

A wooden slice ornament, cut from a log, hangs from a pine branch. The ornament is light-colored wood with a dark, textured bark edge. The background is a soft-focus winter scene with snow-covered pine branches and a blurred building in the distance.

Traditional Indigenous Medicine in North America: A Review

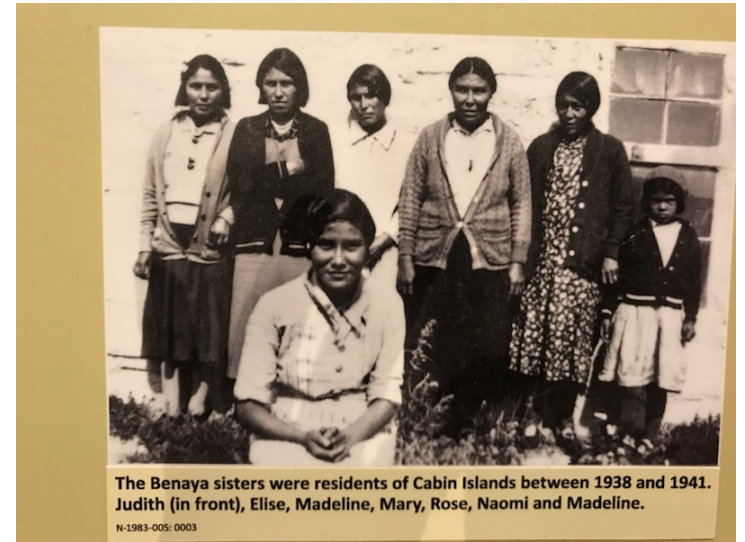
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Roots





Stories



Relationship



Ceremony

Background

- Widespread knowledge on Traditional Medicine is elusive amongst most Western trained health professionals and systems.
- This despite that the approximately 7.5 million Indigenous peoples who currently reside in Canada and the United States (US) are most often served by Western systems of medicine.
- There is current exploration in the literature on how a lack of cultural safety impacts health disparities across diverse populations.



Aim of the Present Research

The purpose of this present study was:

- a. To catalogue the current state of the peer-reviewed and grey literature on Traditional Medicine in the North American context.

- b. To provide an evidence-informed guide for medical practitioners, scholars, and communities to better inform practice, policymaking, and research.

Methods

The methodology for this scoping review was a mixed-methods approach (Western-Indigenous):

Western:

- (1) combining a broad research question with a clearly articulated scope of inquiry
- (2) identifying relevant studies
- (3) study selection
- (4) charting the data

Indigenous:

- (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results
- (6) consultation exercise



