Conversations with Caregivers: Indigenous Perspectives on Engagement with School Psychologists

by

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Abstract

The impacts of residential schools on the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples and communities have generated mistrust with Western colonial education and mental health systems. This legacy of harm creates barriers to engagement for Indigenous caregivers, which may impact children's positive social and academic outcomes. There is a gap in opportunities for positive Indigenous caregiver engagement with school psychologists as well as inadequate knowledge of the influences on this engagement. The present study aimed to address this by building knowledge on Indigenous caregivers' experiences engaging with school psychologists through a qualitative study. Based in Manitoba, Canada, eight self-identifying Indigenous caregivers of children with past and/or current involvement with school psychologists shared their experiences with engagement to build insights on the perceived barriers and facilitators to involvement. Qualitative data from interviews was thematically analyzed and identified emergent themes of: relationships with school psychologists, caregiver perceptions of engagement, support accessibility, and systemic changes and connection to culture. The current research privileges Indigenous caregiver perspectives and experiences with school psychologists to help inform psychological service delivery in schools. Future research in this area should aim to include a broader range of Indigenous voices and viewpoints, as well as follow up with recommendations for positive engagement.

Key words: Indigenous caregivers, parental engagement, Indigenous perspectives, school psychology, service delivery

Positionality Statement

I am an Indigenous School Psychology Master's student with mixed ancestry that includes European and Canadian Indigenous descent. I am a registered member of Pinaymootang First Nation, situated in the Interlake region of Manitoba, located on treaty 2 territory, although I grew up living off reserve in the city of Winnipeg. I am a descendent of a residential school survivor and recognize the impacts of intergenerational trauma. I approach this research holding both Western and Indigenous experiences; my education and training are from a colonial academic background, but I make the conscious effort to practice respectful engagement in learning about and honouring Indigenous research methods through research and learning from Indigenous scholars and Elders. As a school psychology student, I have received training in the standard ethical psychological processes, including engaging with families from diverse cultural backgrounds. I have completed two practicum placements with Indigenous communities in Manitoba, working alongside and learning from Indigenous psychologists, educators, and families. Additionally, I have grown up learning from my mother, an Indigenous school social worker, allowing me to become aware of the unique challenges that many Indigenous families experience within the school system. However, she also showed me the importance of creating genuine relationships with families, and the importance of creating cultural connections to support families and children. This is a value I continue to implement in my practice. I approached this work with the hope of addressing the inequities experienced by Indigenous families to inform service provision and access.

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Conversations with Caregivers: Indigenous Perspectives on Engagement with School Psychologists

Residential schools led to the devastation of Indigenous culture, language, and ways of knowing (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015), with extensive research documenting the traumatic impacts on the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples and communities (Barnes et al., 2006; Bernett et al., 2023, Milne, 2016; Snow et al., 2021; TRC, 2015). Residential school attendance and its intergenerational effects have been linked to poorer health and developmental outcomes, including mental distress, addictive behaviours, and decreased academic and social-emotional outcomes among Indigenous populations (McCormick, 1996; Wilk et al., 2017; TRC, 2015). For many Indigenous families, schools continue to be associated with the legacies of residential schools and may be perceived as perpetuating colonial values. Despite such a foundation of potential mistrust, school psychologists hold an important role in students' education, ensuring students receive the necessary support for lifelong success. However, the profession of school psychology is not immune to historical and current colonial legacies. It is crucial that school psychologists take concrete steps to integrate culturally safe and relevant practices that foster the development of trusting and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous caregivers to promote engagement and support Indigenous families.

Caregiver Engagement

Caregiver engagement can be defined as active contribution or feelings of involvement with academics and connection with school staff (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2019), including consultations with school psychologists and engagement with assessments and support recommendations. Caregiver engagement typically reflects joint

communication between school and home (Schneider & Arnot, 2018) and promotes positive developmental outcomes for children.

Much of the literature surrounding caregiver engagement in schools prioritizes engagement modalities that reflect dominant groups in society, rarely taking the perspective of minority groups (Zaidi et al., 2021). Caregivers from minority groups often find engagement with schools difficult due to cultural mismatches and systemic racial barriers, but still desire to be involved in their children's learning and education (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013). Despite shared values promoting child success and wellbeing, relationships between schools and Indigenous families subsist in the context of colonial systems and the legacies of residential schooling (Milne, 2016; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2019). Research on the engagement of African American families found that caregivers were often forced to conform to Western standards of engagement and parenting practices in order to navigate the school system (Delale-O'Conner et al., 2019). Similar issues arise for minority caregivers in Canada, as the current education system presents a binary approach to caregiver engagement in which minority groups must assimilate to Western standards or face marginalization and continued discrimination (Milne, 2016).

Further, there exists a disconnect in what constitutes respectable parenting between Indigenous and Western cultures (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2019). Literature from largely Western education systems has shown the positive impacts that caregiver engagement has on children's academic and social-emotional outcomes (Epstein, 2005; Rogers et al., 2009; Zaidi et al., 2021). However, much of this research normalizes race-neutral frameworks that do not consider cultural differences in childrearing practices (Delale-O'Conner et al., 2019) and work to maintain systemic discrimination.

Caregiver engagement with school psychologists, including consultations and follow-up with interventions, is vital to addressing children's mental health needs and ensuring children receive support (Golson et al., 2022; Pereira & Barros, 2019). School psychologists are situated within the intersection of mental health, education, and child and family welfare, making their role in reconciliation critical in the advocacy for, and integration of, culturally relevant practices for Indigenous students and families (Bernett et al., 2023; Golson et al., 2022; Manitoba Association of School Psychologists, 2022). Generating systemic changes to foster Indigenous caregiver trust and willingness to engage with school psychologists may be particularly challenging due to discrimination, culturally inappropriate treatments, and disrespect which have generated skepticism among many Indigenous families when it comes to working with school psychologists (Fijal & Beagan, 2019). Narrowing in on the needs of Indigenous families in Canada is contextualized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Report (2015), which released 94 Calls to Action outlining the steps necessary for Canada's overarching systems, including education and health systems, to address harms of colonization and move towards a mutually respectful and equity-promoting society. The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) has committed to addressing the 94 Calls to Action in a report detailing guiding principles and pathways for the profession of psychology when working with Indigenous communities and families (Canadian Psychological Association, 2018).

Cultural Misalignment of Psychological Practice Standards

Mistrust and tension stemming from residential school involvement, coupled with the harm and abuse perpetrated against Indigenous communities, may have generated barriers for Indigenous families to develop trusting relationships with schools and school staff, including school psychologists, impeding their desire to access services and connect with service providers

(Bernett et al., 2023; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2019; Wilk et al., 2019). A distrust in the school system results in less caregiver engagement (Snow et al., 2021). Further, differing cultures have differing understandings of when and where to seek medical, physical, or spiritual help, ranging from traditional practices such as sweat lodge, ceremony, and/or spiritual counselling to Western medical and health practitioners. When it comes to mental health, individuals from different cultural backgrounds may not perceive psychologists to be the most appropriate supports for mental health needs and would rather consult with Elders or spiritual counsellors who are more aligned with their own cultural values (Fiedeldey- Van Dijk et al., 2016; Pumariega et al., 2005). The CPA's (2018) response report to the TRC (2015) outlines recommendations for service delivery and mental health programming relevant to specific areas of psychology including assessment, treatment, training, research, education, and advocacy.

Culturally Competent Practices

In relation to the third principle of the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, *Integrity in Relationships*, the CPA notes that the profession of psychology has not yet taken steps to complete adequate cultural safety and competence training required to appropriately consider relations with Indigenous populations. They urge psychologists to reflect on how their perspectives and beliefs influence their relationships with Indigenous persons and families. Indigenous research approaches emphasize the importance of relationship-building and creating trusting and collaborative relationships (Fiedeldey- Van Dijk et al., 2016; Gould et al, 2021; Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008), therefore, it is vital for school psychologists to work towards collaborative and mutually respectful interactions with Indigenous caregivers to promote engagement.

Among the many considerations that the CPA has highlighted for psychologists, they have specifically urged practitioners to become familiar with culturally appropriate practices and work to find solutions and restorative practices (e.g., community-building circles) rather than focusing on labelling or diagnosing, when working with Indigenous populations. The CPA also outlines guiding principles for assessments, including *Culturally-Grounded Assessments and Approaches* (CPA, 2018, p. 16), which emphasizes the importance of understanding and incorporating Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and methodologies whenever possible in the assessment process. In regards to cultural allyship, psychologists need to "recognize the degree to which Indigenous Peoples in Canada have lacked freedom of choice due to governmental policies, and as a result, how significant a role personal and collective choice plays in treatment and in the reclamation of cultural identity and healing" (CPA, 2018, p. 11). There is a push for school psychologists to create space for autonomy in the assessment process and the integration of Indigenous perspectives in case conceptualization and education planning, further highlighting the importance of caregiver engagement.

Standard Assessments

School psychologists have a responsibility to develop and advocate for more culturally appropriate procedures to increase accessibility for all Canadians, and specifically for Indigenous populations (TRC, 2015). While there are many facets of psychological services that can be problematic for non-Western populations, the use of Western standardized intelligence tests is perhaps the most commonly referenced problem. Beiser and Gotowiec (2000) found that Indigenous children had substantially lower performance scores on standardized Intelligence Quotients (IQ) tests, particularly in the verbal subscale, than their non–Indigenous counterparts within the dominant culture. The CPA acknowledges the disconnect between Western

standardized assessment processes and results for Indigenous populations, discussing the (mis)application of results (CPA, 2018, p. 16). There is a tendency for Indigenous students to be overrepresented with lower IQ and disability diagnoses (Canadian Psychological Association, 2018) while also being underrepresented in gifted education programs (Golson et al., 2022). IQ is not the only predictor of success and school is not the only form of education. Constructs such as intelligence should be described within the cultural context of the individual being assessed, and psychological assessments of Indigenous individuals should avoid framing an individual in a Western diagnostic context (Golson et al., 2022; Snow et al., 2021).

School psychologists act in accordance with procedures guided by institutional mandates that are framed through colonial values and perspectives and can inadvertently do harm to families and children when not equipped to recognize diverse parenting strategies, how culture influences intelligence test scores, and how the poor validity of the tests may attribute to the apparent intelligence deficits (Karim & Weisz, 2010; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2019; Snow et al., 2021). Further, these types of assessments do not consider language dialects, including whether students' first language is a traditional Indigenous language, or if students use an Indigenous English dialect (Ball & May Bernhardt, 2008), further perpetuating colonial values in the psychoeducational process.

Incorporation of Indigenous Knowledges

Indigenous and Western views on mental health and disabilities often do not align (Green et al., 2018). Mental health service delivery has historically failed to incorporate Indigenous knowledges and diverse traditional healing practices (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000). An emergent way to incorporate both Indigenous knowledges and Western systems is through Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett et al., 2007). Two-Eyed Seeing is an approach to research, coined by Mi'kmaw

Elders, Albert Marshall and Murdena Marshall, that recognizes the need for and importance of both Western and Indigenous knowledges to be included in research processes that involve Indigenous communities and embraces research in a way that privileges Indigenous voices (Bartlett et al., 2007; Reid, 2020). Through a Two-Eyed Seeing approach, both research modalities are held as equal, and are incorporated in the research process in an equitable manner. Understanding traditional practices and their significance, and working to incorporate them into their own practices, is important for school psychologists to consider in order to respectfully and effectively work with Indigenous students and families (Canadian Psychological Association, 2018).

