

INCORPORATING TEACHINGS: WHAT THE CULTURAL ADAPTATION PROCESS CAN TEACH MAINSTREAM ORGANIZATIONS ABOUT TRAUMA-INFORMED PROCESS



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About the Study

This was a process evaluation project undertaken in order to understand the cultural adaptation process of mainstream evidence informed programming within an Indigenous child welfare community.

How We Approached It

Management and frontline staff were provided with Mothers in Mind (MIM) training and consultation. The team discussed group content and membership, and engaged in weekly briefing and debriefing sessions to discuss process and implementation issues. Notes were taken each week as part of a pre-determined interviewed guide around process and changes to curriculum delivery or content. Qualitative interviews were then conducted with both program participants and program facilitators and the end of the program.

Findings

Participants Characteristics: Diversity in participants backgrounds, from trauma experiences to cultural identification and spirituality, reinforced the knowledge that generalizable adaptations should never be the goal of a culturally responsive approach. Although the introduction of concrete cultural components such as smudging and medicine bundles was experienced as valuable, they were perceived more as spiritual elements rather than cultural, and went along well with the topic of self-care.

Referral Process: Due to the complex nature of therapeutic programming within the context

of child protection involvement, changes were implemented so that referring child protection workers had a better understanding of the nature of the program and the importance of voluntary engagement for mothers and their children.

Content Challenges: Changes were made to consider the issues of trust and safety within a child protection setting, such as the addition of sessions to allow more space and time for group cohesion and safety to develop and to prepare for more challenging content through the use of trauma-informed principles of trust, transparency and choice and collaboration.



“Intention is the key to respectful implementation.”

Garrett et. al, 2008, p. 190

Takeaway

The process of cultural adaptation can inform mainstream services to the benefit of all future participants. Importantly, trauma-informed approaches require an acknowledgement that complex trauma includes and is compounded by experiences of intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and blood memory (Aguilar & Halseth, 2015).

It is more important to consider cultural safety rather than cultural competence. Understanding the history of oppression is more meaningful than concrete representations of cultural constructs (e.g. smudging, medicine wheel, medicine bundles etc. are subjective experiences and vary based on identity).

Financial Contribution From



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada