

# The Impact of Colonialism on the Increased Prevalence of Mental Health Issues Among Indigenous Women in Canada

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## Rationale:

- **Colonialism** – with its harmful ideologies, discriminatory practices, and detrimental socioeconomic impacts – is a **principal determinant of health** for Indigenous people.
- **Indigenous women** face **unique disadvantages** due to their Indigenous identity and social position as women.

## Common Experiences:

High rates of stress, anxiety, & suicidal ideation

Frequent diagnoses of depression and anxiety disorders

Chronic stress & Postcolonial trauma



## Gaps in Mental Health:

Indigenous women are less likely to report excellent mental health compared to men... But more likely to be diagnosed with 1) anxiety & 2) mood disorders.

1) **32.6%** vs. **15.3%**  
2) **26.2%** vs. **11.8%**

Limited research focuses on Indigenous peoples' **gendered experiences & perspectives**, the **reasons** for gender health gaps, and the **intersection** between colonialism, sexism, and Indigenous women's mental health.

## Research Question & Objectives:

**How has colonialism contributed to the increased prevalence of mental health issues among Indigenous women in Canada?**

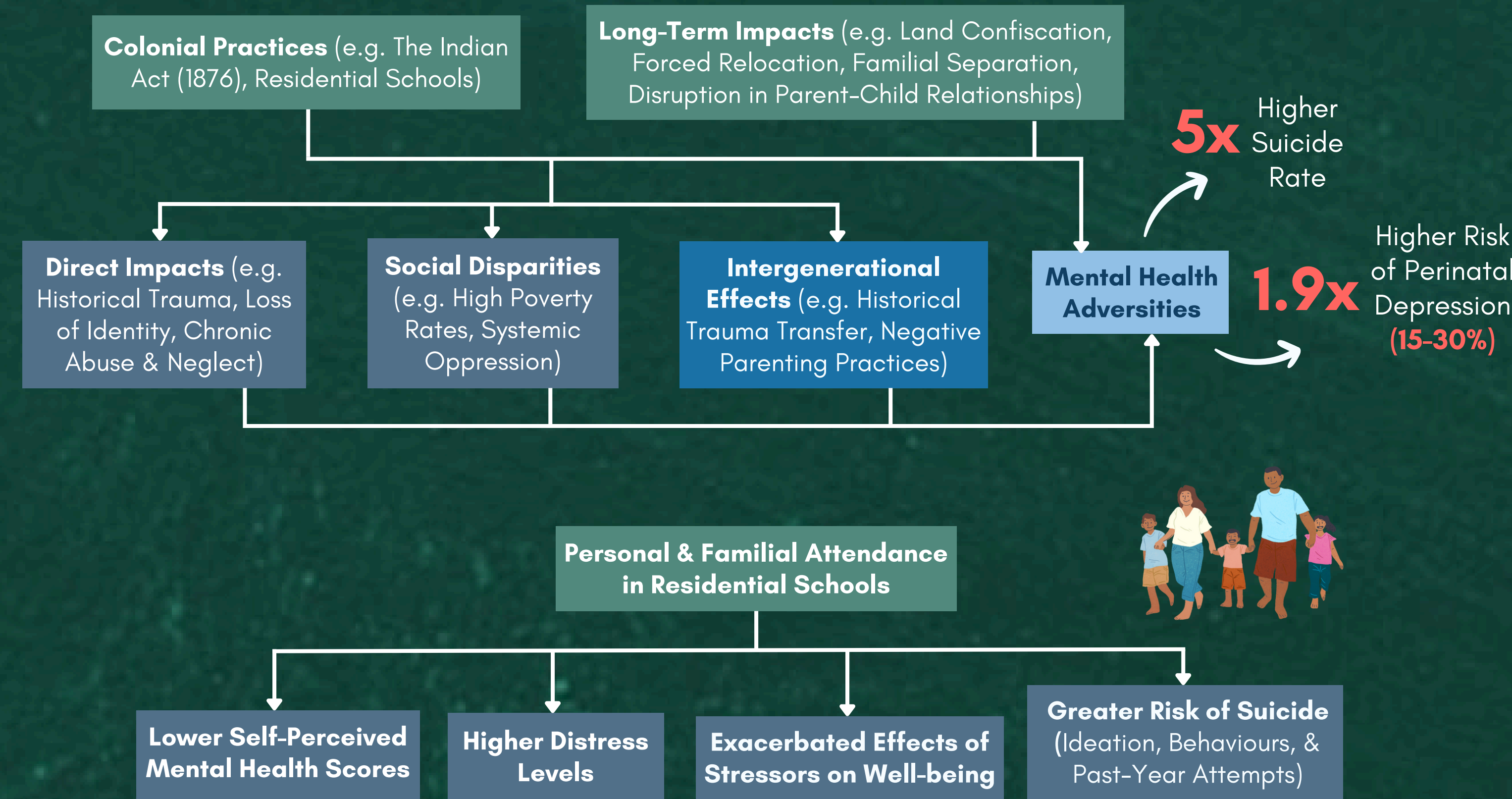
- 1) Investigate the **direct role of colonial practices** in exacerbating mental health issues among Indigenous women in Canada
- 2) Analyze the **diverse systems and mechanisms** through which colonialism indirectly acts to increase mental health issues among this population