Additional Pathways to Reconciliation

Research discussing the importance of taking proactive steps to address psychology's role in perpetuating harmful colonial practices is burgeoning. There is acknowledgement that while psychology has provided recommendations for cultural literacy, practices do not reflect this (Bernett et al., 2023). Bernett et al., (2023) outlined areas of consideration for school psychologists when working with Indigenous families that reflect and extend the CPA's recommendations. Day (2023) discussed potential changes for psychological education and training to "Indigenize" graduate level psychology programs (p. 46). Pham et al., (2022) advocate for the inclusion of a "cultural humility framework" within school psychology to promote equity for minority groups, while Fiedeldey- Van Dijk et al (2016) advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous culture in framing interventions. Clear guidelines and recommendations exist for pathways to cultural relevancy and literacy within psychology. However, school psychology still has improvements to make in taking actionable steps to updating its practices to answer the TRC's Calls to Actions, align with the CPA's guiding principles, and begin to

understand and integrate Indigenous perspectives on traditional and family-oriented needs, and the barriers and facilitators to Indigenous caregiver engagement.

The Current Study

The process of reconciliation and acknowledgement of harms towards Indigenous populations is relatively recent for colonial institutions, with little research to date documenting Indigenous caregiver perspectives on concerns regarding their engagement with schools. It is necessary to recognize, understand, and incorporate Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, and voices into the education and mental health systems. This current study aimed to gather perspectives and record the experiences of Indigenous caregivers' engagement with school psychologists within Manitoba schools, including their reported understandings of standard psychological processes and the perceived cultural relevancy of these consultations and interactions with school psychologists. To do this, Indigenous caregivers of children with past and/or current involvement with school psychologists were invited to share their stories through an interview. There has been a notable gap in the literature surrounding caregiver engagement with school psychologists, in particular, Canadian Indigenous caregivers. This study sought to showcase Indigenous caregiver perspectives and give voice to Indigenous families who have been consistently underrepresented in both education and mental health servicing.

Method

Participants

In this study, caregiver is broadly defined to include biological parents, foster parents, adopted parents, grandparents, aunt, uncles, siblings, or anyone else that is a primary caregiver for a child. The term caregiver is used as not all participants were biological parents, or considered themselves 'parents' of the children in their care; rather, they referred to themselves

as caregivers, which included biological parents, foster parents, adopted parents, and/or kinship caregivers.

Eligibility for this study included: (1) self-identifying as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or of mixed Indigenous descent; (2) being a primary caregiver of a 5-21-year-old child currently enrolled in a Manitoba school; (3) having contact with a school psychologist within the past 5 years. Participant recruitment did not stop due to data saturation, which has been a topic of contention in the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Data collection ended in part due to time constraints and a lack of interest from prospective participants. There were sixty-two prospective participants, 54 of which met eligibility criteria. Of those eligible participants, 16 scheduled interviews but only half showed up. Therefore, a total of 8 self-identifying Indigenous caregivers participated in the current study.

Six of the participants self-identified as female and two self-identified as male. Five participants self-identified as First Nations, two self-identified as Métis, and one self-identified as having mixed ancestry. One participant lived in Northern Manitoba while the rest were situated within the city of Winnipeg. Given the identifying nature of the small sample size, participant data will not be desegregated between Indigenous identities. The median income level among participants was $25 000 - $49 000, with a median education level of College/ Technical school degree. Participants had between 1-5 children, with a child median age of 12-years. Seven participants reported a family history of residential school attendance, while one participant reported not being sure.

Procedure

All procedures were approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board (HE2022-0376). Participants were recruited from the community through convenience sampling

using online advertisement and collaboration with community agencies and practicing school psychologists in Manitoba. Interested individuals were directed to complete an online screener to confirm eligibility. Once deemed eligible, participants were provided with a consent form detailing the study purpose, confidentiality information, and potential risks and benefits. Consenting participants were then invited to schedule a 90-minute online or in-person interview. Participants were compensated at a rate of $25/30 minutes for their interview, in the form of an electronic gift card, to show gratitude for sharing their stories. They were also provided with a resource list that included mental health resources in Manitoba, if requested.

Culturally Grounded Research

The research team consisted of myself, the Indigenous team lead, and two research assistants, one of whom self-identifies as Métis. Interviews were conducted by the team lead, while transcriptions and analysis were completed by the entire research team. The research process was supported by a non-Indigenous settler and advisor who works to be an ally in supporting this work from a lens of self-determination.

To develop a process grounded in community values, I engaged with multiple Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and culturally relevant practitioners to bring together multiple perspectives on appropriate and respectful approaches to recruiting and interviewing Indigenous caregivers, and analyzing Indigenous data. Cultural advisors were consulted at multiple time points throughout the study, including prior to participant recruitment, after the first interview, and during the data analysis process. Cultural advisors provided insight into the significance of appropriate psychoeducational measures for Indigenous youth, creating and fostering trusting relationships with families, recognizing and respecting traditional and cultural values as essential for understanding Indigenous families, and considerations of data sovereignty. They also

underscored the importance of researching and understanding the experience of Indigenous families, particularly concerning historical trauma related to Child Welfare System involvement. Cultural advisors were gifted Tobacco for sharing their knowledge.

Measures

Sociodemographic Questionnaire

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to provide sociodemographic information, including family composition, education level, annual household income, and family residential or day school involvement (See Appendix A).

Perceived Barriers Scale

During the interview, participants were provided with a list of barriers (See Appendix B) that have been identified through the literature as impeding caregiver engagement with schools and school staff. Using a Likert scale with the anchors (1) *strongly disagree* to (5*) strongly agree*, participants were asked to rate the perceived importance of these barriers as they related to their personal engagement. They were also given the opportunity to include any barriers that were missing from the list.

Interviews

Caregivers were invited to participate in interviews and respond to questions regarding their experiences and understandings of their and their child(ren)'s involvement with school psychologists (See Appendix B). Interviews were created to take 1-hour but ranged from 45-90 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured using primarily open-ended with some close-ended questions that explored topics relating to: (a) traditional practices and cultural relevancy; (b) relationships with schools and school psychologists; (c) understandings of roles and processes; (d) perceived barriers and facilitators to engagement; (e) future directions and changes. The

interviews were informed by the DSM-5's Cultural Formulation Interview (Aggarwal et al., 2016) and designed to allow caregivers the space share their experiences through conversation. Both online and in-person options were offered; however, all participants opted for online interviews.

Qualitative Analysis

While navigating the research process, it is vital to focus on reciprocity (Maiter et al., 2008) and the power dynamics that exist between researchers and participants (Baum et al., 2006), which is especially important when working with Indigenous communities and families (Kovach, 2021). Prior to beginning the interview, caregivers were engaged in conversation so they could get to know myself, my positionality and my role as a researcher. This allowed for a relationship to be built prior to beginning the research portion of the interview where caregivers felt comfortable sharing their experiences.

Throughout the interview, my guidance of the conversation was limited; rather, caregivers were provided the space to share their story. Story telling is an important part of Indigenous traditions, and a central aspect of Indigenous epistemologies (Iseke, 2013; Kovach, 2021; Tachine et al., 2016; Wilson, 2008). It is important to recognize the historical negative impacts of psychology on Indigenous populations and to acknowledge there will inevitably be distrust for Indigenous participants when working with psychologists, even with Indigenous psychologists. Therefore, the interview process was guided by the practice of Two-Eyed Seeing, honouring the knowledge and values of both Indigenous and Western practices, following the recommendations set forth by Wright et al. (2019) encompassing reciprocal relationships and research, accountability, Indigenous involvement and deferring to Indigenous leadership, and inclusion of Indigenous methodology.

The current study utilizes a qualitative research methodology to align with Indigenous research methodologies (Kovach, 2021). Since I was interested in the meanings and understandings that caregivers attribute to their experiences working with school psychologists, I applied a reflexive thematic analysis, guided by an interpretivist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2008). Reflexive TA follows organic coding procedures that do not require a codebook or coding framework (Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2021). Reflexive TA is ideal for looking at personal experiences situated within wider socio-cultural contexts through identifying patterns across entire data sets (Braun & Clark, 2020). Reflexive TA is appropriate for this study as it allows the coding procedure to remain unstructured, changing as the researcher's understandings of the emergent themes and codes change (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Further, Reflexive TA considers the researcher's biases and subjectivity in the analysis process, which is consistent with Indigenous sciences, in which the researcher's self-identity is tied to their place in nature, and therefore their place in science (Hatcher et al., 2009). The researcher's subjectivity is vital to interpreting codes through a reflexive TA approach (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

This reflexive TA followed a six-phased method which involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, refining and naming themes, and reporting the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2008, 2021). Unlike other analysis procedures reflexive TA allows for more theoretical flexibility (D'Souza et al., 2022). Since this data was used to reflect on Indigenous caregiver experiences working with school psychologist, an interpretivist approach pairs well with the reflexive TA procedure, as it allowed data interpretation to remain organic to the context of the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2021; Lin, 1998). An interpretivist approach aligns with Indigenous methodology, such as meaning making, in that the meanings that participants attribute to their experiences are centralized and

used to generate themes and codes (Kivunja, 2017). The flexibility of reflexive TA and interpretivist theories allows for more freedom to look at the data in a way that reflects Indigenous perspectives and epistemologies. Kovach outlines strategies for incorporating thematic analysis into Indigenous methodologies using 6 steps: (1) A priori framework, which involves situating Indigenous theory into the analytical framework; (2) First level analysis, which involves understanding what the stories are revealing; (3) Relational analysis, which involves exploring the burgeoning relationships between stories; (4) Intentional interpretation, which urges the researcher to confirm the analysis is situated in Indigenous theory; (5) Arriving at themes; (6) valuing and incorporating "Coyote Codes", which are outlier codes (Kovach, 2021, p. 208). These steps were reflected and incorporated into Braun and Clarke's (2008; 2021) thematic analysis steps.

Rigour

To ensure the quality of this study, the 15-point checklist criteria provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) for good thematic analysis was adhered to throughout the entire qualitative analysis process. Audio files were transcribed by two research assistants and checked by the principal investigator for accuracy. Interview notes were completed after each interview that provided a broad overview of the discussion and the principal investigator's first impressions of the data. The coding process implemented researcher triangulation where research assistants and the principal investigator independently coded transcripts and came together to discuss their interpretations and understandings of the data. Final coding and theme generation was conducted by the principal investigator. All data files were considered equally in the coding process. As the principal investigator, I acknowledge my own experiences and how these may have influenced my interpretation of the data.

Participants were offered to engage in the process of member checking, which is a technique used to check for accuracy and credibility of results, by having participants review their own transcript (Birt et al., 2016). This approach has been cited by Indigenous scholars as vital for maintaining trust and respect throughout the research process and working to correct the misrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples within academic research (Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). However, no participants endorsed wanting to engage in member checking.

Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive Data

During the interview process, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire rating the perceived importance of barriers to caregiver engagement within schools. Data was analyzed using R software (R Core Team, 2021). Due to the small sample size for quantitative data, data was analyzed descriptively and used to supplement qualitative findings.