Procedures of Search

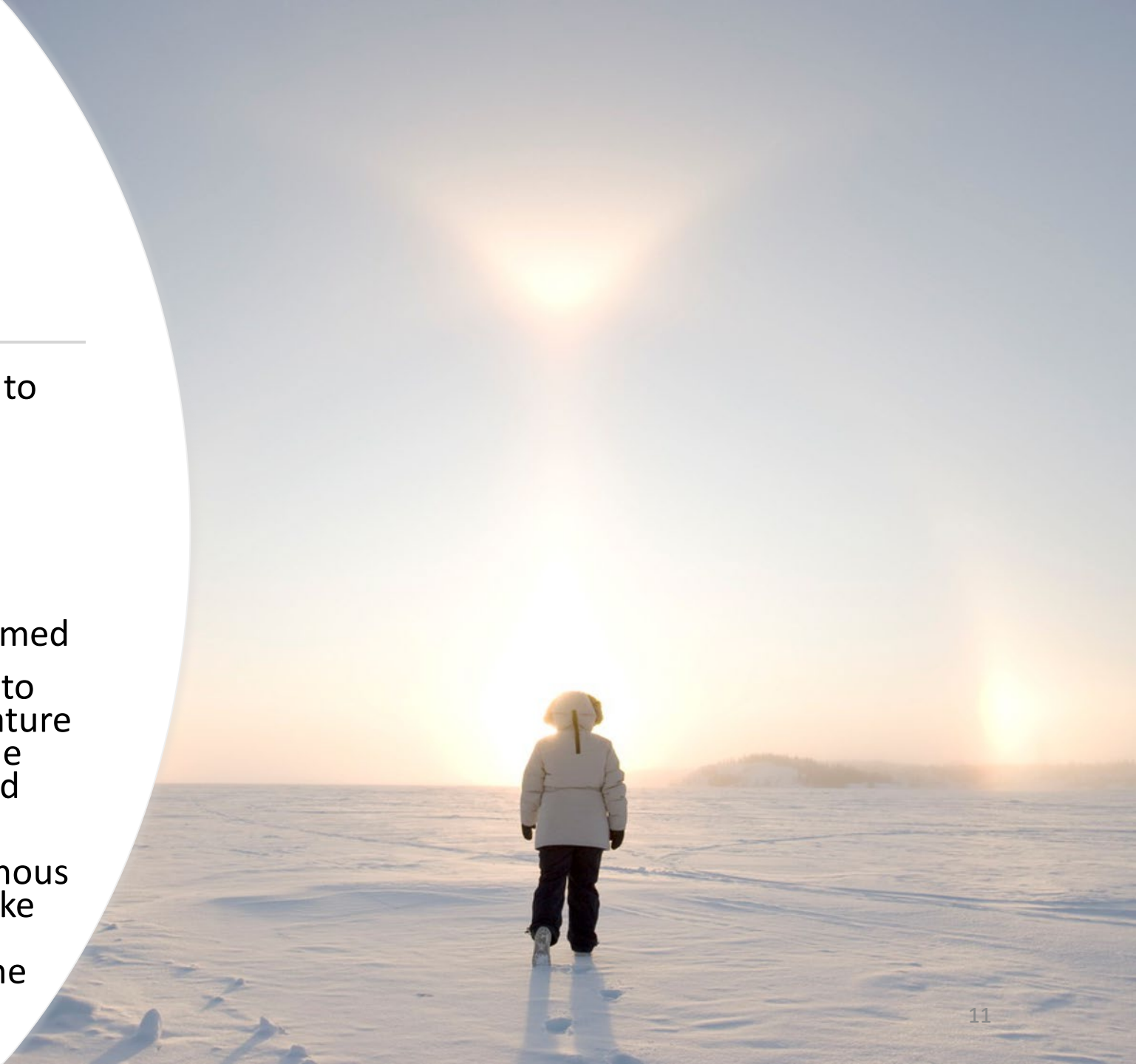
- No specific definitions for TM used:

There is currently a vast array of Traditional Medicine modalities, practices, and people across North America, which therefore required a broad inductive and immersive approach to allow the community of researchers in this area to provide their own definitions regionally, which therefore made an impact on the breadth of articles found.



Procedures of Search

- North American Indigenous was defined to be First Nations, Inuit, Métis, American Indian, Alaskan Native or the respective Bands and Tribes within those groups.
- Database and grey literature search
- Quality assessment of studies not performed
 - a. The purpose of this review was to map the existing state of the literature on this topic and not to analyze the results of the included articles, and
 - b. The vast array of formats and methodologies used in the Indigenous traditional medicine literature make the dominant Western metrics of validity simply not applicable to the current research purpose.



Sample Electronic Research Database Search Strategy (PubMed)

