Exploring the Health Experiences of Indigenous Trans, Two-Spirit and Gender Diverse Communities: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

This scoping review addresses the range of existing research on the health and experiences with health services of Indigenous gender diverse, trans, and two-spirit people. This review has been drafted by the Indigenous Leadership Group, under the Trans PULSE Canada project, that brings expertise in the form of research, practice, and lived experience to move this work forward. Using a scoping review methodology, existing knowledge in the literature was collaboratively and systematically searched, selected and synthesized. Four major themes emerged from the preliminary findings. Firstly, the literature highlights critical approaches to understanding traditional Indigenous gender identity and diversity. Secondly, findings yield information on health experiences related to spirituality and the physical, social, sexual, emotional, and mental health of this community. Thirdly, ongoing experiences of stigma, transphobia, violence, and discrimination to this community are reflected in findings. Lastly, findings point to the experiences with health-related services and explore practice and policy implications. The objectives of this presentation are to 1) disseminate findings from this review to respond to the knowledge gaps in the literature and 2) demonstrate the review's importance as it aims to expand on the limited knowledge of this topic and guide the development of an Indigenous qualitative study that uses decolonizing methodologies. In advancing the state of knowledge, findings may lead to improved health experiences and service delivery.

Introduction

Rationale

- Literature on the health of trans, two-spirit, and gender diverse Indigenous people is scarce. This scoping review addresses the range and nature of existing research on the health and experiences with health services of Indigenous gender diverse, trans, and two-spirit people to systematically map research completed in this topic and to identify gaps in knowledge and research implications.

- The review is being conducted by the Indigenous Leadership Group of Trans PULSE Canada, a national community-based research study.

Objectives

- To explore the extent, range, and nature of existing research on the health and health care experiences of Indigenous Trans, non-binary and two-spirit people

- Expand knowledge in this field and identify future research recommendations to guide a follow-up qualitative study that uses Indigenous ways of knowing and decolonizing methodologies.

Methods

Eligibility Criteria

- Date range: 2005-present (search reference list for prior work)
- Global search: Limited to North American context
- Language: English
- Source type: Scholarly Articles, Books, Book Chapters, Dissertations/Theses, Peer-Reviewed

Methods

Table 1: Search Terms

Population Group	Gender Identity	Health/Wellness/Wellbeing
Indigen* OR Aborig* OR Native* OR "First Nation*" OR "First-nation*" OR "1st Nation*" OR "1st-nation*" OR Inuit* OR Inuk* OR Metis OR "Native* Alaska*" OR "Alaska* Native*" OR "Native* Of Alaska*" OR "America* Native*" OR "Native* Of America*" OR "Native* America*" OR "America* Indian*" OR "Indian* America*" OR "Indian* Of America*" OR Amerindian* OR Amerindien* OR "Status Indian*" OR "Non-status Indian*" OR Autochtone OR Maori	Transgender* OR Transpeople* OR Transperson* OR Transsexual* OR Transexual* OR "Gender Variant" OR "Genderqueer" OR Intersex* OR "Two Spirit*" OR "Twospirit*" OR "Two-spirit*" OR "2 Spirit*" OR "2-spirit" OR "Twin Spirit*" OR "Twinspirit*" OR "Middle Person" OR "Gender Diverse" OR "Gender Fluid*" OR "Gender Non-conform*" OR "Non-binary" OR Agender* OR Enby OR "Gender Role" OR "Third Gender"	Health* OR Communit* OR Wellness* OR Holistic OR Wholistic OR "Alternative Medic*or Practice* OR Approach* OR Therap*" OR "Well Being" OR "(Social OR Indigenous) Determinants Of Health)" OR Medic* OR Care OR Counsel* OR Cop* OR Resilience OR "Social Theory" OR Ecosocial OR Bioecological OR Bronfenbrenner OR "Ecological Systems Theory"

Figure 1: Selection of Sources of Evidence[6]

Identification
- Records identified through databases (Web of Science, CINAHL, Ovid Medline, Embase, PsycINFO, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, iPortal Indigenous Studies Portal Research Tool) (n = 3,641)
- Additional records identified through other sources (n = 60)

- Records after duplicates removed (n = 1,107)

Screening
- Records screened (n = 137)
- Records excluded (n = 970)

Eligibility
- Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 47)
- Full-text articles excluded (n = 90)

Included
- Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n = 47)
- Studies included in quantitative synthesis (meta-analysis) (n =N/A)