Results

I recognize the matter of authority regarding writing about and interpreting Indigenous voices and stories. Language is a medicine (Archibald, 2008) and the stories that have been shared within this study do not belong to me; rather, receiving stories is a gift and "…collecting data is the gifting of another's story to the researcher" (Kovach, 2021, p. 156). These stories have been gifted to me and it is my honour to share them, while acknowledging my interpretations and summaries are influenced my own experiences, understandings, and perspectives.

While working with Indigenous data it is important to be cognizant of not engaging in deficit theorizing, where the individual is blamed for their response to systemic deficits (Kovach, 2021). This requires conscious reflection from the researcher to engage in Indigenous theorizing, addressing colonial histories and influences, and positionality within the research (Kovach,

2021). While the following discussion may reflect largely negative sentiments, it is important to remember that these reflect deficits and failures at a systemic, not individual, level.

Conversation Summaries

Interview summaries are brief first impressions of the conversation, with identifying information changed or removed while keeping the sentiment of the story. Participants did not consent to have their names shared and were invited to share a pseudonyms; none were given, therefore, they were provided pseudonyms.

Lily

This caregiver shared their story of advocating for their elementary school aged child to receive an assessment, as they believed their child needed additional supports. They expressed frustration with trying to get their child assessed and the difficulty in receiving a referral, which required them to strongly advocate to the school on their child's behalf. Lily also mentioned subtle acts of racism and bias perpetuated towards them from school staff, based on their Indigenous heritage. Despite feeling dismissed and discriminated against by school staff when attempting to have their child referred for an assessment, their determination led to their child receiving the desired assessment and subsequent supports. Lily expressed feeling validated by the school psychologist, who acknowledged the difficulties faced by the family and confirmed the importance of the child receiving an assessment. This validation provided a sense of relief to Lily. The psychologist's communication with both the family and school staff, and the efforts made to support the chid, resulted in Lily having a positive attitude towards their experience working with the psychologist. They also highlighted the importance of their child's emotional intelligence and cultural practices in creating a holistic identity beyond their diagnosis. Overall,

Lily's experience can be summarized by feelings of frustration, validation, relief and a hope for a better system where families are listened to.

Sophia

This caregiver discussed the lack of psychological services in Northern communities in Manitoba, resulting in their child having to wait almost 12 years before being able to access services. Despite this, their experience with the school psychologist was generally positive, with Sophia noting good communication with the psychologist and sufficient explanation of the assessment process. The school psychologist made the effort to build a relationship with the family and gain a better understanding of the child prior to beginning the assessment, which created a sense of ease and safety for the family. Sophia noted that the psychologist's willingness to visit in person instead of relying solely on Zoom was appreciated, as it helped bridge gaps in the community's services as well as form a connection with the family. Despite a positive experience with the school psychologist, Sophia expressed frustration with other healthcare professionals' lack of understanding of Indigenous caregiving practices and parenting styles. They emphasized the importance of understanding Indigenous ways of living and parenting, and how this can mitigate potential misunderstandings and judgements of Indigenous parents. This criticism extended to school staff, including teachers, whom Sophia noted have a tendency to perceive Indigenous parents in a bad light. Further, Sophia felt that school staff were not educated on working with children with diverse needs, resulting in inadequate or improper supports for those children, including Sophia's own child. Generally, Sophia held a positive perception of the school psychologist, but expressed concern with other healthcare practitioners and educators.

Charlotte

This caregiver discussed the process of two of their children receiving assessments in elementary school after feedback from teachers regarding their children's behaviours. They shared their negative experiences in attempting to access supports for their children and not being able to receive a referral. Despite seeking assistance from outside supports, including private services, Charlotte described feeling that their children did not receive adequate help within the school system. They expressed frustration with the lack of communication with the school psychologist once their children did receive an assessment and felt they were not adequately informed about the assessment process nor provided adequate support from the school psychologist. Charlotte expressed discomfort speaking with the school psychologist and other school staff, due to perceived disrespectful communication and racial profiling. They highlighted feeling intimated and discriminated against because of their lack of education, being a young Indigenous parent, having decisions made without them, and feeling cornered by a group of primarily White professionals. However, Charlotte expressed a positive sentiment towards the process due to the fact the assessment provided better insights into their children's challenges and functioning. Despite some positives, they expressed frustration with the lack of involvement and explanation provided during the assessment, emphasizing the importance of clear communication and understanding for parents with limited educational backgrounds. They also criticized the lack of Indigenous representation in educational settings.

Stephan

This caregiver shared their experience referring their child for an assessment in elementary school due to concerns regarding their child's learning and attention. Stephan discussed feelings of intimidation when interacting with the school psychologist, but needing to

overcome that in order to prioritize their child's education and support needs. Despite efforts made by the school psychologist to understand their familial circumstances, Stephan expressed frustration with a lack of understanding of their community's culture and ways of living. They value communication and honesty, and acknowledged that while some recommendations provided may not fit their child's maturity level or specific needs, they believed the school psychologist was doing their best to support their child. Additionally, Stephan advocated for more diversity among psychologists to better align with the experiences of the families they serve.

Riley

This caregiver shared their story on supporting the children in their care to ensure they received access to proper supports, including psychoeducational assessments. Riley discussed being an advocate for their children and doing research on their own time to clearly outline their child's struggles and support needs for the schools when seeking assessments. Riley mentioned occasionally needing to find external support for assessments when they faced difficulty accessing support through the school. They also highlighted the importance of clear communication and collaboration between themselves, the school, and external assessment providers to ensure the child's needs are met effectively. Overall, Riley expressed satisfaction with the assessment process and the support received. They suggested that psychologists working with Indigenous families should be mindful of trauma history and work towards building trust with families. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of establishing a genuine connection with families and being supportive of the child's needs while acknowledging the challenges faced by Indigenous communities in seeking help and support from Western systems.

Blake

This caregiver shared multiple experiences working with school psychologists, noting differing levels of willingness to engage with the school system. During initial meetings, they felt intimated and defensive, rejecting the assistance offered due to a lack of trust with the school. Initially, Blake felt overwhelmed and misunderstood by school staff who did not understand the personal challenges they were facing and how this impacted their ability to parent. They felt that the school psychologist was part of a system that did not take the time to understand their situation and believed that more communication and relationship-building from the beginning could have led to better outcomes for their child. Blake shared a story of another experience with the school psychologist where they felt more receptive and recognized the importance of early intervention and support for their child. Despite this, they still felt hesitant engaging with the school system due to a lack of communication and understanding from the school psychologist. In this conversation, they touched on cultural differences in engaging with school psychologists, highlighting the colonial nature of assessments and the lack of consideration for Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Blake expressed the need for more Indigenous school psychologists and culturally relevant support in schools. Finally, Blake reflected on the challenges their child faced in expressing his Indigenous identity at school and the importance of cultural support and acceptance in educational settings.

Bailey

This caregiver shared their story of navigating the process to get their child an assessment in early elementary school and the supports they received from the school psychologist. Bailey discussed advocating on their child's behalf and finally finding someone who believed them and helped them get a referral, after being dismissed by school staff time and again. They discussed

finding comfort in working with the school psychologist, who provided explanations about the assessment and recommendations for support at home and school. As they reflected on their interactions with the school psychologist, Bailey expressed appreciation for the psychologist's willingness to listen without passing judgement, emphasizing the psychologist's caring and understanding approach that made them feel valued as a caregiver. They felt supported and empowered by the psychologist's collaborative approach, seeking input and suggestions from the caregiver. Cultural considerations were briefly mentioned, as Bailey expressed appreciation that the school psychologist asked about their child's spiritual name, which this caregiver noted is rare for Western practitioners to ask about. Overall, they felt gratitude for the support received and the positive impact it had on their child's school experience.

Jordan

This caregiver reflected on their journey navigating the education system for their child, from elementary to high school. Jordan discussed the challenges of finding funding for children who do not fit typical criteria. They expressed frustration with the lack of understanding and communication from the school staff, particularly regarding inclusion of children with diverse needs. Jordan emphasized the importance of being heard and understood in educational settings, highlighting the systemic challenges faced by families navigating the educational support system. As they discussed their child's transitions through various schools, Jordan expressed gratitude for the consistent support of the school psychologist, whom they perceived as an educated outsider capable of advocating effectively for their child's needs. They appreciated the psychologist's understanding of their child's unique needs and hope for continued involvement in their child's education. Jordan also discussed their ongoing communication with the school psychologist and the importance of being actively involved in their child's education. They

touched upon cultural differences in interactions with school staff, and highlighted the importance of acknowledging and respecting diverse backgrounds. Jordan stressed the need for school psychologists to establish genuine connections with Indigenous families and to demonstrate empathy and cultural awareness in their approach.

Theme Analysis

These conversations with Indigenous caregivers revealed four themes, encompassing multiple subthemes, outlined in Table 1. The themes that caregivers discuss are intertwined and splitting them felt like fracturing a story. Despite reporting them as separate, the themes are fluid and flow into one another; one cannot exist without the others. It was a serendipitous occurrence that the themes connect in a circular fashion, aligning with the concept of circles that is often found in Indigenous culture. Circles represent holism and connection (Archibald, 2008) and imply that all parts are equal and cannot exist on their own (Wilson, 2008). Themes and subthemes are visualized in a thematic map (see Figure 1).

Table 1

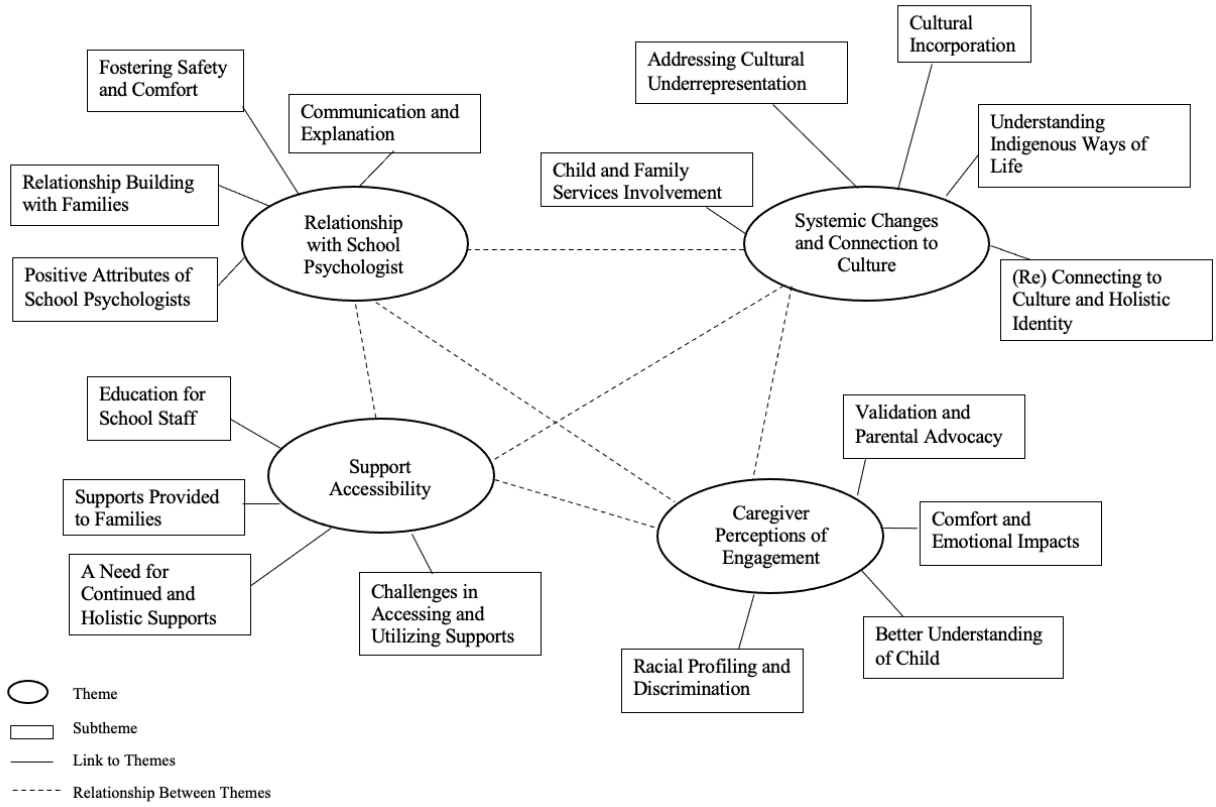
Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Relationship with School Psychologist	Relationship Building with Families Fostering Safety and Comfort Communication and Explanation Positive Attributes of School Psychologists
Caregiver Perceptions of Engagement	Better Understanding of Child Validation and Parental Advocacy Comfort and Emotional Impacts Racial Profiling and Discrimination
Support Accessibility	Supports Provided to Families Challenges in Accessing and Utilizing Supports A Need for Continued and Holistic Supports Education for School Staff
Systemic Changes and Connection to Culture	Addressing Cultural Underrepresentation Cultural Incorporation (Re) Connecting to Culture and Holistic Identity Understanding Indigenous Ways of Life

