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Final Report

Mite Achimowin (Heart-Talk) First Nations Women's Expressions of Heart Health: Decolonizing research methods and knowledge through community-based digital storytelling

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Prairie Research Centre

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The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: www.uakn.org



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Abstract:

A digital storytelling study collaborated with Manitoba First Nations (FN) women with lived experience of caring for a biomedical diagnosed heart condition. The objective was to identify and locate concepts, language, and experiences of heart health among FN women. Six women created five digital stories; four are available publically online. Themes addressed by the storytellers include: changes to diet and lifestyle, related health conditions, experiences with healthcare system, residential schools, and relationships with children and grandchildren. The intersection of Western and Indigenous knowledges heard in the women's stories suggests mite knowledge and care is embedded within a historical and social context. Insights into the non-dichotomous relationship between Indigenous and biomedical heart health, along with their conceptualizations of heart reveals historical and social roots of heart health issues Indigenous women face.

Literature Review/Conceptual Framework/How Research is Community-Driven: Research Question/Objectives:

This study first located heart health concepts from First Nations women using a two-eyed seeing approach. The study drew on Indigenous and Western methodologies to guide research strategies of learning circles, and the tradition of oral storytelling.

This digital storytelling study collaborated with Manitoba First Nations (FN) women with lived experience of caring for a biomedical diagnosed heart condition; either their own heart condition or caring for someone with this diagnosis. Two primary objectives guided the study: 1) to identify and locate concepts, language, and experiences of heart health among FN women; 2) to share the digital stories with healthcare professional students and engage in a dialogue.

Methodology:

As an arts-based research method that combines oral history and storytelling with digital technologies, each digital storyteller produced a recorded three to five minute story that incorporates the storyteller's own stories, words, photos, music, and video. Indigenized digital storytelling method adds ceremony, feasts, and sharing or learning circles in lieu of a discussion group.

Results/Findings:

Produced Digital Stories

- The six women storytellers created five digital stories and four are publically available on the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health website in the Social Determinants of Health category:

The link is: https://www.cnsa-nccah.ca/563/mite_achimowin_-_Heart_Talk.nccah

The storytellers addressed a variety of influences that have impacted the heart health of FN people including: transitions from traditional to westernized lifestyles and diets; trauma of residential schools; racism in healthcare; subjugation of culturally-rooted medicines, and economic and geographic marginalization. In particular, the storytellers talked about how trauma affected their families and broken relationships. Women attributed maintaining or restoring heart health to positive, meaningful, engaging relationships in all aspects of life – one’s friends and family, with health professionals, medicine, food, lifestyle, one’s ability to make a living, spirit, culture, community, and land.

- *Voices from the Field*, a podcast produced by the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAH), which focuses on innovative research and community-based initiatives promoting the health and well-being of First Nation, Inuit and Metis peoples in Canada. EPISODE 4 **mite achimowin (Heart Talk): First Nations Women Expressions of Heart Health study**
<https://soundcloud.com/nccah-cnsa/voices-field-heart-talk>

Discussion, Knowledge Mobilization Activities, Recommendations: (please include a narrative from the community perspective)

Knowledge Translation Activities:

- November 23, 2016 4th Annual Indigenous Health Research Symposium hosted by the Manitoba First Nations Centre for Aboriginal Health Research (MFN CAHR)
- November 26, 2016 CBC interview with Terry McLeod
- November 26, 2016 CBC article
- April 29, 2017 *mite achimowin* Heart Talk: First Nations Women Expressions of Heart Health Digital stories for Medical Education *Creating Spaces 2017 Dreaming the Myth Onward – The Stories We Don’t Always Tell* Winnipeg, Convention Centre
- October 26, 2017 Reflections on mite achimowin: First Nations Women Expressions of Heart Health - An Indigenized Digital Storytelling Research Study PEKE Webinar,
- May 20, 2017, 13th international Congress of Qualitative Inquiry Congress University of Illinois Urbana Champagne
- September 2017, Voices from the Field: Podcasts on the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health

- May 18, 2018 Research Day event for the Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute, University of Manitoba; Dr. Todd Duhamel, Associate Dean (Research and Graduate Studies) Faculty of Kinesiology
- October 2018, Paper, Mite Achimowin: Digital stories of Manitoba First Nations Women's Expressions of Heart Health" submitted to the journal International Journal of Circumpolar Health

A sample of comments from the First Nation women storytellers about Heart Health:

Changes to Diet

Storytellers' believed that colonial-imposed interferences to diet contribute to the *mite* of Indigenous peoples:

I think most of us come from hunters and gatherers, fishermen. And we lived off the land, and that was our... that was how we lived. We lived a healthy life. We had berries. We didn't have any sugar in our diets, at least when I was growing up in my family. Living off the land was really... it was hard but it was physical as well.

