






Evaluating Facilitators' Experience Delivering a Stress-Reducing Intervention for Indigenous Women with and without HIV

BACKGROUND

The ongoing effects of settler colonialism and the embedded systemic discrimination therein contribute to inequities in health services and outcomes among Indigenous people living in Canada. Indigenous people also encounter increased health-related stressful life experiences such as socioeconomic insecurities related to housing, food, income, employment, and education [1]. These inequities and experiences have led to the disproportionate rates of HIV among Indigenous women [1, 2, 3].

STUDY DESIGN

The Indigenous Women's Stress Study was a six-month, single-arm intervention trial that was delivered bi-weekly with Indigenous women living in Thunder Bay.

-  15-minute autogenic training relaxation techniques
-  Educational and strength-based cultural activities
-  20–45-minute guided imagery relaxation exercises

FACILITATORS' EXPERIENCE

The team conducted a focus group to elicit feedback from the intervention's facilitators. The objective was to evaluate the intervention to better understand the experiences of facilitators, how they described the program's strengths and challenges, and the extent to which the intervention was seen as being feasible and useful in a real-world setting as a part of community programming through a non-profit service organization.

REACH



- **Organizational Community Building:** sessions drove engagement and built trust within the community.
- **Connections:** participants built friendships and communities of support.
- **Stigma Reduction:** reduced changes in perceived levels of stigma among their participants without HIV and shifts in comfort among those participants living with HIV

"And I think it's given some of the women, some of the [HIV] positive women, like a lot more confidence to talk about it [HIV], to be open and to be that role model for other people."

EFFECTIVENESS



- **Facilitator Development:** improved confidence in leadership and technical skills, increased ability to navigate difficult conversations, and skills development as a member of both the research and non-profit teams.
- **Participant Development:** intervention participants displayed improved leadership and communication skills, increased confidence, and newfound social ease.
- **Elder & Knowledge Carrier Development:** growth as "mentors" and opportunities to pull the intervention participants out of their comfort zone or help to encourage them as leaders in their own right.

"I didn't think [cries] that I could be in that role [of facilitator]. So, it was empowering to know that I can do this, and people trust me."

IMPLEMENTATION AND ADOPTION



- **Accessibility:** the intervention was adaptable, including considerations to physical limitations and skill levels, and looking to participants for direction on activities.
- **Challenges for the Non-Profit:** research study setting made for stricter participation rules than typical non-profit program settings.
- **Connecting to Indigenous Culture:** changes in Indigenous cultural knowledge or where intervention participants were able to connect with each other through culture.

"I think if we ever did [change activities] it was just to go with the flow or to meet people's schedules."

WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS

- Our findings demonstrate that interventions aimed at reducing stress among Indigenous women facing socioeconomic insecurity, including those living with HIV, are feasible in real-world settings.
- Focus group analysis shows that facilitators who deliver the intervention grow as leaders, and participants of the intervention are likely to engage in other health and wellbeing programs offered by the community partner hosting the intervention.

To learn more, see the article: Quelch J, Jackson R, Toombs E, Robinson M, Serghides L, Aker A, Gauvin H, Sinoway C, Barkman L, Mushquash C, Gesink D, Amirault M, Benoit AC. 2023. Evaluating facilitators' experience delivering a stress-reducing intervention for Indigenous women with and without HIV. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, vol 2023. doi: 10.1155/2023/9219287

[1] Phillips-Beck, W. et al., "Early-life origins of disparities in chronic diseases among Indigenous youth: pathways to recovering health disparities from intergenerational trauma," *Developmental Origins of Health and Disease*, 2019.
[2] Park, J. et al., "Avoidable mortality among First Nations adults in Canada: a cohort analysis," *Health Reports*, 2015.
[3] Jardine, M. et al., "Digging deep: barriers to HIV care among Indigenous women," *Turtle Island Journal of Indigenous Health*, 2021.