	Child and Family Services Involvement

Figure 1

Final thematic map showing four themes



Theme 1. Relationship with School Psychologists

> *"It's about relationships. I feel like I say this all the time. But it is. It's the foundation of who we are. That's the worst thing they stole from us with colonization, is how to be in that relationship with each other."* [Lily].

All caregivers reported the relationship they had with school psychologists impacted their engagement and discussed the various aspects that they perceived as influencing this relationship. Caregivers talked more about the aspects they believed fostered positive relationships rather than detailing negative relationships. They pointed out qualities and missed opportunities for positive relationships that they would have liked to see but did not, including building a relationship with the family and open and consistent dialogue.

Relationship Building with Families. Relationship building was noted as particularly important in caregivers' engagements with school psychologists. Key points that were discussed included early connection with the family and meeting with caregivers prior to meeting with students in order to build a foundation of trust and respect between caregivers and the school psychologist. This would also allow school psychologists to gain an understanding of family circumstances. Stephan shared that, "*to know the child, you would have to know the parents because they are a reflection of how they are raised, right? So having to sit down with the child first, you're kind of doing things backwards because they [school pyschologists] need to look at it from a parent perspective. It would be easier if they talked to the parent*." Caregivers noted they felt more comfortable and relaxed about the assessment process when they had established a relationship with the school psychologist, even if it was a brief introduction: "*And that's what building relationships is. I think just having a conscious awareness, like really thinking about who is this family? What is their view? What is their lens? How do I need to respond to them and how do I create a safe space here, in the way that I communicate and the way that I am. That's what I would do if I was a school psychologist…Have a little premeeting over like, 'This is what we're going to do. This is who I am.'*" [Lily].

Notably, most caregivers felt as though they were not adequately involved in the assessment process, relating to a lack of communication and rapport with the school psychologist. They were not told about what the assessment consisted of, why certain tests were used, nor were the results of the assessment sufficiently explained. Charlotte expressed the significance of this: *"I think it would be [important] to just spend time with the parents…invite them if they're interested in being a part of the process because*

these things just happen and we don't know about it… I think just being involved with the parents as much as the parents are willing to be involved."

Caregivers emphasized the importance of being involved from the beginning of the assessment, not just to sign documents or when results were completed: "…*I was just brought in to basically put a signature on these papers and agree with these plans…"* [Blake]. Caregivers felt that psychoeducational plans were being created without their input and they were expected to sign off without question, which perpetuated feelings of unease and distrust with the school psychologist. It ultimately made caregivers feel they were not welcome to participate in important educational planning for their child: "*But I think it's important that you're always a part of the team*." [Jordan].

Fostering Safety and Comfort. Caregivers noted that when the school psychologist made the effort to build a relationship with them and understand their familial situation, it made them feel more comfortable allowing their child to work with the psychologist: "*I guess just like creating a sense of safety. And then that's hard because it'll be different for every family, because we're all different people. Everybody needs different things and to feel safe. But I think that that's about just making sure that they know that you're [school psychologist] a part of their community and that you care about not just their child but about their family's wellbeing*." [Lily]. Similarly, Lily also shared that, "*even the environment…there was Indigenous art. It was like, you know, just stuff around that made him feel more comfortable. So even just thinking about what's the setting we have here? Where are they going to be? Where are the kids going to be meeting?"*

For others, there was a sense of unease when the relationship building piece was missing, as they felt unsure of who was working with their child and what was being

done with them: "*There's deep rooted mistrust in the Indigenous community with Caucasian people, right? Because there are so many things done to the kids without the parents knowing and the parents never knew until the damage was already done. So, when somebody tells you they're going to assess your child and you don't really know what that means, that can also instill fear in parents*." [Charlotte]. At the same time, they did not feel comfortable asking questions or raising their concerns with school psychologists, given the lack of relationship and communication: *"Home visits [would be more comfortable]. Like we have been going to the school and …that seems like you are being cornered right. Like even if it was like we meet somewhere or we do a home visit where [school psychologist] can meet the family. You know…that way you're more comfortable."* [Stephan].

Communication and Explanation. Communication was also noted as important to relationships by all caregivers. This included communication prior to the assessment process, and a desire for continuous communication throughout the assessment. Caregivers noted mixed experiences regarding communication. Some noted that the school psychologist created an open dialogue which made them feel included and fostered a positive relationship. Sophia shared that, *"he [school psychologist] did explain everything he was going to do…So I understood what his role was. He explained it really good",* while Bailey shared that, *"the school psychologist has been awesome... She will email me and tell me like he [child] does this and that... 'What do you like suggest?' We kind of like go back and forth on suggestions, what we can do and what not*." This open and reciprocal conversation where the psychologist seeks caregiver input fostered trust and engagement.

Conversely, others noted there was a lack of communication, leading to feelings of exclusion and mistrust. Caregivers were concerned that, at times, the school psychologist hid or omitted details of the assessment process and results. Charlotte shared that, "*what I found is they sort of tippy toed around the different ideas of how he would function growing up and how he would function as an adult… I feel like instead of being helpful and giving me plans to help him they were trying to be nice about things. But I think when you assess somebody's child, you should be trying to help that family understand what does that mean and how can you, like, help that child to succeed…They didn't go over that."*

The importance of caregiver awareness of all aspects of the assessment process was emphasized. Most caregivers noted that they did not feel they understood what the role of a psychologist was or why certain children did or did not need to be assessed, even after their own child(ren) went through the process: "*There is just a lack of understanding about what the school psychologist could do*." [Blake]. They often felt confused during the assessment process and felt that aspects of the assessment and report were not fully explained: "*You know, sitting down with the parents and reading what you wrote is great, except that if there is, like, no educational background for the parent or comprehension, you reading something to them doesn't really make a difference*." [Charlotte]. Many reported feelings of intimidation and inadequacy in relation to the school psychologist, and were not comfortable asking questions. Caregivers felt that school psychologists needed to make the effort to better explain their role and the assessment process to families, which would help foster a better relationship and increase their willingness to engage.

Positive Attributes of School Psychologists. In discussing their relationships with school psychologists, caregivers noted general positive attributes that arose that reflected specific actions of the school psychologist. For some, this included the school psychologist taking the time to do a thorough assessment to accurately capture the strengths and challenges of their child. Regarding this, Jordan noted that, "*I guess I have found that they just get it. You guys get it. You understand. You understand what my child is going through…from that knowledge piece, right? You understand the diagnosis and what is needed.*" For others, positive attributes included creating an open and non-judgemental communication line where the caregiver did not feel pressured to engage but knew there was the space to do so: *"…but she just says anything that you need help with, I could help you with. And I really like that. Like she left it up to me [to engage] and she didn't point out any of the things that me or my family was struggling with*." [Blake].

Other sentiments included feeling understood by the school psychologist and being able to rely on the school psychologist to find the proper supports for their child and ensure they were implemented within the school: *"I don't know how to put it like…. They truly do want to help my son. That's their best [intention] is to figure out the best plan for him…Honesty is really the main thing... As long as they're being honest about it [assessment process]."* [Stephan]. Specific characteristics of the school psychologist that were highlighted included being welcoming, caring, understanding, and non-judgemental: "*Yeah, it's been very positive. Like, she's [school psychologist's] very caring and understanding."* [Bailey].

Theme 2. Caregiver Perceptions of Engagement

"*I don't know what I would do without her [school psychologist] quite frankly.*" [Jordan].

"*…I kept asking for help and nobody was listening and then by the time somebody cared, it was too late."* [Charlotte].

When discussing their experiences with school psychologists, caregivers reflected on both the positive and negative facets they perceived as influencing their interactions with school psychologists. Caregivers discussed the aspects they perceived as being positive in their interactions with school psychologists, including gaining a better understanding of their child and feelings of validation. Caregivers also reported aspects that hindered their engagement and negatively influenced their relationship with their child(ren)'s school. These aspects included the need for caregivers to advocate for their child to receive support, and varying levels of caregiver willingness to engage with the school. For many caregivers, their strained relationship with the school influenced their relationship with the school psychologist, sometimes deterring their ability or willingness to connect with the school psychologist.

Better Understanding of Child. Through the assessment process, caregivers reported that they felt they had a better understanding of their child and how their child functions and moves through the world: "*...I learned about the way he [child] functions… if I speak to him in complex sentences he doesn't understand…So I thought that was positive for me to know that because as a mom, when you're telling your kid to do all these things, if you don't know [how child functions] then it can create [problems]... That's probably one of the problems is I wasn't speaking to him in a way that he was able to process it…"* [Charlotte].

Despite some caregivers feeling as though they did not fully understand the assessment process, they gained a deeper connection to their child through the diagnosis and being able to provide tailored supports to their child's specific needs. Riley explained, "*Just knowing what it [diagnosis] was, what was wrong with her…and knowing how to manage her*". This was noted as one of the most positive aspects of working with the school psychologist: "*I still don't even know if I fully comprehend it because it seems like a vague term, but it's helped because through that I've been able to sort of explain it a little bit more to people, because people are sort of perplexed by his behaviour…So there's been some, you know, positive things that have come out of it [assessment process]*." [Charlotte].

Validation and Parental Advocacy. Almost every caregiver noted experiences of having to advocate for their child(ren) to either receive an assessment or a reassessment for further diagnosis, or adequate supports. They felt they knew their child was experiencing more challenges but were not receiving the support they required. This led to caregivers needing to do their own research on certain disorders and the appropriate supports and then bring this to the school: "*Like my perspective on it is I'm not going to be the doctor, [or] psychologist. But like I said, I have to understand my child. So I am going to look up things…. But I knew that if my kid didn't get support, he would be one of those children who would fall through the cracks, and I've done everything in my power to make sure that that doesn't happen."* [Jordan].