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram for the scoping review process.[6]
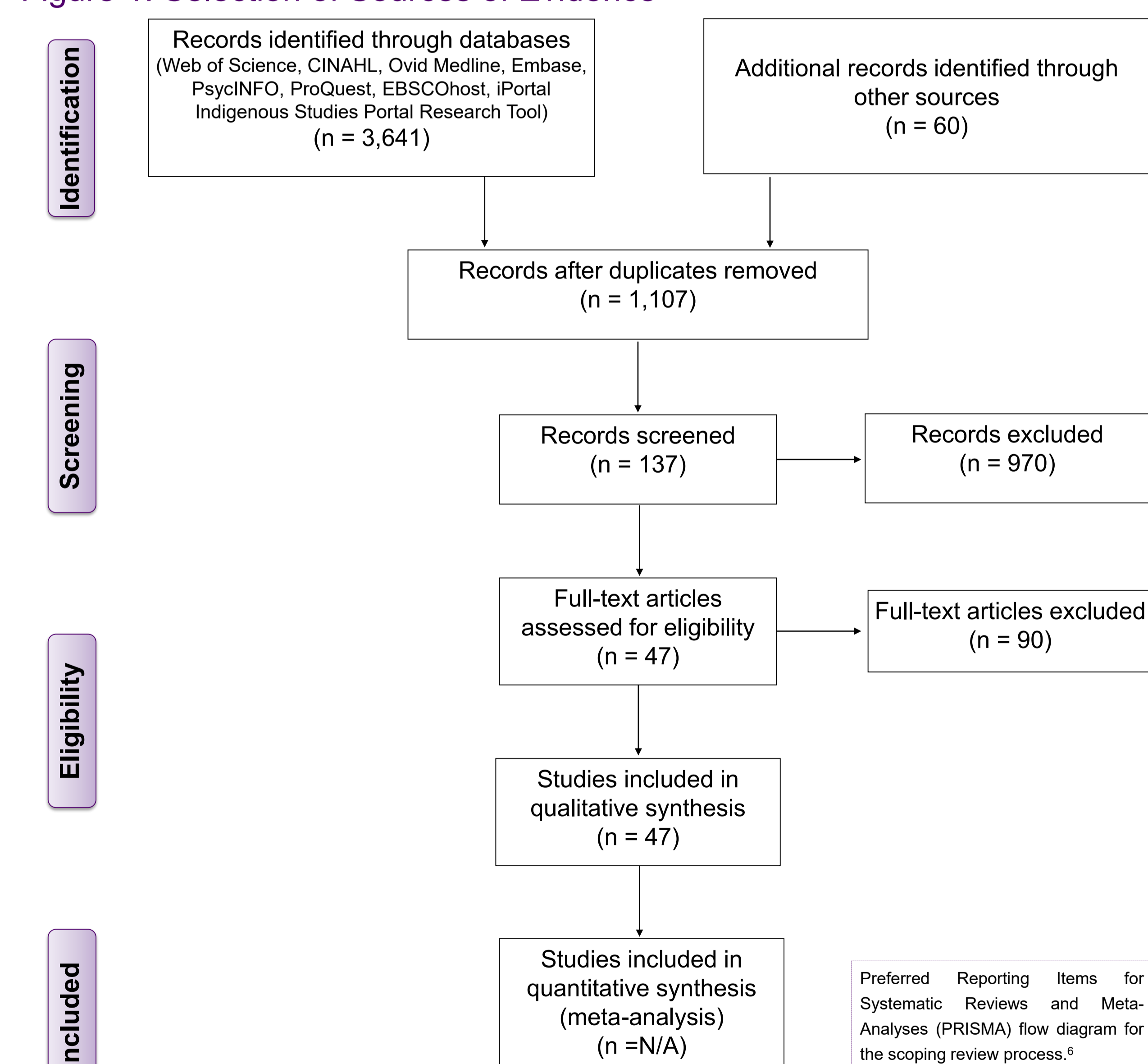
Table 2: Selection of Sources of Evidence

Does the article include a focus on Indigenous peoples?		Does the article include a discussion of gender identity?		Does the article include a discussion of health, well-being, or healthcare in general?	
Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2	Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2	Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2

Data Analysis & Synthesis of Results

Literature is currently being analyzed by 3 reviewers using NVivo qualitative analysis software to manually and collaboratively extract relevant information into jointly developed themes.

