sharing knowledge · making a difference
partager les connaissances · faire une différence
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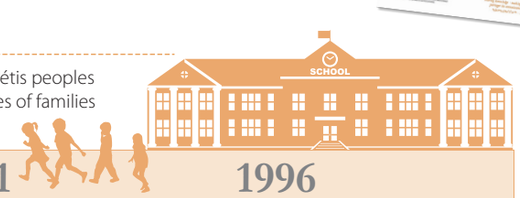
SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

This infographic can be found in the NCCAH fact sheet *Culture and language as social determinants of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis health* (2016). Culture is the foundation of individual and collective identity, and is expressed and maintained through language. The erosion of culture and language can adversely affect mental health and well-being. This fact sheet reviews disruptions to, and current trends, in language use and cultural practices for First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, provides an overview of how language and culture influence Indigenous perceptions of health and illness, and highlight some promising initiatives in revitalizing their languages and cultures.

COLONIZATION

The goal of the residential school system was to assimilate First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples into European society through the separation of children from the cultural influences of families and communities (Allen & Smylie, 2015).



1620 The first of these schools was established as part of early missionary activities,

1879 but they proliferated after the endorsement of the 1879 Davin Report,

1931 peaking in 1931 with over 80 schools across Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012).

1996 The last residential school closed in 1996; however, *the legacy of intergenerational health impacts is ongoing* (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2014; Loppie Reading & Wien, 2009).

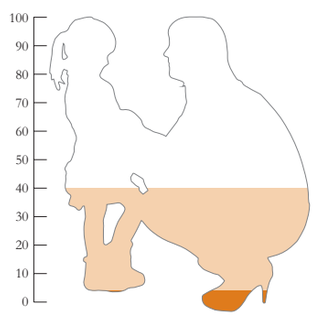
OVER 375 YEARS OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

While there are cultural and linguistic differences among Aboriginal peoples, as well as differences in their experiences with colonization, their socio-economic status, and their general health, one of the experiences shared by all Aboriginal peoples as a result of colonization is an erosion of culture and languages.

The early years are a special time for learning and absorbing language and culture from parents, families and communities. Investment in early childhood development programs that incorporate culture and language is key to improving health outcomes.

CHILD APPREHENSION

Aboriginal people continued to experience trauma, loss and grief as a result of the rapid expansion of the child welfare system in the 1960s. During this period, commonly known as the 'Sixties Scoop,' (Sinclair, 2007), disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal children were placed in foster care.

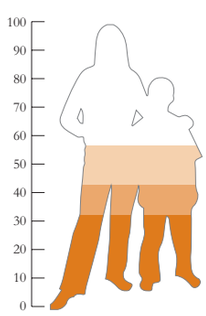


By the end of the 1960s, "30% to 40% of the children who were legal wards of the state were Aboriginal children – in stark contrast to the rate of 1% in 1959" (Fournier & Crey, 1997, as cited in Kirmayer et al., 2000, p. 609).

30 - 40% by 1969

1% 1959

LANGUAGE & CULTURE REVITALIZATION



Cultural Activities

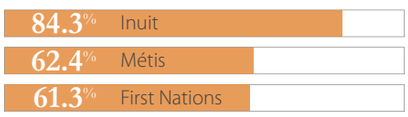
56% Inuit

43% First Nations (off-reserve)

33% Métis

Boys and girls 6 - 14 years old taking part in cultural activities in 2006 (Smith, Findlay, & Cromption, 2010).

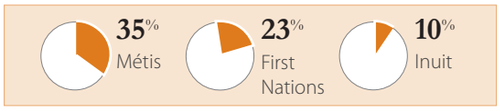
Furthermore, 215,960 (61.3%) of First Nations, 193,330 (62.4%) of Métis and 28,970 (84.3%) of Inuit had engaged in some of these activities (making clothing or footwear; making arts or crafts; hunting, fishing or trapping; and gathering wild plants) within the previous year (Statistics Canada, 2015).



Those involved in cultural activities said they experience *"more control over their lives; more spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical balance; less substance use; and less depression"* (FNIGC, 2012, p. 212).

Overall, the 2011 National Household Survey reports that approximately one in six Aboriginal people are able to use an Aboriginal language in conversation. This translates to 240,815 Aboriginal people, or 17.2%, of the population, a decline of 2% since 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Learning Language



It is estimated that 23% of First Nations, 35% of Métis, and 10% of Inuit are currently learning an Aboriginal language as a second language (Frideres, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2011). According to the 2011 Census of Population, there are over 60 Aboriginal languages in use across Canada (Langlois & Turner, 2014) which can be grouped into the following linguistic families: Algonquian, Inuit, Athapaskan, Haida, Iroquoian, Kutenai, Salish, Siouan, Tlingit, Tsimshian, Wakashan, and Michif (Statistics Canada, 2011).

TRANSFORMATIVE

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