Caregivers reported feeling as though school staff were not listening to them when they brought up their children's diverse support needs, resulting in not feeling comfortable engaging with school staff. Riley touched on the importance of school staff

support: "*Knowing that you're just trying to be there to be supportive of the child that's getting assessed or let alone even getting help in general. Cause it's very hard*." Most caregivers discussed the difficulty of navigating the referral process and trying to get their child assessed and felt that the schools were not listening to their concerns, sometimes forcing them to find external services for their child to be assessed. There was consensus that the referral process was an overwhelming and challenging process to navigate without support: "*So by the time they get these assessments done and they read it to you, it's just kind of like, ugh, you know, it's just, like, a really exhausting process*." [Charlotte]. Similarly, Lily expressed, "*So it's exhausting to have to go in, literally do all of the labor in all of the places and fight for…all of it…It was the constant just banging your head against the wall at every gate until you bang through…So, yeah, the head psychologist was awesome. It was getting there, that was the piece. I don't know what is needed to change that*."

When they were finally able to access supports for their child(ren), caregivers noted feeling supported by the school psychologist, who listened to and validated their concerns: "*I found somebody that believes… what I said to them about him... So I was really, really appreciative of that*." [Bailey]. Often, this resulted in the school psychologist advocating on behalf of the family to provide proper supports for the child: "*... the school psychologist, she was so good and she just came in and she was like, 'You know, she's right. There's no reason why this child shouldn't have been here a year ago.' She's White and educated and the head of psychology. So, I was just thinking that was very beautiful allyship and so I think that, like, that is a huge thing that I really needed in that space*" [Lily].

Comfort and Emotional Impacts. Many caregivers that reported having a strained relationship with the school also had limited willingness to engage with the school and/or school psychologist. For some, they felt less inclined to engage due to perceived negative relationships with school staff. For others, they felt a need to engage for the good of their child despite not feeling welcomed by the school. Blake notes, "*I do have a lack of trust. Will I still engage with them because I know it's beneficial for my son? Yes. But I do sometimes, I feel like their relationship…it doesn't feel good*." Caregivers noted feeling less educated than the school psychologist which made them feel uncomfortable asking questions or for clarification: "*I had this belief...[that] I was more unsophisticated or uneducated, but I thought that, like, I never had a trust in doctors and a school psychologist is kind of lumped in with a doctor … and I thought, like they're going to try and put my son on these pills. They're going to try and medicate him and I was so worried about that…"* [Blake].

Some caregivers reflected on stressful experiences they had when attempting to work with school psychologists and school teams. They noted feelings of inadequacy, judgement, and rejection perpetuated by school staff. They also discussed how the school teams were composed of largely White staff members which made them feel defensive and intensified their negative experiences: "*… the school psychologist and the school social worker and these teachers and the guidance counselor, they invited me into…this parent room…And there I was, like a young single mom on welfare, struggling to go back to school and doing the best that I could do... and to be invited into this room… with all these, like White people with their clipboards and their pens. And now that I look back at*

it… I was so scared and I just felt so attacked…I just felt completely like, rejected that whole meeting. I just felt so attacked and on the defense." [Blake].

Caregivers' negative feelings about the assessment process were often directly related to the degree of communication with the school psychologist and sufficient explanation about the assessment process and results offered by the psychologist. Stephan shares, "*it's kind of intimidating because you don't know what you're getting into*." There were also concerns with what was included in the report, with some caregivers expressing concern that the reports focused too much on the caregivers' personal lives, which they felt was unnecessary to include: "*And…they assessed my children and interviewed me. So then my life is typed up in this report…And it's usually just hyper focused on the fact that I'm a single mom and I have this many kids. And I know those things can make a difference, but that seems to be the primary focus, I find…And, like, there's so much more to life than just, like, the mom's marital status and how many kids they have. There's so much more things…One of my first kids that was assessed…I found that situation, like, really stressful because the school was really stressing me out. They were approaching me and, like, asking me what was wrong with my son and I was saying, like, I don't know…I didn't have answers..."* [Charlotte]. This fostered hesitancy in engaging.

A few caregivers also reported feeling emotional about the outcomes and diagnosis for their child, with one caregiver reporting not wanting to accept that their child might need additional supports: *"… they're [school psychologist] explaining things to me and it's still emotional…Like I was upset… And he was diagnosed with [a]*

disability. And I think it was emotional just knowing that he's going to have a diagnosis and he's on medication." [Blake].

Racial Profiling and Discrimination. Stemming from colonial legacies were feelings of discrimination or judgement from school psychologists and other staff based on Indigenous heritage, the way caregivers dressed, their age, their lack of education, and/or their socioeconomic position: *"It's like the way they [school staff] addressed us or addressed me, I guess, you know? And I don't know if this sounds bad, but I'm going to say maybe they had already racially profiled our family."* [Charlotte]. Also discussed were perceptions of unconscious bias from school staff that impacted children receiving support, including Indigenous children being overlooked for assessments and supports: "*I feel like especially with Indigenous children, it's not just slipping through the cracks. There's a lot of unconscious bias that contributes to that…"* [Lily].

Lastly, caregivers noted explicit experiences of racism from school staff and how this negatively impacted their desire to engage with schools: "*My mom's White too. My dad's experienced a lot of racism in the health care system. And when she's there, never has. Always when she's not. And that's the reality. So, like, bring [white co-parent]. And so I did. Yeah, it's awful and it sucks. But that's just the bottom line. And it's still true. I experienced some really intense racism in a meeting at the school with my youngest and my partner wasn't there. When he was there, they weren't so bad*." [Lily].

Theme 3. Support Accessibility

"*I guess in hindsight, just having ongoing support would have been really helpful*." [Jordan].

Every caregiver shared their experiences navigating the process of accessing and utilizing supports, along with whether or not supports were provided to them and their child(ren). There were varying levels of support provided to caregivers, largely dependent on their relationship with the school psychologist and the school in general.

Supports Provided to Families. Most caregivers discussed receiving valuable supports from the school psychologist: "*But, I mean, it's helpful to me because I get help… So he has this area in the school that he could go when he's feeling overwhelmed and they, they have a better understanding [of him]*." [Riley]. For some caregivers, the assessment process resulted in their child receiving supports into adulthood: "*So now, because of this assessment, she is classified as a vulnerable person. She will be taking care of for the rest of her life, which makes me feel like my heart is at ease*." [Lily]. For others, they were provided supports to help manage child's behaviours and needs in everyday life. "…*The schools…they helped me out…they gave me supports and whatnot, so I've been trying to utilize them…. So I kind of like it too, that they give me suggestions what I can do with them at home."* [Bailey]. However, Jordan touched on the inadequacy of support provision: *"Okay. so did [school] share any information? I think they have to. Was it helpful? No."*

Challenges in Accessing and Utilizing Supports. Caregivers also reported challenges in utilizing the supports that were recommended or provided: *"…but trying to find funding for kiddos who don't fit the typical criteria is extremely difficult. It has been extremely difficult…It's been a journey…And I think about the fact that I have an education… and I can navigate a system. What about the families who can't and who are carrying all that trauma?"* [Jordan].

One caregiver discussed the lack of supports that were provided to Northern communities, as some communities do not have access to school psychologists or to mental health support in general: "*No counselling, no nothing. Not even the school offered anything for him*." [Sophia]. Other caregivers reported that the supports that were recommended by the school psychologist were not tailored to or relevant for their child. For example, Stephan shared that the supports were not age appropriate for their child and so they did not feel they should implement them: "*They provided like some things that we could do at home. I don't know. Some things were kind of childish for my son's age and for his maturity*." This relates to a lack of relationship building and the school psychologist not taking the time to get to know the family or the student, as caregivers felt the school psychologist was providing blanket recommendations and did not understand their child's individual support needs: "*So in the end, that department hasn't helped other than they, like, they did their job, they did their report, they made their diagnosis and yeah*." [Charlotte].

A Need for Continued and Holistic Supports. Caregivers discussed feeling as though there was a lack of communication between agencies, particularly Child and Family Services (CFS) and the schools, that impacted the support provided to children, as well as the communication between agencies and families: "*By the time you get the report, you don't even know how to get a hold of these people anymore, let alone ask questions, right?"* [Charlotte]. Further, they discussed a need for continued supports after children were involved with psychology and particularly after graduating school. Additionally, caregivers felt there was a lack of communication between the school psychologist and teachers regarding supports that led to teachers being unaware of the

supports or how to implement them within the classroom: "*You know, it's like the telephone game where things get kind of like skewed. I think with teachers there's varying understandings of what it means, like all these assessments and so on. If you have like the teacher in the meeting and the resource teacher in the meetings and the school psychologist giving their recommendations all in the same room with the parents. I feel like that's important. Then it's like okay, we're all here, we all heard this."* [Lily].

Education for School Staff. Caregivers noted that many school staff were not educated about mental health, psychopathologies, or supporting students with diverse needs. Specifically, Bailey noted that, "*I don't think the teacher really understood him [child]*." Caregivers felt that teachers were not adequately equipped to be supporting their children: "*And the biggest challenge is that when educators go through and get their education degree, they don't learn about inclusion. They don't learn about our kids, right? Whether they're autistic or ADHD or whatever. You shouldn't have to do a masters to learn about inclusion. We're putting people, these professionals, in this position to implement this concept, but they have no clue about it*." [Jordan]. A couple caregivers expressed a sentiment about the school needing to change in order to support their child, rather than their child having to learn to adapt to the school, and that this change could be brought forth with better education for teachers and staff: "*I don't want nothing to change about him. I want the schools to change to support him. …they just have a lack of understanding of how ADHD kids are…I hope the school gets education on ADHD children.*" [Sophia].

Theme 4. Systemic Changes and Connection to Culture

"It's just that's your culture. That's who you are." [Stephan].

"*Nobody really factors in, like, our culture*." [Sophia].

Lastly, caregivers discussed the aspects they felt should change about the Western education system and the way that school psychology operates. Caregivers reflected on the cultural underrepresentation found in the school system along with the lack of incorporation of Indigenous culture and traditions into curricula and education planning, including clinical interventions and recommendations. Caregivers expressed differing cultural identities and varying ways of connecting with and incorporating traditions into their lives. They discussed hopes for their children as they navigate the world, including finding their own connections with culture and holistic identities. They also advocated for the inclusion of Indigenous culture into educational systems.

Addressing Cultural Underrepresentation. A few caregivers discussed the lack of Indigenous school staff, educators, and school psychologists within the education system. Charlotte discussed the impact of this: *"So that also has created a problem for my kids in the school system too, like in our neighbourhood…When you go to a school and nobody looks like you, right?"* Caregivers expressed the notion that they would feel more comfortable interacting with and seeing psychologists that looked like them and understood their culture and values: "*But it would be much easier for us to see the people that look like myself or understand what I've been through instead of trying to, you know, fit in with them…but I just don't see too many Indigenous support workers in there at schools. It's not a bad thing, it's just unfortunate, but it is what it is."* [Stephan]. This perpetuated feelings of hesitancy and unease for many caregivers, especially when factoring in colonial legacies: "*I hope that it could change. Definitely with more*

Indigenous school psychologists. And it's a more familiar face like, hey, you know, you're like brown like me. And then that for sure, that is less threatening." [Sophia].

