of pollution in Alberta (Semeniuk, 2017). Contamination of wildlife greatly affects the Indigenous population whose livelihood is dependent on the environment that surrounds them.

Chemical pollutants have also been found to affect Indigenous communities that have industrialization surrounding their reserves. Aamjiwnaang First Nation members living on the reserve which is located near Sarnia, Ontario, believed that the amount of industrialization that surrounds the reserve was exposing them to higher-than-normal levels of chemical pollutants. Members of Aamjwnaang have reported for years that they believe the 40 chemical plants that surround their home are affecting their health. For years, members were reporting chronic headaches, miscarriages and asthma. Of those who took part in a recent study, forty percent of the residents required an inhaler (Canadian Press, 2013).

- ***Cultural Continuity***

Cultural continuity can be described as the social and cultural cohesion within a community (Reading & Wien, 2009). Chandler and Lalonde (1998) conducted a study in which they looked at the rates of Indigenous suicides in British Columbia. In areas where there were higher degrees of land title, self-government, involvement of women, control of education, security and cultural facilities, as well as control of health policies, practice of health and social

programs, which are key aspects to create strong cultural continuity, there were also low rates, or absence of, suicide among Indigenous community members. In addition to the previously stated determinants of cultural continuity, intergenerational connectedness plays a significant role. This is maintained and shared through intact families and engagement of elders in a community who pass on traditions to the younger generations (Reading & Wien, 2009; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998).

- **Indigenous Social Determinants of Health- Distal**

As stated previously, of all of the social determinants of health, distal determinants have a profound effect on Indigenous overall health as they encompass political, economic and social contexts that construct the intermediate and proximal social determinants of health (Reading & Wien, 2009). The distal social determinants of health that have the most influence are the *outcomes of colonialism, racism and social exclusion* and *repression of self-determination*.

- ***The Outcomes of Colonialism***

Colonialism continues to result in social, political and economic inequalities that influence the creation of intermediate and proximal determinants that ultimately impact the health of Indigenous people (Reading & Wien, 2009). The trauma that has occurred to the Indigenous people, continues to be passed on generationally, due to disadvantaging political structures, economic deprivation, poverty, lost opportunity and many more deprivations. Through colonial attitudes and structures, power, freedom and control were taken from the Indigenous people. Social policies have affected in a negative fashion the economy, education and social justice of the Indigenous people.

The “Indian Act” was created in 1876, in which the federal government took control of various matters of Indigenous life, is the most relevant representation of colonization that occurred and still occurs today. The “Act” grants the government the Canadian federal government to govern, regulate and administer the affairs of registered Indigenous peoples and reserve communities (Hanson, 2009). The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has criticized the Act stating that “The Indian Act is a racist document” (CBC News, 2002). This is because, the Act incorporates assimilation policies that are intended to abolish the cultural, social, economic and political power of the Indigenous population, in order for the Indigenous people to fit the mould of what the colonizers who drafted this act believed was “Canadian” (Hanson, 2009).

The Indian Act encompasses many of the puzzle pieces that continue to show the heavy effect of colonialism on the Indigenous community in Canada. Nova Scotia senator, Dan Christmas, was the first Mi’kmaq member of the Canadian Senate. Christmas has spoken out against the “Indian Act” in the past saying ““The point I'm making is a very stark one: Life under the Indian Act is a horrible and unproductive existence whose ultimate destiny is insolvency and ruin, both economically and emotionally.” He has also said “This colonial, prescriptive, paternal, destructive, racist and discriminatory act turned its back on the Mi'kmaq Nation” (Tasker, 2017).

The Indian Act has largely stayed true to its original application, even with numerous amendments over the years. The Indian Act is an outcome of colonialism that continues to affect the overall health and well-being of Indigenous people.

- ***Racism and Social Exclusion***

Racism and social exclusion are two of the first traumas that the Indigenous people in Canada faced when European settlers first arrived in Canada and ones which continue to affect

the Indigenous community today (MacDonald, 2015). In Canada, the issue of racism is overshadowed by Canada being named by some to be the second most tolerant and inclusive country in the world (Gilmore, 2015). The examples of this racism are: The Canadian health care model continues to fail Indigenous people; the over representation of Indigenous youth in Canadian jails and prisons; a school system on reserves that has a graduation rate below 50% of youth who attend school; politicians that do not recognize the needs of the Indigenous people who are their neighbour; many more actions by the government, but also the people who live in Canada.

Racism towards the Indigenous population occurs all over Canada, however Winnipeg and Saskatchewan report the highest degree of racism in the country (MacDonald, 2015). In one Canadian study (MacDonald, 2015) thirty percent of people polled, believe that the racial stereotypes about Indigenous people are accurate. As well, fifty-two percent of those polled believe that the economic issues that Indigenous people face, are their own fault (MacDonald, 2015).

The fact of racism continues to create barriers for Indigenous people to participate in the national economy (FNC, 2004). Since racism and social exclusion correlate with one another, the stress of living in a racially charged environment also affects the overall health of Indigenous people (Reading & Wien, 2009; Galabuzi, 2004; Coryse & Scott, 2006; Kirmayer, Brass & Tait, 2000). In Winnipeg, economic stability dictates where many Indigenous people reside. The North-End of Winnipeg has two of the poorest postal-codes in Canada. Not only are those who reside there making less than half of what the average Winnipegger makes, it has the highest rate of violent crime in Canada. There is an invisible racial line that divides white Winnipeggers from the Indigenous population. Divided by CP rails, the white neighbourhoods look nothing like their

Indigenous neighbours across the rails. Youth in the North-End of Winnipeg are at a high risk of dropping out of school before they finish grade 9: One-third of youth there do not complete high school. This in turn leaves youth disengaged from the labour market, at a high risk of crime, gang activity, misuse of drugs, alcohol and solvents. Children as young as 9 living in the North-End are using solvents to “get high”. It also leads young girls (as young as 11) to engage in the sex trade, putting their lives at risk (MacDonald, 2015). Hospital stays and visits in the North-End are much different than those in “white” neighbourhoods in Winnipeg. The rate of hospitalization due to violence is more than 7 times greater than in the other areas of Winnipeg. Twenty percent of youth who are hospitalized due to violence, are hospitalized more than twice in a single calendar year. Carolyn Snider, an Emergency Room doctor expressed how, if this level of hospitalizations due to violence had been caused by a different issue, such as heart attack, there would be significantly more uproar in Canada (MacDonald, 2015). Youth who experience violence in their communities, are most likely experiencing violence from a fellow Indigenous youth.

Indigenous men and Indigenous youth who are male, experience Carding: A form and act of racism that mirrors the racism occurring with the Black community in Toronto. The act of Carding is where a police officer will stop a person on the street and ask for their identification without a warrant, probable cause, or a complaint against them. The officer will then gather information surrounding the person’s race, height, gender, age and any other information the police officer believes is relevant to their practice of policing (Tobias & Joseph, 2018). In Winnipeg, it is estimated that an Indigenous male will be “carded” on average twice a month by police (MacDonald, 2015). This is an issue that affects all Indigenous people and minorities in Canada.

Children and youth are particularly impacted by social exclusion. Research by Mignone and O'Neil (2005), found that when Indigenous youth experience social exclusion, the rate of drug and alcohol use increases. In that study, 27% of the Indigenous youth who took part indicated that social exclusion had affected their self-esteem, to some degree.

- ***The Repression of Self-Determination***

The final and most important distal social determinant of health is self-determination. Self-determination influences all other social determinants of health in some capacity. In order to optimize their health, Indigenous individuals must participate equally in political decision making, as well as in the control over their own lands, economies, educational systems, social and health-care systems (Reading & Wien, 2009). As stated previously, this is not occurring due to the ongoing effects of colonialism.

### **Summary: The Impact of Social Determinants on Indigenous Children and Youth.**

Indigenous children and youth are greatly affected by the quality and nature of the social determinants of health that impact their communities and their future lives. Greenwood and de Leeuw (2012) report that there is little data on the Indigenous children and youth population in general, let alone data reporting on their Indigenous social determinants of health. UNICEF reported that Indigenous children and youth in Canada fall significantly below the average health rating of non-Indigenous children and youth (UNICEF CANADA, 2009). Indigenous children and youth are also at a higher risk of infant mortality, tuberculosis injuries, death, youth suicide, ear infections, childhood obesity, diabetes, dental caries and increased exposure to second-hand smoke (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2000).

The environmental, political and social disparities faced by Indigenous children and youth create a social system that continues to allow the latter to have overall lower health status than their non- Indigenous peers. Children and youth born into this colonial legacy, continue to deteriorate in their health status through neglect of their distal, intermediate and proximal social determinants of health (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012).

The health inequities that Indigenous children and youth face in Canada while young, also have a direct impact on their overall development. Some of the most common outcomes of suffering from disparities and poorer overall health are crime and addiction. Thus, Indigenous children and youth who are born into colonial legacies that shape their environments and diminish their overall health, also have higher rates of substance misuse and increased interactions with the criminal justice system (Chansonneuve, 2007; Department of Justice Canada, 2011).

The overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the criminal justice and foster care system is interpedently associated with the quality and nature of the social determinants of health for Indigenous people, including the complex intergenerational trauma that the poor outcomes from these determinants have engendered for Indigenous peoples (Kolahdooz, Nader, Yi & Sharma, 2015). Recovery of trauma is typically attempted by white practitioners, who give little notice to racism and culture (Lavallée & Poole, 2010). In order for true healing to occur and to tackle the overrepresentation of youth in the criminal justice and foster care systems, we must therefore begin to address the negative social determinants of health for Indigenous people (including the family unit) and the mental and physical health inequities which these have engendered. It is not only the individual that is directly affected by the social determinants of health- but the entire family unit. The negative social determinants of health have led to conditions that have stressed,

destroyed or fractured family units and community. Due to these negative social determinants of a large number of Indigenous children and youth being placed in foster care. In addition, the Western perspective of healing, which is a legacy of colonialism that has also caused immense trauma in Indigenous communities, must be replaced by Indigenous healing methods and by honoring and respecting the perspectives of these Indigenous communities themselves, on how to heal their own people.

### **The Literature on the Criminalization of Indigenous People and Youth**

There is evidence throughout the literature in many academic streams that support the notion that Indigenous people and Indigenous youth are criminalized at a high degree than other people in Canada and that this is linked to disadvantages resulting from the social determinants of health and colonialism. The criminalization of Indigenous youth can easily be seen through the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the Canadian Criminal Justice system. Indigenous youth are less likely to receive alternative sentencing, are more likely to be arrested, more likely to be refused bail, more likely to remain in custody, and more likely to be sentenced to time in a detention facility compared to non- Indigenous youth in Canada. Basic human right protections for children and youth are sadly not as likely to be applied if they are of Indigenous descent. (Cunneen, 2007).

The following sections will provide insight into this evidence for the higher criminalization of Indigenous youth.

- **Indigenous Youth and the Canadian Youth Justice System**

While significant changes have been made in the area of youth justice, there still remain significant differences in the proportion of Indigenous youth who are being accused and charged

with crimes, compared to non-Indigenous youth. Currently in Canada, the rate of Indigenous youth incarceration, those who have been formally found guilty of committing an offense is significantly higher than the rates for non- Indigenous youth. (Malakieh, 2018).

- ***Indigenous Youth Male Admissions***

Indigenous male youth also represent 47% of all male youth admissions to custody in provincial and territorial correction systems (Malakieh, 2018). As youth are protected by the Youth Criminal Justice Act (see below for more details on the YCJA), there is no federal detention for youth aged 12-17, as all dealings with youth in the area of law are covered by provincial and territories provincial laws and jurisdictions (Duckett & Mohr, 2015).