## Methods:

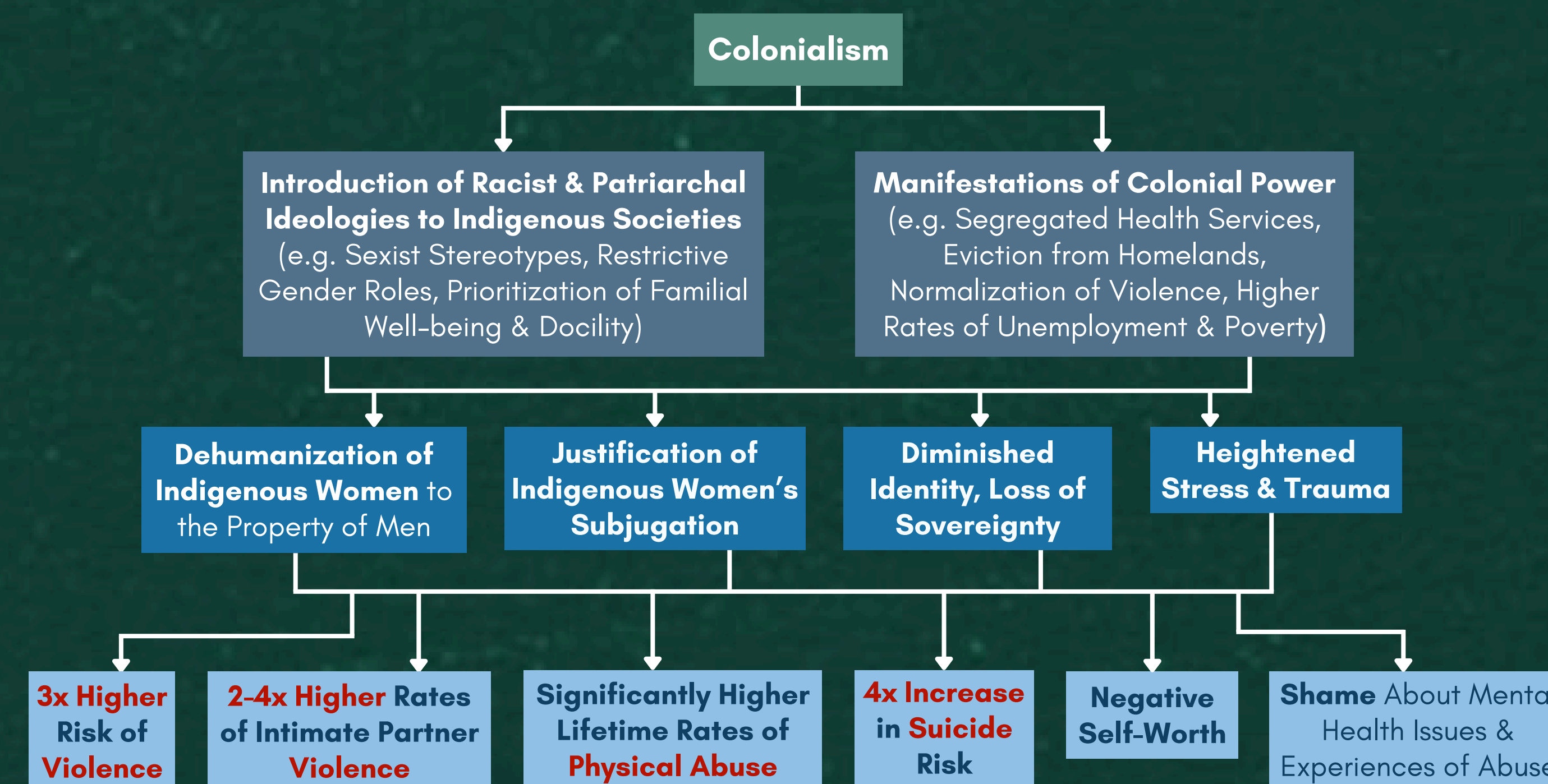
- **Population:** Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) women aged 25–60 years with experiences of stress, mental health issues, or gender-based violence
- **Databases and Journals Used:** ScienceDirect, Indigenous Studies Portal, Scholars Portal Journals, and MEDLINE (Ovid) / PubMed, *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing: Te Mauri – Pimatisiwin*
- **Generation of Search Strings** with Subject Headings and Keywords
- **Citation Mapping + Hand-Searching Journals**
- **Thematic Analysis** → Categorization of Findings into Central Themes