One woman discussed gardening foods like potatoes, carrots, and turnips with her grandfather that would be prepared by her grandmother while she played outside. Further, she would eat goose, duck, moose, fish, rabbit and beaver that was hunted by her extended family members. When her grandparents passed away her mother would buy store-bought food instead, which was less healthy. Another woman reiterated the impact of grocery stores:

The language, the family life was all very traditional and wonderful. And then the changes happened with introduction of foods – Hudson Bay Stores and then the schools, and all the changes that happened.

Changes to Lifestyle

Connected closely to changes in diet, movement away from traditionally active lifestyles to sedentary lifestyles was identified as problematic for maintaining good heart health. For example, the transition from walking everywhere to driving in vehicles was mentioned as a necessary aspect of contemporary life, but it was also felt to be to the detriment of the health of Indigenous peoples. Travelling by canoe was mentioned as a traditional activity that kept both the body and the mind active, demonstrating the holistic ways health can be viewed. The gathering of water and food were also identified as traditional ways to keep active. Further, Childminding younger children by older siblings were identified as a way to keep holistically healthy through activity and connection to others.

We're not connected to people the way that we were. We're not connected to the land, certainly, the way we were. So it's a whole host of things that we have gone through over the years that has affected our heart. It's not only diet, it's that

whole aspect of looking at health in a holistic way. We don't have that anymore. We have maybe parts of us, but certainly not the way that we used to have at one time.

Related Health Conditions

The intersections between heart health and diabetes, as well heart health and smoking were brought up by the women.

With the diabetes health, of course, one of the complications is heart. So with all the diabetes that are going around in our communities, and the obesity and all of that stuff, heart health definitely is a factor that we have to address.

And part of this, like you say, we never had it years ago. But then, since this technology and everything coming in, there's a lot of cigarettes, number one.

Experiences with Healthcare System

All storytellers had experiences with various facets of the mainstream healthcare system. Many of these experiences involved seeking care for their own heart health or family members' heart health, though many women spoke of the healthcare system more broadly as well. Experiences of both overt interpersonal racism were described, as well as, epistemological racism wherein the women described how their medicines and worldviews were regarded as invalid by the healthcare system.

One woman described an incident when she was working among a predominantly non-Indigenous staffed health care setting where she would hear racist comments about Indigenous patients:

Our people were really looked down on, and were not treated very well by some of the nurses. Some of the nurses were good, but some of them weren't. And they acted or spoke – sometimes I think they thought I didn't understand or didn't hear me – I'd hear them talking about our people. Like we didn't have feelings?

Another woman described a relative's experience of trying to access healthcare; he was turned away due to the healthcare worker's belief that nothing was wrong with him other than alcohol abuse, an attitude which stems from racist stereotypes:

I lost (a family member). He did drink a lot. And anyway, he got sick and every time he went to the Nursing Station, the nurse in charge there told him, he said, 'Oh, you have a severe hangover,' without checking him. And he went about three, I know three times for sure, whether the fourth time, I can't remember. But anyway, they kept chasing him home, 'There's nothing wrong with you. You're just... quit drinking, get, you're... hung over, you know. Anyway, he died one night in...his home.

Residential Schools

Storytellers explicitly identified their and their family's experience with residential schools as a factor that has affected their *mite*.

I think one of the things that I see that really changed our lives was the residential school. Our whole world turned upside down.

Residential schools produced fractured relationships between children and their parents or children and their grandparents. This had an impact on both the children's and the adults' health and wellbeing, as in this example of residentially-schooled children who lost the ability to speak and understand the only language their grandparents spoke:

So there was that gap again, and it was hurtful in the heart, to our grandparents because they couldn't speak to their grandchildren. That caused stress for grandparents as well. Hard stress for them.

Relationships with Children and Grandchildren

Interrelated to the above discussion of residential schools and the identified connection the schools have had to intergenerational relationships, the women described reconnecting or strengthening relationships with children and grandchildren as a mode of healing the heart. The storytellers discussed these relationships as having an effect on both physically and holistically healing the heart. That is, their relationship with younger generations was the purpose for engaging in physical activity and physically caring for their hearts:

I'm just tryin' to keep my heart healthy for my grandkids. They keep me going.

Relationships with children and grandchildren had broader implications for the heart health of many of the women:

The Creator gave them a seed for my heart to start; that's how I look at it. And this is, the heart is still beating. And I give my heart to my children and the heart's still going, and for their children. They're all beating. From the Creator to my parents. And this is what I call my heart, and it's still going. And I'm thankful for that.

...the traditional teachings to pass on to our children and grandchildren, is the drum. You know, the heartbeat of the nation, is the heartbeat of yourself, community, and all that we see as traditional people. I think that's the first thing I'd say, as opposed to the physical heart