Indigenous youth males are also seven times more likely to be a victim of homicide, compared to non- Indigenous male youths (Department of Justice, 2019) s a result of the above statistics, Indigenous people as a whole, have lower confidence in the Canadian justice system, compared to non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2018).

- ***Indigenous Youth Female Admissions***

Much like the case with Indigenous adult females, Indigenous youth females are acutely overrepresented in overall admissions to custody in provincial and territory jurisdictions. Indigenous female youth represent 60% of the total admissions to custody, while non-Indigenous youth represent 40% of custody admissions across Canada (Malakieh, 2018).

- ***Indigenous Youth Incarceration Rates 2016-2017***

Currently in Canada, the rate of Indigenous youth incarceration, those who have been formally found guilty of committing an offense is significantly higher than the rates for non- Indigenous youth. In 2016/2017, Indigenous youth accounted for 46% of all total admissions to

youth correctional services (Malakieh, 2018). Alarming, the proportion of Indigenous youth admitted to correctional services in Canada has continued to rise. In 2006-2007, Indigenous youth accounted for 21% of total admissions. This number rose in 2015/2016 to a 35% of total admissions, (rising by 14% in 9 years). In 2016/2017 the proportion of Indigenous youth admitted to corrections was 37%. The inconsistency between 46% of total admissions and 37% of admissions, is due to jurisdictions not recording Indigenous incarcerations rates (Malakieh, 2018).

The high rates of incarceration are occurring, despite the explicit provision in the statute which states that: “Although the court must consider alternatives to custody for all offenders, particular attention must be given to the circumstances of young Aboriginal offenders.” (Department of Justice, 2017). In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called upon the government to eliminate the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in custody. Call to action number 30 states: We call upon federal, provincial, and territorial governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in custody over the next decade, and to issue detailed annual reports that monitor and evaluate progress in doing so. The calls to action numbered 25-42, all relate to the current criminal justice system and they request from the TRC on how to address the issues surrounding Indigenous people in Canada and justice (Government of Canada, 2018).

- **Gangs**

Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson (2008), suggest that a reason for the high number of Indigenous youth who are incarcerated, could be related to gang activity as Indigenous youth involved in the Canadian Justice System tend to have higher recidivism rates. This also plays a role in the psychological factors of which being part of gang implies. Grekul and LaBoucane-

Benson (2008), imply that the risk factors of Indigenous youth and the lack of protective factors, lead them to gang life and subsequently lead them to be involved with crime.

For Indigenous youth who become involved in Indigenous gangs, the psychological element of relationships and friendship is a large role. When youth are developing, the need for relationships and sense of belonging is an element in which they desire (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson (2008) conducted interviews with ex-gang members who were part of an Indigenous gang, inmates in a federal facility in the Prairie Region, social workers, jail officials and others who were involved with working with Indigenous gangs. The authors found that youth are being recruited to gangs at a high level in the Prairie Regions. Youth are being recruited through street life and through the prison systems. An interesting aspect that the researchers found was that youth searching for an identity within the Indigenous gangs, actually lose their true identity as an Indigenous youth, since they lose all connection with their family and friends (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). The element of finding one's true identity and place as an Indigenous youth is actually lost, once they are recruited to a gang. A detective involved in the interviews noted that Indigenous youth as young as 9 were being recruited. Ex-gang members speak to the psychological trauma they endured as a child, which they believe led them to being attracted to the gang lifestyle. They spoke about poverty and dysfunction while growing up as a child and how it was "thrilling" to be in a gang and they felt a real sense of belonging with the gang lifestyle. An ex-gang member spoke directly about growing up with family members being addicted to drugs and alcohol, having an unstable household, seeing intimate partner violence between adults in the home and having to take care of the younger family members at such a young age.

Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson (2008), found that family dysfunction and search for one's identity is a leading factor for youth to be involved in gangs and to commit crime. Dysfunction in the home can lead youth to seek out gang life as an alternative family. Children and youth who are longing for a sense of identity, are typically the children and youth who become involved in gangs, as the vulnerability is what gang leaders are in pursue of. Families who are also involved in gangs, are a precursor for youth to become involved as they grow up with the ideation that being part of a gang is one's identity.

Committing crimes as a child or youth within a group setting, is described with three steps: group of friends hanging out, group of "wannabes" and finally gang formation. This stems from groups of children and youth collectively finding each other as they are experiencing similar issues in their home life. From there it evolves. The authors do make it clear that not all youth involved in gangs commit crimes, and not all Indigenous youth who commit crimes are part of a gang (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008)

- **Structural Inequalities**

Grekul and LaBoucane- Benson (2008), describe that it is not only family structures that influence children and youth to commit crimes, but the structural inequalities that they face such as living conditions, the Indian Act and lack of opportunities. This is also reflected in the work mentioned above by Godley (2018) and Cunneen (2007).

Structural inequalities related to the Social Determinants of Health play a significant role in understanding the psychology of Indigenous youth in Canada. Education plays a significant role, as mentioned early on in this paper. An ex-gang member spoke about how words play a large role in one's evaluation of him/herself. The ex-gang member spoke about how they were once called "Just a dumb Indian who would never amount to anything" by one of his teachers

(Grekul & LaBoucane- Benson, 2008). He then explains how this notion when added to racism, poverty and lack of education, leads children and youth to be involved in crime life.

- **Mental Health**

Godley (2018) described the self-reporting of Indigenous people and how they view they are discriminated against in Canada. Not only does this affect societal systems, it greatly affects the mental health, identity and well-being of Indigenous youth and adults.

A large portion of mental health of Indigenous children and youth revolve around the issue of identify, as suggested previously by Grekul and LaBoucane- Benson (2008). The colonial experiences that the Indigenous population continue to face today, play a significant role in the mental health of the children and youth in the Indigenous communities in Canada. Brant (1990), suggest that the repression against the hostility that Indigenous people face, can be seen through alcohol consumption and high grief reactions.

The higher rates of emotional stress, depression, anxiety, substance misuse, and suicide are all related to one's mental health, which can be broken down into one's struggle with identity and self -esteem, which is further broken down to how society, politics and government treat/have treated Indigenous people in Canada (King, Smith & Gracey, 2009).

Indigenous people in Canada may not seek out treatment for mental health issues, as there is evidence that providing counselling services to Indigenous people in Canada through "cultural mainstream" methods, may actually increase feelings of colonial oppression (Duran & Duran, 1995).

Experts in the field suggest that, while many of the causes of mental illness, addiction and suicidal behaviour in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities may be similar, there are added cultural factors in Aboriginal communities that affect individual decision making and

suicidal ideation. These cultural factors include past government policies, creation of the reserve system, the change from an active to a sedentary lifestyle, the impact of residential schools, racism, marginalization and the projection of an inferior self-image.

An interesting perspective into the mental health of Indigenous children and youth, is that psychology research and practice is typically done through a Western lens. King, Smith and Gracey (2009), describe how the idea of mental health within Indigenous communities differs from the Western point of view, thus studies done on the Indigenous population, may not yield accurate results.

- **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has 94 calls to action that were set out on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The TRC calls out to all governments, educational/religious institutions, civil society groups and all Canadians to step up and take action. Of the 94 calls to action, numbers 25-42 are related to Justice (Government of Canada, 2018). Call to action number 38 states: “We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in custody over the next decade”

At the time of this paper, the Department of Justice is continuing a broad review and amendments to the YCJA that include changes to prevent Indigenous youth from being unnecessarily charged with crimes. As well, round tables are being held to further educate the public on the issue. The government has also allocated funding to Indigenous youth focused programs.

## **Indigenous Youth in the Criminal Justice System and Foster Care**

Statistics are scarce, which detail the proportions of Indigenous youth in Canada who were formerly in care and who have also been involved in the criminal justice system.

Unfortunately, it is a trend in Canada to not report or support research initiatives to review the connection between Indigenous youth involved in foster care or residential care system and the criminal justice system. Similarly, it is difficult to find any statistics related to the number of Indigenous youth who have once been a part of the criminal justice system while also simultaneously being involved with either the foster care system or residential care system.

However, there is data on non-Indigenous children, which shows that a disproportionate number of children and youth have been involved in the criminal justice system also have a history of being in foster care. (Baskin & Sommers, 2011; Cutuli et al., 2016; Herz, Ryan, & Bilchik, 2010; Ryan et al., 2007b; Taylor, 2006). One study, conducted in the United States on juvenile delinquency, maltreatment and placement, found that youth who had some experience with the foster or residential care systems were at a significantly higher risk of being involved with the criminal justice system at some level (Ryan & Testa, 2005). The authors referred to it as the “child welfare-to-prison pipeline.” However, this study did not specifically look at Indigenous youth.

The reality of criminal activity negatively affects the children or youth’s ability to find a placement in a home, which is two-fold as it also affects their offending pattern. Children and youth who are involved in the criminal justice system and the foster care system, may also receive more punitive sentences from the courts (Conger & Ross, 2001; Morris & Freundlich, 2004; Ryan et al., 2007b). The cycle of children and youth who are involved in the criminal

justice system and foster care system, along with their offending patterns, have been shown to have a deleterious effect on youth (Gilman, Hill, & Hawkins, 2015).

- **Criminalization of Indigenous Youth in Care**

Currently, neither Statistics Canada nor the RCMP provide statistics in regards to the number of Indigenous youth who are involved in the criminal justice system while simultaneously being involved with the child welfare system. Kids, Crime and Care (2009), state that Indigenous children involved with the child welfare system are at a higher risk of offending. They also explain how the removal of Indigenous children from their family dwelling, has a significant impact on their overall wellbeing, which again, affects their risk of offending. Of youth involved in the child welfare system, 36% have had some degree of involvement with the criminal justice system in Canada (Kids, Crime and Care, 2009). Approximately 41% of children and youth who had been or who are currently in care, have had involvement with the justice system by the time they are 21 years old (Kids, Crime and Care, 2009).

A report by Trevethan et al. (2001) found that a larger number of Indigenous adult inmates had been involved in some area of the child welfare system, compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Two thirds of the indigenous inmates had been adopted, placed in a group home or foster care, at some point throughout their childhoods. It was also found that these Indigenous adult inmates had experienced an extensive criminal history and instability while growing up, compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (Trevethan et al., 2001).

The report looked at Indigenous adult inmates and did not look at their criminal histories, while they were youth, however, due to their extensive criminal histories and to the large numbers of Indigenous adult inmates who have been involved with the child welfare system, it can be assumed that some of the inmates had been involved with the criminal justice system as

youths, while also being involved with the child welfare system. As well, of the Indigenous adults who were a part of the report, it was found that those who reported having had unstableness, lack of family balance, throughout their adolescence also had more extensive youth criminal records (Trevethan et al. 2001).

- **Efforts to Provide Alternative Sentencing for Indigenous Youth**

On June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018, Nova Scotia opened the first Gladue Healing and Wellness Court in Wagmatcook N.S. The court will serve the surrounding areas of Wagmatcook, Waycobah and Victoria County (Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2018). It is the first provincial court in a Canadian province that will hold regular sittings in a First Nations community, with the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia (Family Division) having a sitting on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The Gladue Healing and Wellness programs are specifically used for Indigenous youth and adult offenders only (Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2018). The Gladue court digresses from traditional courts as it incorporates Indigenous restorative justice traditions and customs. Included in Indigenous restorative justice traditions is the voluminous inclusion of the community. Incorporated in the court's overall decision, is the consideration of broader issues, such as intergenerational trauma and residential schools. The court aims to identify the root of offending behaviour and create a plan in order for people to gain access to programming. The court will also allow for the Indigenous offender to accept responsibility for their actions. Wagmatcook is the second court, after Eskasoni, to become a First Nation community to offer court services on a reserve (Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2018). Not only were programs designed with consultation from First Nation communities the court room design was also designed with the input of First Nation people.