Cultural Incorporation. All caregivers noted that they try to incorporate traditional healing, such as medicines, ceremonies, and land-based activities in their everyday life and in supporting their children. A couple caregivers discussed how land-based learning was more helpful for their children than the recommendations provided by the school psychologist: "*Also, the understanding that my son is a hunter/gatherer and has a deep connection with the land, just like the elders say there is nothing wrong with him. He is just not meant to be in a classroom all day and conform to colonial expectations and timelines*." [Sophia].

Relatedly, caregivers discussed the disconnect between Western assessments and Indigenous culture; they felt that assessments were culturally irrelevant and did not consider Indigenous culture or knowledge: "*So maybe it's even looking at rewriting the types of assessments or these current assessments and adapting them according to culture or language*." [Charlotte]. A few caregivers noted that their child only receives Western services to satisfy schools so that CFS is not involved, but that they do not feel those services are appropriate, nor that the diagnosis held any meaning for them or their family. Stephan noted the apparent lack of willingness from staff to make cultural accommodations: "*Where it's like okay, this is the way we [Western educators] go about things. The way we like doing things, agree with it or not. And if I don't agree with it, it's like, okay, well…that's the way they want it, you know, where it's like, you don't hear me out…it'd be a lot nicer if there were people that were more willing to listen instead of talk*."

Caregivers reported that they hoped that psychology could begin to incorporate Indigenous culture, including traditional healing methods, into its psychoeducational framework, in order to better reflect Indigenous ways of living and hold more relevancy for them and their communities: "*I think that kids should be knowing how to harvest food and medicines and how these medicines are used. Or how to purify water to protect and to have that close relationship with land…And what's important and also to know to be brought up in our ways, right. Where children are at the center of the community and. And that, you know, they have the right to have their spirit name and their clan to know which family lines they come from and where their original territories are and when gifts started to emerge, and those gifts are nurtured and supported…And I don't think any of that really is even thought of with school psychology*." [Blake].

(Re) Connecting to Culture and Holistic Identity. Caregivers discussed how their culture is intertwined in their self-identity and wanting to raise their children to know who they are, and not feeling as though receiving a diagnosis defined their child: *"We haven't highlighted that [diagnosis] as the reason why he [child] struggles…So I just hope that he can, yeah, accept himself."* [Jordan]. They want their children to find a holistic identity and know their gifts outside of the diagnosis. When discussing their child, Lily further explained, "…*she has an intellectual disability…and not that I like to ever say that out loud very much, but it's the truth and I never told her. I feel like it would hurt her. There's so many beautiful things about her that contribute to our community and to our people*."

For many, diagnosis is a Western concept and does not align with their understanding of mental health. In addition to a holistic identity, caregivers reported that

they hoped their children are happy and can navigate the Western world being proud of who they are and their Indigenous heritage. Sophia explained that, *"I hope that [child] grows into be a good man that can function in life, and you know, I hope he doesn't keep doing bad things. But he seems really good…But I think the life in the reserve is the life for him... And it's not as strict. He won't be treated like a criminal. So his life is here.*"

Most caregivers shared that they are reconnecting with their culture because for years they had to hide their Indigenous identity or were not raised knowing their culture, and that they are sharing that journey with their children. Charlotte noted, *"I try to take the kids to as many events like as we can because I didn't really know a lot about my family's history when I started to have kids*." Similarly, Blake reported that **"***I expose them [children] by bringing them to ceremonies and I guess because it's newer. It's not something that like I did all my life…"* Some caregivers mentioned struggling to find their cultural identity, as they felt torn between White and Indigenous self-identities: "*You know, it's funny because growing up, there was no Anishinaabe or whatever… So now I'm on a little reclaiming journey*." [Jordan].

They also discussed the precariousness of not wanting to force their children to engage with traditional activities, such as ceremonies, but also wanting their children to be able to find a sense of identity that incorporates their Indigenous heritage: "*I would say, to just reject it and to learn about who they are as Indigenous Peoples…That's more important…Having a good, healthy sense of identity…That they just can grow into, learn who they are and their gifts…just have a good life…I'm okay if they're not successful in the Western society of Canada."* [Blake]. Many caregivers expressed a

desire to instil in their children the idea of living a ‘good life’ according to Indigenous ideals, which values the importance of community.

Understanding Indigenous Ways of Life. Caregivers discussed feeling as though school staff, and the school psychologist in particular, did not understand the way that many Indigenous families live. There was a noted lack of awareness and understanding of the differences in Indigenous culture, parenting, and ways of living among Western educators and practitioners: “*For schools psychologists… they should just have an understanding of our lifestyles, what we actually do and the activities the kids participate in or what they should be participating in…Just like an understanding of trauma that is more cultural for these kids*.” [Sophia]. There are many factors outside of school, such as socioeconomic status, family health, food security, and the amount of sleep a child got the night before that influence how they perform at school that are not being considered when looking at a child’s functioning at school. Riley explained that additional understanding of Indigenous histories is vital: “*So if you’re working with a lot of Indigenous families, there might [be] a lot of backlash from them. And it’s not anything obviously towards you, but it’s just the fact of their background…And it’s just some people trust and some people don’t and it’s very hard*.”

This sentiment also relates to school psychologists not taking the time to build relationships with families and understand familial circumstances. One aspect that was frequently discussed was differences between Indigenous and Western ways of living, being, and understanding of mental health and education. Charlotte further explained, “*…I think it’s good if people in the school system or in the psychology department could also factor in family situations and see maybe where they might need to go like the extra*

mile…maybe they need to consider our culture more… Do these people [school psychologists] realize a lot of the trauma that the families have been through, [are] not because of them, but because of this systematic approach to the way this country decides to treat Indigenous people, right?"

Caregivers expressed a disconnect between the Western education system and understanding of mental health and wellbeing compared to Indigenous knowledges, reporting that the Western education system did not understand and incorporate Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Many also reported not valuing Western education and a desire for their children to learn Indigenous education, such as medicines, land-based learning, and sacred teachings. Caregivers felt a pressure to engage with the Western education system and expressed hope that schools would begin to learn and understand Indigenous ways, in order to incorporate this into practice, which extended to the practice of school psychology: "…*Western society is so individualistic and that's just not how we are and so for me and for our family, just like having someone who understands what this means… The reality is our ways are not deficit disordered. They're not like the Western methods…This is just the colonial way that we need to move through life because of the systems that have been imposed on our people. But that's not our way*." [Lily].

Child and Family Services Involvement. Involvement with CFS was brought up in every conversation: *"{Were there any other, like, sort of challenges or barriers that you have experienced, like working with psychologists that you can think of?} Honestly, the fear of CFS."* [Stephan]. Caregivers reported constantly worrying and fearing that schools will involve CFS, regardless of their parenting practices, levels of involvement

with the school, and complacency with Western educational standards: "*We always fear CFS, even if we're good parents*." [Sophia]. Additionally, some caregivers reported that they felt the school only communicated to them through CFS and that schools involved CFS too often and at a higher rate for Indigenous families than other families. This impacted their relationship with schools, willingness to engage, and trust levels: *"You know, because I can speak from experience, people love to call CFS on you when you're Native and you have kids, they just love it…because I find like, you know, I don't know why it is, but with, like, I'll just say the general population versus native people, the general population doesn't want to talk to Indigenous people or Native people. They just go through CFS. That's how they talk. They talk through an organization that can tear your family apart. And that doesn't make sense to me, like why not just openly talk to the families, ask if there's something you can do or offer your help or provide help or something, you know?"* [Charlotte]. Many caregivers shared stories of school teams, including the school psychologist, reporting them to CFS for seemingly no reason and how this negatively impacted their perceptions of and relationships with the schools: **"***So that was like a reminder, like, oh, like you can't trust these helpers… I can't trust the school psychologist and I couldn't trust the principal….There was that lack of trust and comfort and they did involve CFS.*" [Blake].

Ranked Barriers

In addition to sharing their experiences, caregivers were provided the opportunity to rank provided barriers to engagement on a scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*), as they related to their own engagement with school psychologists. Descriptive results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Perceived Barriers Scale Descriptive Results

Barrier	Mean	Median
Lack of Trust/ Comfort	3.9	4.5
Communication Issues	3.5	4.5
Work	3.4	5
Lack of Support	3.3	3.5
Differing Understanding of Responsibilities	2.8	3.5
Transportation	2.6	2.5
Family Responsibilities	2.1	2

Note: Barriers are listed from highest to lowest based on mean scores.

Caregivers were asked to report which of the above barriers they perceived as having the most impact on their engagement with school psychologists. A lack of trust/ comfort with school psychologists was reported as being a significant barrier for caregivers. Communication issues, work responsibilities (e.g., not being to take time off of work to come into the school for meetings), and a lack of support from school psychologists were also reported as creating challenges for caregivers to engage with school psychologists. Differing understandings of responsibilities (e.g., not understanding the role of school psychology), transportation, and family responsibilities were reported as less critical barriers to engagement.

Caregivers were also asked to report what they perceived as being the biggest barrier to their engagement. Communication issues (n =3) was reported as the biggest barrier, with lack of transportation (n = 2) and lack of support (n =2) ranking second. Family responsibilities and lack of trust/ comfort were reported as the biggest barrier by one participant each. Work and differing understandings of responsibilities were not reported as being the biggest barrier for any caregiver. Other barriers that were mentioned included the referral process and navigating the

assessment process (*n* = 1) and a lack of funding and programming for diverse child needs (*n* = 2).

Discussion

This is the first study of its kind privileging Canadian Indigenous caregivers' voices and sharing their stories of engaging with school psychologists. Caregivers in Manitoba were invited to share their stories working with school psychologists within schools across the province. Through these conversations, caregivers discussed their varying experiences and interactions with school staff, primarily school psychologists, highlighting the interplay between colonial and systemic challenges, cultural considerations, relationships and communication, and the critical role of advocacy. A summary of the emergent recommendations for each theme is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Emergent Recommendations by Theme

Theme Domain	Emergent Recommendations	Target Audience
Relationship with School Psychologist	• Establish early and continuous communication with caregivers • Create transparency in the assessment process • Recognize and mitigate discrimination and unconscious bias	• School psychologists • Educators • Graduate training programs
Caregiver Perceptions of Engagement	• Validate and support caregiver concerns • Create open and supportive environments • Streamline and support psychoeducational process • Address emotional impacts, enhance comfort and build trust	• School psychologists • District leads, superintendents • Policy makers
Support Accessibility	• Tailor support recommendations to individual needs • Advocate for holistic supports and coordinate communication	• School psychologists • Educators • Policy makers

	• Incorporate Indigenous culture and practices into psychoeducational frameworks	
Systemic Changes and Connection to Culture	• Facilitate cultural reconnection and promote holistic identity • Understand familial contexts and cultural histories • Provide education and training for school staff on Indigenous culture • Hire and train more Indigenous school psychologists to provide culturally relevant support • Re-evaluate involvement with CFS	• School psychologists • Educators • Graduate training programs • District leads, superintendents • Policy makers

Caregivers universally reported that their relationships with school psychologists significantly influenced their engagement with the school system and their experiences navigating the psychoeducational assessment process. They emphasized the importance of early and consistent connection with families and reciprocal communication. There was reported confusion around the role of school psychology, underscoring the importance for school psychologists to provide clear explanations about psychological processes, provide information in a more comprehensible and accessible way, and continuous updates to ensure caregivers feel more involved. This can work to mitigate feelings of intimidation and hesitancy that caregivers reported.