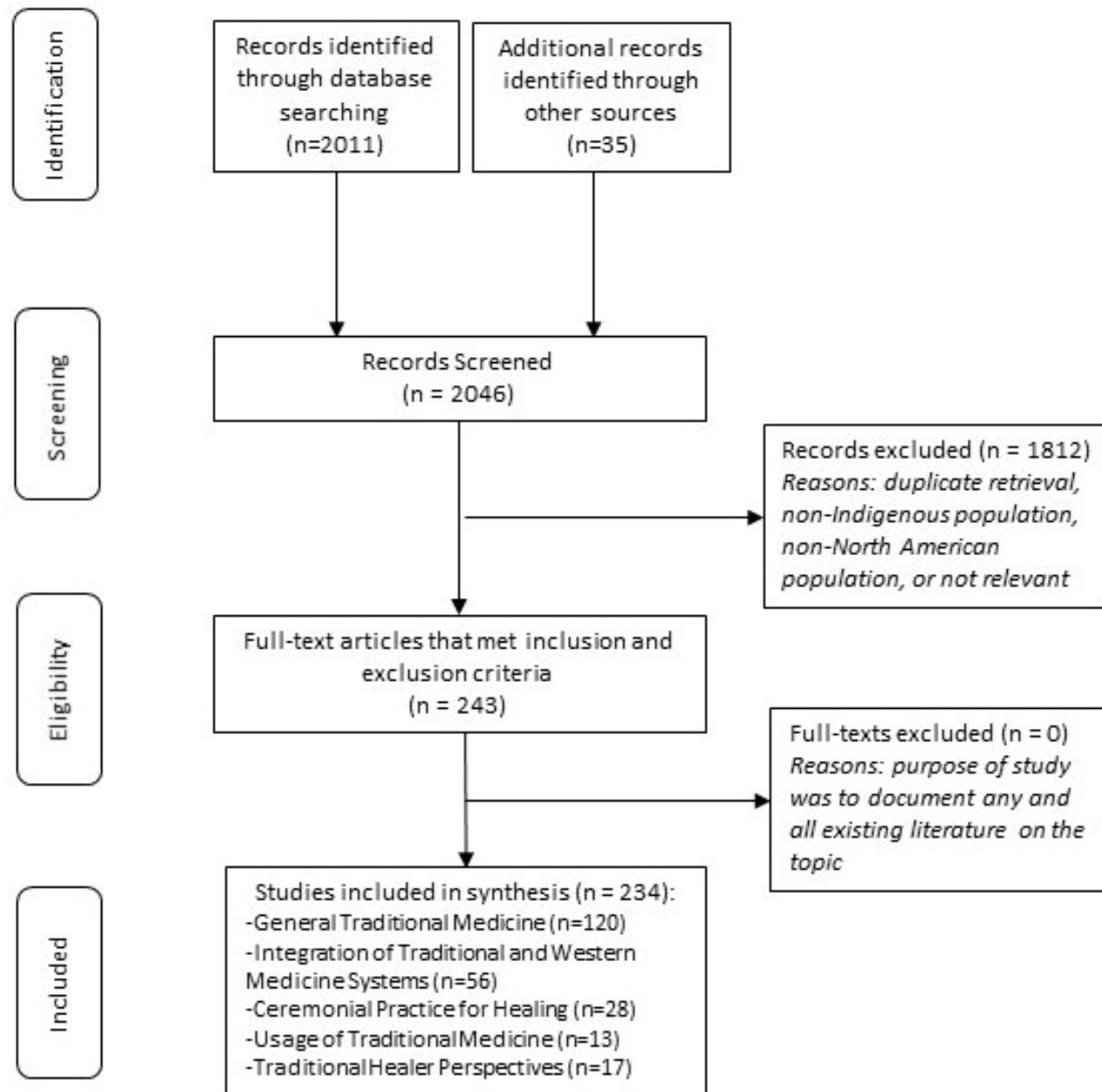
Dates All dates to March 31, 2019 Language(s) All