Results

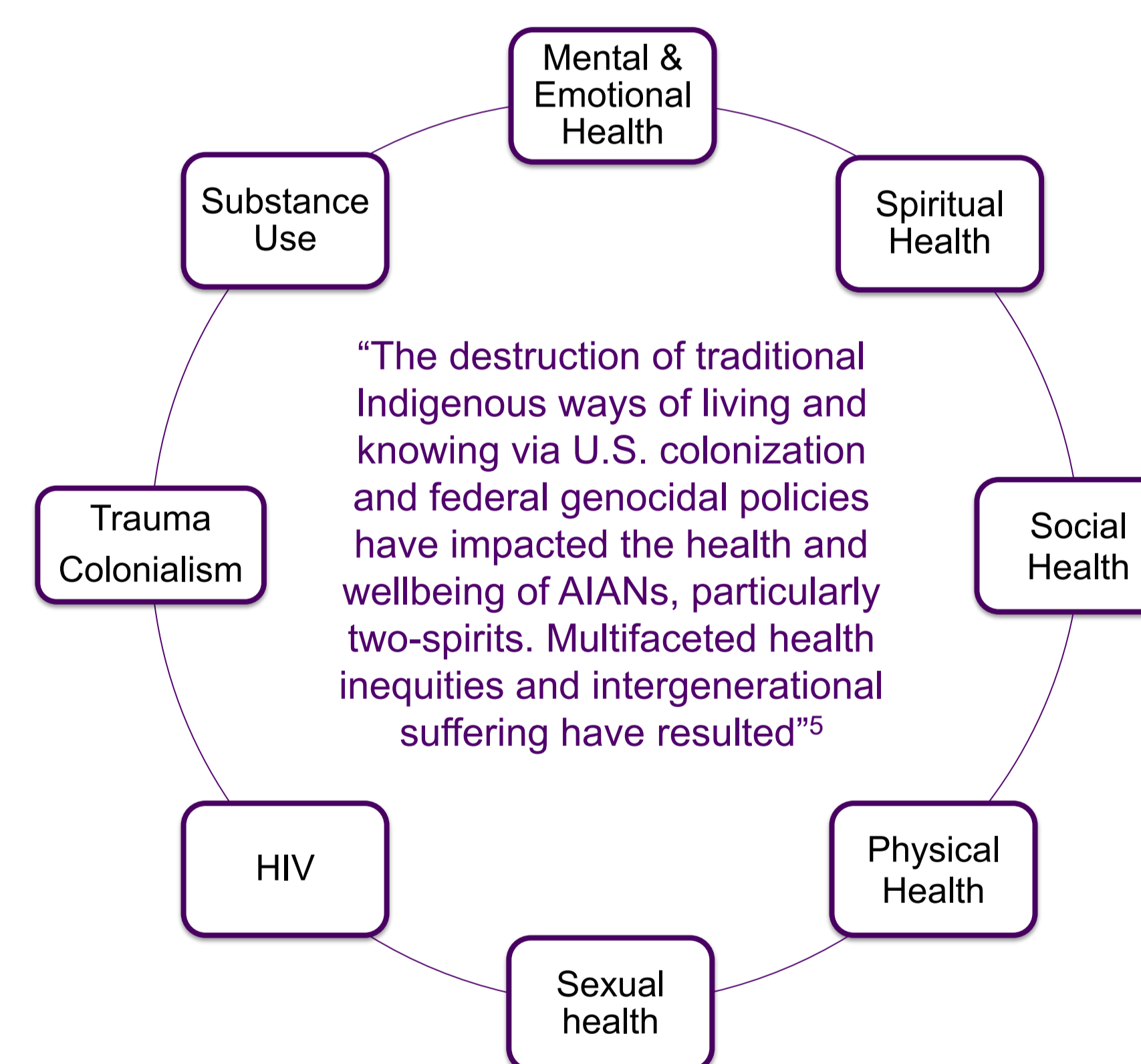### Traditional Indigenous Gender Diversity and Identity

How Indigenous gender identity and diversity is addressed, defined and conceptualized (traditionally and presently). Refers to Indigenous-centred and tribally-specific understandings of gender identity.

"Two-Spirit asserts ceremonial and spiritual communities and traditions and relationships with medicine as central in constituting various identities, marking itself as distinct from dominant constructions of GLBTQ identities. This is not an essentialist move but an assertion that Indigenous gender and sexual identities are intimately connected to land, community, and history."[4]

"In some tribes two-spirit individuals play an important storytelling role; they serve as the living memory of the people. This knowledge may provide an important link to a time when their community embraced alternative models of sexuality and gender"[2]

Health Experiences

Defined and understood through a contextual analysis informed by Indigenous knowledges and traditions. Health experiences are conceptualized as interrelated and contextual, rather than looking at the findings as segmented parts of an individual's health and identity. Protective factors include social support systems, connection to community, and resilience.

