

Ethical Considerations & Reflections On Community-Based Research with Indigenous Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Dr. Mikaela Gabriel & Dr. Sabina Mirza

Introductions

- Researcher positionality – who are we?
- **Dr. Mikaela Gabriel**
 - Mik(aela)of the Mi'kma'ki & Italian
- **Dr. Sabina Mirza**
 - South Asian descent
- Positionality/Location of self in research
- Why is this reflexivity important?





Our Research

- **Dr. Mikaela Gabriel:** Employment and Education Pathways: Exploring Traditional Knowledges Supports for Transitions Out of Homelessness for Indigenous Peoples

&

- **Dr. Sabina Mirza:** Exploring Schooling And Educational Attainment Through The Experiences Of Homeless Youth

What Our Research Explored

We both had dissertations on youth experiencing homelessness

- **Mikaela:** Indigenous youth and life transitions into urban centres
- **Sabina:** youth homelessness and barriers to education, that had a strong portion (just over 25%) of the population that were Indigenous

How can we change things through listening to Indigenous youth?

How can we learn about homelessness prevention from the voices of youth?



- Indigenous Peoples of all ages (i.e., children, youth, adults, and elderly) are represented among drop-in shelters across Canada
- Indigenous Peoples face multiple health and housing barriers that negatively impact their trajectory to street living
 - Poverty/economic instability, service access, literacy weaknesses, discrimination, colonization, **addictions and mental health**, and intergenerational trauma due to residential schools that impact successful transitions to housing
- Yet **little is known** about Indigenous Peoples' experiences of living on the streets, and even less has is known about those who survive and thrive in street life settings, despite mental health obstacles

This research sought to contribute new insights to understanding the immediate and pressing issues facing these Indigenous People, so that appropriate health services and policies can be mobilized.



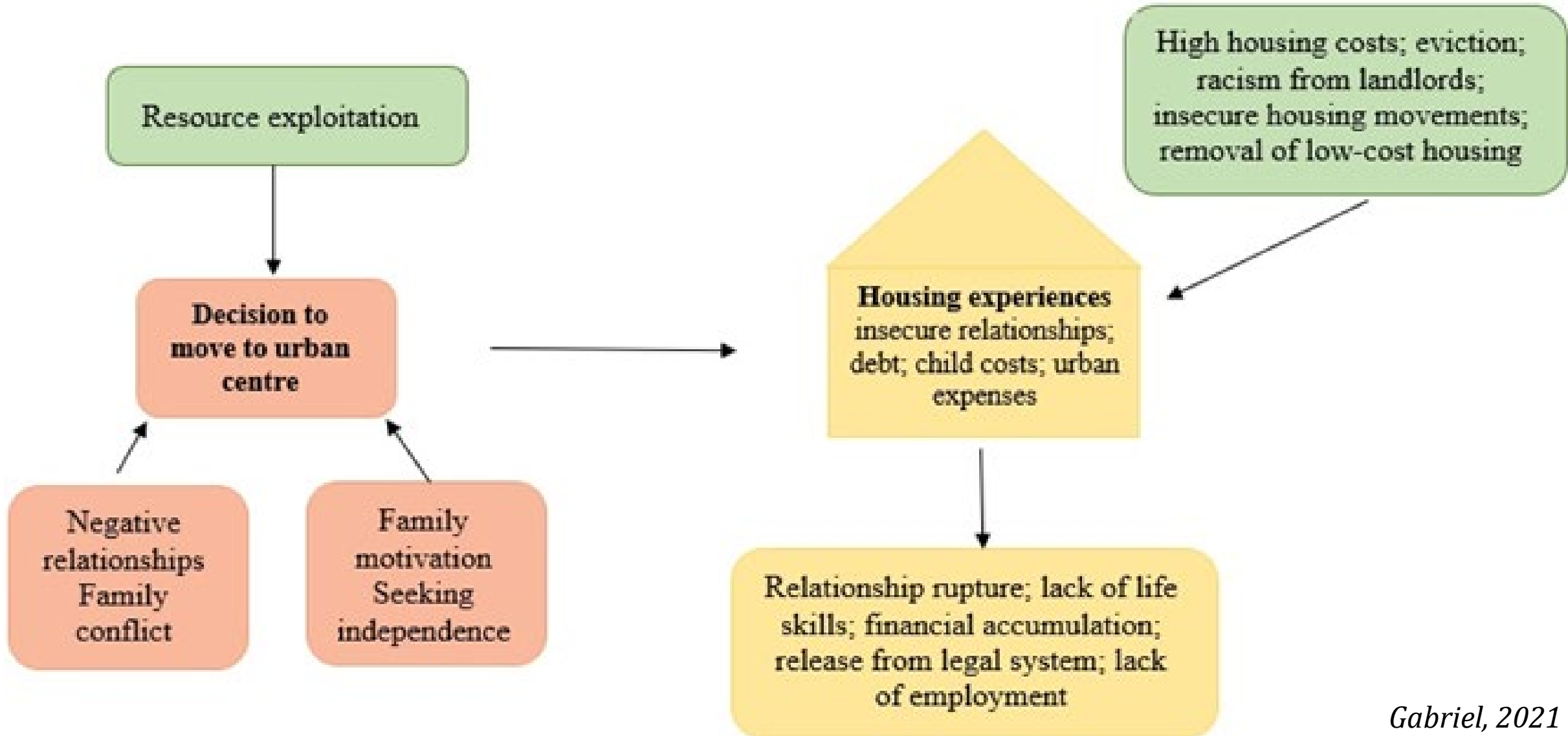
Pathways into Homelessness for Indigenous Youth

