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Canadian Domestic Homicide
Prevention Initiative



Indigenous Mothering in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence in RRN Places

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Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative Conference

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Background

- Intimate Partner Violence

- Indigenous:

- 15% of Indigenous women have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV), where their non-Indigenous counterparts recorded rates of 6% (Moeke-Pickering et al. 2018).
 - 88% of women in NWAC's MMIWG2S+ database were mothers (NWAC 2015).

- Mothers:

- IPV is three times more likely among mothers than non-mothers (Buchanan, Power, and Verity 2013)
 - Often, pregnancy triggers an increase in violence, with those who experience pregnancy violence experiencing significantly higher rates of physical and sexual assault, and physical threat (Brownridge et al. 2011).

- Rural, Remote, and Northern (RRN):

- 38% of the women and girls killed in Canada in 2019 lived in RRN places (Moffitt et al. 2020)
 - In RRN populations, the most common method to kill was firearms (36%) when method was known. This is different from when looking at method of killing overall - most victims died of stabbing (38%), followed by shooting (24%), strangulation (11%) or beating (11%) (CDHPI 2018)

Conceptual Framework: Mothering & Indigenous Mothering

What is Mothering?

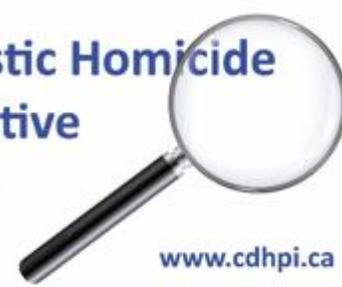
“Mothering [is] described as a storied space filled with childhood memories of experiences with parents, families and friends; storied through the embodied experience of being a mother to each of your children and the ideological expectation of what constitutes being a good or bad mother; a relational space as you open to seek out supports to be a mother and you are visible and judged; storied space is of fluid interactions between private, relational and normative forces.”

(Pitre, Kushner & Hegagoren, 2011, p. 260)

What is Indigenous Mothering?

“Aboriginal mothering is recognized as extending beyond the biological act of giving birth and involves a multitude of roles and relationships across times, spaces, and generations...it is a complex web of relational practices, was, and is fundamental to life.”

(National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2013:p.3)



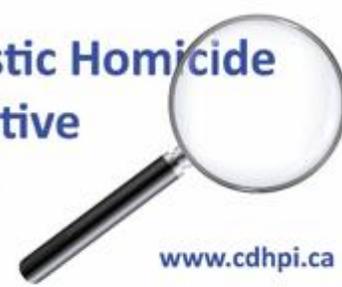
Theoretical Framework

Decolonial Feminist Theory:

- Indigenous Mothering and Multigenerational Trauma
 - Reduction of Indigenous Mothering = Solving ‘the Indian Problem’
 - Targeted as they provide *the raw materials necessary for Indigenous life*.
 - VAIW is a structural feature of settler colonialism.
 - Gender dichotomization, racialization, and heterosexualism are just some of the tactics the colonial state employs (Noel Mack & Na 2019).
- Indigenous Intersectionality:
 - “Violence is gendered, aged, and linked to access to land.”

(Clark, 2016, p.49)
 - Indigenous women and girls exist in a ‘double-bind’ in that their participation is essential to changing their communities, their government, and their lives, while simultaneously being silenced in key decisions, policies, and initiatives.

(Kenny 2006)



Methodology

- Secondary analysis of the CDHPIVP dataset looking for cases classified as ‘Indigenous’, and ‘children’, and ‘rural, remote and northern’ (n=17).
 - Our process of constant comparative analysis was combined with a review of the literature.
 - Independently began the following process, utilizing ‘Grounded Theory’ analysis to identify the social process of “Indigenous mothering”.
 - **Grounded Theory:** “Systematic theory developed inductively, based on observations that are summarized into conceptual categories, reevaluated in a research setting, and gradually refined and linked to other concepts.”
- (Schutt, 2014, p.341)
- Using NVivo, we reviewed each file in its entirety, developing general concepts inductively, and then collapsing into themes.