- **Sentencing Principle: Other Sentencing Principle Section 718.2 Canadian Criminal Code**

Section 718.2 in the *Canadian Criminal Code* indicates that a court must take into consideration several principles when determining a sentence for an individual. The *Canadian Criminal Code* s.718.2 (e) explicitly states: “All available sanctions, other than imprisonment, that are reasonable in the circumstances and consistent with the harm done to victims or to the community should be considered for all offenders, with particular attention to the circumstances of Aboriginal offenders” (Criminal Code, 1985). Section 38(2)(d) of the YCJA:” all available sanctions other than custody that are reasonable in the circumstances should be considered for all young persons, with particular attention to the circumstances of aboriginal young persons;...” runs parallel to section 718.2 in the *Canadian Criminal Code* (Department of Justice, 2015). Theunissen, Anderson, Thoms, Bearden and Nunes (2020), argue that courts should take into consideration “culpable categorization: circumstances affecting youth in care, and society’s perception and categorization of them, may inordinately influence their likelihood of entering into the justice system when sentencing youth who have been or are in care “ (p. 18)

### **Youth in Care and Criminalization: Conclusion**

The realities pointed out in the discussion above, as well as those related to the Social Determinants of Health, suggest that the foster care system and the criminalization of Indigenous youth are not two separate entities, but rather one intertwining system, in which both influence each other; thus they must be looked at together and in conjunction with those Social Determinants. With many Indigenous youth being brought up in two worlds, in situations of poverty, marginalization and racism, there are daily contradictions presented to them. From those contradictions, come the societal colonialism that creates a system in which Indigenous youth

face daily structural barriers (Gilchrist & Winchester, 1995). Of those structural barriers, “blame,” is typically placed on the Indigenous youth, rather than on the foster care system and other societal systems such as the criminal justice system (Gilchrist & Winchester, 1995). Like in the 1980s and 1990s, the criminalization and penalization of Indigenous children, youth and families (in forms of the criminal justice and foster care systems) can be viewed as a form of cultural genocide, as the foster care system and criminal justice system continue to remove Indigenous children and youth from their families and communities (Gilchrist & Winchester, 1995).

Yet, despite this fact, there is a significant gap in our knowledge about the number of Indigenous youth who have been involved with both the foster or residential care system and the criminal justice system. The future of these youth and the implications of the criminalization of Indigenous youth in care also lacks significant information.

Another significant gap that exists, relates to what the Indigenous communities themselves may be doing, in order to address the social determinants of health, in order to reduce the number of children and youth who are involved in both of these systems. Community is at the centre of the Indigenous world view and, consequently, it is critical to understand what communities are doing, on their own behalf, to address these issues, from an Indigenous lens, community level and from an anti-colonial stance. This view will help address the factors and realities of Indigenous people, that contribute to the placement of Indigenous children in foster care and help create strategies to prevent their criminalization.

## Chapter 3

### Purpose of the Research and Research Questions

Colonial systems have long had negative effects on the health and well-being of Indigenous people in Canada. Indigenous people have felt that they are not visible in systems that greatly affect them, such as in health care (Hole et al., 2015). Many of the colonial systems that are in place in Canada today stem from attempts to control or eradicate the Indigenous population when colonizers arrived in what is known today as Canada (King, 2017)

In this regard, there is an importance in finding out what pro-active and preventative work is currently being spear-headed by the Indigenous communities themselves, in order to improve the health and well-being of their Indigenous youth, and to combat the phenomena of youth in care and in the criminal justice systems. This is work that also runs counter to colonial approaches, such as those employed in the youth justice and foster care systems, by attempting to improve upon the social determinants of health.

Thus, the purpose of this scoping review was to examine the extent and range of the literature on the current strategies and approaches that are being implemented in Indigenous communities to lower the number of children and youth in the child welfare and criminal justice system. The scoping review question that was posed was as follows:

1. What is the extent of the literature, on the strategies and approaches that are being utilized by Indigenous communities to create a healthy community and to lower the proportions of indigenous youth who are involved in the child welfare and criminal justice systems?

The following sections will detail how this question and project was operationalized.

## Chapter 4

### Methodology

A scoping review was determined to be an appropriate method to use as it allows the researcher to examine the extent and range of literature in a given area, theme or question (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The review consolidated the available readings from academic databases (ex. EBSCO, etc.), as well as Google Scholar, on the methods and approaches that are being undertaken by Indigenous communities themselves to lower the number of youth, who are involved in the above systems, by creating a healthy community.

A scoping review allows for an analysis of the state and extent of the literature on a topic that may be complex or may not have been reviewed in the past. As well, a scoping review allows for answers to unique and specific research questions, which individual research studies may not answer fully or may not be able to shed light upon. Scoping reviews are also valuable in a practical way; they can be useful in shaping courses of action that can produce real policy alternatives and they can help shape implementation (Mays et al., 2001).

For the purpose of answering the research question above in a strategic manner that would provide the most knowledge around the topic, the scoping review framework highlighted by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) was used. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) described 4 reasons as to why one may use a scoping review as a method:

1. to examine the extent, range and nature of research activity,
2. to determine the value of undertaking a systematic review,
3. to summarize the research findings,
4. to disseminate the research findings and to identify the research gaps in the literature.

In addition to the 4 objectives Arksey and O'Malley (2005) proposed, the study also followed the 5 key stages that were suggested by the authors, in order to properly adhere to the research method:

Stage 1: identifying the research question

Stage 2: identifying relevant studies

Stage 3: study selection

Stage 4: charting the data

Stage 5: collating, summarizing and reporting the results

Stage 1 of identifying the research question, is simply identifying the research question the author would like to explore. As well, it includes determining the research terms that will be used to answer the questions. Stage 2 is the most relevant step of a scoping review- to find primary studies and reviews to answer the research question. This stage included using an electronic database. Stage 3 used the research parameters to strategically select the studies that were most relevant to the research question. Stage 4 includes organizing the selected articles into a charting system (created by the researcher) that pulls out particular details of all the final articles. The final stage, Stage 5, refers to summarizing the final articles and reporting the results.

## **Process**

The rigorous screening process for this review, following Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework, involved a review of publication titles, which involved looking strictly at the titles of the articles for similar wording to those in the research parameters. This stage of screening was quite liberal to ensure that articles were not being screened out for specific jargon reasons. Following the title review, the abstract was read in order to determine if the description provided there was similar to those utilized in the research parameters, as well as if the outcome of the report/study was relevant to the research study. For example, if the abstracts did not include reference to Indigenous people (including: aboriginal, Indian, First Nation, Métis or Inuit) the article was not moved forward and was eliminated at this stage. Following the abstract review, a full review of the articles and reports was done in order to determine if the literature addressed the research question. Following the full review, the articles that were successful, were then charted, summarized and reported. The final articles are the results of the scoping review.

- **Stage 1- Identifying the Research Question**

In order to begin the scoping review, a detailed research question was developed, in order to attempt to learn about what initiatives and practices Indigenous communities may be undertaking to reduce the number of children and youth who are involved in the criminal justice and foster care system.

A list of research parameters was also developed, in order to delineate the range and extent of this study. The research parameters for this scoping review were as follows:

Year(s) of publication of articles and reports:	<b>2003-2020</b>
Country covered by the articles or reports:	<b>Canada</b>
Language of publication of articles:	<b>English</b>

The details to how the decisions regarding each of these parameters were made are found below.

Databases accessed:

- i) **EBSCO, Academic Search Premier, APA PsycArticles, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, CINAHL, Education Research Complete, ERIC, MEDLINE, SociINDEX** - Zero results were returned from a search of these databases
- ii) **Google Scholar** was then used, since none of the databases above returned any results. This database returned a large number of results, composing of academic and non-academic literature, some of which were more relevant than others. Only the first 30 pages that were returned were reviewed

- ***Search terms***

The search terms in this review were first developed by the researcher in conjunction with the Thesis Committee and refined through a process of trial and error, with the assistance of a Librarian, Sandra Sawchuk, at Mount Saint Vincent University. The following key terms and connectors were used as the search words for the scoping review:

**Canada\* AND (foster care OR foster children OR foster care system OR child welfare) AND (community practices OR community services OR community program) AND (indigenous OR native OR aboriginal OR indian OR metis OR first nations OR inuit) AND (criminal justice) AND (social determinants of health)**

After the initial search in the University databases produced no results, a number of alternative search terms and/or combinations of search terms, as well as different connecting statements, were used and trialed, however they all yielded no results in the databases. Therefore,

the search terms above were used for the final search in Google Scholar as they were deemed to be the most relevant and accurate.

- ***Timelines***

The years 2003-2020 were chosen since the current *Youth Criminal Justice Act* was enacted in 2003 across Canada and is still the Act that governs Juvenile Justice to present day (Department of Justice, 2017). Any articles that were produced before 2003 were not considered as being relevant and were discarded as being out of date, since the practices and approaches in these articles might be rendered irrelevant or obsolete by the provisions of the new *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. In addition, any community initiatives that were started after 2003 might be responding to the new act (ex. The provision for alternative sentencing).

- ***Geographic Extent***

The geographic region of “Canada” was chosen as another parameter, due to the need to limit this study to the country in which this thesis is being conducted. Although Indigenous people across the world face many similarities, their situations are also very unique in a plethora of ways, depending on local histories, laws, practices, economic and political conditions and social attitudes. In particular, Indigenous people in Canada may be affected in unique ways by the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* and the child welfare systems in Canada, legislation and institutions, which may vary drastically from those of other countries in the world where Indigenous people are found. Similarly, the responses to similar legislation will be different, across different nations, due to regional and historical differences.

- ***Databases Accessed***

The first databases that were used in the scoping review process were: EBSCO, Academic Search Premier, APA PsycArticles, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, CINAHL, Education Research Complete, ERIC, MEDLINE, SociINDEX. These databases yielded zero results. “Google Scholar” was then used as the primary database. As the library databases did not produce any results with our search, therefore moving to Google Scholar allowed for additional resources to be captured (such as non-governmental reports, community agencies etc.)

- ***Language of Publication of Articles***

For the purpose of this research study, only English articles were accessed. Some French-language articles will have keywords in English that may have been picked up by the academic search.

- **Stage 2- Identifying Relevant Studies**

In Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) manual for scoping reviews, Stage 2 of the scoping review framework is identifying relevant studies. Consequently, a preliminary search in the scholarly databases of the Mount Saint Vincent Library was first conducted. The following databases were accessed: EBSCO, Academic Search Premier, APA PsycArticles, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, CINAHL, Education Research Complete, ERIC, MEDLINE, SociINDEX. Unfortunately, the search that was conducted in these databases and using the above terms yielded zero results. In consequence, and on the advice of the librarian at Mount Saint Vincent University and the Thesis Supervisor, while also following the methodology of Arksey and O’Malley, the search was moved to the internet search engine “Google Scholar,” which thus became the sole research database in this study that returned any results to be thorough (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005)- recognizing that existing networks and

relevant organizations justifies using Google Scholar as it captures a breadth of literature and reports. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) state in Stage 2: "the whole point of scoping the field is to be as comprehensive as possible in identifying primary studies" (p. 23).

