

**Social Justice & Decolonization
With
First Nations Clients**

*Josephine C. H. Tan, PhD., C. Psych.
Lakehead University
Thunder Bay, Ontario
Canada*

CCPPP Presentation, 12th May 2023

1

Overview

- History of colonization
- Residential school system
- Public inquiry & TRC
- TRC call to action and response from CPA
- Working through the lens of social justice

2

History of colonization

Pre-European arrival: Independent & self-governing Indigenous societies

Post-European arrival: Geographical dislocation, social & cultural disintegration, health & social problems

3

History of colonization (continued)

- 11th century – arrival of Europeans
- Contact and trade between First Nations & Europeans
- Development of settlements
- Alliances with First Nations
- Clashes and war between French & British
- Treaties between British & First Nations for peace
- Treaties between British & First Nations for land

4

History of colonization (continued)

The Indian Act in 1876

- Made the government “guardian” of First Nations
- Objective = assimilation
- Controls definition of identity, land, governance, legal rights, etc.
- Created settlements
- Divided First Nations into groups defined by the government

5

Residential schools

Objective = assimilation

- Placed Indigenous children into boarding schools
- Children segregated from families, communities, culture
- Erase Indigenous culture
- Funded by the government, ran by religious orders
- Schools underfunded, understaffed, inadequately trained staff

6

Residential schools (continued)

- Children actively abused, neglected
- Language & cultural practices prohibited and punished
- Starvation, malnourishment
- Poor living conditions – lack of ventilation & heat
- Forced into physical labour
- Serious medical illnesses
- Death from fires in schools, tuberculosis, suicide, running away from schools

7

Child Welfare System

- Children taken away from parents, placed with non-Indigenous families
- Child welfare stepped in after children left residential school, or after schools closed down
- Sixties Scoop
- Ensured continued separation of children from families and communities
- Led to cultural discontinuity

8

Residential schools: immediate consequences

- Trauma
- Poor physical health
- Compromised education
- Loss of culture, denigration of self and culture
- Fear of authority figures, loss of initiative, poor problem-solving abilities, alexithymia, insecure attachment styles, dysfunctional coping, depression, anxiety, trauma, grief, anger
- Poor parenting styles

9

After leaving residential schools

- Return to families and communities created by the government; settlements underfunded, underserved
- Difficulty fitting in
- Many did not disclose abuse in schools, kept trauma to self → maladaptive coping
- Unemployment, poverty, homelessness
- Trauma brought into relationships, compromised parent-child relationships
- Poor maternal, prenatal, and infant health

10

Residential schools & intergenerational trauma

- Children of residential school survivors did not learn parenting, culture, and language from parents → loss of knowledge across generations
- Exposure to parental trauma and maladaptive coping
- Community health affected by government policies and funding
- Inadequate government policies & funding → lack of housing, poor food safety and water quality, low access to education and employment, medical underservice → compromised physical & mental health

11

Residential schools: ending of the system

1980's: Disclosure of abuse

1990: Phil Fontaine called for government apology and reparations

1991: Individual lawsuits, formation of residential school survivor groups

1996: Canadian government called for an inquiry

1998: Established the Aboriginal Healing Foundation

2005: Assembly of First Nations launched class action lawsuit

2006: Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement

12

Indian Residential School Agreement

2008: Restitution to survivors, including compensation and funding for therapy for them and their children

2008: Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) established

13

Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

Objectives:

- (i) Document information on history and legacy of residential school, harms done, resilience and courage of the students, families, and communities
- (ii) Work towards establishing and maintaining mutually respectful and inclusive relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples

2015: TRC reports, call to action

14

CPA's response to TRC reports

2018: CPA Task Force on Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report (see https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Task_Forcees/TRC%20Task%20Force%20Report_FINAL.pdf)

In the Task Force report - acknowledgment of failure on the part of professional psychology

- Relying on epistemologies & research that are of little relevance to Indigenous peoples
- Lack of knowledge in the Indigenous cultural & historical contexts
- Not opposing discriminatory government policy

15

CPA Task Force guiding principles

Task Force report contained several recommendations, identified 6 guiding principles

1. Cultural allyship
2. Humility
3. Collaboration
4. Critical reflection
5. Respect
6. Social justice

16

1. Cultural allyship

Must have cultural literacy = understanding of Indigenous concepts and worldviews, their perspectives health and healing, knowledge of colonial history

Recognize importance of land and natural environment in healing and well-being

17

2. Humility

Recognize limits to which Western ways of knowing and Western clinical psychology are applicable to Indigenous peoples

Recognize importance and value of Indigenous knowledge

18

3. Collaboration

Collaborative discussions with Indigenous groups

Explore, develop, implement alternative approaches for use with Indigenous clients

19

4. Critical reflection

Know the impact of colonial history on Indigenous populations

Know past impact of psychology on Indigenous peoples

Evaluate own skills and performance and impact on Indigenous clients

Psychologists and mental health professionals might need healing themselves

20

5. Respect

Ensure that Indigenous clients have same protection and freedom as non-Indigenous clients under CPA Code of Ethics

Recognize the importance of personal and collective freedom of choice in interventions and reclamation of cultural identity

Recognize that approach to case conceptualization might differ depending on Indigenous community

21

6. Social justice

Address inequities & discrepancies in services and supports to Indigenous peoples

Provide services that comparable in quality, evidence-base, and accessibility to services offered to non-Indigenous clients

Use culturally relevant approaches in interventions and research, prioritize needs of Indigenous communities

Address lack of Indigenous representation in profession

22

Task Force guiding principles in specific areas

- Assessment
- Treatment
- Research
- Education
- Training
- Program development
- Program evaluation
- Advocacy and social justice

23

Keep in mind...

- ❖ Not all First Nations and communities are alike
- ❖ Half of First Nations live on reserve, rest live off-reserve
- ❖ Different communities have different kinds of resources, needs, and challenges
- ❖ Diversity among First Nations, e.g., with respect spirituality or religion, knowledge of Indigenous culture, desire to reconnect with culture, exposure to residential school
- ❖ Do not stereotype

24

Working through the lens of social justice

No formula, no one prescribed way, but consider...

25

Working through the lens of social justice (continued)

Decolonizing the self:

- ✓ learn about Canada's colonial history, Indigenous culture, their worldviews and ways of knowing, etc.
- ✓ Know limits of Western psychology
- ✓ Commit to Two-Eyed Seeing

26

Working through the lens of social justice (continued)

Decolonizing psychology (CPA Task Force report):

- ✓ Use culturally appropriate psychological research, assessment, and treatment
- ✓ Prioritize and empower the needs of Indigenous communities
- ✓ Acknowledge that Indigenous communities have their own case conceptualization
- ✓ Explore, develop, implement alternative approaches

27

What does decolonizing mean?

Decolonizing does not mean rejecting all that is Western or European-based. It means to value and learn, not suppress, non-European knowledge systems.

For clinical psychologists, it also means recognizing the strengths and resilience of the Indigenous peoples, their culture and traditions.

28

Working to meet CPA Task Force recommendations

Let's learn together!

29