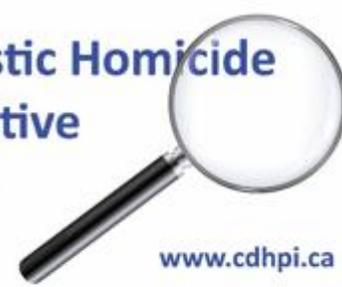
Findings: Demographics

- Participants:
 - Survivors: n = 15
 - Proxies: 2*
- Age:
 - Range: 25-58
 - Mean: 41
 - Average age at time of first incident: 24.5
 - Average age at time of first pregnancy: 21
- Average # of Children: 3
- Interesting Insights:
 - 12/17 had probable traumatic head injuries (e.g., choking head injury).
 - 7/17 explicitly reported near-death experiences (NDE).
 - 8/17 experienced some form of reproductive violence.
 - 9/17 discussed past abuse.
 - 7/17 described more than one IPV relationship.
 - 5 were married; 7 were in common-law relationships; 2 were dating their partner; and our 2-Spirited participant experienced non-IPV violence.

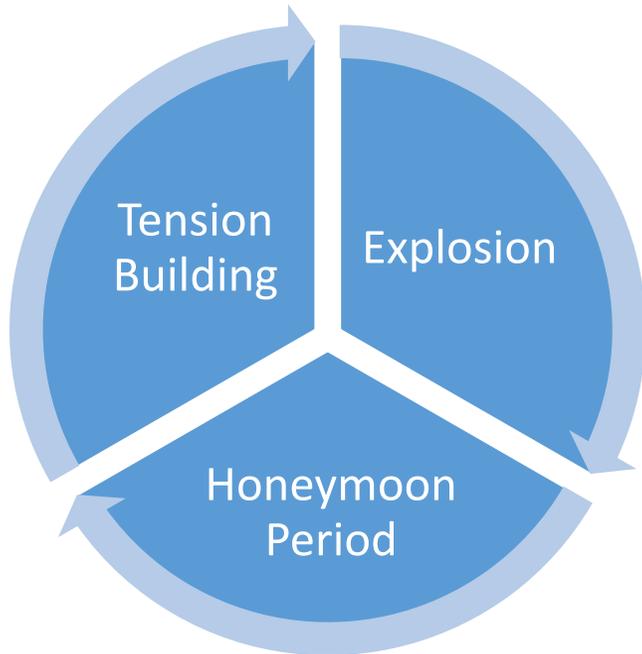
*we removed two (one was non-Indigenous; another was missing 'mothering')

