

Exploring Mental Health Services and Supports for Indigenous Boys and Men: A Scoping Review

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Introduction

While research on Indigenous mental health has expanded in recent years, much of it has focused on Indigenous populations broadly or on specific groups such as women, children, and youth (Innes & Anderson, 2015; Melro et al., 2024; Nelson & Wilson, 2017; Waddell et al., 2021). Indigenous boys and men remain significantly underrepresented in both research and programming despite facing mental health inequities (George et al., 2019; Boksa et al., 2022; Rand et al., 2022).

The objective of this scoping review is to map the existing literature on mental health supports available for Indigenous boys and men in Canada. Specifically, we aimed to:

- Identify the range of mental health and wellness services, supports and interventions that are tailored for Indigenous boys and men.
- Examine the impacts and outcomes of such mental health and wellness services, supports and interventions.
- Explore key themes that are prominent or absent in the literature on mental health and wellness services, supports and interventions for Indigenous boys and men.

Methods

- This scoping review was modelled using the PRISMA checklist (Prisma-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018) and was evaluated using the JBI manual guidelines (Peters et al., 2020).
- Text extraction was managed using Covidence software, from the following databases: 1) Scopus, 2) PubMed/MEDLINE, 3) PsycINFO, and 4) Web of Science, as well as a focused grey literature search using Google Scholar, Indigenous journals, and relevant community websites to supplement our review.
- Two reviewers conducted the Title and abstract screening, with a third resolving conflicts. The same two reviewers conducted full-text screening, and subsequent extraction was completed collaboratively.

Inclusion

Population: Programming intended for those who identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis men between the ages of 9 and 30, residing in Canada.

Focus: Resources, programs, or interventions aimed at promoting psychological well-being. This may include initiatives delivered through various settings and modalities.

Exclusion

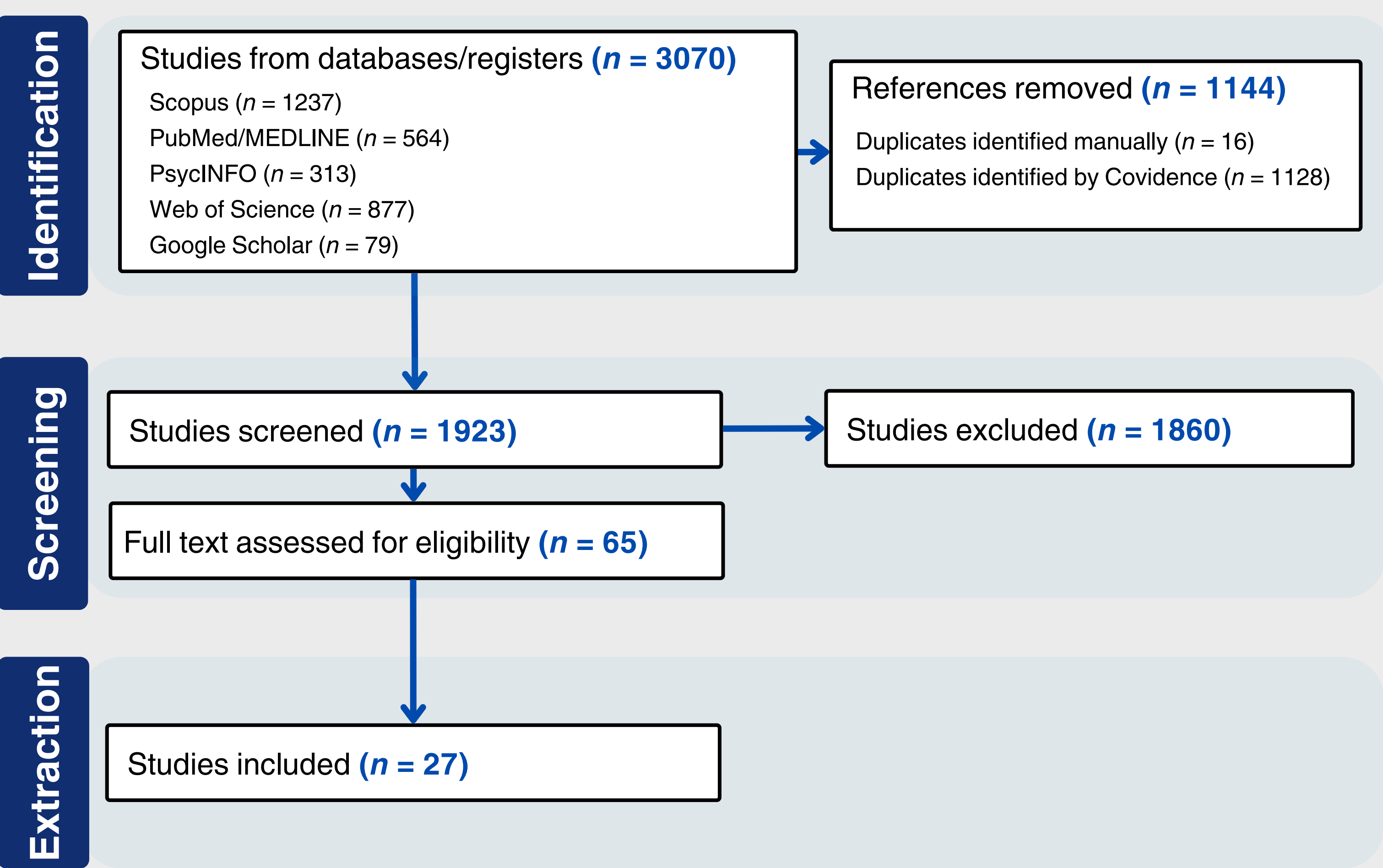
Population: Programs or interventions are not specifically targeted toward Indigenous boys and men between the ages of 9 and 3.

Geographic scope: Programs or interventions conducted outside of Canada.

Time frame: Published before 2000.

Content: Articles describing multiple programs were excluded if description of the programs lacked sufficient detail.

Results



- Within the 27 studies included, 17 unique programs were discussed.**
- Most programs were designed for young adults and adults, with two programs ($n = 4$) specifically designed for youth between the ages of 12 and 19 (Francis et al., 2018; Gittings et al., 2022; Gittings et al., 2024; Lys et al., 2024).
- Program objectives:**
- Violence prevention and desistance ($n = 11$)
 - Social connection ($n = 6$)
 - Healthy relationships ($n = 5$)
 - Wellness promotion ($n = 2$)
 - Skill acquisition ($n = 2$)
- Prominent themes discussed in the literature:**
- Connection and brotherhood ($n = 22$)
 - Intergenerational relationships ($n = 15$)
 - Trust between participants and facilitators ($n = 13$)

Strengths

- Facilitating spaces for **connection** with peers and mentors and ensuring **trust** within and between participants and facilitators is essential.
- Ceremony, traditional knowledge, and cultural practices** were central to participant engagement, identity and well-being across programs.

Gaps

- Few programs are designed specifically for **boys**. There is a need for programs that focus on the engagement of boys and young men (Gross et al., 2023).
- Most initiatives are deficit-focused; there is a need for more **strengths-based, proactive approaches**.

Insights

- Grassroots, community-driven and participant-led** models increase impact; they help to develop ownership, self-determination and identity.
- The consideration of **men's-only** and **male-led spaces**
- Joy and humour** are important aspects of programming

Key References

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Melro, C.M., Kakish, I., D'Souza, N. et al. A descriptive overview of healthy relationship programs for Indigenous youth in Canada: an integrated environmental scan. *Discov Public Health* 21, 120 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12982-024-00248-0>

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