

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS IN VANCOUVER, CANADA



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QUICK FACT

This study was done in collaboration with the Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society.



The residential school systems (RSS) forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families, communities and cultures in an attempt to assimilate them into white Canadian culture from the late 1800s until 1996.

Indigenous children in the RSS often experienced neglect, sexual, physical, emotional abuse, and sometimes death.

Unaddressed childhood trauma often leads to substance use as a coping mechanism.

This study investigated the role of intergenerational trauma in high CWS placements among Indigenous young people who use drugs.

Intergenerational trauma is defined as widespread trauma endured by a community passed down through multiple generations.

BACKGROUND



Today, nearly 50% of youth in the Canadian child welfare system (CWS) are Indigenous.

METHODS

Between 2011 and 2016, researchers spoke to 675 youth and young adults who use drugs enrolled in both the At-Risk Youth Study (ARYS) and the Vancouver Injection Drug Users Study (VIDUS).



Researchers asked about drug use, personal experiences with CWS, and family experiences with RSS (Indigenous participants only).

FINDINGS

The study found a relationship between close family exposure to RSS (grandparent, parent) and increased risk of CWS involvement among Indigenous youth who use drugs.



Indigenous youth who had both a parent and grandparent institutionalized in the RSS were twice as likely to be placed in the CWS compared to Indigenous youth without a grandparent or parent that attended the RSS.

SO NOW WHAT ?

Findings suggest that family exposure to the RSS is a significant contributing factor in the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the CWS today.

Governments must prioritize and fund Indigenous community involvement in child welfare case management and have these rules standardized across regions.



Urgent need for increased support and investment in Indigenous-led, community-based approaches to address intergenerational trauma, specifically with the CWS.



Keeping Indigenous families together in a community is critical for healing the ongoing impacts of colonization.

This undergraduate student work is a product of a collaboration between the Making Research Accessible initiative (MRAi), researchers, Dr. Evan Mauro, and the students of ASTU 100 at UBC. This student work has been reviewed by the lead author of the original item. Revisions provided by the lead author have been incorporated into the student work with support from the UBC Learning Exchange and members of the MRAi. The reader should bear in mind that this is a student research project/report and is not an official document of UBC.



KEYWORDS:

Intergenerational Trauma, Residential Schools, Child Welfare System

Infographic by Maiya Dexel, Kimia Bahrami, Gabrielle Mann, Christian Sanchez, Elizabeth Olenchenko