The Cycle of Comparative Mothering

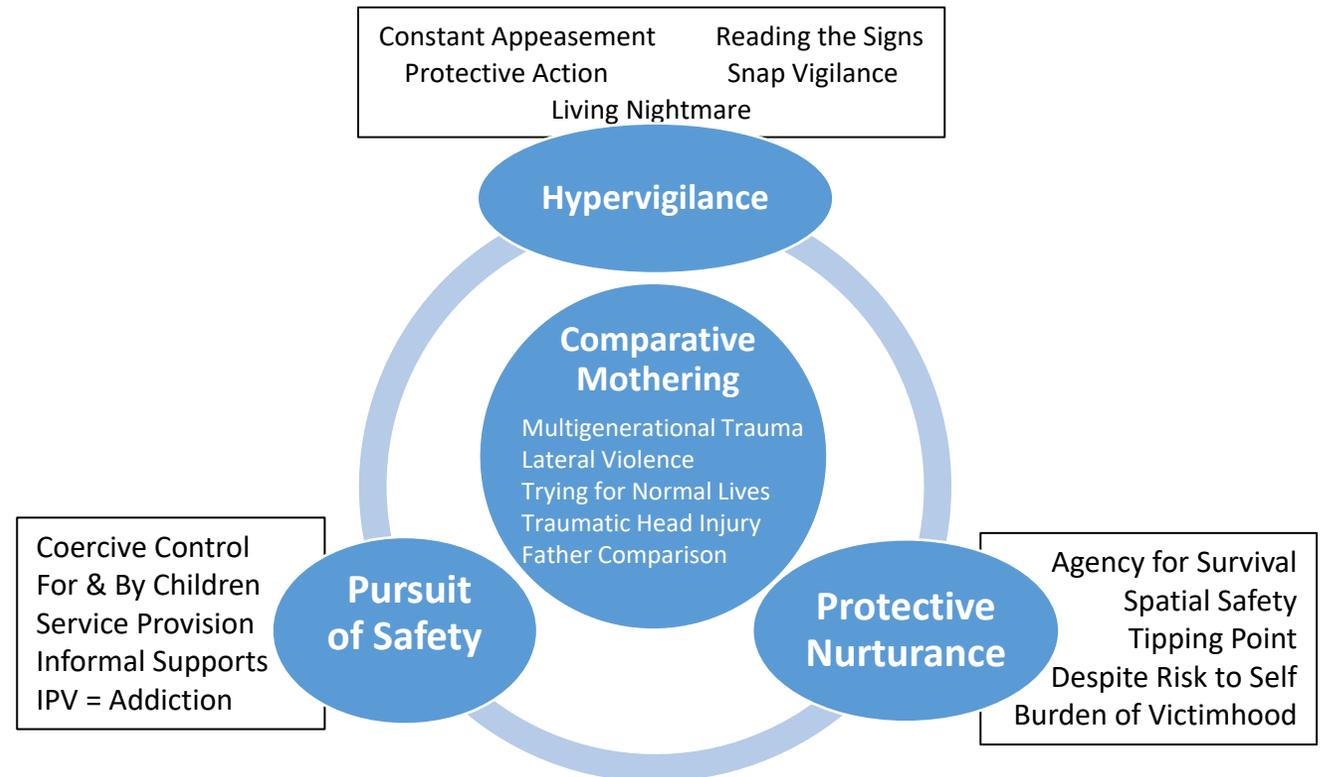
Responding to the Cycle of Abuse



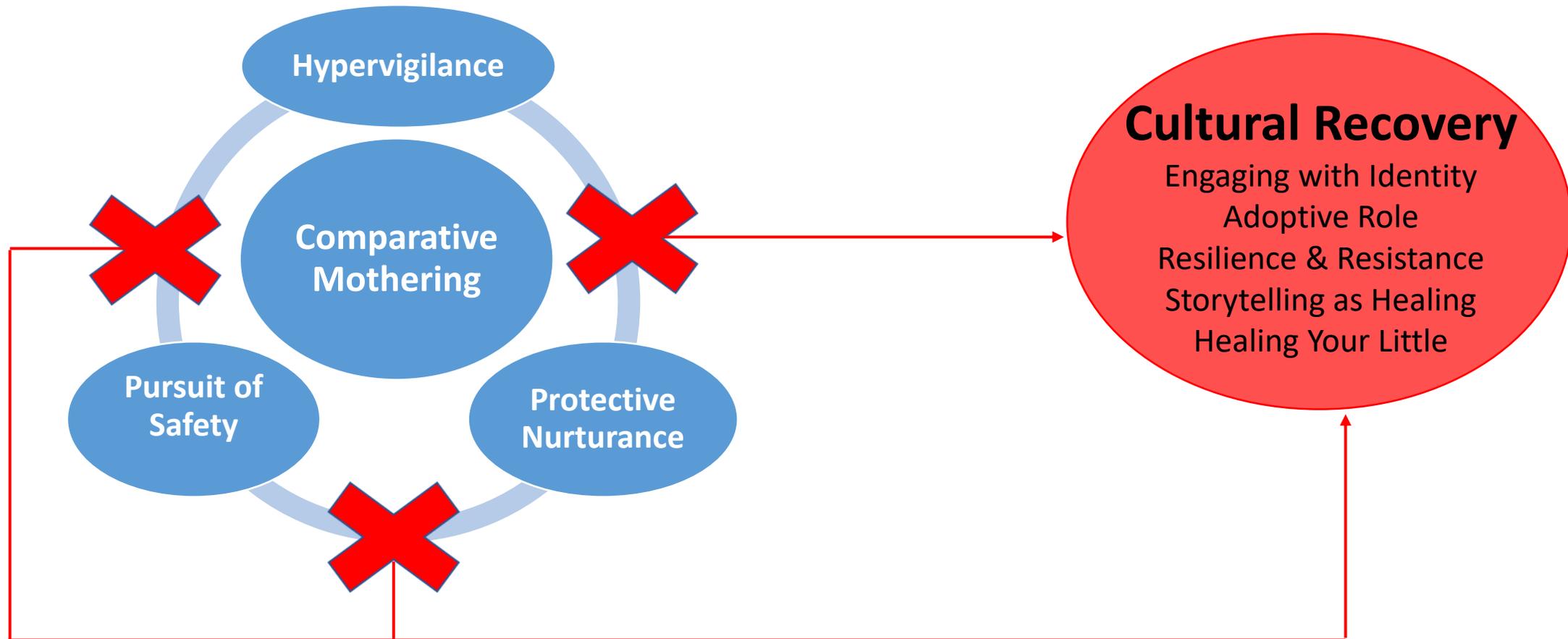
IPV Cycle of Abuse

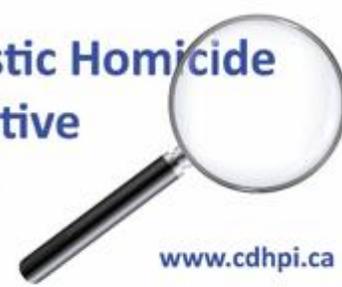


Cycle of Comparative Mothering



Cultural Recovery as Breaking the Cycle





Comparative Mothering

Multigenerational Trauma

“that pattern of victimization, I suppose, repeated itself in my life, I ran away from home because it was safer to, I was on the streets and be at the mercy of predators than being in my parents’ home, even though they were split up, it still wasn’t safe” – Edith, 40

Lateral Violence

You know like, my mom was always for the two of us, she could do whatever she could to go out of her way, just playing with us, trying to have a normal life. So, I think aside from the violence and the abuse and the yelling, you know, things that no child should have to see, I think being in that home at that particular time just allowed us to have a normal childhood.”
– Donna, 25

Trying to Make Lives Normal

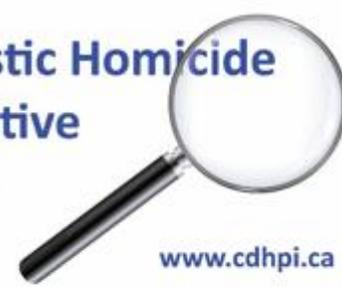
“But they wouldn’t have stepped in because they were family. Like that I felt, like I found this out later on that’s the reason why was because they’re related and because he didn’t want to arrest my dad” – Jenna, 49

Traumatic Head Injury

“I researched after about being choked like that... some of the women don’t report that they were choked you know, they don’t go to the hospital or anything and you know 3 days later they die from the injuries of being choked. And that’s even happened - like I was lucky that that didn’t happen to me because I – I totally had an NDE.” (Kelsey