Keywords

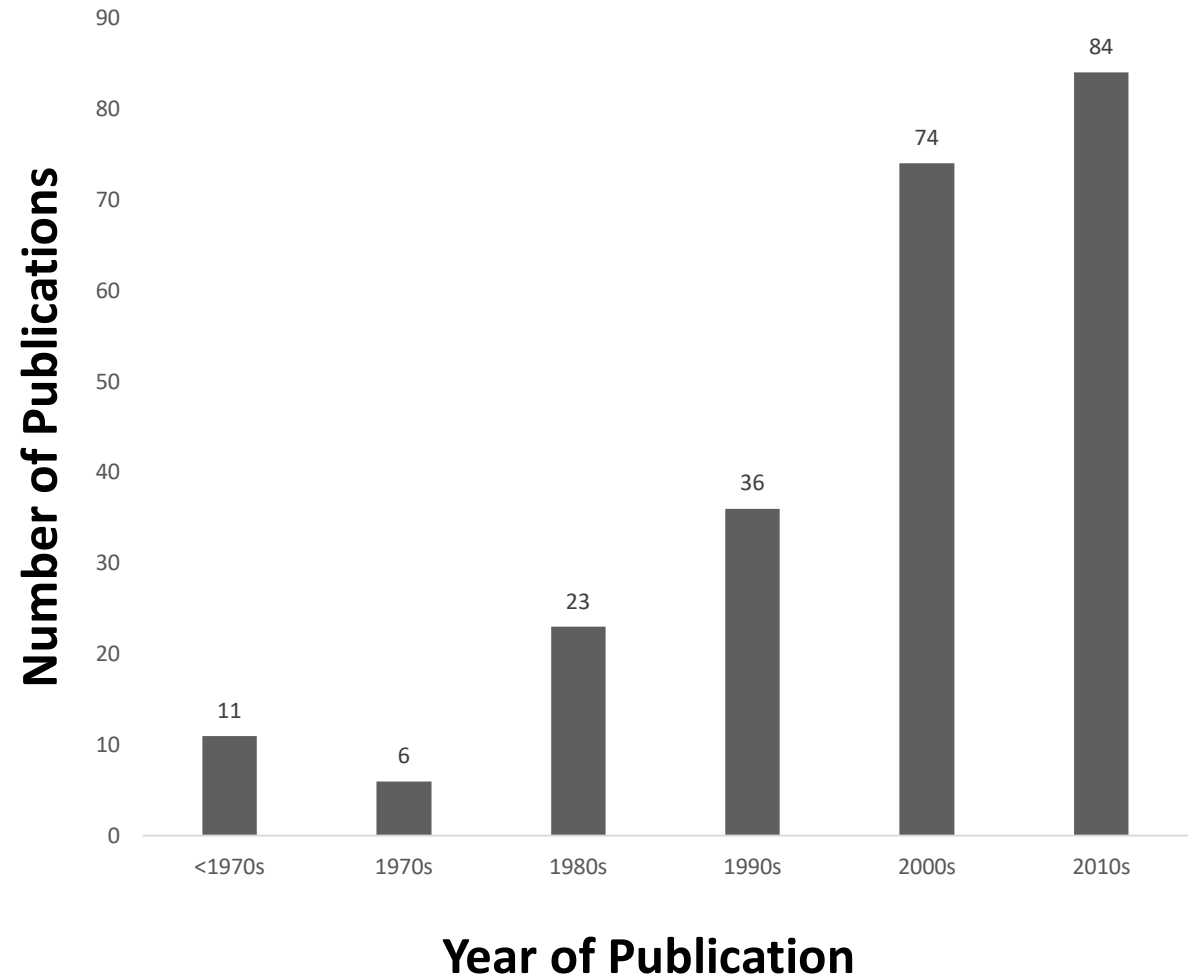
Indian OR "American Indian" OR "Alaska Native" OR "Native American" OR "First Nations" OR Indigenous OR Métis OR Metis OR aborigin* OR "First Nation*" OR amerindian OR tribe OR tribal OR reservation OR Pima OR Cherokee OR Inuit OR Yupik OR Navajo OR Lumbee OR Apache OR Ojibw* OR Sioux OR Salish OR Aleut OR Inupiat OR Haida OR Athabaskan OR Zuni OR Cheyenne OR Hopi OR Cherokee OR Mohawk OR Crow OR Mi'kmaq OR Micmac OR Lakota OR Cree OR Blackf* OR Dene* OR Assiniboine OR Chipewyan OR Eeyou Istchee OR Eskimo OR Haudenosaunee OR Innu OR Inuk*, Inuvialuit OR Iroquois OR Lenape OR Menominee OR Nakota OR Nakoda OR Oji-Cree OR Sioux OR Dakota OR Turtle Island OR Gwitchin OR Vuntut Gwitchin OR Choctaw OR Chippewa OR Apache OR Pueblo OR Shawnee OR Cahuilla OR Coshatta OR Arapahoe OR Paiute OR Mono OR Cabazon OR Me-Wuk OR Diegueno OR Catawba OR Cayuga OR Chemehuevi OR Chickahominy OR Chickasaw OR Potawatomi OR Pomo OR Cocopah OR Coeur D'Alene OR Comanche OR Yakama OR Siletz OR Chehalis OR Coos OR Goshute OR Umatilla OR Cortina OR Coshatta OR Cowlitz OR Shoshone OR Shawnee OR Maidu OR Kumeyaay OR Yavapai OR Mojave OR Havasupai OR Ho-chunk OR Hoh OR Maliseet OR Hualapai OR Inaja OR Ione OR S'Klallam OR Jamul OR Karuk OR Keweenaw OR Kickapoo OR Kiowa OR Klamath OR Kootenai OR Luiseno OR Odawa OR Cupeno OR Elwha OR Lummi OR Makah OR Wampanoag OR Mesa OR Miccosukee OR Moapa OR Modoc OR Monacan OR Maidu OR Morongo OR Muscogee OR Narragansett OR Nez Perce OR Nisqually OR Nooksack OR Oneida OR Onondaga OR Osage OR Paiute OR Luiseno OR Pamunkey OR Pascua* OR Passamaquoddy OR Pawnee OR Peoria OR Picayune OR Creek* OR Ponca OR Puyallup OR Quapaw, Quechan OR Quinault OR Rappahannock OR Sac & Fox Nation OR Sac and Fox Nation OR Samish OR Chumash OR Seminole* OR Seneca OR Shinnecock OR Shoalwater OR Oyate OR Snoqualmie OR Ute OR Squaxin OR Suquamish OR Kumeyaay OR Tejon OR Muscogee OR Osage OR Thlopthlocco OR Tohono O'odham OR Tonkawa OR Tulalip OR Tule River OR Tuscarora OR Keetoowah OR Skagit OR Wampanoag OR Washoe OR Wichita OR Winnebago OR Winnemucca OR Wyandotte OR Yavapai* OR Yocha* OR Yurok OR Zuni OR Yellowknives OR Sarcee OR Wasagamack OR Anishinabe OR Maliseet OR Tli* OR Mississauga OR Odawa OR Oneida OR Tuscarora OR Oji* OR Assiniboine OR Tlingit OR Tagish OR Tutchone OR Elders