In using Google Scholar, the Scoping Review was then targeted predominantly on the grey literature, as well as any academic literature that was accessible to the Google Scholar search engine. Google Scholar has the capabilities to capture grey literature that the University's databases could not capture with the search strategy. This grey literature is comprised of sources such as reports from non-profit and/or Indigenous organizations, government reports, statistical and demographic reports, articles in community papers, etc. Grey literature is an important piece, as not all that happens in Indigenous communities, or is called-for by these groups, is captured in academic writings. Therefore, using Google Scholar allowed for a search that would capture both academic and grey literature within one single search strategy.

- **Stage 3- Study Selection**
- *Overview*

The study selection process began with narrowing the number of studies that resulted from the Google Scholar search. Since the results numbered approximately 19,200 articles and the probability of articles being relevant became increasingly lower with each subsequent web-page, on the advice of the University librarian, only the first 30 pages of the Google Scholar results were chosen to be reviewed, (where each page contained 10 links). Thus, approximately 300 links were eventually explored. This was a "loose" parameter which could be later changed, had I found that there were still relevant articles being listed throughout pages beyond the 30.

All of the 300 articles from the Google Scholar database were examined and were uploaded to a OneDrive and then sequentially sorted into four folders labelled: *Title, Abstract,*

**Full Review** and **Final Articles**. Those whose titles were found relevant to the research question and had reference to the parameter search terms were placed in the *Title* folder. Following this step, I reviewed the abstracts of all of the articles which had been collected in the *Title* folder. Those whose abstracts that were found to be relevant to the research question were moved into the *Abstract* folder for organization purposes. From there, the articles were transferred to the *Full Review* portion of the scoping review, as these articles were now qualified to read in entirety. Those articles that were found to be relevant in the *Full Review* folder were then placed in the *Final Article* folder, where they were analyzed completely, as they fit the search criteria and used for the final results of the scoping review.

- **Stage 4- Charting the Data**

The charting element of a scoping review is undertaken to easily and graphically illustrate the steps that the researcher took, in order to come to their final conclusion (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Charting also summarizes the data, in order to allow readers to quickly glance at the type of literature which was found (ex. reports, studies, etc.). It further demonstrates what happened at each step of the scoping review, so that if a replication were to take place by other researchers, comparisons of the similarities and differences can be noted. Finally, it is also an exercise that is designed to keep the author organized, as initially, a great many articles are often found.

Arkey and O'Malley's (2005) Stage 4 (Charting the Data) was done simultaneously to their Stage 3 (Study Selection). Following Arksey and O'Malley's method, I created an Excel spread sheet where the number of articles found in the "Title" "Abstract" "Full Review" and "Final Articles" were charted in order to capture a clear understanding of methods at exact points in the research. This was also done in order to promote clarity, in case another researcher wanted

to eventually replicate this study. In a replication study, there may be differences based on time of the research study and slight shifts in parameters, but a very accurate replication should be capable of yielding similar results.

Once the final articles were collected, they were placed in a separate excel sheet to further analyze the results, in order to qualify the final results of the scoping review process. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) listed 7 key points that are generally used when entering data into a "data charting form":

- Author(s), year of publication, study location
- Intervention type, and comparator (if any); duration of the intervention
- Study populations (carer group; care recipient group)
- Aims of the study
- Methodology
- Outcome measures
- Important results

For the purpose of this research, the following key points were chartered in an excel spreadsheet. The key points do not necessarily follow the 7 key points which Arksey and O'Malley (2005) recommended in their framework; however, these overarching key points were relevant for the present research study.

- Author
- Title
- Year
- Journal

- Report Style
- Study Population
- Themes

As the search did not yield a large number of results, the above overarching key points were chosen as they were able to provide complete charting without missing information.

- **Stage 5- Collating, Summarizing and Reporting the Results**

The process outlined in the previous four stages, allowed the researcher to collate and summarize the result in a strategic manner. The research strategy was chosen based on wanting to explore the extent of community-based knowledge and academic research in the area of community and the number of children and youth involved in the criminal justice and foster care system, in a non-ambiguous fashion. The previous four stages allowed for the researcher to decipher or question the meaning behind the results to determine what is happening at the community level.

The results of the scoping review will be discussed in the next sections: Results and Discussion Section.

## Chapter 5

### Results

This Scoping Review attempted to determine the extent of the literature on pro-active and preventative projects that are being undertaken in Indigenous communities in Canada, whose ultimate aim is to prevent inordinate numbers of Indigenous children from becoming involved in the Foster Care and Youth Justice Systems. The results of this Review are summarized in Figure 1 (below).

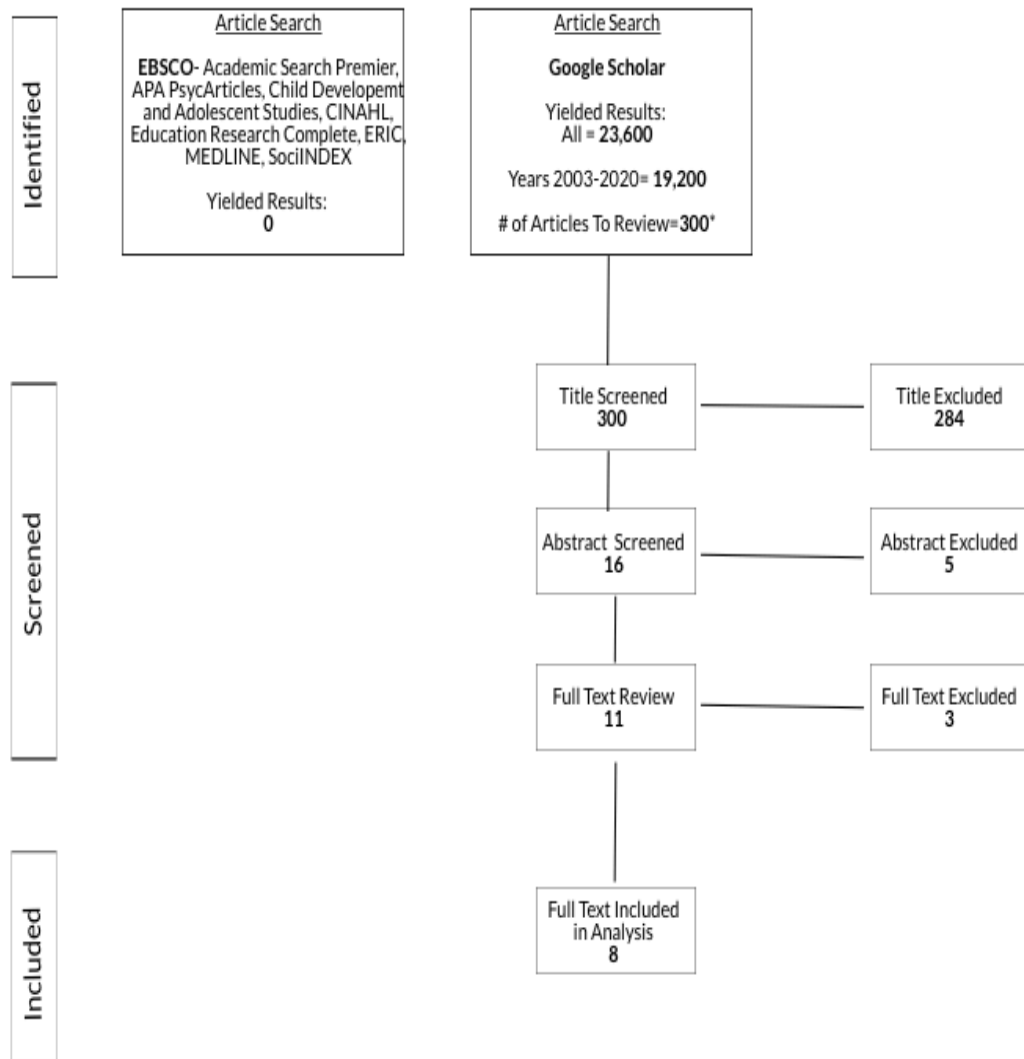
As Figure 1 indicates, the first step involved a search through Mount Saint Vincent library databases (EBSCO, Academic Search Premier, APA PsycArticles, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, CINAHL, Education Research Complete, ERIC, MEDLINE, SociINDEX). Unfortunately, utilizing the identified search parameters, yielded zero returned articles. A number of alternative search terms and combinations of search terms were also utilized, yet those searches also yielded zero results.

After the search was moved to Google Scholar, (following consultation with the Thesis Committee and the University Librarian), a total of 23,600 results were achieved. Once the parameter of articles that were written between the years 2003-2020 (present) was applied, this total was reduced to 19,600 documents. After the first 30 pages (300 links) of the Google Scholar results were screened for relevant titles, a total of 16 titles were found to be relevant and 284 were found not to be relevant. The Abstracts of all 16 articles were then screened for relevancy and 11 of the 16 were found to be relevant, while 5 were deemed to be not relevant. A full review of the text of the 11 remaining articles was conducted and 8 documents were found to be relevant, whereas 3 were deemed not relevant.

In summary, using the rigorous scoping review method of Arksey and O'Malley (2005) to answer the identified research question, zero articles were found using the study's search parameters, when the search was conducted on the library databases of academic and peer-reviewed literature. Following a move to Google Scholar, which allowed a search of the grey literature and academic literature that is available to that search engine, only a total of 8 out of 300 articles were found to be relevant to the research question.

With only 8 articles found that were gathered utilizing the search parameters, one important finding arose: Any initiatives that are being conducted in Indigenous communities, to prevent the entrance of children and youth into foster care and criminal activity, are not being captured in the academic literature.

**Flow Chart of Screening Process**



\* Refers to stated parameter of limiting the search to the first 30 pages of GoogleScholar

**Figure 1: Flow Chart of Scoping Review**

**Final Articles**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Type of Source</i>
Totten, Mark	Aboriginal Youth and Violent Gang Involvement in Canada: Quality Prevention Strategies	2009	IPC Review	Scholarly Journal Article
Libesman, Terri	Child Welfare Approaches for Indigenous Communities: International Perspectives	2004	Child Abuse Prevention Issues- Published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies	Discussion paper/ summary of previously-published report
Blackstock, Cindy & Trocmé, Nico	Community-based child welfare for Aboriginal children: supporting resilience through structural change	2005	Social Policy Journal of New Zealand	Scholarly Journal Article
Sinclair, Raven	Identity lost and found: Lessons from the sixties scoop	2007	First Peoples Child & Family Review	Scholarly Journal Article
Kirmayer, Lawrence J., Sehdev, Megha., Whitley, Rob., Dandeneau, Stéphane F., & Isaac, Colette	Community Resilience: Models, Metaphors and Measures	2009	Journal of Aboriginal Health	Scholarly Journal Article
Trocmé, Nico., Knoke, Della., & Blackstock, Cindy	Pathways to the Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children in Canada's Child Welfare system	2004	Social Service Review	Scholarly Journal Article/ Research Study
Greenwood, Margo., & Leeuw, Sarah.	Social determinants of health and the future well-being of Aboriginal children in Canada	2012	Paediatrics & Child Health	Scholarly Journal Article
Blackstock, Cindy	The Occasional Evil of Angels: Learning from the Experiences of Aboriginal Peoples and Social Work	2009	First Peoples Child & Family Review	Scholarly Journal Article

**Figure 2: Final Article Charting**

A total of 8 articles were found which fit the search criteria that was described in the Methods section. At this stage, it is important to note another item that cannot be ignored: there is overall lack of scholarly articles that discuss Indigenous children and youth in care and youth in the Criminal Justice system in Canada, as well as the social determinants of health. In addition to the lack of scholarly articles, there is also a lack of articles that demonstrate those approaches that work for communities, in creating healthy and safe outcomes specifically for children and youth, especially those that operate through a strengths-based approach and that address the Social Determinants of Health

### **Extent, Range and Nature of the Literature**

The final article categorization (as seen in Figure 2) demonstrates the following: Seven of these were articles in scholarly journals, one was a discussion paper, summarizing the results of a previous report. This was the report by Libesman (2004) “Comparative models for the delivery of child welfare services to Indigenous communities.” Furthermore, only one of these scholarly journal articles “Pathways to the Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children in Canada's Childwelfare system” (Trocmé, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004) relayed the results of a primary research study. The other articles mainly argued important topics and points, utilizing other primary sources.