Father Comparison

“because he wanted control of his life, he wanted control of her life and if her life didn’t match up with the picture that he had in his mind that wasn’t going to be okay.” – Donna, 25



Continuous Hypervigilance

Constant Appeasement

“He had got me to a place where I was scared to make eye contact...he would accuse me of looking at them or trying to flirt with them... So, I was at a place where I was scared to even make eye contact with people let alone talk to them.” – Whitney, 38

Reading the Signs

“The look in his eyes. The look in his eyes. His eyes would be dark. They would always change. There were many arguments, where if I couldn’t walk away, I’d tried to talk to him in a way that would calm him down.” – Amber, 51

Protective Action

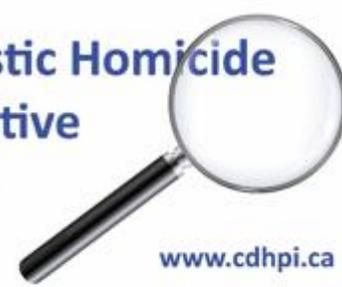
“if I would turn my back to my ex and look at them without blinking, they knew it was time to go in their bedroom uh because he was starting to get upset or he was uh leading some sexuality.” – Edith, 40

Snap Vigilance

“And he finally went to bed and I quickly like grabbed a bit of stuff and phoned my friend and told her. And she hoped—like she drove to my house in not even a minute, and she picked me up and then I took off out of town.” – Melody, 26

Living Nightmare

“at the time when he did that to me, I just wanted to end everything because I was in love with him, and it just felt like a nightmare.” – Laura, 27



Protective Nurturance

Agency for Survival

I didn't go then, instead I gave my daughter well basically, I gave her up. When I did, she was hurt and angry and she wouldn't come back so that led to a break down for me."
– Lindsey, 52

