THE NEED TO CHANGE THE NARRATIVE, TO CHANGE THE CONTEXT: URBAN INDIGENOUS WOMEN SURVIVING-OR-THRIVING RESPONSES TO STRESSORS

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Infographic by: Emilia Zamora

Introduction

Some Indigenous women in Canada face lifelong systemic and structural stressors rooted in colonization and displacement, which impact their health, wellbeing, and access to culturally grounded care (1,2). These stressors—range from daily hassles to chronic and traumatic events—can lead to both distress and resilience, shaped by intergenerational trauma, sociocultural context, and available coping resources (3,4).

Study Question: ***"What are the life stressors and coping strategies used by Indigenous women living in Toronto, Ontario?"***

Methods

Broader research study

Phase 1

Learning more about Indigenous women's life stressors and coping mechanisms

Phase 2

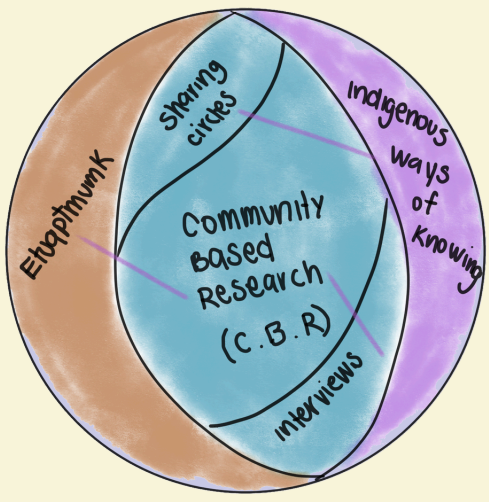
Retreat to discuss phase one findings and pilot stress-reducing strategies

This study

Phase 3

The design of a Culturally inclusive stress-reducing intervention

Study design



Research ethics & study governance

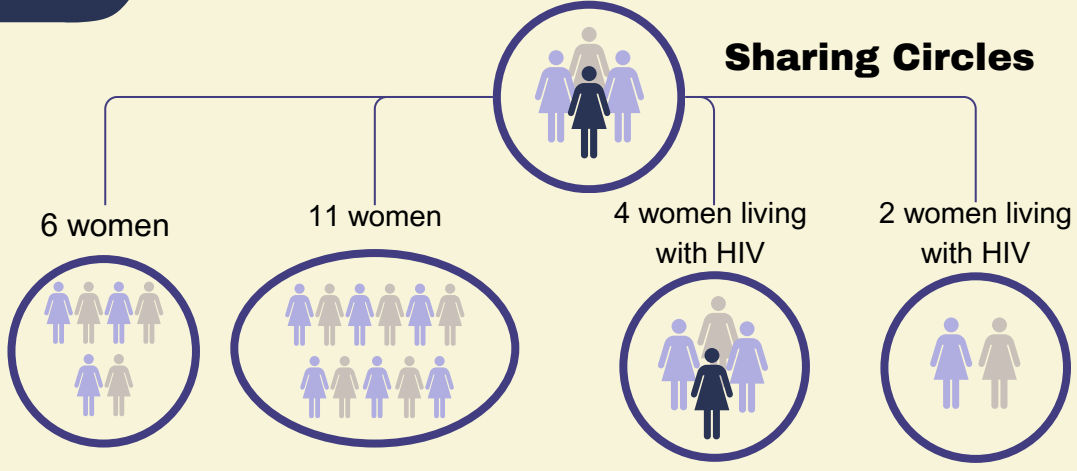
This study received ethics clearance from Women's College Hospital and followed Indigenous data governance principles.

Data Collection

30 Participants who are women living with and without HIV

7 individual interviews

Sharing Circles



Analysis

11 transcripts (277 pages) using a **thematic analysis** was conducted with multiple coders to ensure reliability.

Results

We identified three broad themes. Themes were not mutually exclusive and highlighted how women's responses to experiences vary and overlap between all themes.

Finding #1: Challenges with asserting or maintaining control over structural and systemic barriers

Finding #2: Survival responses to stressors

Finding #3: Made attempts to establish control

Discussion

- This study presents a cross-sectional snapshot of urban Indigenous women's experiences, noting a few limitations such as the absence of Inuk participants and unexamined factors like identity and length of urban residency.
- The findings show that many stressors Indigenous women face have distal sources; therefore, researchers must widen their lens to interrogate broader systemic contexts rather than place the burden of change on women themselves (6,7).
- The results also highlight the need for culturally rooted services that adapt systems—not just individuals—to support Indigenous women (8,9).

References

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Department of Health and Society
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
SCARBOROUGH