AND

"Traditional healing" OR "Traditional healer" OR healing OR religion OR "Medicine m*" OR "Medicine wom*" OR "Sweat lodge" OR "Traditional Medicine" OR Ceremonial tobacco OR Ceremon* OR Shaman* OR "Traditional medicine policy"



Trends in the number of articles identified in this scoping review over time





Categorical Findings

- General Traditional Medicine
- Integration of Traditional and Western Medicine Systems
- Ceremonial Practice for Healing
- Usage of Traditional Medicine
- Traditional Healer Perspectives

General Traditional Medicine

- 120 articles identified in this category.
- Majority of the publications being from 2009 and earlier (78%, n=93).
- Articles spanned a wide time period between 1888 and 2017 (average year of publication was 1997).
- General research topics were wide ranging.
- Large number were written from an observational or commentary perspective by non-Indigenous scholars (e.g., anthropologic perspectives).



General Traditional Medicine

- A mixed methods study by Mainguy et al. (2013), found that the level of spiritual transformation achieved through interaction with traditional healers was associated with a subsequent improvement in medical illness in 134 of 155 people ($P < .0001$), and that this association exhibited a dose-response relationship.
- A 13-week intervention with “Indigenous Healing and Seeking Safety” in 17 participants demonstrated improvement in trauma symptoms, as measured by the TSC-40, with a mean decrease of 23.9 (SD=6.4, $p=0.001$) points, representing a 55% improvement from baseline (Marsh et al., 2016).