Mental & Emotional Health, Spiritual Health, Social Health, Physical Health, Sexual health, HIV, Trauma Colonialism, Substance Use, Substance Use

"The destruction of traditional Indigenous ways of living and knowing via U.S. colonization and federal genocidal policies have impacted the health and wellbeing of AIANs, particularly two-spirits. Multifaceted health inequities and intergenerational suffering have resulted"[5]

Indigenous Traditional Knowledge Systems and Practices of Wellness

Health understood through Indigenous ways of knowing that encompass elders, participation in ceremony, relationships, history, and move beyond illness, deficits and discrimination.

"Though pre-colonial Indigenous ways of life will never be fully restored, the knowledge of traditional cultural roles and identities has the power to instil positive identities and healthy self-concepts in two-spirits."[1]

"Cultural resilience, or meaningful connectedness to culture, through ceremonies, spirituality, Elders, traditional activities, and kinship support are protective and buffer the effects of adversity"[5]
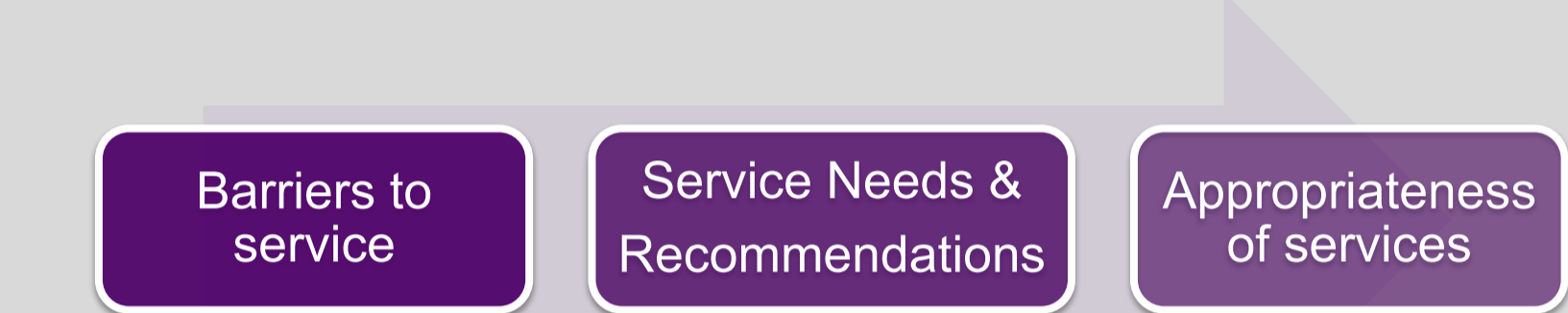
Stigma, Transphobia, Violence & Discrimination

Defined as experiences of stigma, discrimination, violence and/or transphobia experienced by this community based on their identity. This is understood as it relates to the sociopolitical context and how it influences all aspects of health.

"It is the experience of these interlocking forms of colonial and heterosexist, homophobic/transphobic oppression that make Two-Spirit people's experience of health and health care significantly problematic and which places them at a unique disadvantage with regard to health care access and service delivery."[3]

Interface with Health Services

The experiences of gender diverse and trans Indigenous communities with barriers and access to health-related services. This can include barriers, facilitators, gaps and needs in service access and use.

- Barriers to service
- Service Needs & Recommendations
- Appropriateness of services

Discussion

- In this scoping review, we identified 47 primary resources published between 2001 and 2018 that address the health experiences of Indigenous trans, two-spirit, and gender diverse communities.

- This review is of importance as it aims to expand on and advance the limited knowledge of this topic in the field and identify research knowledge gaps. In advancing the state of knowledge, findings may lead to improved health experiences and service delivery in this community.

Next Steps

1. All articles will be analyzed and summarized using the data analysis approach identified.

2. Data analyzed and synthesized into themes from included articles will be used to extend knowledge of this topic in the field, identify knowledge gaps, and will consider relevance to key groups.

3. Recommendations for the direction of future research will be made in relation to the development of a grant proposal for an Indigenous qualitative study that uses decolonizing methodologies.

Acknowledgements

References
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