Introduction

My name is Shezrell-Rae, I am from the Ahousaht First Nation, both maternally and paternally, with ties and connections to other Nuu-chah-nulth Nations. I am married to Nick who is from the Tsartlip First Nation, which is located on the W̱SÁNEĆ territory; therefore, my family is culturally blended. I am a 4th year undergraduate student within the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria.

Questions

During our workshops I asked the following questions; participants responded verbally and through artwork.

What is a strong Indigenous woman? What does she look like, feel like?

She is strong, she is kind, she is a leader, she has happiness, she has humor, she has a strong connection to culture and family, she is unstoppable, she is empathetic. She has the most scars in heart, but is resilient.

In your own words, what type of lateral violence is there?

Participants responses varied from: Bullying, Peer Pressure, Racism, Cyber Bullying, Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Physical Violence, Rape, and Mental and Emotional Abuse.

If you have experienced any form of the lateral violence mentioned previously, what were the impacts you experienced?

Feeling isolated, feeling empty, having heartbeat, feeling anxious, my sadness turns into anger, it impacted my sleep, my eating, and my lifestyle, living in pain, having bruises and bumps.

Sisters Rising Methods

Sisters Rising is a community-based study with self-identified Indigenous girls and young women, ages 13 to 26. The research is conducted in urban and rural Indigenous communities in western BC.

Sisters Rising responds to the urgent need for community-rooted responses to sexualized violence that support Indigenous wellbeing and sovereignty. Our goal is to challenge the victim-blaming climate of racialized gender violence by re-centering Indigenous teachings and linking body sovereignty to decolonization and land sovereignty.

As a Sisters Rising research facilitator, my focus is to re-center Indigenous teachings and linking body sovereignty to land sovereignty from a strength-based lens.

FINDINGS

After completing multiple workshops and one on one interviews with participants, key findings highlight that Indigenous girls and women are still in dire need of (but not limited to):

- Better health care access
- Healthy food
- Access to licensed practical nurses
- Cultural connections to ceremony
- Increased support groups
- Girls’, women’s & youth groups
- More helpers within community
- Appreciation and validation
- Access to diverse counsellors and therapists
- Cultural connections to land
- Easier access to sports and opportunities
- Equality within community
- Someone they can talk to

Participants who had experienced lateral violence described it in the following ways:

- Isolation & heart break
- Feeling anxious and lifeless
- Feeling angry, sad, lost
- It effected their sleep, eating habits and lifestyle
- Living in pain, and sadness
- Physical bruises and bumps
- Pushing people away
- Feeling ugly, didn’t love herself
- Loss of connection to family
- Loss of connection her culture and land

“I want to be able to walk home safe, or at least have more street lights on my reserve”

Sam*, 14, Sisters Rising Participant

“I would feel more confident if our nation had our own soccer field”

Cindy*, 16, Sisters Rising Participant

“I felt hurt, then sad, then angry, then lost because of the violence I experienced”

Becky*, 21, Sisters Rising Participant

“I just want to be able to see a nurse for my safety”

Jane*, 24, Sisters Rising Participant

* Names have been changed to protect participant privacy

Conclusions

All participants had experienced some form of lateral violence, including sexual assault, colonial violence/gendered racism, physical violence, family and domestic violence, emotional abuse, bullying and/or cyber bullying. However, each also shared a positive reclaim: wanting to reclaim their strength, happiness, kindness, and connections to culture and family, to be unstoppable, to become a leader, to carry the scars but maintain a sense of humour.

Lastly, an important tool for the success of this research, is I have to put the communities teachings, events, values, and way of life into consideration while completing this research project.

Presentations

- School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria (Nov. 20 2017)
- School of Nursing, First Peoples House, University of Victoria (Nov. 12 2017)
- School of Child Youth Care, University of Victoria (Feb, 2018)
- Our Bodies, Our Sexuality, Our Rights Toronto, Symposium, (March, 2018)
- School of Child & Youth Care, University of Victoria, (March, 2018)

Publications

- Networks of Change

References and Acknowledgements


I would like to give my gratitude and acknowledgements to the W̱SÁNEĆ people for allowing to come into their community to complete my work. I want to acknowledge the funders and the school of CYC for giving me the privilege to complete the work. I want to acknowledge the participants for being vulnerable in order for me to complete the work. Lastly, I want to thank Dr. de Finney for allowing me to complete the work under her supervision.