Caregivers underscored the importance of being included as active contributors in the assessment process from conceptualization onwards, leading to the recommendation for school psychologists to foster relationships built on a foundation of trust and respect to foster safety and comfort for families. Given the colonial legacies of residential schools, this is vital to alleviate apprehensions and ensure caregivers feel valued as participants in their child's education. As the CPA (2018) report outlines, Indigenous families have long been excluded from the conversation surrounding decisions made on their behalf, and school psychologists need to make an active

effort to provide caregivers the space to voice their opinions, while acknowledging and understanding that Indigenous persons may have differing approaches to psychoeducational assessments.

Not only does this reflect the importance of supporting caregivers and creating environments where they feel comfortable and safe, it relates to the recommendation of streamlining the psychoeducational process for ease of access for caregivers. The sentiments of advocacy and inclusion were discussed by caregivers, many of whom shared experiences of having to advocate for their children to receive proper supports and be taken seriously by schools. They felt dismissed by school staff, and sometimes discriminated against, when trying to access supports. Caregivers discussed feeling as though school psychologists did not take the time to understand their personal situations and were not aware of differing cultural influences, such as traditional parenting practices or understanding of mental health, creating a disconnect between caregivers and psychologists. Conversely, other caregivers spoke about school psychologists who supported and validated their concerns, reflecting cultural allyship in advocacy. This highlights the sentiment of creating safe environments where Indigenous caregivers feel empowered and able to engage, aligning with the TRC's Call to Action vi: "Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children" (2015, p. 2). School psychologists, and school staff generally, need to work to create more inviting environments and exhibit a conscious effort to understand families' perspectives and experiences to support relationship building and engagement.

Additionally, caregivers shared their efforts in accessing supports and the varied levels of assistance provided by school psychologists. Caregivers reflected on the lack of cultural incorporation and understanding that they experienced in their interactions with school

psychologists, including the irrelevancy of psychoeducational assessments, and advocated for this to be more thoroughly considered within the profession of psychology. They expressed hope for their children to find cultural connections and holistic identities, advocating for changes in the Western education system to better incorporate and represent Indigenous cultures and traditions. These factors are not novel, however; they have been discussed in existing literature regarding psychology's vow to work towards reconciliation, yet, minimal proactive changes have been reported (Bernett et al., 2023; Golson et al., 2022), further showing the importance of school psychologists, district leads, and policy makers to advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous culture and perspectives into psychological practices.The CPA recommends "an acknowledgement should be incorporated into all assessments including a statement of humility, acknowledgement of territory, experience, history, and a recognition of the power dynamic [between the psychologist and the family]" (CPA, 2018, p. 17). In the spirit of being culturally aware and sensitive, it is important for school psychologists to recognize that all individuals, including themselves, are influenced and shaped by cultural contexts and to recognize how their cultural history influences their interactions with students.

Relatedly, caregivers discussed feeling as though school psychologists did not take the time to understand their personal situations and were not aware of differing cultural influences, such as traditional parenting practices or understandings of mental health. There are many such aspects that influence caregivers' ability to be actively engaged with their children's mental health and education planning alongside culture, including socioeconomic status and individual experiences (Beiser & Gotowiec, 2000). It is recommended that school psychologists make the effort to gain insight into familial circumstances to better understand the families they are working with and provide appropriate services. As the manifestation of mental disorders is

culturally bound (American Psychological Association, 2003), it is vital that school psychologists educate themselves on the cultural background of their students, which would aid them in properly diagnosing and recommending appropriate interventions.

Caregivers also highlighted key points for systemic change to create more culturally safe and relevant practices. They stressed the influence of enduring impacts of colonial legacies on their interactions with school psychologists, noting a lack of consideration of systemic barriers faced by Indigenous families and emphasized the importance of understanding and incorporating Indigenous views and values into the education and mental health systems. There is a noted lack of understanding regarding how colonial legacies continue to influence Indigenous families, and how this impacts Indigenous caregivers' abilities and willingness to interact with colonial systems. Trust plays a dual role as both a barrier and facilitator when working with Indigenous families. Many caregivers reported feeling hesitant engaging with schools due to colonial impacts and legacies of trauma, accentuated by a misunderstanding of Indigenous parenting practices and cultural values, making it crucial for school psychologists, and school staff generally, to educate themselves on Indigenous experiences.

Systemic racism is still prevalent in the education system, with Indigenous caregivers feeling as though they are being scrutinized for their parenting more often than non-Indigenous caregivers. There is a persistent and ever-present fear for Indigenous caregivers that schools will involve CFS for minuscule mistakes, things that students disclose to school psychologists, or for simply not valuing Western education. The apprehension of CFS involvement and systemic discrimination creates barriers for positive and active engagement from Indigenous caregivers (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2019; 2020). This underlying fear is reflected in research on other minority families, who fear governing agencies and feel pressured to teach their children to

safely navigate these systems (Delale-O'Conner et al., 2019). Building relationships and understanding familial circumstances can help school psychologists work with other school staff to provide additional support and resources that can mitigate the need for CFS involvement.

Indigenous knowledge and culturally competent and safe practices have long been overshadowed in the mental health and education fields (Montesanti et al., 2022). Caregivers are concerned that teachers and school staff are not being educated on Canadian Indigenous history, including the unique histories of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, and ways of life. This can result in challenges working with Indigenous students and families, and the continual perpetuation of colonial standards that underlie systemic racism within the education system when educators and school psychologists are not knowledgeable or actively learning about Indigenous cultures (Howell & Ng-A-Fook, 2017). The CPA (2018) highlights the failure of psychology to address and understand the colonial impacts that influence parenting capacity, family structure, home environments, and willingness of caregivers to engage with Western systems (CPA, 2018, p. 15). However, Indigenous communities do not expect non-Indigenous educators to be experts on Indigenous traditions or knowledges, but rather to be willing to learn from and work collaboratively with Indigenous families (Wotherspoon, 2006).

School psychology has historically been tasked with assimilating non-typically functioning children into the normative culture, with practices rooted in the need to "normalize students" to fit Eurocentric standards (Grant et al., 2022, p 349). While psychology has acknowledged its role in perpetuating colonial standards, including the fact that standardized assessments lack Indigenous knowledge incorporation, values, and traditions, little has been done to address this (Bernett et al., 2023; Golson et al., 2023; Nelson, 2017). Without education, understanding, and clear actions to address the colonial harms perpetuated against Indigenous peoples, an

acknowledgement is not enough. Research needs to translate into action and practice. However, an important aspect to consider is the implication of asking non-Indigenous practitioners to implement and incorporate traditional practices and knowledges into the psychoeducational process. Practitioners should seek guidance and feedback from the Indigenous families and communities they are working with on best practices and ideal ways to inclusively and respectfully incorporate traditional values and ways of knowing from various Indigenous groups. Following recommended guidelines set forth by institutions such as the CPA, practitioners should also seek guidance on best approaches to respectfully working with families and school systems to incorporate these practices in a collaborative manner (Schmidt, 2019).

Reflections in Literature

While the specifics of the themes that have arisen in these conversations are novel and unique to the population of this study, some of the larger sentiments have been reflected in literature involving Indigenous and other minority families in their attempts to engage with their children's educational journeys, specifically relating to relationships, communication, and cultural irrelevancy. A few of the specific themes discussed in this work have been expressed in Nelson's (2017) work looking at the engagement of Indigenous parents with children classified as having special needs, including themes relating to Indigenous worldviews, understanding of Indigenous experiences, and the power of relationships. She shows that for these parents, having a trusting relationship with at least one educator increased parental follow through with psychoeducational processes, despite initial refusal. In another study, Mueller and Buckley (2014) found that minority parents were hesitant or reluctant to engage with Individual Education Planning (IEP) meetings due to confusing language and negative relationships with

educators, further emphasizing the crucial need for school staff and psychologists to focus on relationship building with accessible communication for families.

The importance of communication between families and schools is further reflected in research involving immigrant families' engagement with teachers, citing a lack of communication and miscommunication as critical barriers to familial engagement (Zaidi et al., 2021). Schneider and Arnot (2018) detail reciprocal communication and parental involvement as creating positive relationships between families and schools. Parents perceptions of being included as part of the decision-making processes for their children's educational goals influences their perceptions of and willingness to engage with schools (Zaidi et al., 2021). School staff tend to maintain dominance over relationships with parents (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014), therefore it is crucial they reflect on their role in fostering positive relations and ensuring to maintain open dialogue with families.

The lack of cultural consideration in the education system has also been detailed. Research on African American parents revealed a lack of culturally relevant curricula within schools resulted in parental concerns that children were not getting a well-rounded education since cultural aspects were missing (Delale-O'Conner, et al, 2019). While Dingwall and Cairney (2009) found that for many Indigenous Australians, mental health services were inadequate and inappropriate due to a lack of cultural knowledge and consideration on the part of service providers. Further, Pereiro and Barros (2019) found that parents were more likely to engage with their children's mental health interventions when they perceived their children to have an actual need, as many Indigenous families may see their children's differences as gifts and therefore do not see the need for psychological interventions. Furthermore, Wotherspoon (2006) found that non-Indigenous educators believed they held an understanding of Indigenous knowledges even

when omitting family and community involvement in the planning and implementation of lesson activities that supposedly included cultural aspects. Given these sentiments expressed by families, Macfarlene et al (2011) advocated for the creation and incorporation of a framework that incorporates cultural aspects into psychological assessment processes in order to better support families of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

Current literature emphasizes the crucial role of positive relationships, trust, and clear communication between school staff and families to facilitate parental engagement. Many parents, particularly from minority groups, express concern about the lack of diversity and cultural considerations within the education system, including psychoeducational processes. The current research highlights the barriers and facilitators that Indigenous caregivers perceive when engaging with school psychologists, many of which are reflected in literature exploring parental engagement in educational systems. Results underscore the importance of systemic efforts from student training programs to governing agencies working to mitigate the reported barriers to engagement and build upon reported facilitators. Efforts should be made to foster trusting relationships and improve communication with families, with school psychologists adopting a non-judgmental approach to engage Indigenous families and create inviting environments where caregivers feel comfortable voicing their concerns and asking questions. School psychologists also need to work to create mutually respectful relationships with clear communication and explanations to mitigate reported feelings of mistrust and apprehension. This starts with honest self-examination of the psychologist's own biases and racisms, without which knowledge building and pathways to supporting Indigenous families cannot begin.

It is important for school psychologists to show a genuine interest in children's wellbeing, translate assessment results into accessible language, and provide tailored and practical strategies for caregivers to use to support their children's unique needs. There also needs to be an understanding of accessibility issues for families, including having to navigate work and family responsibilities to attend meetings and be an active contributor to their child's education plans, with efforts to alleviate these barriers for families whenever possible. Educators need to make the conscious effort to learn about Indigenous cultures and history through conversations, training and educational opportunities in order to better connect with and support Indigenous students and families to foster safe school environments. Policy makers and those in positions of power should be mindful of the way the educational and mental health systems have continued to uphold colonial standards and should work to advocate for updated culturally safe policies and practices that promote Indigenous Knowledge. Working with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and communities and families is vital for improving service access and delivery for Indigenous Peoples. Implementing the aforementioned recommendations at a systemic level can help bridge the gap between Indigenous families and Western educational systems, creating more inclusive and culturally safe and responsive environments.