- Disproportionate rates of homelessness are present and persistent
- Homelessness for Indigenous youth rooted in colonization and ongoing systemic racism, oppression & intergenerational trauma
- Creates disparities in health, employment and education
- The gravity of these historical events and factors have dire impacts on Indigenous youths' health, mental health, and life transitions



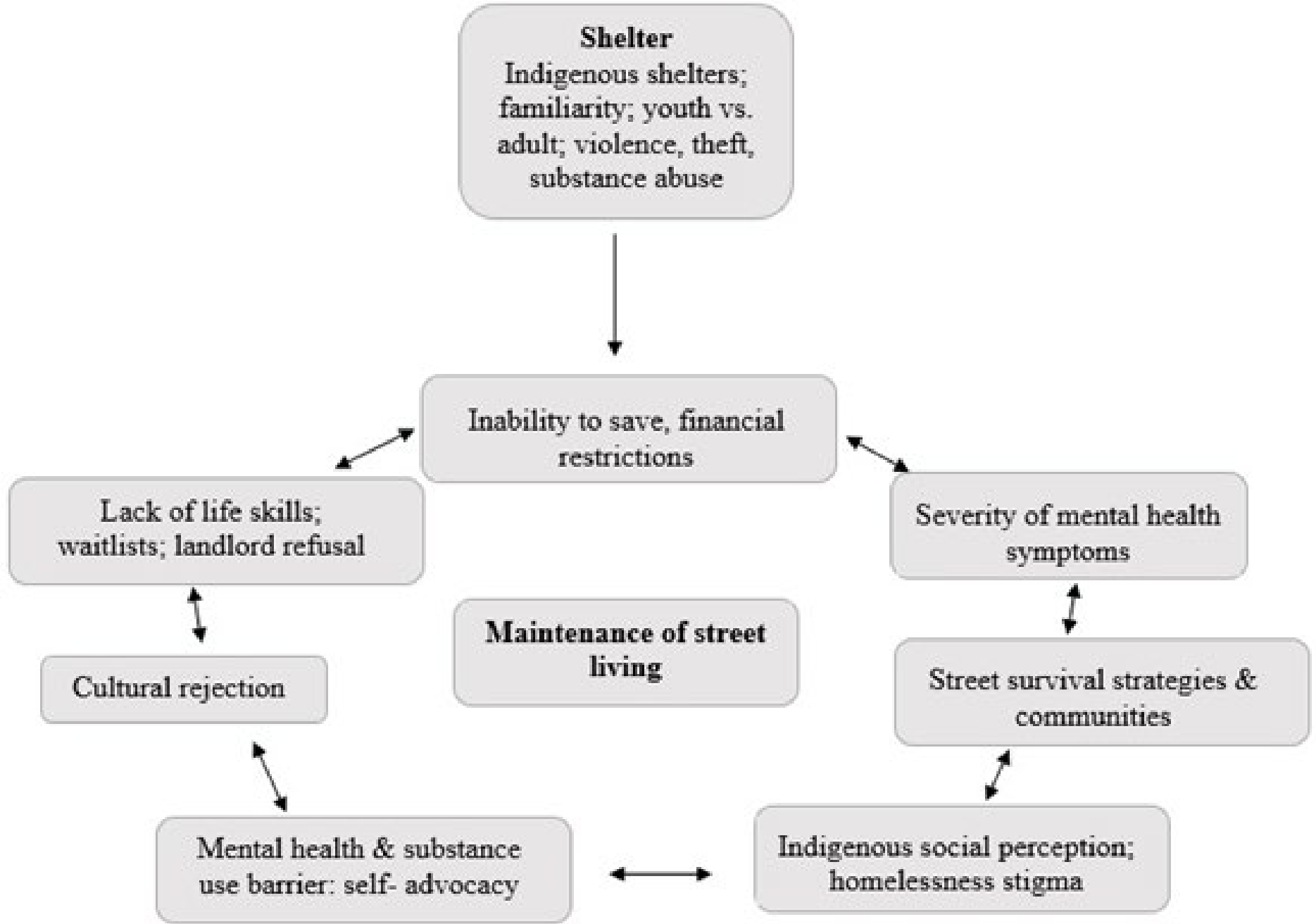
Reserve Life & Urban Living

This study explored and expanded on transitions and pathways that contributed to insecure living, illustrated here



Housing Difficulties & Street Living

Of those participants that experienced homelessness, the following maintenance factors contributed to street living and movement from shelter services





Key Conclusions

This study originally sought to explore life transition needs for Indigenous homeless clients, however, it also offered insights into:

Elders:

community value, teachings, and insights into meaningful approach into supporting community members. Their teachings can guide models for program delivery and training

Employment:

the role of community in providing training and employment opportunities

Education:

the value of Indigenous student spaces; identity factors; impact of underfunding for Indigenous education centres; financial impact for accessing school; need for scholarships in life transitions

Homelessness:

Indigenous perspectives on housing loss, structures, and living arrangements; need for Indigenous shelters; community vulnerabilities; service barriers and waitlists

Programming:

benefit, enjoyment, and skill building; referrals and connections

Policy:

Funding barriers; cultural safety needs and training; the price of miseducation in community and service providers

Sabina: Highlights of the Research Results

- **FAMILY LIFE:** For many youth in this study (60%), homelessness is the much **safer option** than remaining at home.
- **SHELTER AND SUPPORTS:** About 80% of study youth felt there should be more services and resources available in York Region, as the region as **there are not enough supports.**
- **MENTAL HEALTH:** Of major concern, is that 80% of the youth described **feeling down, depressed, or hopeless** on several days of the week.
- **EDUCATION/SCHOOLING:** Of the 40 youth I interviewed, 30 (75%) **were *not* attending school** at the time of interview and those who were attending, almost half of them said they were having difficulty remaining in school.





Safe Sharing Spaces

Indigenous Peoples, wellbeing, and life transitions in urban spaces are complex; greatly impacted by the intergenerational transmission of colonial trauma

Much more information is needed to address Indigenous homelessness in cities across Canada in to best understand and support life transition needs

Previous research in Indigenous communities has been extractive, exploitative, and interpreted out of context & without community consent

How do we conduct safe research?

(Benoit, Carroll, & Chaudhry, 2003; Cochran et al., 2008; Cove, 1987; First Nations Centre, 2007; Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2001; Marshall & Stewart, 2004; Menzies, 2001; Smith, 1999, p. 59.)