## Results:

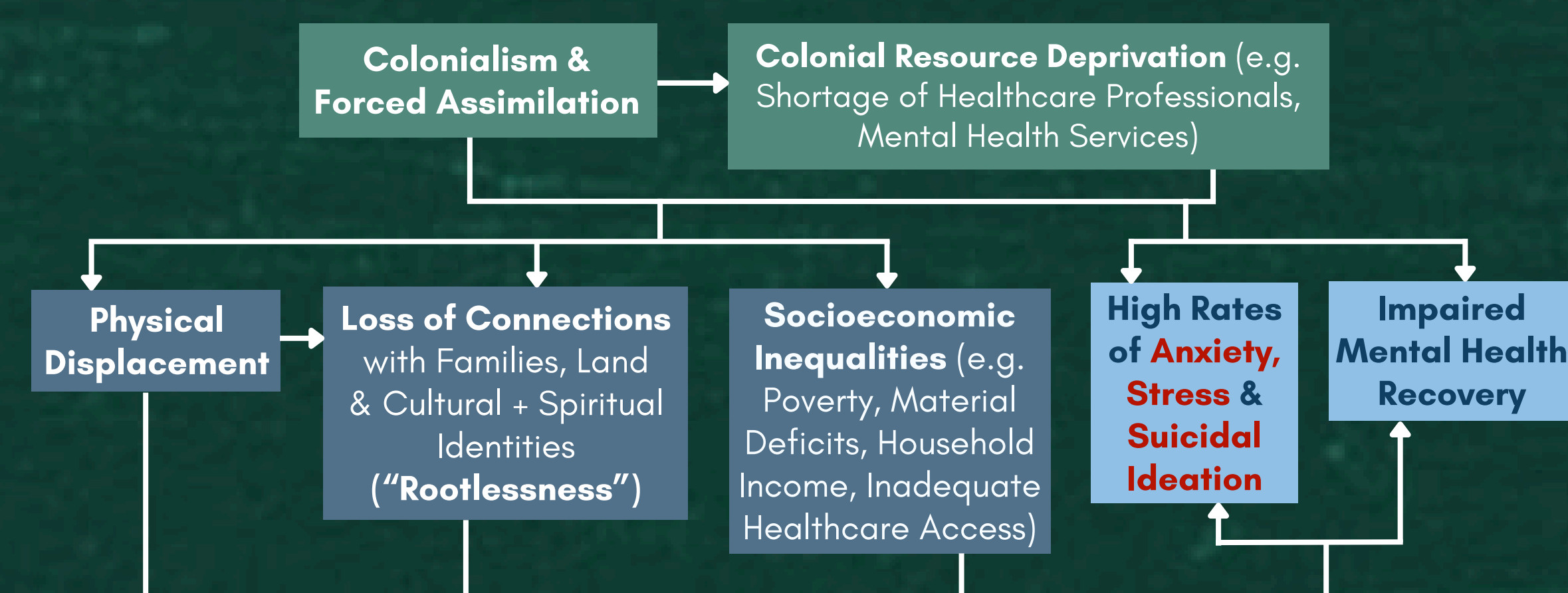
### Theme 1: The Role of Colonial Practices in Worsening Indigenous Women's Mental Health