Limitations

There were a few notable limitations of this study. Firstly, the sample size was smaller than anticipated, due to limitations in interview attendance. Further, there were challenges in engaging with prospective participants. All potential participants opted to engage in online interviews, which may have been due in part to recruitment occurring shortly after the height of COVID-19 related health and social restrictions. Half of participants that scheduled interviews did not show up and there were challenges in reconnecting with interested participants to

reschedule interviews. There are many potential reasons for this, including a lack of trust with Western research and school psychology. Despite this, there was a relatively high response rate, indicating good interest in the research topic.

Secondly, online interviews limited the extent to which relationship building with caregivers could occur prior to the interview. This may have impacted the comfort levels of some caregivers in sharing their stories. This also impacted the ability to gift caregivers with Medicine pouches alongside their monetary compensation. However, online interviews broadened the reach of participant recruitment, allowing for connection with caregivers living in rural and Northern Manitoba, and increased accessibility for those caregivers who may have had barriers in travelling for in-person interviews (e.g., transportation, family responsibilities).

Thirdly, the primary use of convenience sampling through social media may have introduced a bias towards caregivers with access to technology and reliable internet and WIFI connections, restricting the scope of prospective participants. Of note, there exists the potential bias that all caregivers in this study were actively engaged in their children's assessment process, despite varying experiences. This engagement, coupled with the small sample size, leads to challenges in generalizing the results to the broader Indigenous populations in Manitoba. Indigenous populations and communities are not homogenous, and caution needs to be taken when attempting to generalize a few perspectives as representative of all Indigenous families' experiences. However, valuable knowledge and perspectives have been shared to provide preliminary insights into Indigenous caregivers' experiences with school psychologists in Manitoba.

Knowledge Exchange

It is important that Indigenous voices and stories are continued to be heard. This study will be submitted to academic journals that focus on school psychology and Indigenous perspectives. The hope is that this research will open the door for more important future research, and spur decision making for best-practice standards that align with the TRC's Calls to Actions and the CPA's guiding principles. Sharing this research at an academic level is relevant for school psychologists to see specific barriers and facilitators that Indigenous families perceive and experience. Additionally, this research can provide insights towards active practices that schools and school psychologists can take to increase comfort for Indigenous caregivers to engage and create more accessible and culturally appropriate approaches. At a community level, this research will be shared with interested school divisions and relevant community agencies in Manitoba, specifically including those that provide psychoeducational relevant support to Indigenous families, through presentations, infographics, and/or one-page summaries. The results will also be shared with the caregivers that shared their stories for this study to show that their perspectives are being included in research and potentially changing the way that school psychologists engage with Indigenous families.

Implications and Future Directions

The recommendations that emerge from this work have the potential to be impactful for the discipline of psychology, and subsequently, the experiences of Indigenous families. There are many steps the profession of school psychology needs to take towards incorporating culturally safe and relevant practices. This study reports a few examples, aligned with the guiding principles provided by the CPA in response to the TRC's Calls to Action, that have been discussed by Indigenous caregivers as influencing their engagement with school psychologists.

The hope for this research is that it will deepen the understandings for school psychologists, policy makers, and graduate training programs, on what Indigenous families see as the barriers to their engagement, along with the facilitators to help promote positive engagement. More perspectives need to be heard to more accurately reflect Indigenous families' experiences, while also disaggregating differing Indigenous identities to honour the unique experiences and ways of knowing and being that each Nation holds.

Further, it would be beneficial for practicing school psychologists to reflect on the steps they are taking towards reconciliation, specifically in regard to family engagement, and assessments and supports. Building knowledge on how school psychologists can strive to form trusting relationships with Indigenous caregivers is vital in supporting Indigenous families. Despite outlining guidelines and recommendations (CPA, 2018), psychology needs to update its practices to effectively respond to the TRC's Calls to Action in order to further understand caregiver perspectives on traditional and family-oriented needs, and the barriers and facilitators to Indigenous engagement. Improving safety, equity, and culturally aligned care will require concrete actions and investments at multiple systemic levels, including across graduate programs, child and school psychology, and educational systems. However, the brunt of the work should not fall to Indigenous persons to educate psychologists, rather, psychologists need to walk their own paths towards reconciliation and respectful practices. Without systematic efforts to address school psychology's legacy of mistreatment, Indigenous caregivers will continue to face barriers to positive engagement with schools. By reflecting on reconciliation efforts outlined by the CPA (2018) and guided by the recommendations from this study, school psychologists can work to better support Indigenous families through the integration of culturally

safe and relevant practices, rooted in trusting relationships, to counter the legacies of colonialism.

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Appendix A

Part A: Sociodemographic Information

What is your gender?

1. Female
2. Male
3. Non-Binary
4. Two-Spirit
5. Other
6. Prefer not to answer

How do you identify in terms of ethnicity?

1. First Nations
2. Inuit
3. Métis
4. Mixed Indigenous ancestry
5. Other
6. Prefer not to answer

Home community (if applicable) _____

How many children do you have in your care?

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5
6. 6
7. 7
8. 8
9. 9
10. 10+

How old are your children, in years? (List for each child) **_____**

Are you the primary caregiver for any of these children?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Prefer not to answer

What bracket best reflects your annual household income?

1. $1 - $9 999
2. $10 000 - $19 999
3. $20 000 - $29 999
4. $30 000 - $39 999
5. $40 000 - $49 999
6. $50 000 - $59 999
7. $60 000 - $69 999
8. $70 000 - $79 999
9. $80 000 - $89 999
10. $90 000 +

What is your education level:

1. Some high school
2. high school diploma
3. College/Technical school (e.g., business administration)
4. Bachelors degree (e.g., BA)
5. Professional degree (e.g., MD)
6. Masters degree
7. PhD

Have you or any member of your family (including parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles, etc.) attended a residential or day school?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don’t know
4. Prefer not to answer

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Consent and Greeting: *Hello! My name is [name]. I want to welcome you and thank you for taking the time to meet with today. [Provide background/ positionality.] I see that you have already completed a consent form and agreed to participate in this conversation, is that correct? I'm very grateful that you agreed to share your thoughts and experiences with me. I'm going to be asking you some questions about your experiences with school psychologists in your children's school. I'll start by asking you some questions about yourself, and then some questions about your experiences working with school psychologists. I want to remind you that you don't have to answer any question you don't want to, and that your participation here is completely voluntary. I also want to remind you that nothing you share here today will be linked with your name. All names will be removed from the document, but if you wish to create a pseudonym (fake name) to use instead, you can do so. I would also like to get your consent to audio record this conversation so that I can go back and listen to it when writing my report, is that okay?*

Do you have any questions before we begin?

- [Begin audio recording]

[Note: Interviewer's goal will be to discuss first-order questions in topics through Parts B-E, with follow-up questions at the discretion of the interviewer based on the information provided by caregivers and based on caregiver responsiveness**]**

Part B: Traditions and Culture

First-Order Question	Follow-up Questions
Would you say that you identify with a particular culture or cultural background?	What are the particular aspects of your culture/ cultural background that are important to you? Can you describe them?
	Do you practice any traditional practices or healing methods, such as going to Ceremony, smudging, others?

Part C: Connection with School Psychologist

First-Order Question	Follow-up Questions
Can you tell me a bit about your child's experiences either through therapy or assessment services provided through a school psychologist?	Can you walk me through this process? What went well? What didn't work well?
	How would you describe the communication? Where can it be improved?
	Did you seek services, or was service recommended (by a teacher)?

	How comfortable are you talking to or engaging with school staff? Working with the school psychologist in particular?
	About how many times did you meet with or receive updates from the school psychologist? Do you still meet with them?

Part D: Understandings of Roles and Responsibilities

First-Order Question	Follow-up Questions
What was your understanding of the role of the school psychologist in providing services (assessments, therapeutic) to your child?	Has your child been diagnosed by a school psychologist? Can you explain your child's diagnosis? Did you agree/disagree with the diagnosis or treatment plan?
	Do you feel like if you raised concerns or had opinions about the best treatment for your child, the school psychologist would listen to you? Can you explain why or why not?
What was your understanding about what your role was as a parent in providing information to the school or school psychologist, or in asking questions?	How comfortable do you feel asking questions or for clarifications if you don't understand something?
	Has the school or school psychologist offered treatments or supports to you and/or your child? If yes, can you describe the supports offered? Do they follow through?
	In your opinion, would you say these assessments/supports are culturally relevant to you and your child?

Part E: Barriers and Facilitators to Engagement

First-Order Question	Follow-up Questions
What was the most positive aspect about your experiencing working with a school psychologist that helped you engage?	Thinking about your meetings with school psychologists, what are the things the school or the school psychologist can do to make these meetings more comfortable? Uncomfortable? Can you explain?
Can you tell me about some of the challenges of working with (meetings, phone calls) the school psychologist?	What are the aspects of your culture that impact or influence your experience working with school psychologists? Can you explain this? *Prompt*: is it hard for you to engage with school psychologists due to cultural differences?)
If you had a concern about your child's development or assessment, would you be willing to reach out to the school psychologist in the future? Why or why not?	

Part F: Future Directions

First-Order Question	Follow-up Questions
What are your hopes and goals for your children?	Using the Medicine Wheel, can you show me..
Can you tell me about some of the positive takeaways for your child after working with the school psychologist?	Did your child experience any negative impacts from receiving services from school psychologist?
	If you could suggest one thing for school psychologists when working with Indigenous families, what would it be? Can you describe the ideal experience when working with Indigenous families?

Part G: Ranked Barriers: *I'm now going to provide you with a list of potential barriers to engaging with school psychologists. Using the scale provided, can you please indicate which are barriers to your engagement. At the end, there is the option for you to add any other barriers or things that made it difficult for you to engage.*

Not Applicable	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to Answer
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Communication Issues (lack of communication with school psychologists, miscommunications).	**0 1 2 3 4 5 6**
Differing Understandings of Responsibilities (not understanding what the responsibilities of the school psychologist are or not understanding what they expect of you).	**0 1 2 3 4 5 6**
Transportation (lack of transportation to the school, cost of transportation).	**0 1 2 3 4 5 6**
Family Responsibilities (no childcare for other children, taking care of other family members/	**0 1 2 3 4 5 6**
Work (can't take time off, no flexibility to come into school during the day).	**0 1 2 3 4 5 6**
Lack of support from school psychologists (don't explain what they are doing, you don't believe they are doing everything they can to support you and your child).	**0 1 2 3 4 5 6**
Lack of Trust/ Comfort with school and school psychologists (feel like the school psychologists are judging you or will involve	**0 1 2 3 4 5 6**

CFS. Don't feel comfortable engaging with school psychologists).	

Other Barriers (please list)

Of the barriers listed above, which is the biggest barrier for you? Can indicate more than one barrier.

Closing: *Thank you so much for taking the time to share your story with me. I greatly appreciate it. In the consent form, it was mentioned there was the opportunity to have your name included in a Roles and Acknowledgment section of any publications. Is this something you would be interested in?* [If yes, provide Roles and Acknowledgments form].
Once again, thank you for sharing your story with me. [Provide gift card compensation].