

# Mental Health and Wellbeing

Subjects: Psychology, Psychoanalysis

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This is a comparative study that explores Indigenous communities, rural poverty, and mental health and well-being in Australia and Canada. It draws upon a person-centred approach as described by Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology framework. Hence, the role of women within these communities and their strength in support of the well-being of their families is also examined. Themes that emerge within a humanistic theoretical framework will be highlighted. Examination of current data is provided and existing research findings are compared where relevant to indigenous populations.

Keywords: Indigenous ; Person-Centred ; Mental Health ; Well-being

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## 1. Introduction

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)<sup>[1]</sup> estimated that 370 million indigenous people live in 90 countries. Although making up only 5% of the total world population UNDP reports that indigenous communities are described as most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

A scan of the existing research on Australia and Canada's indigenous communities highlight specific themes within in the literature. These include a focus on chronically food insecure communities<sup>[2]</sup>, health<sup>[3]</sup>, psychosocial and climate change related issues<sup>[4]</sup> within some communities. However, there is little consensus on the current state of general well-being within the targeted populations.

Evidently Australia and Canada have some of the best health conditions in the developed world<sup>[5]</sup>. However, there continues to be gaps within certain demographic groups including indigenous populations. Hence, the current research project is interested in examining well-being of indigenous people with a focus on mental health in specific communities.

The research project investigates the dynamics of Indigenous communities, rural poverty, mental health and well-being of individuals within their communities. The research occurs across a number of overlapping areas of interest. First, is the ways members of Indigenous Australian and Canada's First Nations communities engage with members of their own community such that it may enhance and promote mental health and general well-being. Hence, I explore the relationships they form with other members of the community, the extent and nature of their engagement, and the overarching impact of poverty in these communities. Significantly, the role of women in supporting the flourishing of well-being in these communities is explored. Second, the research provides an analysis of the work of official and unofficially appointed members of indigenous communities and other organisation such as Non-government organisations (NGOs) that help promote mental health and well-being in these communities. Individuals may include community and family appointed leaders, NGO officers and/or healthcare and allied health workers such as community nurses, social workers and counsellors embedded within the community. The research examines the extent and nature of commitment and engagement with members of Indigenous communities. Finally, the role of formal government policies, in supporting mental health and wellbeing initiatives and the process of change are described.

The two key questions explored in this project are:

1. What is the relationship between rural poverty, mental health and well-being in Indigenous Australian and Canadian First Nation communities?
2. What is the role of women in fostering well-being within these families?

Hence, the research provides an assessment of the impact of mental health and rural poverty on the well-being of Indigenous communities with a focus on the role of women. Here, the project draws on a Rogerian <sup>[6]</sup>person-centred approach where the aim is to maintain unconditional positive regard when working with a wide range of individuals or groups. Rogers' Person-Centred theory argues that each individual will possess self-actualising tendencies. The aim is to therefore seek within each group, areas of strength which may help to foster wellbeing within their communities.

## 2. Research Design

I conduct a preliminary search of open access databases while alternative sources are used to identify literature on mental health and wellbeing in indigenous populations. Studies from January 1, 1990, through December 1, 2018, that included mention of indigenous participants and, where possible, compare findings with those of non-indigenous populations. Methodological quality of studies are evaluated to assess for gaps in the literature.

## 3. Significance

The research project is significant as the impact of mental health and well-being on families in Australian and Canadian indigenous communities have not been systematically studied. Further, where research does examine the well-being of targeted groups within indigenous communities, the role of women is generally minimised. By contrast, this study examines both the impact of poverty on one's general well-being and the role of women in fostering community mental health and well-being.<sup>[2]</sup>

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