

EH KWA'A'NUNS KYE'A'MIEUX: NAVIGATING OPIOID AGONIST TREATMENT AND FIRST NATIONS' WELLNESS THROUGH COLONIAL SYSTEMS IN RURAL SETTINGS

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Background:

In Canada, both rural and First Nations communities are disproportionately affected by the ongoing overdose crisis. Opioid agonist treatment (OAT) has protective effects against overdose. However, Indigenous people in rural communities face access challenges. We undertook a longitudinal qualitative study in Tla'amin Nation to understand lived experience and contexts in order to inform rural First Nations' OAT policy and practice.

Approach:

Indigenous methods and ways of knowing informed this study. Vignettes are used to showcase participant experiences, which are a decolonizing research strategy that uses individualized stories to facilitate storytelling. Storytelling is the primary method of teaching and passing on knowledge in Tla'amin Nation. Analysis was informed by Tla'amin Nation's Health & Wellness Plan as well as Elder teachings to ensure interpretations aligned with traditional teachings and Nation planning.

Analysis:

First Nations participants described several challenges with accessing OAT. These included rigid delivery schedules, privacy concerns, and daily travel to town. These created employment barriers, particularly for those working in manual labour jobs in remote locations. Navigating these challenges led to unregulated drug use and OAT adherence issues. Racism and discrimination were also described. These experiences were echoed by Tla'amin Health Centre staff, who framed these experiences as colonial care.

Conclusion:

Vignettes are integral in showcasing First Nations' OAT experiences in rural settings. Storytelling allows for an emphasis on individual experience, which can be erased by Western qualitative research analytical methods (e.g., thematic analysis). Tla'amin teachings emphasize how current colonial systems leave people behind. There is a need to expand Nation-led health and wellness services, including OAT, harm reduction, and healing. Embedding study findings within First Nations' teachings and strategies is integral to sharing results outside of colonial research and policy systems.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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