

February 20, 2020

Barriers to reconciliation: The legacy of schools connection to the child welfare system

Schools are viewed as dangerous places according to participants in a recently released study. In it, Indigenous parents and caregivers share fears that if they send their children to school, they may not come home. Because of the lasting legacy of the residential school system, the 60s Scoop and institutions that continue to misunderstand Indigenous cultural practices, schools are often seen as unsafe places where Indigenous children have historically been taken from their families.

“What we found was that Indigenous families fear for their children at school,” says Dr. Emily Milne, an assistant professor of sociology at MacEwan University.

Milne and co-author Dr. Terry Wotherspoon at the University of Saskatchewan conducted interviews with 61 parents and teachers in the central Alberta area from October 2017 to January 2019. In their recent paper, “Schools as ‘Really Dangerous Places’ for Indigenous Children and Youth: Contradictions in Pathways to Reconciliation,” Indigenous parents and teachers share their concerns about how closely the child welfare system has operated with school boards.

Indigenous parents reported instances of teachers contacting child welfare services before bringing concerns to the parent, social workers underestimating parents ability to support their children, and children self-censoring what they tell teachers.

“In the view of some people, Indigenous ways of doing things may not be seen as appropriate,” said one participant.

All of this works to undermine the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. While the Commission viewed education and sharing cultural knowledge as key to achieving reconciliation, the everyday reality of bias and misconception prevents the advancement of those goals.

Research findings raise concerns that teachers are overreporting Indigenous families to Child and Family Services. Milne and Wotherspoon recommend ensuring that teachers and schools have appropriate knowledge of Indigenous cultures, perspectives and experiences, and that schools have clear guidelines and processes for teachers to follow if they suspect a child is being mistreated.

Visit [Canadian Review of Sociology](#) to read the full paper.

For more information, please contact: Samantha Power, Media Relations Advisor

Cell: 780- 231-5954 Email: powers16@macewan.ca