Four out of eight articles were authored by Indigenous women – Cindy Blackstock (2005 & 2009) Margo Greenwood (2012) and Raven Sinclair (2007).

All articles had a Canadian lens that spoke to the realities of Indigenous peoples in Canada. with one article- *Child Welfare Approaches for Indigenous Communities: International Perspectives* offering research from the United States of America, New Zealand and Australia in order to present an international comparison.

Many of the articles used the term “Aboriginal” or “Indigenous” to refer to all Indigenous people in Canada. There were no significant details in these articles as to which specific tribes were discussed. However, most did distinguish between First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

There were no articles that seemed to be directly authored by or at the behest of government or non-profit, community organizations. From this finding, I began to pose questions as to whether or not the Indigenous communities in Canada seek to publish any community-based projects work that they are undertaking? Community organizations and even government organizations do not need to seek publishers to publish work.

## **Themes of the Literature**

The formal charting of themes amongst the final 8 relevant articles revealed the following overarching topics and evidence that can be found throughout the majority of the articles:

- **Indigenous Children and Youth**
  - The overrepresentation of Indigenous children in youth in the child welfare and criminal justice systems.
  - There are more children involved in the child welfare system currently than at the peak of the residential school era.
  - Demonstrated calls for Indigenous communities to have autonomy over child welfare.
  - Preventative measures are key to lowering the number of children entering the foster care and criminal justice system
- **Social Determinants of Health**

- Colonialism continues to impact Indigenous peoples to a high degree in many aspects of the Social Determinants of Health
- All of the challenges that Indigenous children face began with colonization and the history of European settlement.
- **Indigenous Community – What is needed**
  - Community projects need to truly involve the Indigenous community; many projects are “in” community but are still developed and controlled by outside systems.
  - Indigenous culture and culturally-appropriate practices must be included in child welfare and criminal justice systems.
  - The designation of “Indigenous” cannot be viewed as composing a single entity
  - Indigenous people are very resilient, despite the incredible challenges their communities have faced and continue to do so.
  - There are limited financial resources, that are going to Indigenous communities, to aid with child welfare and criminal justice issues.
  - Partnerships must be formed between Indigenous communities and overarching systems such as federal, provincial, educational and others, that directly impact the lives of Indigenous people in Canada.
  - Allow for more flexibility, autonomy and a holistic approach to healing within Indigenous communities.
  - Indigenous communities must be equipped with the governance and resources they need to address the factors - such as inadequate housing, child poverty and

substance misuse - that lead to the high numbers of children who are involved in the foster care and criminal justice system.

- **Way Forward**

- Those policy-makers and workers who are involved in the system (developing, working etc.) must start to learn about the history of Indigenous people.

## **Research Gaps in the Existing Literature**

The results of the scoping review demonstrate that there has been very little academic writing and reporting on the topic of Indigenous communities and what they are doing to lower the number of youth who are involved in the criminal justice and foster care system. This is clearly demonstrated by the very limited number of relevant final articles from the scoping review. The research question was answered, however not in the way that was expected. It demonstrated that there are a minimal number of academic articles available. There were no articles that documented any strategies that are currently being tried. Instead, the review showcased that almost every article that was found continued to stress the importance of developing “new strategies” and utilizing existing strategies to help Indigenous communities. Interestingly, the “strategies” to be utilized were never detailed nor did they give a pathway of “how” to develop new strategies. There were action items that were provided, which in turn could be recognized as strategic approaches. For example, Blackstock and Trocmé (2005) speak to Indigenous communities having autonomy when it comes to the child welfare system. As well, the article mentioned that culturally appropriate responses are needed. Kirmayer et al. (2009) highlight the need for people working in the child welfare system in Canada to be educated on the history of Indigenous people in Canada.

In consequence, there is little recognition in the scholarly and grey literature of what is being done at the community level in Indigenous communities. Many articles from this review cite previous research that demonstrates what “type” of strategies should be in place in order to achieve lower numbers of children being involved in the care and criminal justice systems. However, there seems to be no current academic literature reflecting what is currently being done by Indigenous communities. In turn, there is very little academic and reporting recognition on what is happening at the ground/ grassroots level in Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities are working to lower the number of children who are involved in the criminal justice and foster care system (this will be further discussed below, in Chapter 6, the Discussion section of this thesis). However, it would appear that this is not being captured in the academic literature, as many of the projects and initiatives that exist are grassroots projects at the community level (see a few examples of this, in the section below, Chapter 6, entitled *Existing programs addressing child welfare and development issues*).

## **Overall Finding**

The most jarring and important result of this scoping review is the acknowledgment and conclusion that a scoping review was not the most appropriate method to answer the research question. After utilizing this methodology, the Scoping Review found no literature that showcased “...*the strategies and approaches that are being utilized by Indigenous communities to create a healthy community and to lower the proportions of indigenous youth who are involved in the child welfare and criminal justice systems.*” (from the Research Question).

In hindsight, this was most likely going to be the case, as a scoping review is a research method that reflects a traditional Eurocentric approach to research and documentation, one that does not take into account, or legitimize, Indigenous ways of recording their activities and

traditional ways of knowing. The scoping review demonstrated that there is not a significant amount of academic research that has explored the two systems as a unit and, therefore, there needs to be a shift in how research is conducted on programs that affect the phenomenon of Indigenous youth in care and in the Youth Criminal Justice system.

Even if the research question had been shifted, a Scoping Review would not appear to be the appropriate method to answer an Indigenous community-level question, since Eurocentric academic processes of recording and disseminating information do not align with Indigenous ways of knowing. It may not be possible to answer the research question by means of a traditional academic process, however it does not mean that other ways of recording or disseminating do not exist. Researchers must acknowledge that because this question may not be able to be answered in a systematic way, it does not mean that other legitimate forms of dissemination do not exist in other forums (and should be considered as an equally academic approach), such as storytelling in the Indigenous culture. Iseke (2013) describes the importance of storytelling in Indigenous communities “Storytelling sustains communities, validates experiences and epistemologies, expresses experiences of Indigenous peoples, and nurtures relationships and the sharing of knowledge. Storytelling is also a central focus of Indigenous epistemologies, pedagogies, and research approaches” (p.1)

This finding, unintended or not, demonstrates the importance of the following question: *Whose knowledge or ways of knowing or communicating are seen as legitimate?* This unintended finding of this research study will be further explored below, in Chapter 6, the Discussion section.

## Chapter 6

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a scoping review, in order to gain a greater understanding of the extent of the literature, on the strategies and approaches that are being utilized by Indigenous communities to create a healthy community and to lower the proportions of indigenous youth who are involved in the child welfare and criminal justice systems. The research question was proposed in order to quantify and explore the different types of research, reports or other documents that were available with a set of very specific research parameters. The purpose of having the specific set of research parameters (please refer to Chapter 4, **Methodology** section), was to be able to gauge the extent and nature of the literature in a specific theme or area (in this specific case, exploring the extent and nature of the literature on community initiatives that address the themes of the social determinants of health in relation to decreasing the numbers of indigenous youth in care and the criminal justice system). A secondary goal was to outline in a systematic way, the search for this literature, so that this process can also be replicated by other researchers. In addition, much of the research that has been conducted on issues in the Indigenous communities has focused on issues and problems. Consequently, it would appear that virtually no research is being conducted on initiatives, programs or policies that are improving the lives of Indigenous communities and/or that arise from the communities themselves.

However, while the research question was answered by this disciplined research method, it was never really answered in the expected way. The finding that there is no literature which describes community and preventative programs brought on the onset of more questions throughout the research process. I began to question why I was unable to find any example of

such initiatives. I briefly considered changing the research question, in order to reflect the small number of partial results that I obtained. However, after having conversations with my Thesis Committee about why the Scoping Review returned no examples of preventative programs, it was determined that the lack of results pointed to an alternative explanation: The fact that, a Eurocentric approach, comprised of a Scoping Review may not have been the proper research method to use, in order to answer such a question. From this conclusion, I began to challenge my thinking and training in academics and posed a question that went above the core research question: *Whose knowledge or ways of knowing are seen as legitimate?* In other words, the results suggested that, as academics, in order to answer such questions, we must value Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous research methods, even if they may not be recognized by all as a standard academic process.

### **Action Needed- Sparking Change for Youth in the Criminal Justice and Foster Care Systems**

In Canada, the current state of the number of Indigenous youth involved in the criminal justice and/or foster care system is at an all-time high. An interesting finding throughout the scoping review (with the final articles) was that the “newest” article in the list of final eight that were considered is 2012. There was an expectation that more recent literature would have been found and would have been deemed relevant to the research question. As well, there was an assumption that more academic literature was being produced surrounding this topic. There are many questions as to why there were so little results captured in the current scoping review: Is research being done? Is research being published?

Throughout the final scoping review articles, there were suggestions around working with Indigenous communities to foster change, but there were no articles that spoke to a successful intervention that communities have done to help reduce the number of children and youth involved in both systems.

A significant amount of the research I have encountered was not at a community level looking at the number of youths involved in the systems. This is an area of action that needs to begin with addressing the systemic barriers that researcher entities in the past have created. As well, much of the research is from an outside perspective looking in. There are many actions that are suggested from the authors, many of which are fantastic, however there is no recommendation on how to actually address the actions that are needed.

### **Existing Programs Addressing Child Welfare and Development Issues**

One of the possibilities that was raised by my Supervisor is that the readers of this study might assume that there are simply no initiatives happening at the level of the Indigenous communities, that focus on improving those Social Determinants of Health and that foster the prevention of large numbers of children from entering the child welfare and youth justice systems. However, this is not a valid conclusion, as I will illustrate below. As a member of the Indigenous community, I can speak to the existence of many programs and community efforts that are in place to bring about healthy communities (this includes lowering the number of children and youth who are involved in the criminal justice and foster care system).

There is evidence that work is being done in Indigenous communities which is not being reflected in the academic literature. Some examples can be found in the very community location of this university. One example is at the *Mi'kmaw Child Development Centre* in Halifax. The *Centre* offers parent support groups, prenatal and postnatal groups, Aboriginal Head Start,

Collective Kitchen and other support groups throughout the month (McMillan & Glode-Desrochers, 2014). The programs that they offer to community members are provided through an Indigenous lens: they focus on spiritual, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Their range of programs (pre-natal to adult) are available to those who need them and are delivered by members of the Indigenous community. They also provide safety, food, water and advice to those who access their services.

I am also a proud member of a group entitled the *Mental Wellness Coalition* that meets at the *Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre*, in Halifax. The *Coalition* gathers every month to discuss important issues and implement programs that will provide support to Indigenous people in this city and is funded by Indigenous Services Canada (MNFC, 2021).

