

The healing journey process: learning from the life stories of Indigenous women having experienced homelessness in Montreal and Val-d'Or

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Centre d'amitié
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Val-d'Or Native
Friendship
Centre



Regroupement
des centres d'amitié
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Conseil de recherches en
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DIALOG

Réseau de recherche et de connaissances
relatives aux peuples autochtones
Research and Knowledge Network Relating
to Aboriginal Peoples

Research context



Can we find ways to talk about homelessness that stop stigmatizing ; contribute to give back dignity?

Can we provide a portrait that centralizes the voices of those who experienced it and try to learn from their perspectives and experiences?

General Research Question & Objectives

How can be characterized the perspectives and life trajectories of Indigenous women having experienced homelessness in Montreal and Val-d'Or?

Document life events (from childhood to adulthood) : find similarities and differences within their stories

Highlight the sources of their resilience

Render visible the links between their lives and the great historical and contemporary complex of colonization (alliance between the State, the Church and Capital) in Canada, **but most particularly in QUEBEC**

Contribute to the renewal of the conceptual tools enabling us to understand indigenous homelessness



Val-d'Or

≈ 32000 inhab.; ≈ 7%
identified as
Indigenous (2011)

Montreal

≈ 2 millions inhab.;
less than 1%
identified as
Indigenous (2011)

Research methods



Qualitative-
inductive approach
to research

Life story interviews: Focus on women's articulation of the experiences that bear meaning to them, attention to emotions and memory

Contextualized analysis: Use of various written sources (historical accounts, government documents, petitions) in order to situate the stories of participants within the story of the family and the community and further linking those community stories to broader policies (land development and resources, reservations-settlement, christianization, residential schools, institutionalized discrimination of Indigenous women through the Indian Act, etc..)

Literature

- **intergenerational trauma** (Menzies 2009; Aboriginal Healing foundation, Brave Heart 1997, 2001, 2008; Yellow Bird 2013; Duran 1995; Sotero 2006)
- **Intersectional violence** (Clark 2012, Bilge and Collins 2016)



A collaborative process

1.

- Meetings with directors of VDNFC and NWSM
- Presentation of research and objectives
- Commitment to come back with results and find ways to make participation worthwhile
- Interest to participate?

2.

- Outreach workers identified women that could be potentially interested
- Rounds in areas of VD (parks, train tracks, la Piaule) and during the Morning Circle
- Poster on board

3.

- Meeting set up where project was presented: expectations, compensations, freedom to stop, confidentiality, etc...
- Proceed or agree to meet at some other time
- Verbatim were given back to women who expressed desire to get it

Profile of research participants



Participants living in Val-d'Or

7 women (aged 33 to 55yo)

6 originally from QC/ 1 western province
(adopted/scooped)

All had parents that were sent to RS

3 went to RS themselves

6/7 mothers (aver. 2,5 children)

Participants living in Montreal

7 women (aged 27 to 59yo)

3 originally from QC / 4 from western provinces

2 adopted- scooped

All had parents that were sent to RS

All mothers (aver. 3,5 children)



**WHAT CAN BE SAID ABOUT THE HEALING
JOURNEY OF THE PARTICIPANTS?**

Experiences of neglect during childhood stemming from RS experiences

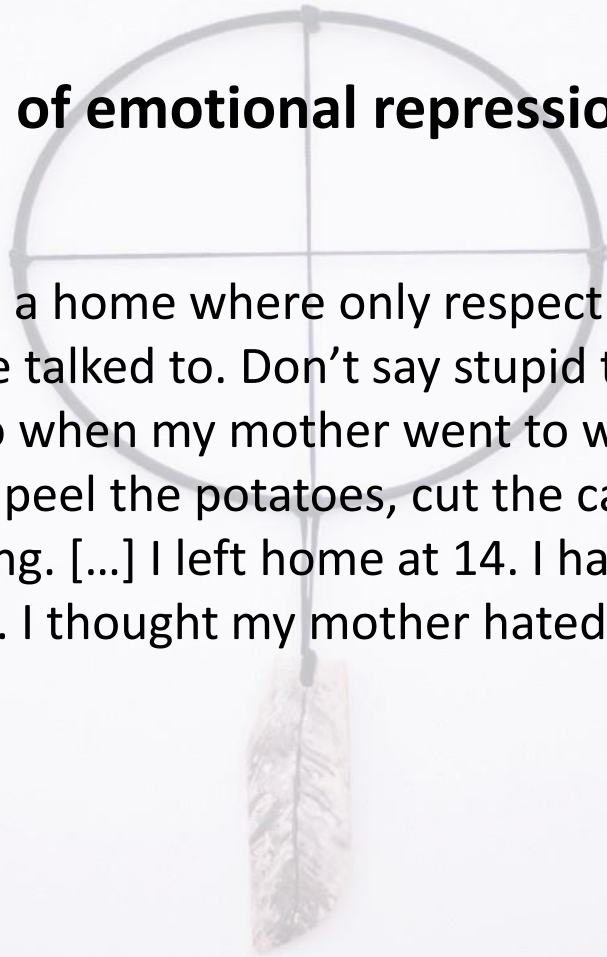


“With my dad, when he was doing good, we were doing good. But in general I think we preferred when he wasn’t there. I don’t remember everything very clearly, but something happened and **I’ll forever remember it. We had escaped but he had found us. We were in an abandoned house and he came to beat my mother up. I remember that event. It was so scary.** “