"that's where I actually put my foot down to myself and said, "I will never allow myself to go through this". I'd been punched out so many times, but for me to sit inside a hospital waiting for surgery for a whole week. And my daughter was – nobody was actually taking care of my daughter." – Mary, 31

Tipping Point

Spatial Safety

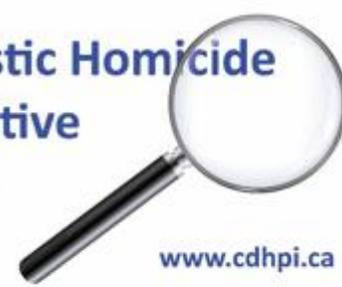
"my first thought was protect my kids, get my kids away, you know, some distance from this mad man." Robyn, 51

Despite Risk to Self

"he put the kids in the car and then he shut the doors and he turned to me and said, I'm not bringing them back. And he got in the vehicle and he was in a parking lot so he had to back up so I went and stood behind the car." – Robyn, 51

Burden of Victimhood

"I had to quit physiotherapy because I couldn't afford to pay for it, I didn't know where the money was going to come from. I have permanent damage in my neck, I've always had to struggle with that...So then you end up on painkillers and they're highly addictive, so there was those things."
– Lindsey, 51



Pursuit of Safety

Coercive Control

For & By Children

“It was in the middle of the night and it was so dark and I didn’t know that all of them had actually witnessed him trying to choke me until the two youngest girls told me a couple years after that they felt they had saved my life.” – Whitney, 38

“what he did during that time is he always had at least two of my kids with him and he would set specific parameters and timeframes on me... If the police were to show up, he would kill the two kids that he had with him. If I told anybody and he found out he would kill the kids one at a time in front of me.” – Teri, 49

Service Provision

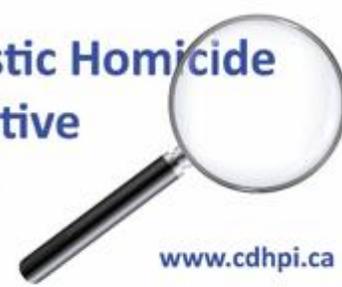
“the fact that this worker in this home was so, you know, relaxed, and so child friendly and that I could kind of have a really good relationship with that worker, it kind of made me feel like I had a normal life.” – Donna, 25

Informal Supports

IPV as Addiction

“And I think the thing often in an abusive relationship, I find it very much like the cycle of addiction where your first experiences with that person can be on such a high. There’s so much – you get so much attention and so much love and you really feel really good about yourself in the relationship before this starts to happen. And then I feel like it’s very much like the cycle of addiction.”
– Whitney, 38

“think at that time I was just so young I didn’t even think, my mom, her partner and his friends, they were so close, they would say ‘you have to think about the baby’.” – Chantal, 37



Cultural Recovery

Engaging with Identity

“it saved my life. Like, I wouldn’t be here without ceremony.” – Kelsey, 49

Adoptive Role

Resilience & Resistance

“It was not in strength, but in despair, that I began to repair my broken spirit. Because my children were watching me. Relying on me to put back the pieces of our lives. It was an arduous journey.”

– Amber, 51

“A cousin offered me – I can come stay at her house...And then, but I did not have any income at all after I got out of the hospital. She offered to let me come and stay at her house, so I stayed at her house for like two weeks.”

– Melody, 26

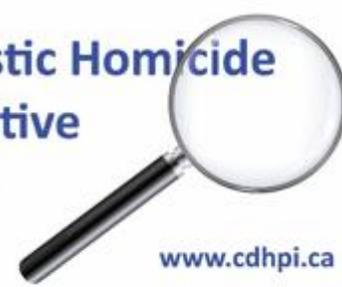
“It’s always healing to tell your story, no matter how many times you tell it...When you can tell your story without fear, and without crying. Then you know you’ve come to heal.”