Like the two examples above, every city in Canada will have their own projects that are being conducted on the issues of the Social Determinants of Health, youth development and care. One example of a cross-Canada program, that focuses on Indigenous children and youth and families who have had involvement with the child welfare system, is The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society's "Spirit Bear" program (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, 2021)

A member of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, Spirit Bear represents the 165,000 First Nations children impacted by the First Nations child welfare case at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, as well as the thousands of other children who have committed to learning about the case and have taken part in peaceful and respectful actions in support of reconciliation and equity.

In essence, there is a great deal of work that is being conducted with many allies from across the city and country, yet whose literature was not captured with the research method that was used. There are also, quite likely, many other community-based programs/action projects that are constantly happening in communities across Canada, whether they be focused on health research, mental health, nutrition, statistics and more (Kirmayer et al. 2009). These are simply not being recorded and/or disseminated by Eurocentric methods of communication and dissemination.

### **Eurocentric Communication and Dissemination**

We are in a time when, more than ever, research with Indigenous communities is so important and, more specifically, strength-based research. It should never be the participants carrying the burden of research that is being conducted in their communities, for others. Many Indigenous people are “tokens” for research. Kelly (2007) used Kater’s 1977 tokenism theory to explain racial tokens in research on black teacher in the United States and how there was pressure on teachers to have had specific experiences, as well as specific responsibilities as they are the racial minority. Indigenous people in Canada have a different worldview than non-Indigenous people, meaning that current Eurocentric research methods do not always follow Indigenous worldviews, thus resulting in gaps of understanding (Wilson, 2008).

This is the time to challenge the current narrative of what is viewed as appropriate research methods, especially when it involves the Indigenous community. It is a time to challenge the way that academics have been conducting and disseminating research through an Eurocentric lens. Research being conducted in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, has historically been led by non-Indigenous researchers (Kilian et al., 2019). This stems from many aspects and consequences of colonialism, including the low levels of educational attainment

amongst Indigenous youth (related to colonization) which has led to the low number of Indigenous researchers and academics.

In order to challenge narratives or have an understanding of what constitutes an “Indigenous lens” it is essential to have this knowledge, in order to further understand what the author is conveying.

## **Indigenous World Views**

Across the world there are numerous cultures, identities, religions and worldviews. Worldviews shape how people view the natural, human and spiritual world, as well as interpersonal relationships. They also shape how they view others in the world that may share similar worldviews and knowledge. These aspects of human culture either bring people together or, at times, create division. Since the beginning of the colonization of the Indigenous lands in Canada, Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing have been ignored by Europeans, who imported Eurocentric worldviews and ways of knowing to Canada. This Eurocentrism continues to dominate and direct public systems such as the child welfare and criminal justice services.

There are many ways to express and explain what a worldview is and how it is instrumental to culture and power. What follows below is an Indigenous explanation of worldview by the Indigenous people in Canada, who create teaching modules on Indigenous treaties (Arnot, 2002):

A worldview can pertain to an individual, group, or society. Overall, a worldview is a set of beliefs and values that are honoured and withheld by a number of people. A worldview includes how the person or group interacts with the world around them, including land, animals, and people. Every person and society has a worldview. Worldviews differ today from person to person. Many societies pass on their

worldview to their children to ensure worldview continuity. As people interact and learn from one another, it is not uncommon for them to acquire the beliefs of other worldviews. Worldviews evolve as people and societies evolve (p. 31)

Worldviews are different for each individual person, regardless of their shared culture and that is no exception for Indigenous people. Many Indigenous people have different worldviews based on beliefs, experiences, trauma and many other life events that have shaped their views. It is challenging to compare and contrast Western (or Euro) worldviews and Indigenous worldviews as they are unique for many. It is important to note that worldviews are very different amongst European societies and cultures. Similar to Indigenous people, not all Europeans share the same worldview. Edward Hall (1959), described a notion of a high context and low context culture spectrum throughout European societies based on values placed on communication. High context and low context cultures tend to both display patterns of association, interaction, territoriality, temporality, self-expression, and learning, but on the opposite side of the spectrum (Hall, 1959).

### **Indigenous Versus European Worldviews**

Typically, when one envisions an Indigenous person, a stereotypical, pop-culture image comes to mind. However, Indigenous people in Canada are not a homogenous group. One must seek to understand the vast diversity amongst Indigenous people in Canada, in order to begin to understand the complex challenges they face. The differences amongst Indigenous people that can make each person unique and have different worldviews, regardless of their shared culture are as follows: generational differences between Indigenous people, how one self-identifies and whether that falls into the government categories of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, various sub-groups, status versus non-status, whether or not one lives in an urban centre or an Indigenous community and the identities of male and female (Frideres, 2008). While there are many shared

worldviews in the Indigenous culture, it would be misleading to create a list of similarities and differences between Indigenous cultures as it would be nearly impossible to adequately describe the richness and diversity that each unique Indigenous community possesses (Alberta Education, 2005). Many Indigenous practices and worldviews include the “Seven Generations of Teaching” which are not included in many of the Western systems that have been placed upon Indigenous people (Lavalle & Poole, 2010). The “Seven Generations of Teaching” implies that what people do today will have an impact on the next seven generations to come and what has happened in the past seven generations, is having an impact on people today (Lavalle & Poole, 2010). The “Seven Generations of Teaching” have been orally based down by Indigenous ancestors for centuries.

### **Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Worldviews**

As previously discussed, Indigenous ways of knowing and worldviews are unique in many ways, and there is no worldview that is completely common between all Indigenous people, however there are some commonalities between worldviews (Education Alberta, 2005). It is important to note that the following worldviews are based on the author’s perspective of overarching shared worldviews amongst the Indigenous community.

- **Worldview of Earth/Nature**

Indigenous people are the caretakers of the natural world and honour the gifts that she presents: water, air and fire (AFN, 2020). There is a deep spiritual connection between the natural world and Indigenous people. Indigenous people have a deep connection with the natural world and believe that mother earth provides for life in all capacities. This includes providing for industry, ingenuity and progress (AFN, 2020). Indigenous people believe that Mother Earth, if listened to,

will teach humans how to take care of her, but also take care of children. The Assembly of First Nations (2020) eloquently describes the relationship between the natural world and the way that Indigenous people live:

This relationship is based on a profound spiritual connection to Mother Earth that guided indigenous peoples to practice reverence, humility and reciprocity. It is also based on the subsistence needs and values extending back thousands of years. Hunting, gathering, and fishing to secure food includes harvesting food for self, family, the elderly, widows, the community, and for ceremonial purposes. Everything is taken and used with the understanding that we take only what we need, and we must use great care and be aware of how we take and how much of it so that future generations will not be put in peril.

- **Worldview of the Spiritual World**

- *Spirituality*

Indigenous people view a connection between the visible physical world and the spiritual world. It is viewed as a circle, rather than a linear (Euro) worldview (Education Alberta, 2005). Time is viewed as “a cycle of renewal that links past and present and future for all things” (Education Alberta, 2005). Individuals see their place and purpose in the world through their connections between the “seen” and “unseen” forces (Education Alberta, 2005). Everything in the world, from rocks, to animals, to plants, have a spirit and that spirit, relates to the way of living for Indigenous people (Education Alberta, 2005). This allows for a deep connection to the world to help guide individuals in all aspects of life.

- *Religion*

Religion (Evangelism and Catholicism) was introduced to Indigenous people in Canada when European settlers attempted to convert Indigenous people to their religions. Religion and spirituality are not the same thing, however an individual (and many Indigenous people) can have a relationship with the spiritual world and religion. (Education Alberta, 2005). A way to differentiate between religion and spirituality can be explained as “religions are systems of attitudes, beliefs, and practices that focus on groups, while spirituality centres on an individual’s understanding of his or her place in the world” (Education Alberta, 2005). Many Indigenous people practice both spirituality and religion. Many Indigenous people did not have a chance to learn about their spirituality until later in life, due to forced removal and placement in religious residential schools.

- **Worldviews of the Social World**
- ***Culture***

Culture is a worldview that is different for each person, whether Indigenous or not. Indigenous people share and express culture through ceremony (i.e. sweats, pow-wows) teachings (i.e the seven teachings) elders (i.e the most respected in community), traditional medicines (medicine wheel, sweet grass, medicine pouches, etc.) the role of men and women (i.e. women are central to family unit, life-givers etc.) and the importance of family members and community (Poonwassie & Charter, 2001). Indigenous people view and interpret their culture in many ways- with a main interpretation of the connection with earth. Indigenous culture also accepts other worldviews- acceptance of come as you are.

- ***Community***

Community is viewed as a very important aspect of one's life. The community is part of the individual. Community serves as empowerment for individuals and family (Poonwassie & Charter, 2001). Through an Indigenous worldview, the community is an integral piece for the individual, rather than an individual being more important than the community.

- ***Family and Children***

Families and children are the core of a health community. A quote by Dr. Margo Greenwood (NCCAH, 2015) describes the value of family through an Indigenous lens:

Families touch our individual and collective being from the personal to the professional to the political. To be strong as nations, we must nurture and support our families and communities. It is within our families that we as individuals come to know our place in the world and to know ourselves as part of a larger collective (pg. 9)

Family and children are what Indigenous people credit for surviving many attempts of cultural genocide and assimilation. Mothers are credited with keeping families alive as they pass on the teachings of their grandmothers. Children are the next generation that will pass on the teachings. Children are valued as important pieces of community and very well respected.

- **Two-Eyed Seeing**

As Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people live together within Canada and take part in systems together, research and life the concept of "Two-eyed seeing" is a unique opportunity. Two-eyed seeing is "To see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012, p. 335). The idea of accepting both

Indigenous worldviews and Western (European) worldviews, demonstrates that there is space for both worldviews to work cohesively. Indigenous people and people of European descent will continue to be living together in today's Canada, therefore two eyed seeing is a unique opportunity where the strengths of both views, can work together in order to have the best outcome for whatever system or challenge, individuals face. All worldviews can co-exist together in a respectful manner, but currently, our systems and methods of communicating to others what our communities are doing do not reflect this entirely, but changes are happening.

### **Attempts to Negate Indigenous Ways of Knowing**

Eurocentric images and beliefs regarding Indigenous people and holding judgement over their ways of knowing and worldviews have shaped and continue to shape the way systems are created in Canada. This has been and is demonstrated by not acknowledging Indigenous knowledge, nor agreeing with it and by forced assimilation. It was from the ideation that Indigenous worldviews were not acceptable/understood by the new European settlers that branches of forced assimilation policies were put into place: Reservations, Indian residential Schools, the *Indian Act*, foster care, health care, the justice system and the current education system (Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003). This reflects the neglect on reporting and disseminating positive community initiatives that are meant to address systemic issues such as the ones above.

One of the most influential systems that continues to have an impact on Indigenous people in Canada is the education system. The education system in Canada was created without acknowledging Indigenous knowledge and which continues to have a widespread negative effect on Indigenous people (Battiste, 2005). Referring to previous writings in this work, the education system continues to have the greatest impact on Indigenous people in Canada when it comes to

socioeconomic status, health status and overall wellbeing. The education system fails to adequately teach Indigenous youth; it negates Indigenous culture; it allows for disproportionate drop-out rates, thus, perpetuating the community's means to attain employment and higher salary paying jobs, lower physical and mental health status of community members which than affects overall well-being (Adelson, 2005).

### **Child Welfare and Justice Systems**

Differing worldviews and understanding of such views between settlers and Indigenous people in Canada continue, even to this day, to have a negative impact on the lives of Indigenous people. Through a criminal justice and foster care lens, this is being viewed today more than ever before.

Before colonization, care of Indigenous children was viewed and practiced in a holistic manner, which included the community. Children were viewed as intricate, respected pieces of a community and ecosystem (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). This is the complete opposite of how the Canadian child welfare system is legislated and practiced today in Canada (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). For example, the Canadian child welfare system views family as the main social grouping and connection to the child, whereas for Indigenous people, the community is that centre. Eurocentric notions of children (viewed as property of their parents) (Heywood, 2001) is the opposite of the Indigenous worldview of children. The child welfare system is also not equipped to understand the social determinants of health as an explanation for why Indigenous families and communities are in a vulnerable state. For example, a family that cannot provide food their children does not always mean neglect- it could be because of the historical treatment of Indigenous people in Canada has led families to poverty.

Indigenous knowledge and worldviews continue to be ignored in child welfare academic programs (i.e social work degrees), whose graduates will have to deal with the exceptionally high numbers of Indigenous children and youth who are involved in the care and justice systems. Bennett and Blackstock (2002) argue that this lack of education on the history of Indigenous people in Canada begins with education system and academic institutions. They argue that Indigenous knowledge tends to be a scope of the academic anthropology discipline, rather than to be accepted and integrated into professional disciplines such as social work. changes to the construct of a system will not happen as the mould will not shift from what is believed to be “relevant to the profession”. This ideology is what is causing so much harm to Indigenous children and youth involved in the foster care and criminal justice system. These systems not created or intended to serve or adapt to the people involved (which both systems have extremely high numbers of Indigenous people) as it is constructed in a worldview that differs from Indigenous people.

Viewing Indigenous ways of knowing as what they are, rather than attempting to place and mould these views into a Western perspective, could have a drastic impact on how the criminal justice and foster care system functions for Indigenous children and youth. Both systems were created and are operated through an individualized lens, rather than a community lens. In this way of conceptualizing personal and family problems, the individual (in this case, the Indigenous child) is perceived to be at the centre of the system and typically is regarded as the “problem,” rather than looking at all that surrounds the individual that could potentially lead an individual into both systems. This is why it is very important to focus on the social determinants of health, when attempting to deal with the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the criminal justice and foster care system.

The Eurocentric approach to researching and documenting projects that do exist in Indigenous communities which counter these realities is similarly not sensitive to Indigenous ways of communicating knowledge.

### **The Criminalization of Indigenous Children as a Problem of Human Rights and Racism**

Chris Cunneen (2007) explores the relationship between criminology, human rights and Indigenous peoples. Cunneen (2007), describes how it is nearly impossible to look at the issues of criminalization of Indigenous people without looking through a lens of human rights. He speaks of the crimes that were committed against Indigenous people (such as residential schools) as being some of the worst crimes against humanity. Cunneen (2007, pg. 245), describes “ethnocide” as: “the aggressive attempt to “civilize” Indigenous peoples through a range of state-endorsed laws, policies and practices”.

In Canada, the ideology of the residential school system was to change the way of life of young Indigenous people from that of “savages” to one of “civilized Christians” (Petoukhov, 2011). This act of criminalization of Indigenous people, continues to have an indisputable effect on the lives of Indigenous people from not only a personal perspective, but also from a policy and law perspective. Crimes were undeniably committed by the state when children were stolen from their homes and forced into residential schools. Cunneen (2007) refers to Milloy (1999, p. 15) when speaking about the crimes committed by the state against Indigenous people as “violent in its intention to ‘kill the Indian’ in the child for the sake of Christian civilization. In that way, the system was, even as a concept, abusive”.

The criminalization of Indigenous people and youth in Canada has long been a national crime, one that stemmed from racism (Cunneen, 2007). Racialized constructions of Indigenous people continue to play a role in the current criminalization of Indigenous people in Canada. The laws and policies that were created also had racist tones. Government used their laws and policies to justify the intense harm they were committing against the Indigenous people in Canada (Cullen, 2007).

Criminologists, such as Cunneen, suggest that the crimes against Indigenous people in Canada cannot be ignored. The overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the Canadian criminal justice system is the product of criminalization over hundreds of years of ethnocide and assimilation crimes that were committed against Indigenous ancestors.

As stated above through the lens of criminology, the policies and laws constructed throughout history, play a role in the criminalization of Indigenous people and youth. However, the way that individuals in a position of power apply those policies and laws, significantly influences the rate of criminalization of Indigenous youth.

It is not only the policies and laws that influence the overrepresentation of Indigenous people (youth and adults) in the Canadian justice system, it is society's constructed views of the Indigenous people in Canada that greatly influence not only systematic discrimination, but societal discrimination that leads to class inequality, income inequality and education inequality (Porter, 1965). The notion of inequality of the Indigenous people in Canada and how that leads to the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth and adults in the Canadian Criminal Justice System, must be comprehended through a multi-faceted approach. This approach, as described by Godley (2018), is described as intersecting axes of gender, race/ethnicity, immigrant status (not

necessary when looking at Indigenous people in Canada) and social class. All of these axes play a role in the social injustices that Indigenous people in Canada face daily.

Sociologists and anthropologists have continued to research the area of class inequality after Porter. They have been successful at demonstrating the influence of race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, physical appearance, weight and sexual identity in relation to education access, income, overall health status and life expectancy (Godley, 2018; Abada et al. 2009; Guppy & Luongo 2015; Lightman & Gingrich 2012; Ramraj et al. 2016). As well, sociologists describe discrimination (racism, sexism and ageism) as one of the largest contributors to the ongoing social inequalities in Canada (Godley, 2018; Browne 2017; Fleras 2014; Jedwab 2014; Nagra & Maurutto 2016).

Godley (2018), explored the level of discrimination that occurs in Canada, using the revised version of the EDS (Everyday Discrimination Scale) that is found in the CCHS (Canadian Community Health Survey), a self-report survey. Godley (2018) found that Indigenous people in Canada were 11.35 times more likely to experience racial discrimination than Whites in Canada. From these results, they also found that Indigenous people were facing discrimination on more than one level. Godley's (2018) study found how self-reports of discrimination of Indigenous people confirm the lasting effects of colonization, racism and cultural extinction (Godley, 2018;Paradies, 2016). As well, the results support the long documented and researched racism against the Indigenous people in Canada (Godley, 2018; Madibbo, 2005; Mensah, 2002; Paradies, 2016)

### **Indigenous Research Methods- Shawn Wilson**

Shawn Wilson's (2008) book *Research is Ceremony- Indigenous Research Methods* eloquently challenges the way researchers ask questions and seek answers. He speaks about what

the core of research is: unanswered questions and the reveal of unquestioned answers. After conducting a scoping review that answered the research question in a completely unexpected way, Wilson's book became an instruction manual as to why this happened and what do to about it.

Wilson (2008) highlights the importance of an Indigenous research paradigm- maintaining, transmitting and clarifying Indigenous ways of doing and knowing, in a research process. A strong Indigenous research paradigm will provide ways of demonstrating uniqueness (compared to the Westernized perspective) and celebrating culture, appreciating Indigenous history and worldviews, enhancing the understanding non-Indigenous researchers to issues, cultures and values (Wilson, 2008). In addition, Wilson (2008) highlights how other systems, such as the Canadian government, have invested millions of dollars in inquiries surrounding Indigenous people, but have done little with the recommendations that were produced from these reports. Much like the government, academic institutions have been slow to adopt an Indigenous lens when it comes to research- whether it be with an Indigenous researcher (which would be ideal) or non-Indigenous researchers.

In terms of Indigenous research, relationships and relationship-building are at the core of a successful working partnership between the researcher and the Indigenous community and must be in place, in order to have successful research (Wilson, 2008). However, before arriving at the core of success, there are hurdles that exist for an Indigenous researcher, or someone who is using an Indigenous research approach (Wilson, 2008). Some examples of this include Indigenous researchers having to separate themselves from Indigenous cultures to focus on academics (which still presents major challenges for researchers who seek out academic endeavours but have to fold into a Westernized or dominant perspective), further marginalization

(since an Indigenous lens has the appearance of being “exotic”), having to decolonize existing dominant research methods and finding an institution where Indigenous research methods and an Indigenous lens are accepted (Wilson, 2008). “Unfortunately, Indigenous researchers have often had to explain how their perspective is different from that of dominant system scholars; dominant scholars have seemingly needed no such justification in order to conduct their research”. This could be partially related to the small amount of Indigenous community research and dissemination that currently exists.

All of these challenges that Indigenous research methods face, demonstrate that it is still a challenge to have an Indigenous lens accepted and disseminated, even when an Indigenous lens can be used in all areas of research, especially the notion of the three R’s: Respect, Reciprocity and Responsibility. Wilson (2008) expresses the need for Indigenous approaches to be accepted in mainstream dominant research, especially when it respects the research participants and communities.

The use of the scoping review, in the present study, was thought to be the best suited method for the unforeseen barriers that were placed on the research process. In my view, the scoping review allowed room for myself to challenge my own knowledge of research methods and findings, with the help of Shawn Wilson, which ultimately lead to my unintended results.

## **Decolonizing Indigenous Research and Methods**

Unfortunately, using a scoping review research method to answer a research question, about the extent of the literature on what Indigenous communities are doing to decrease the number of youth who are involved in both the criminal justice and foster care systems, is not a method that involves taking a community perspective. Indigenous communities have the most knowledge about their communities: Using a scoping review with this type of question, did also

not provide the results one would have expected as this westernized method does not align with Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous people have been at the centre of research for years, typically in a non-strength-based approach, and their involvement in the research process is key for decolonizing Western research methods (Datta, 2018). Datta (2018) speaks to how Indigenous people often do not benefit from research (even though it is focused on them) and it is simply the researcher who is benefitting from Indigenous people taking part in the research, which further solidifies that many research approaches with Indigenous people are colonizing. This is demonstrated by the unintended finding of this study: there was an answer, however it was not the expected answer to the research question. It was later recognized that, based on the Westernized research method that was used, the results of the scoping review in this research study reflect the need for an Indigenous lens. The question that was posed was very important, yet, due to the selected research method, the question could not be answered and will not be answered in the future, if an Indigenous lens approach is not used. This solidifies the idea that, research processes that are typically used with similar research questions, can be colonizing.

An example of applying an Indigenous lens includes storytelling. Datta (2018) expresses the importance of storytelling in the Indigenous communities and how this is a recognized method of dissemination:

Stories can vary from the sacred to the historical; some focus on social, political, and cultural ways; some are entertaining, even humorous; some tell personal, family, community, or an entire nation's experience; some are *owned* by certain clans or families and can only be told by a member of that group; others can be told by anyone who knows them and care for the,,; stories reflect the perceptions, relationships, beliefs, and attitudes of particular people (page 37).

Decolonizing research benefits both the participants and the researchers and unfortunately in 2020, this way of thinking is slow to advance.

### **Implications**

The results of the scoping review demonstrate the need to have more Indigenous scholars conducting research, more community-oriented research in academics, as well as detailing the need for strength-based research approaches. In addition, I believe that part of decolonizing Indigenous research, is to demonstrate what is missing in academics surrounding Indigenous communities and highlight the need of what type of work must be done collaboratively by academics and community members. There is also a need to look at or re-think dissemination in Indigenous communities. Alternatively, there is a need to rethink how academic researchers may find information on what is happening at the level of Indigenous communities themselves.