“My parents both went to residential schools. My step-dad and my mother I mean. **What they experienced there is their legacy to us. They didn’t have the parental skills and they neglected us.** Often times, they would leave to party for days. My mother was 25 and had 3 young kids. She couldn’t know how to care for her children because she was looking to fill her own needs to be loved.”

Experiences of emotional repression

“I come from a home where only respect has to pass. Only speak when you are talked to. Don't say stupid things. Very hard strict family. [...] So when my mother went to work, no matter how old I was, I had to peel the potatoes, cut the carrots, scrub the floors and everything. [...] I left home at 14. I had enough. I thought I was adopted. I thought my mother hated me.”



Prevalence of abuse: intersection of patriarchal and colonial violence

“And then I said to myself, I’m gonna tell my mom [about the sexual abuse I was enduring] and see what she is going to do about it.. [...] She didn’t do anything. She didn’t say anything. She just listened. And in my head, I was saying, « aren’t you going to say anything? » [...] at that point, **I started asking myself what is wrong with her. I know now that it had to do with her, growing up...**”

“**Youth protection came into my life because the government obliged us to go to school.** If that didn’t occur, I would have been abused, but perhaps less so. And the fact that I denounced my abusers and they didn’t believe me had massive impacts on my life afterwards.”

Being scooped and transplanted



“I remember being bullied, ignored. I think I have been depressed for as long as I can remember”

“I began school and there was a lot of racism. **I’ve been beaten because I was unlike the others. I didn’t know how to speak French at that time and I found it was hard.** I remember saying to myself, I’ll never be able to speak properly”.



Consequence: Being imbalanced and being unaware of it

“I spent my whole life living like a robot, feeling nothing.”

«My criminal offense didn't change my life. Looking back I realized that I haven't been well my entire life. I used to say to my kids when they were young to reach out and seek help. But I didn't follow my own advice. »



Consequence: Being imbalanced and being unaware of it

“I was meeting with different men that were dysfunctional for myself. I couldn’t find the right man. And trying to fit in everywhere I went. So I started coming through these doors. Going to treatment centers. See specialists in every way I can to develop new skills to cope with I wouldn’t come out from. (...) That led me to homelessness.”

“Its only today that I’m starting to speak to someone about my marriage, my divorce and all the abuse I’ve experienced. With a social worker I mean. I’m tired of these panic attacks; I’ve had them ever since I was with him. I’ve never been at ease with him.”

Life paths marked by relationships and teachings fostering resilience

1-Caring relationships during youth

“ My grandmother, she was the one who was loving me unconditionally. When she died, I couldn’t stay, I couldn’t bear looking at her house. For years after I have been depressed, **longing so badly for feeling again as complete as I did when she was with me.** ”

“At 13yo I met a lady who held a foster home with only girls in it. I liked the idea and I went there. She kept me until I was 16. **Very kind, spiritually oriented lady. She passed away now but I keep very good memories of her.**”



Life paths marked by relationships and teachings fostering resilience

2-Relationships with –elders, healers, social workers, peers, family members, new found relatives- adult life

“It was the identity crisis that affected me. I didn’t know who I was. I was lost. **Working with indigenous organizations**, I’ve become better able to self-identify by seeing some of myself in others. Before that, I felt alone, like I was the only one in the same situation that I was in. I had no means to understand my life story.”

“I met... now this is amazing. My mother died when I was a baby. I met her mother! [...] Now THAT was amazing. THAT was amazing to me that I met her mother. [...] It was incredible. I purposely got to know my aunts and uncles. And we were very close. As close as you can be when you are thousand miles apart. You know what I mean? “

Life paths marked by relationships and teachings fostering resilience

3-Practices fostering inner connection, letting go and re-birth

“ I could either be on the streets or here. I seek balance every day, how to go through what I need to work on myself, from the wounds that I kept. Stayed quiet about them. And when I see my grandkids. **I'll do anything to get better. I will not pass this on to them. Especially the youngest ones.**”

“I met with the traditional healer. He said: what's going on with your skin? I've psoriasis. I have it all over pretty badly. [...] And he said that (the trauma of having been scooped)'s manifesting from you not letting it out. That's why its happening to you. **From that day forward, I've really decided to let it out. Whatever is in me, I let it out.** [...] I never done that before. “

The healing journey process: not linear!

Circles of awareness (individual level)





Conclusion: What can we learn from research participants stories about how to support the healing journey process?

