

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

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Introduction

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

ACCESS Open Minds Indigenous Youth Mental Health and Wellness Network (AOM-IYMHWN) undertook a scoping review to systematically map the existing literature on services designed toward supporting the mental health of Indigenous boys and men in Canada.

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

- Identify the range of available mainstream and culturally grounded mental health services.
- Examine the formats and modalities through which these services are delivered.
- Explore key themes that are prominent or absent in the literature.
- Assess evaluations of these services, including their observed and measured outcomes and effects on wellbeing.

Method

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

Inclusion

Population: Individuals who identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis, identify as men and are between the ages of 9 and 30, residing in Canada.
Focus: Resources, programs, or interventions aimed at promoting psychological well-being. This may include initiatives delivered through various settings and modalities.

Exclusion

Population: Do not include or specifically discuss the experiences of First Nations, Inuit or Métis individuals, or the experiences of boys and men.
Geographic scope: Programs or interventions conducted outside of Canada.
Time frame: Published before 2000.

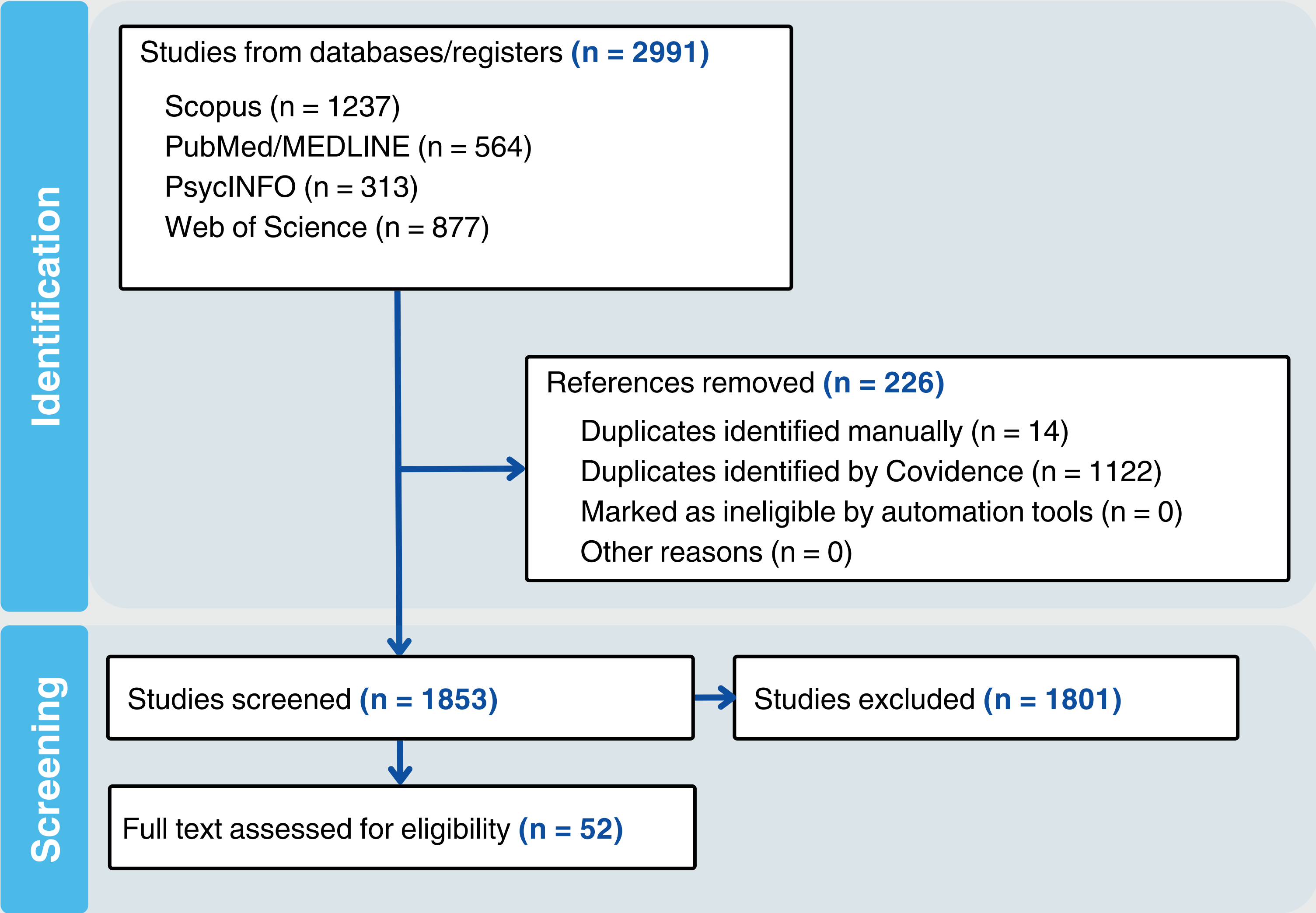
Discussion

This review will summarize available research, identify knowledge gaps, and clarify key concepts in the field. It builds on AOM-IYMHWN’s earlier scan of healthy relationship programs for Indigenous youth, which highlighted the promise of gender-specific approaches culturally grounded, community-driven programming for Indigenous boys and men (Melro et al., 2024). Notably, a recent web based scan found only one mental health service focused on increasing resilience and reducing suicide rates in vulnerable Indigenous boys and men (Perez et al. 2024).

These findings underscore the limited availability of targeted services and the need for expanded, culturally safe interventions. This review will help inform the development of gender-specific programming that is responsive to unique needs and strengths of Indigenous boys and men.

Limitations

This scoping review is limited to published academic and grey literature available online. As a result, relevant programs that have not been documented or made publicly accessible may be missed. Further, scoping reviews rooted in Western research practices may inadequately reflect Indigenous knowledge bases and understandings of health. As Chambers et al. (2017) highlight, we must be mindful of the limitations of scoping reviews and their ability to overlook perspectives and reproduce colonial hierarchies of evidence. Programs with low participation from Indigenous boys and men may not provide sufficient data to meaningfully assess their experiences.



Key References

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