Research Analysis: Flexible & Thorough Approaches



Big results with broad interpretations, but how do we get here?



Mixed methods (ethnography, surveys and interviews) provide more comprehensive understandings & rich accounts of young peoples lives



Narrative and Thematic analysis of life stories is a thorough process of learning, unlearning, analyzing and interpreting to best understand



Using and including transcripts verbatim to stay as close to the words of youth as possible when disseminating the research



Building Relationships In Person...

- Methods & Approaches
- **Mixed / Diverse methodological approaches**
- **Ethnography** (spending time amidst the community)
- Surveys (Provides specificities such as demographic info)
- Interviews (Allows for re-telling of life stories)
- Anonymity and confidentiality must always be maintained
- **Re-engage with the community after research is over**
- Gaining feedback on the research results can be hard as homelessness is so precarious and we faced the revolving door of shelters



Safe Spaces in Research: 1 on 1

- **Active listening**
 - "tell me more about that"
 - Listen to understand, not to respond
 - Summarizing
 - Reflections
- **Trauma-informed care**
 - Highlighting autonomy
 - Reviewing consent & options
 - Provision of supports
- **Strengths & solutions focused**
 - Highlighting their strengths
 - Relating to supports
 - Identifying positive traits

Reflections on Self-Location & Identification

- **Indigenous & Non-Indigenous Researchers**

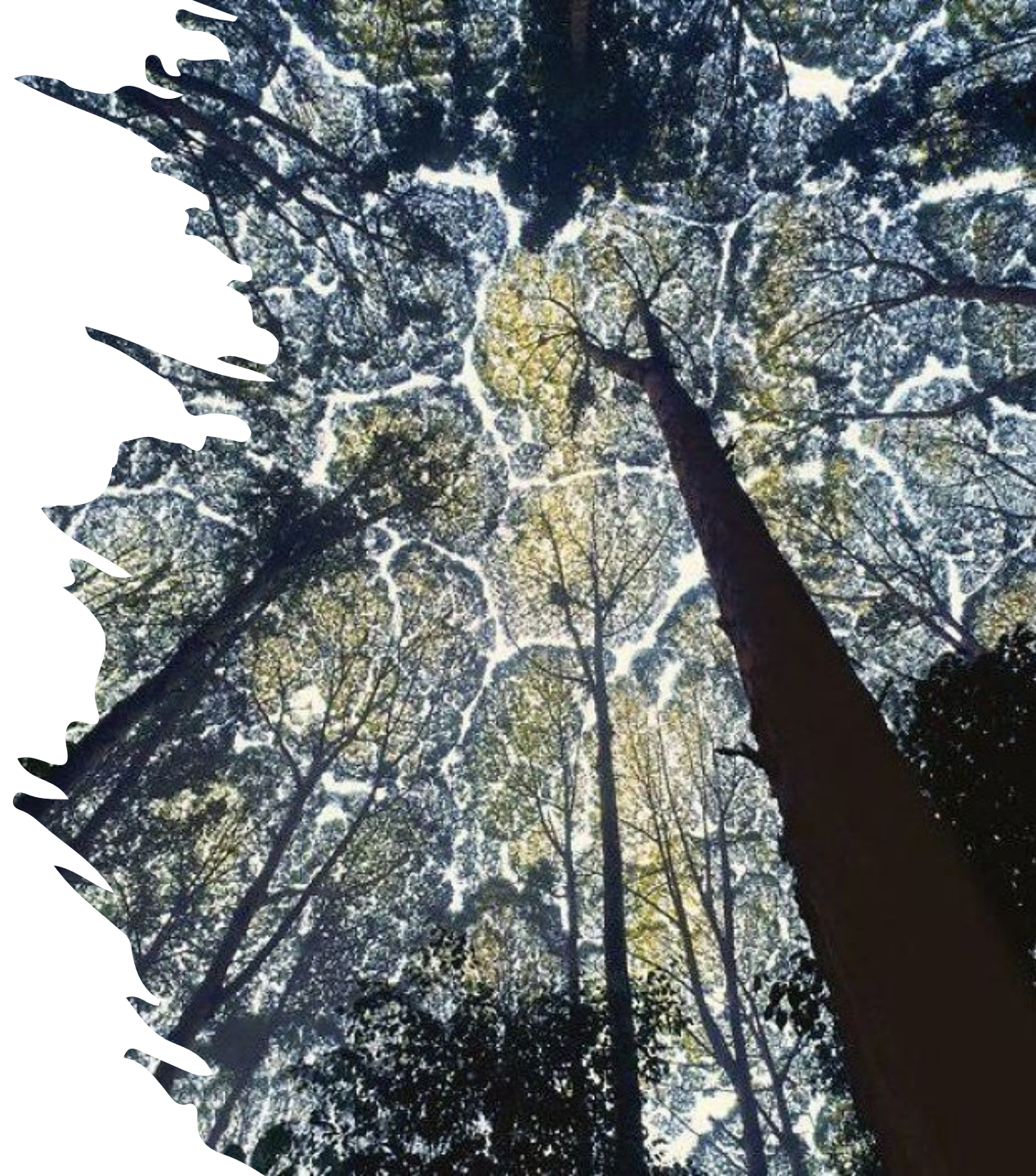
Sabina faced institutional barriers when doing research (ex. Not much on cultural safety beyond guides and manuals on how to engage in research with Indigenous people and Homeless people)