Integration of Traditional and Western Medicine Systems

- 56 articles identified in this category.
- 16 % (n=9) of these were from nursing journals, and 43% (n=24) were articles from mental health and/or substance abuse journals.
- Publication dates ranged from the year 1974 to the year 2019 (average year of publication was 2005).
- 64% (n=36) were based in the United States.
- Range of topics identified.



Integration of Traditional and Western Medicine Systems

- In 2011, the University of New Mexico Public Health department and their General Preventive Medicine Residency Program in the United States started to integrate traditional healing into the resident training curriculum with full implementation completed by 2015 (Kesler et al., 2015).
- The need for advocacy and awareness building on traditional ways of healing were emphasized throughout this category of articles.

*“Lakota doctoring [traditional healing] remains highly relevant for wellness interventions and healthcare services even though it is not amenable in principle to scientific evaluation”
(Gone, 2016).*



Ceremonial Practice for Healing

- 28 articles identified in this category.
- Important sub-categories noted:
 - sweat lodge ceremonies (n=15)
 - traditional tobacco ceremonies and use (n=6)
 - birth and birthplace as a ceremony (n=2)
 - puberty ceremonies (n=3)
 - ceremony for healing from trauma (n=1)
- 75% US publications.



Ceremonial Practice for Healing

- Gossage et al. (2003) reported results from a study that analysed data for 100 inmates who participated in SLCs and found that incarceration recidivism rate for those participants was only 7% compared with an estimated 30-40% for other inmates who did not participate in such ceremonies.
- “Using tobacco in the sacred way is vital for the Anishinabe culture [as] tobacco holds everything together and completes the circle. If tobacco is not used in a sacred manner, the circle is broken and a disconnect occurs in relation to the culture” (Struthers and Hodge, 2004).

Usage of Traditional Medicine

- There was a total of 13 articles published on this topic including well over five thousand participants who completed surveys or interviews.
- 77% of the studies were published prior to 2009 (n=10). The average year of publication was 2002 ranging from the oldest study published in 1988 and the last study in 2017.
- Rates of usage of both traditional medicine and traditional healers varied per region.



Traditional Healer Perspectives

- There were 17 studies that elicited perspective from Elders and Traditional Healers ranging in dates of publication between 1993 and 2019 (average year of publication was 2011).
- 47% of articles were published in either nursing or mental health related journals.
- 65% were US based publications.
- It is not culturally acceptable to alter the words of traditional healers.



Traditional Healer Perspectives

“The doctors and nurses at a local hospital asked me to speak to them on natural medicines. So I did. You could tell the doctors have a hard time trying to understand traditional healing and the use of plants to heal...it is hard for them to understand. Some of them got up and left when I started to talk about how you have to develop a relationship with the plant world...They sometimes have a hard time if things are not done their way...I respect the medicine, I just wish Western medical persons would understand”

“When we gather medicine...the plant has a spirit in it...and...the spirit of those plants stays in the medicine...Every individual is different...every remedy is different...because specific things work for specific people...We’re made up of four parts...physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Sometimes sickness can be caused by imbalance within a person. When we do Indian healing...it goes to the source of the problem...not to the symptoms.”

(In Struthers, 2000)



Limitations

- The use of defined categories may give the impression of distinct traditional medicine themes unrelated to each other.
- Potential for articles to be missed: Traditional medicine terminology can be complex and can be referenced using other languages or simply geographic location.
- A critical review of the retained full text articles was not completed.

Implications/Recommendations

- Self-determined options for traditional Indigenous healing are still lacking in Western institutions yet access is a right for Indigenous peoples.
- There is a need for more open spaces for dialogue and consequent action surrounding the use of Indigenous traditional healing often desired in racially diverse medical settings.
- Prioritizing engagement with Indigenous scholars and/or their scholarship, community members and local knowledge holders is encouraged.





Questions

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References (in order of presentation):

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