Being alive well? Power-Knowledge as a Countervailing Force to the Realization of Mental Well-being for Canada's Aboriginal Young People

*Lewis Williams and Zubia Mumtaz, International Journal of Mental Health Promotion, 2008.*

**Abstract**

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada, commissioned a review of the current evidence on efforts to promote mental health in Aboriginal young people in Canada. A systematic review of the literature reveals that peer-reviewed 'evidence-based' evaluations of mental health promotion interventions with Canadian Aboriginal young people are virtually non-existent. The few published studies on mainstream young people, with their focus on those at risk, addressing individual-level factors within Western positivist conceptualizations of reality, have limited applicability to a colonized people with constructions of health that place emphasis on wholeness, connection, balance and harmony. This paper reviews several interrelated forces shaping mental health promotion discourse and programming as they pertain to Aboriginal young people in Canada today. They include colonization and neo-colonial relations, Aboriginal world views, meanings of health and self-determination, the conceptual and methodological confusion besieging mental health promotion as a discipline, and the tensions between what qualifies as 'evidence' in Western positivist conceptualizations of reality and Aboriginal worldviews, paradigms and realities. The paper locates the marginalization of Aboriginal knowledge relative to Western notions of 'evidence' in dominant cultural-power relations with respect to how they structure the production of formal 'knowledge', potential funding and programming and, ultimately, opportunities for the mental health and well-being of Canada’s Aboriginal young people.