Sabina aimed to minimize harm to youth participants by providing resources and supports

How do you practice cultural safety when youth don't self-identify? A lot of additional time must be spent in the field to establish trust, relationships and connections with Indigenous youth

- **Mixed heritage and identification**

- Identification and reflection with youth
- Point of sharing and meaningful rapport building
- Personal reflections around identity





Building Relationships...On Zoom

- When conducting virtual interviews and connections, there's a few recommendations
- Smudge
- Identification and location of self, connection to community
- Trauma-informed skills
 - Reviewing procedures, purposes, processes
 - Connection to resources
 - Being keenly aware to change in affective state
 - Highlighting **strengths and skills** throughout the interview



Building Relationships...by Zoom

- COVID-19 impacted in-person recruitment and presentation
- Recruitment occurred through worker referral from community partner, as well as community connections through friends
- Rapport
 - Appropriate use of humour
 - Engagement of extra time
 - Connection and questioning
 - Identification of supports in case





Safe Spaces in Research: Community

- Community partnership
- Community-driven research
- Ensure supports are available for youth after the research is done

Trauma-Informed

The absence of cultural safety and trauma-informed care and interaction is not neutral interaction; it is **active harm**

Needs for Indigenous communities includes:

- 1) Community connection
- 2) Transfer of trust
- 3) Community presence (ongoing)

Research Considerations

- While methods are important in accurately answering the questions we ask, when it comes to specific populations or specific histories, we need to make sure it's done in safe ways
- The best kind of research **teaches us things** and **helps others**
- It should help us **understand the world** and **maybe a bit of ourselves in it**



- Take Aways-

- Indigenous youth homelessness is shaped by a **complex, unjust, racist & oppressive history of colonization**; always keep this in mind!
- **Having a home is a human right**; remember that you are engaging in research with youth who have no home. They are suffering from loss, be compassionate and considerate.
- **Indigenous Ways of Knowing & Indigenous Knowledges** needed in research and in homelessness / mental health interventions

Mural by [Paula Tikay](#) and [Aner Urra](#)





Questions to consider...

- What are some of the big take-aways about youth research?
- Why is positionality and reflexivity important?
- Why is it important to act with safety & consideration with certain populations?
- How can we keep gathering knowledge in a safe way?





Thank you for listening

**“Youth homelessness ...needs to
change and that’s why I’m helping
conduct this research”**

**(Craig, age 23, Indigenous & Mixed-Race
Youth)**

**We Welcome Your Questions &
Comments**