– Amber, 51

Storytelling as Healing

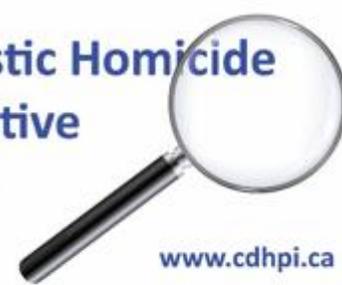
Healing Your Little

“I went and got my baby blanket and slept with the baby blanket instead and then moved onto a teddy bear and then... eventually I had, I had to go sit by water and skip rocks, I had to go draw the next week, and I had to go and I was doing all of these things that I really loved doing that and I did them in order for one week in chronology for every age, like I know that my inner teenager needs my inner grandmother to give her one more hour and then she has to do the dishes or my eight-year-old needs to, to go make some rocks skip on the water or my nineteen-year-old needs to do martial arts and so on and so forth. So, I guess healing my little helped me rediscover who I am and then from there I started discovering other littles, like my inner mentor, my inner superwoman and other things like that.” – Edith, 40



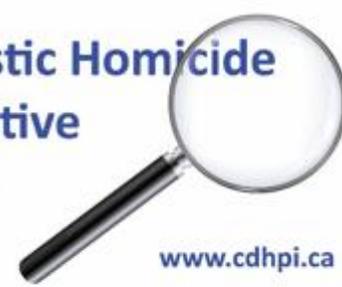
Discussion

- Indigenous Mothering was identified in the CDHPI database through the themes of comparative mothering, continuous hypervigilance, protective nurturance, pursuit of safety, and cultural recovery (Glecia & Moffitt, 2021).
- Although some findings resonate with published literature on mothering, some findings are unique to this study:
 - Comparative performance, identified as a cycle that parallels the cycle of violence, with nuances of normalizing and being normal within the concept of “good mother”.
 - Cultural recovery in RRN places, essential to the well-being of survivors and their cultural beliefs, practices, ceremonies and land-based healing. Serves to interrupt the cycle of comparative mothering.



Discussion Continued

- Continuous hypervigilance is a similar finding to attentive surveillance (Bentley et al., 2017) and vigilance (Wuest & Merritt- Gray, 2001) and acknowledges the efforts that Indigenous mothers take to scan the environment for ongoing dangers.
- Protective nurturance of their children is central to the Indigenous mothers experiencing violence, as reported in other studies exploring mothering during violence (Ateah et al., 2019; Herland, 2020; Pelad & Bark Gil, 2017) and mothering during substance abuse (Shahram et al., 2017).
- Pursuit of safety is propelled by the violent experience, self-preservation and mothering in RRN places where resources are limited. Mothers in the study reported learning about safety planning and implementing these plans, and generally about IPV when they went to shelters.



Implications

- Informal and Formal Supports – recommendations moving forward.
- Multigenerational abuse must be disrupted by recognition and internalization of the traditional roles of women in Indigenous communities – that is, respected and revered as givers of life. Resilience over Victimhood.
- Indigenous mothers report that drumming, ceremony, land experiences, and Elders’ teachings enhance their cultural identities, and self-efficacy of effective mothering under duress.
- The importance for emergency room clinicians to recognize traumatic brain injury and the importance of treatment and extended monitoring to help alleviate the effects of symptoms (Campbell et al., 2018; Hunnicutt et al., 2017) and educating women about the importance of being assessed for TBI and post-concussion; and teaching tactics to cover head with arms their head when being attacked and run away if possible (Monahan, 2018).
- Education: Early childhood education on self-worth and self-esteem; on what IPV looks like beyond physical abuse; education of those providing services (see point 1); Parenting classes and community activities with their children offer a safe place and should be culturally safe and trauma-informed.

Future Research related to Indigenous Mothering



- Difference b/w urban, RRN in terms of cultural recovery (U.I. ([Urban Indigenous] do not have as great of access to land but do have greater service provision access).
- What about the women who have died? The long-term effects on children of mothers who have been murdered.
- How do you support women for whom violence has been normalized, both internally and in the community? Addressing lateral violence.
- More research on the effects of traumatic brain injury/head injury in the context of IPV relationships.

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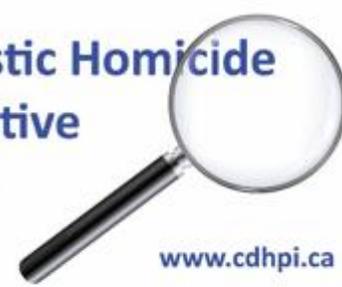
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