

IGSS Journal

INDIGENOUS GRADUATE STUDENT SYMPOSIUM

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ABSTRACT: At the Kamulamun (heart) of Wellbeing

BACKGROUND: Cardiovascular disease (CVD) has been declining in Canada but Indigenous women are significantly disproportionately impacted, experiencing a 76% higher mortality rate from heart disease than non-Indigenous women. Dominant western society situates the biomedical model of health at its core of interventions and there is no research focused on the experience of Mi'kmaq women and their understanding of heart health and wellbeing. Interventions often do not reflect the specific social, political, historical and cultural dimensions necessary to have an impact, therefore understanding the cultural and gendered experiences of Mi'kmaq women is crucial.

OBJECTIVES: To discuss my experience as a Mi'kmaq woman who is a student engaging in research with my community to 1) inquire into the experiences of Mi'kmaw women regarding the meaning of heart in relation to health and wellbeing 2) co-conceptualize meaningful and sustainable interventions focused on heart health and wellbeing that are grounded in the knowledge and experiences of women and their communities.

OVERVIEW: As a Mi'kmaq woman of Newfoundland my knowledge is grounded in Mi'kmaq knowledge systems guided by my relational understanding; valuing multiple worldviews and ways of knowing. This has shaped my methodological approach of using an Indigenous research methodology grounded in community with a community based participatory design, building on my relationships with communities, while using Storyworks. I will further strengthen the involvement of Elders, community leaders, families, and women who are affected by CVD. My methodological approach is grounded in ceremony and reflects the unique worldviews and knowledge held by Mi'kmaq communities.

RESULTS/CONCLUSIONS: Gathering information from Mi'kmaw women I hope to provide information to push for interventions grounded in Indigenous knowledge, which is critical to the relevance and meaningfulness of care and holds the possibilities to address current health inequities by designing new pathways to health and well-being for and with Indigenous peoples.