- **Indigenous Researchers: Results of the Scoping Review**

A positive, and quite frankly personal, highlight of the scoping review outcome, was the number of Indigenous pioneers' work that was captured. As previously noted in the result section, the work of Dr. Cindy Blackstock produced three articles that fit the research criteria and were part of the final eight articles. Dr. Cindy Blackstock is a prominent First Nation professor who has worked in the social working field for over 25 years. She is a member of Gitksan First Nation, with her work focusing on Indigenous theories and remediation of structural inequalities affecting First Nations children, youth & families. She is an Indigenous woman who has a PhD and who conducts collaborations with Indigenous communities. She continues to work with Indigenous communities, while being the lead on many research projects. Dr. Greenwood and

Dr. Sinclair are also to be mentioned as Indigenous women with PhDs who do research in the field of Indigenous studies. With this unintended finding of the scoping review, it is inspiring to see that even with significant research barriers (i.e. Westernized academic methods), Indigenous-led scholarship is being highlighted. It is important to note that Indigenous researchers carry an extra load on their shoulders when conducting Indigenous research.

A question that arises from this discussion is “what is the definition of a scholar?” Can a scholar be an Indigenous Elder? Elders are the experts in the field of Indigenous knowledge of their communities. Institutions may need to consider what is the definition of a scholar in relation to Indigenous culture, when attempting to adopt an Indigenous approach to research.

- **Indigenous Participant and Researcher Burnout**

The burden in Indigenous researchers could potentially lead to their feeling “burned out,” as many institutions are beginning to want to see Indigenous-led research. This is nothing but positive; however from my own experiences with colleagues and knowing Indigenous people in the field, there is a risk of burn-out as they are viewed as the “knowledge keepers” The same individuals are always being called-upon to participate in activities that involve any aspect of Indigeneity. This is a very heavy burden for these individuals to bear.

Building capacity to conduct proper, ethical research with Indigenous communities, specifically around topics such as youth involved in the criminal justice and foster care system needs to take a precedent. There are many barriers around research with youth and rightfully so, however if there is work being conducted, there needs to be an expectation that the results are going to further help spark change.

## **Ideas and Considerations Moving Forward**

Indigenous communities know what is best for themselves and their communities. Academics as well as government have stated that this is the case. However, it becomes very difficult for communities to put their knowledge into action, especially if they do not have the resources to do so. This stems, again, from colonial barriers. With the criminal justice and foster care system being federal and provincial entities, there has to be responsibility placed on the system itself. Formal research does not need to take place to validate the lived experiences and stories of Indigenous people who have been involved in both systems and those in the community. I believe that this is something that affects the efficiency and quality of work that is being done to address these issues.

Research studies and projects with Indigenous people can only go so far if there is no action taken by the entities that are in control of the systems. There is mistrust with government and institutions in communities, due to the horrendous acts that have happened and continue to happen. With the support of research, specifically research conducted by Indigenous peoples, government should be taking action. This could be a changing time in academic and government history, where there is a shift in who is conducting research with Indigenous people, specifically in the area of overrepresentation in both systems.

This includes eliminating the silos that have been created when dissemination and funding is applied to Indigenous communities. This approach does not make sense and leaves work that is being done in these communities compartmentalized. As well, a siloed approach does not create opportunities for systems to work in-sync. Many of the silos are inter-related such the child welfare and criminal justice system. There are many overlapping elements and when they are siloed, they are not looked at as being interconnected, therefore funding one

aspect of an issue, has the potential to exacerbate issues/ not address issues in another area that has a direct impact on the other.

During a time of crisis, which I consider the current state of the foster care and criminal justice systems, action from the highest level needs to be happening in a collaborative manner with Indigenous people and their communities: those who the crisis is truly affecting.

Communities do not have the tools or power to create change on their own, so the action is needed on the side of government and research to attempt to change the pathway and systems that are causing such harm to the overall well-being of Indigenous people.

Building capacity to conduct proper, ethical research with Indigenous communities, specifically around topics such as youth involved in the criminal justice and foster care system needs to take a precedent. The scoping review demonstrated that there is not a significant amount of academic research that has explored the two systems as a unit and there needs to be a shift in how research is conducted with those youth. There are many barriers around research with youth and rightfully so, however if there is work being conducted, there needs to be an expectation that the results are going to further help spark change. Change does need to happen, but I believe that it is two-fold. Once researchers conduct work in communities and see that the intervention has potential to reduce the number of children and youth involved in the criminal justice and foster care system, there needs to be a continuous support in place; that could be in the form of additional funding for communities to continue the work that researchers set forward, or in action-based research that would involve a train-the-trainer type scenario.

Throughout the scoping review process, it became apparent that there is a lack of traditional community-based research and/or a lack of scholarly recording of what is being done at the community level. More specifically, there is also a lack of applied academic research being

done through an Indigenous lens, for community, by community. The results of the scoping review demonstrated that an academic scoping review will not recognize or capture the work that communities are doing with their members, if it is not disseminated in an academic fashion (i.e. through a report). A lot of community-based programming/action is constantly happening with communities whether it be health research, mental health, nutrition, statistics and more (Kirmayer et al. 2009). This scoping review and the results may help to change the ideology around “what” is research/ academic literature. Indigenous research methods may not follow the traditional research methods, however Indigenous knowledge, storytelling etc. should be viewed on an equal playing field for future research involving community.

This may also be a call to action for academic institutions to change their policies around the databases to which they subscribe. As a graduate student, I was not able to access certain databases, due to the university not having a subscription. This area of research may be unique to my interest, but there is a need for conversations around the type of research students are doing, so that the databases meet those needs. It is a great opportunity in the time of reconciliation, to address culturally-based databases that the university may not have accessed before, such as the Bibliography of Native North Americans. This database was not available to me during my research, but the University of Manitoba provides access to the Yale based database to their students. As well, this research may have implications for future research in the area of Indigenous studies, conducted by an Indigenous person. There is a rigorous research ethic process for work with the Indigenous community, which I believe should be in place, however some of those processes may actually be barriers to conducting important work in the field.

This scoping review demonstrated that there is either not a lot of academic research being done, that there is not a good dissemination of projects, that research is not being captured in this

specific area through non-Indigenous research methods, or that all of these scenarios are at play. There is valuable work to be done with Indigenous communities and through an Indigenous lens, as well as a client centred and trauma-informed strength-based approach, applied to the research methods and future research that involve Indigenous people.

## **Limitations**

- **Search Parameters**

There is the possibility that the search parameters used in this scoping review may have been too narrow and thus not have generated all possible results. One limitation that is possible, is the use of singular versus plural search terms. As well, the possibility of not specifically using the term “youth” could be a limitation that had an effect on the number of articles the search produced. It is important to note, however, that a number of alternative search terms and combinations of search terms were utilized, yet these still search yielded zero results.

- **Scoping Review Process**

The scoping review process which followed Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) five stages, was an accurate measure to apply to the research question, however based on the number of results, it is clear that there is not enough academic and grey literature being captured through this process. This demonstrates an issue with the type of academic and grey literature that is being produced. In theory, by following Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) framework, the scoping review process was rigorous and transparent in the findings, which is needed in the area of Indigenous research. Yet it demonstrated the clear gaps that continue to exist in terms of Indigenous academic research being published. As well, it demonstrated that the process of

searching for what is being done at the community level is not sensitive to Indigenous ways of communicating their initiatives.

An on-the-ground community-level approach potentially could have helped us understand the phenomenon to a greater degree and might have been an appropriate Indigenous research method. For example, utilizing a talking circle, story-telling or speaking with Elders are some examples of approaches that could have resulted in more knowledge about proactive methods that communities are taking to address the issues of the scoping review.

In addition, as research is constantly progressing and new material being produced daily, a scoping reviews' results may only be relevant at the specific time a researcher conducts the search. Even with rigorous measures, duplication may not be exact.

- **Databases**

As previously stated, there were no results that were found when using the scholarly research databases. This was a limitation, as using an academic library would have been priority for the scoping review process to ensure rigour. An additional limitation that arose when researching how university databases work, is that grey literature is not typically captured through an academic search. This would have been a limitation if the university database had been used, however Google Scholar (the database that was used in the scoping review) does capture grey literature. Grey literature is very important for any work with Indigenous communities, as there are typically reports and other sources that capture the voice of community more accurately than journal articles in research databases. As grey literature was not picked up by the Google Scholar search, perhaps the lack of grey literature is due to the constraint of the search parameters.

Google Scholar also has limitations to its functions. As it searches the whole web, there is a significant amount of work that is initially captured that eventually does not meet the research criteria. As there were over 20,000 article hits from the initial search and only 300 were looked at due to researcher capacity, there is a chance that some relevant work was not captured. This is however, also a limitation to using the university database as well.

- **Results**

The results were limited to the database used. There is a probability that some work was not captured due to copyrights and other circumstances around publishing. It is difficult to determine what was not captured to do the scope of the work. As well, the low number of final results, could be due to what was produced by the search parameters imported into the database or due to the Eurocentric approach to dissemination.

The unintended finding of the results is not a limitation, however discovering that the use of an academic scoping review may not produce all of the information that is available, ultimately suggests that using an Indigenous research method might have resulted in more relevant results, such as conducting a sharing circle, or interviewing Elders, (compared to an interview)

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the scoping review revealed that there are still gaps in academic literature surrounding the question of what Indigenous communities are doing to address the social determinants of health and lower the number of youths involved in the criminal justice and foster care system. The scoping review also revealed a significant finding in itself: A scoping review is not the ideal research method to utilize when researching such a question, as it does not capture the realities of what is happening in the Indigenous communities.

My personal experience in this process validates conversations I have had with other Indigenous researchers. These have focused on the following themes: The constant stress of ensuring that one's work might do no more harm to Indigenous people; feeling as if you have been placed in a position of privilege, therefore wanting to ensure that you are able to be the voice of people who may not have a voice; and an overall struggle over seeing how much harm has been done to Indigenous people for so long. As well, validating the fact that Eurocentric ways of research, does not promote or capture the true essence of what is happening in community.

There is a need for community voices to be heard, or recorded, and translated into academics in a manner that works for the Indigenous people, rather than for the academic system. For too long, research was being done in ways that did not help the Indigenous community to full potential. Participatory action research and collaborative research is a place to begin. There were no final results that included the communities as part of the research team. In order for change to happen, academics and community must come together and work collaboratively. Academics must be flexible in their methods of working collaboratively with

Indigenous communities, but as a whole, academic institutions must validate the unique measures that need to be in place, in order to protect and represent Indigenous people accurately, even if they do not fall under widely accepted research approaches. Again, Shawn Wilson (2008) expertly explains Indigenous research methods and how it is possible to conduct research with Indigenous people with an Indigenous lens.

The challenge of accepting “Indigenous Research Methods” in academics still remains, but my hope is that it is widely accepted, so that important research questions, such as the one posed in this thesis, can be answered not for the purpose of writing a thesis, but for igniting change in the way Indigenous research is approached. In my view, work with Indigenous people should be collaborative and beneficial to both parties. Communities need help in addressing issues such as criminal justice and foster care, however research does not translate to support for these communities, if the measure is not appropriate for Indigenous people.

The burden of overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the criminal justice and foster care system should not be simply on communities; it must be shared across entities that have caused harm to generations of Indigenous people. Reflection on how research is conducted and the methods that are used to find answers to important questions, is critical when approaching academic work with Indigenous people. It is also important to consider Eurocentric ways of dissemination of knowledge as this method does not coincide with the way Indigenous communities disseminate knowledge. The research question that was posed and the scoping review method used to find the answer to a question that is so important in today’s climate was successful in a paradoxical way: the original research question was answered, however it did not produce the results that the researcher was assuming. The revelation of why there is not higher numbers of research being produced in this field, is the true finding.

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