1-Value the source of strengths and resilience of the women experiencing homelessness

2-Contribute to raise awareness about what is violence, what forms it takes

3-Increase resources for organizations that offer a variety of practices that foster inner knowing- healing (Indigenous and non indigenous)

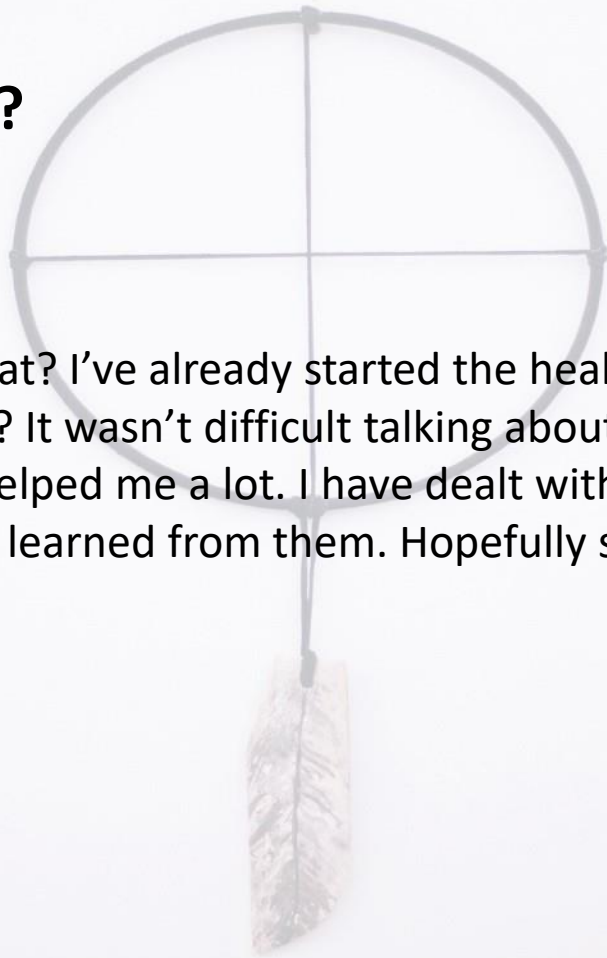
4-Promote Indigenous womens' right to self-determine. (combatting the idea that Indigenous women are unfit to take care of and determine what is healthy for themselves and their families)

5-Acknowledge the impacts of Intergenerational trauma on IW and accept responsibility for past and current colonial policies

6- Transform the youth protection system to stop the intergenerational transmission of Trauma

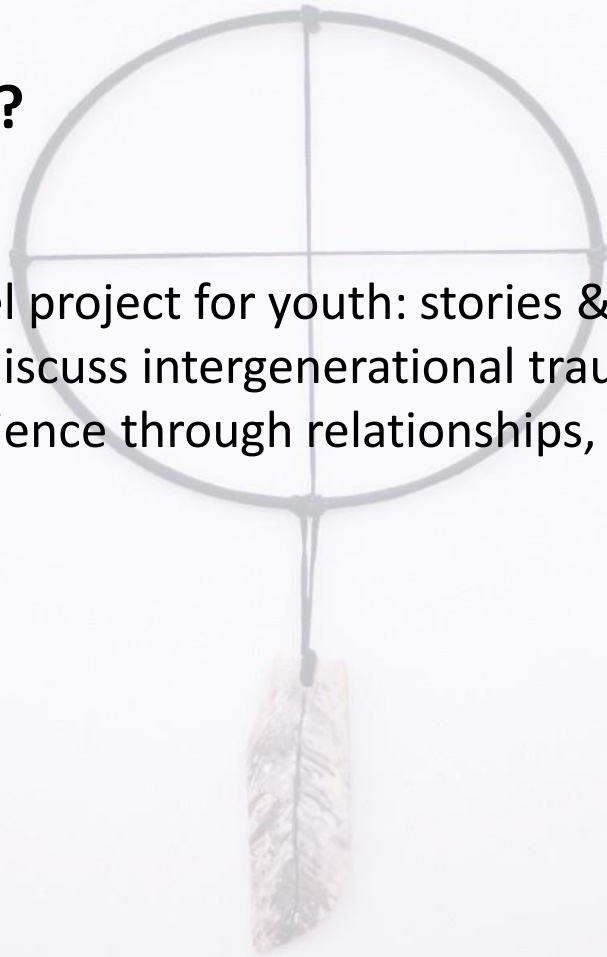
What next?

“You know what? I’ve already started the healing process of my background. So what can I say? It wasn’t difficult talking about it. Like I said, with the women shelter, they helped me a lot. I have dealt with those pains. So I have come to accept them. I learned from them. Hopefully somebody else is gonna learn from it”



What next?

Graphic novel project for youth: stories & experiences would be woven together to discuss intergenerational trauma, leveraging culture for healing, resilience through relationships, etc...





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Miigwech, Merci, Thank you!