

# Occupational Therapists' experiences of assessments with Indigenous peoples.

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# The Historical Context of Healthcare Assessment with Indigenous Peoples in Canada

- Indigenous Peoples have diverse and thriving cultures and healing practices ('North of 60', 2025; Ansloos et al., 2022; Redvers, 2020).
- Indigenous Peoples have experienced abuse, neglect, and flagrant racism in health care settings in Canada, with concurrent poor health outcomes.
- Residential Schools, 'Indian' Hospitals, and the '60's Scoop have contributed to these outcomes.
- In these contexts, assessment practices were used to enforce colonial ways of being.



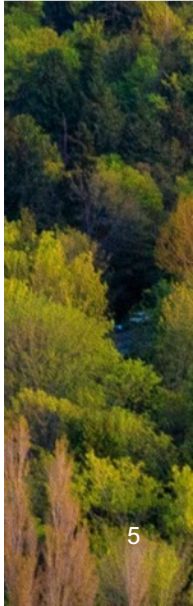
# Current State

- The competencies for OT in Canada (ACOTRO et al, 2021) require occupational therapists to ‘create culturally safer relationships and anti-racist, ethical spaces’ (page 13)
- Few assessment tools have been designed in Canada in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples that are culturally relevant to their experiences of occupation.
- Currently OTs are using their own reasoning and experience to adapt assessments to the needs of First Nations (Pidgeon, 2015; White & Beagan, 2020).



# Objectives

1. To explore the perspectives of occupational therapists working with Indigenous Peoples on the challenges they face during assessment.
2. To explore what is currently being done by practitioners to increase cultural safety of existing assessments.
3. To explore new culturally safer assessment strategies to improve the assessment experience for Indigenous Peoples in Canada.



# Methods

Participants: Forty-three occupational therapists working with Indigenous Peoples across Canada participated in online surveys. 16 participated in virtual storytelling groups.

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

Member checking, collaboration with Indigenous project members, and guidance from an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper consolidated final themes.



# Results

Three distinct themes were developed

1. Systemic barriers negatively affect occupational therapists' capacity to provide culturally safer assessments
2. Importance of building relationships
3. The complex nature of obtaining consent



## Systemic Barriers negatively affect occupational therapists' capacity to provide culturally safer assessments

*“All of our current systems are based in white colonialist processes...It would almost take dismantling the entire healthcare system to be truly culturally safe.”*

Occupational therapists in our study critiqued some of the current ‘indigenized’ assessments being used in Canada while also noting that many of the standard assessments that are required to secure resources are not culturally relevant.

Occupational therapists preferred occupation based assessments in the context of where First Nations participate in what they need or want to do, to determine support needs.



# Importance of Building Relationship

*“It comes right back down to trying to really make that human-to-human connection with people, and just how important that is in setting the tone for moving forward”* Pamela, knowledge keeper

Building relationship is enhanced by entering the provider-service user relationship with *empty hands*, rather than a predefined agenda.

Building relationship is showing curiosity in First Nations and taking time. OTs reported that going into communities and participating in occupations with Indigenous Peoples was effective at building relationship.



# The complex nature of obtaining consent

*“Let's not lose sight of it's my health, and it's my body, and there might be the best drug in the world, but I might have reasons. It's still my body.”* Pamela, knowledge keeper

Occupational Therapists in our study related challenges with obtaining consent that was culturally safer for First Nations clients. True informed consent, including options for other methods of assessment or using non-standard means to achieve a ‘standard’ assessment result were helpful.

In paediatrics, ensuring consent is obtained from the right person, as the family unit may be differently structured, i.e. kinship care.



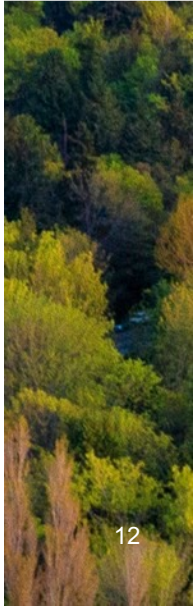
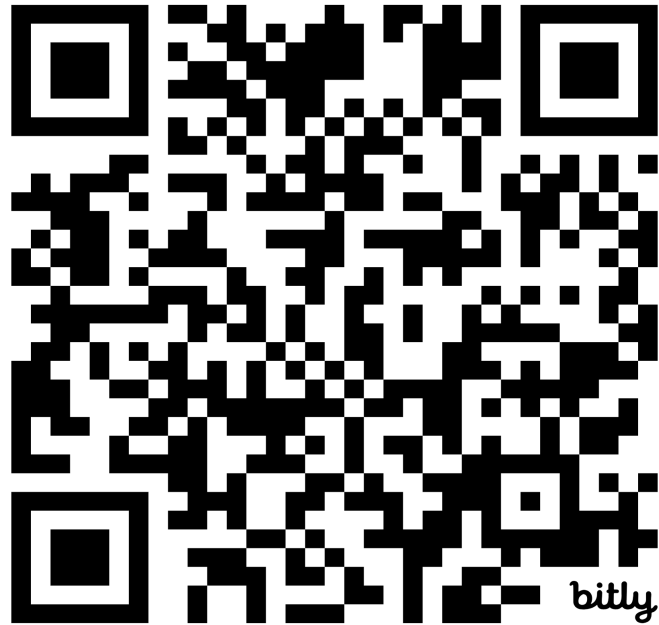
# Conclusion

While challenges and significant inequalities remain, occupational therapists are working towards culturally safer assessment practices with Indigenous Peoples.

The competencies for Canadian OTs (2021) and the Canadian Inter-relational Practice Process (Restall et al., 2022) are steps forward for Canadian OTs to be empowered to centre building relationship with clients from First Nations, and other groups.



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