### Theme 2: Patriarchy as an Instrument of Colonialism – The Impact of Ideologies & Violence

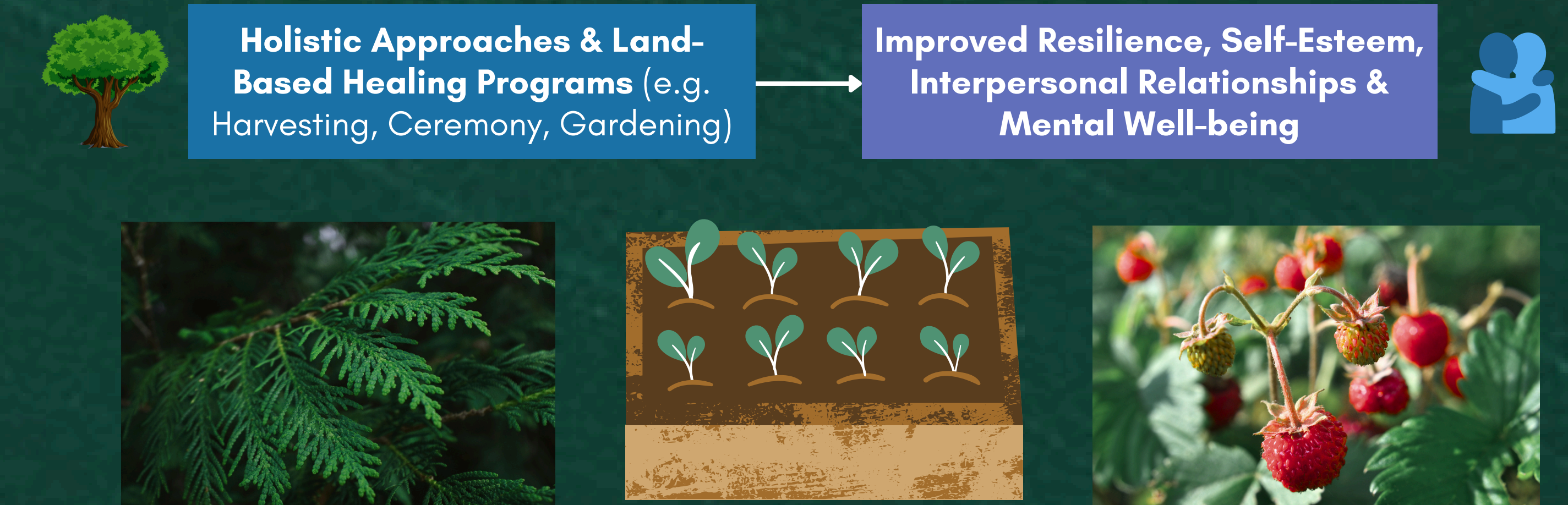


### Theme 3: Colonialism & Indigenous Communities – Rootlessness and Resource Deprivation



## Discussion:

- Similar mental health impacts of colonialism have been observed among other Indigenous groups (e.g. American Indian and Alaska Native populations).
- Across generations, colonial practices and residential schools have jeopardized Indigenous women's mental health **biologically** through epigenetic modifications and inheritance, **psychosocially** through trauma and altered parenting patterns, and **structurally** through socioeconomic inequalities after leaving residential schools.
- Colonial practices and residential schools have **embedded patriarchy** into Indigenous societies, while colonialism and patriarchal oppression have increased Indigenous women's **risk** and **severity of violence** across Canada, the US, and Guatemala.



## Conclusion & Future Directions:

- Indigenous women's mental health must be examined through an **intersectional, anti-colonial lens**, as their mental health issues are **complex** and **collective**.
- Investigating the specific ways through which colonialism acts can inform the development of **targeted, culturally-appropriate interventions** that address the **root causes** of mental health issues, **relieve the suffering of those impacted**, and **reduce the risk of intergenerational transmission**.
- Future directions for research and potential interventions include the incorporation of **land-based healing programs**, **gender-specific and culturally appropriate mental health services**, and **holistic community wellness programs** into mainstream mental healthcare.

To Read the Full Paper and View References:

