



# (Un)Covering Crisis Using Canadian News Media to Understand Police Violence in Mental Health Responses to Indigenous People

Brandon Hey , Jeffrey Ansloos, Mushfika Chowdhury  and Matthew Heakes

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Article abstract

Media depictions of Indigenous people have a long history of perpetuating racist, stereotyping, and victim blaming discourse. At the same time, recent scholarship asserts that news media is shifting its stance towards equity-groups involved in police-based mental health emergency response (MHER). Yet, few have sought to determine how these frames apply to police-based MHER for Indigenous people in Canada. Using an intersectional approach accounting for Indigeneity and mental illness, 168 Canadian media articles published between 1970 and 2022 were collated and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Two overarching themes, affective realities and harms created by police involvement and normative practices perpetuating police impunity were found, as were several sub-themes. Implications for the role and function of news media in supporting the health and social policy needs of Indigenous groups are discussed.

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## (Un)Covering Crisis: Using Canadian News Media to Understand Police Violence in Mental Health Responses to Indigenous People

Brandon Hey

*University of Toronto, Canada, [brandon.hey@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:brandon.hey@mail.utoronto.ca)*

Jeffrey Ansloos

*University of Toronto, Canada, [jeffrey.ansloos@utoronto.ca](mailto:jeffrey.ansloos@utoronto.ca)*

Mushfika Chowdhury

*University of Toronto, Canada, [mushfika.chowdhury@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:mushfika.chowdhury@mail.utoronto.ca)*

Matthew Heakes

*University of Guelph, Canada, [mheakes@uoguelph.ca](mailto:mheakes@uoguelph.ca)*

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## Abstract

Media depictions of Indigenous people have a long history of perpetuating racist, stereotyping, and victim blaming discourse. At the same time, recent scholarship asserts that news media is shifting its stance towards equity-groups involved in police-based mental health emergency response (MHER). Yet, few have sought to determine how these frames apply to police-based MHER for Indigenous people in Canada. Using an intersectional approach accounting for Indigeneity and mental illness, 168 Canadian media articles published between 1970 and 2022 were collated and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Two overarching themes, affective realities and harms created by police involvement and normative practices perpetuating police impunity were found, as were several sub-themes. Implications for the role and function of news media in supporting the health and social policy needs of Indigenous groups are discussed.

## Keywords

media framing, Indigenous health, racism, policing, discrimination, media

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## (Un)Covering Crisis: Using Canadian News Media to Understand Police Violence in Mental Health Responses to Indigenous People

In 2020, the deaths of George Floyd and Regis Korchinski-Paquet reinvigorated calls for increased accountability for police violence<sup>1</sup> and abolition futures reimagining alternatives to community safety (Kaba, 2022). Interactions between police and persons with mental illness became a focal point of discussions, given statistics that find 68% of the incidences of police deadly use of force occur against persons with mental illness (Marcoux & Nicholson, 2021). Research indicates that persons with mental illnesses are also highly susceptible to police-induced psychological violence and neglect (Jun et al., 2020). As this violence intersects with the over-use of restraints and involuntary hospitalization, Oaten et al. (2023) has characterized carceral-based mental health emergency response (MHER) as a type of subjugation of the unwell. With these harms in sight, major Canadian mental health organizations denounced the involvement of law enforcement in MHER (CAMH, 2020; CMHA, 2020). Other factors heighten this susceptibility to police violence. Crime and violent crime involvement has been a concerted area of focus (Helms & Costanza, 2020; Witt et al., 2013). Both the possession of a firearm and domestic violence calls significantly predicted fatal police shootings (Juneau, 2014). Yet this criminalization and police violence is also reinforced by police officers' pre-existing attitudes, beliefs and assumptions (i.e., implicit bias, ideas about mental illness and criminalization), and behaviours, such as charging persons for crime (leading to possible mental health evaluations and treatment) and "mercy bookings" (i.e., whereby persons with mental illness are charged for misdemeanors to obtain requisite services and supports) (Lamb, 2014). Each of these behavioural contingencies fosters police susceptibility to violence, with psychiatric emergencies and those with serious mental illness especially vulnerable (Lamb et al., 2014).

Intersectional accounts also provide a more fulsome picture of police violence (Frankham, 2020). Within MHER, deadly use of force is doubled when indigeneity is considered (i.e., 25% versus 50% for white persons) (Aiello, 2023). Disparities in mental health outcomes and criminalization of marginalized groups supports the criminalization hypothesis, though egregious forms of police violence continue even when criminality is accounted for (Jun et al., 2020). With this, more expansive definitions of police violence have pointed to "ill-treatment, racial discrimination, and the failure to exercise a duty of care" (Cuneen, 2017, p. 1).

In this respect, police violence towards Indigenous communities is manifested through over-policing (e.g., lethal use of force, excessive use of force, etc.) and inequitable protection (including gross negligence, failure to exercise proper duty of care) (Aiello, 2023; Cuneen et al., 2017; Klippmark & Crawley, 2018). Within and beyond MHER, over-policing has gained the most prominence in research, as exemplified in the four-fold incidence of police killings of Indigenous people in Canada relative to their share of the country's population (i.e., representing 16% of police killings while accounting for 4.2% of people in Canada) (Helms & Costanza, 2020; TrackingInjustice, 2023). Similarly, in Australia, over-policing is reflected in the overuse of tasers and oleoresin capicum (OC) spray towards

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<sup>1</sup> Dukes and Kahn (2017) define police violence as "fatalities due to physical injury or negligence as well as excessive nonfatal physical and psychological injury and maltreatment" (p. 691).

Indigenous Peoples (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, 2011, p. 29). According to Crime and Misconduct Commission (2005), 23% of OC spray subjects in Queensland were Aboriginal and 10% were Torres Strait Islander even though Indigenous people comprise 3% of that state's population (Cuneen, 2017).

Though not as readily seen with MHER, police violence through inequitable protection (or under-policing as it is more commonly referred to) has also been the subject of concerted research: such as in Australia with Aboriginal people in custody (Cuneen, 2017; Klippmark & Crowley, 2018), and in Canada, with Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) (Bhandar, 2016), and the Starlight Tours (Razack, 2014). In the case of custodial deaths among Australian Aboriginals, a lack of or "miserly exercise" in a duty care and negligence are more often linked to Indigenous deaths rather than physical violence by police (Klippmark & Crowley, 2018). In the case of MMIWG, police refusal to protect Indigenous women and girls has been documented (Aiello, 2021; Brodeur, 1991). Within MHER with Indigenous peoples, medical negligence and dereliction of duties has also been found, though these works are typically limited to single person case studies (Razack, 2020).

### **What these Stats Tell us About Police Violence and the Function of Police**

These race-based inequities in over-policing draw empirical support for the idea that police exist to construct and enforce racial hierarchies (Cooper, 2015). In this respect, police violence is used to suppress threats to "existing social structures arising from the presence of minorities (Edwards et al., 2018), and "the distribution of resources controlled by whites" (Helms & Costanza, 2020, p. 44). In times of economic inequality, coercive conduct by police is used to guarantee the supremacy of white settlers (Helms & Costanza, 2020).

Within the Canadian society, police violence towards Indigenous Peoples can be understood as a tool of settler colonialism (Aiello, 2023). Lethal force (i.e., the epitome of over-policing) is associated with the maintenance of a racial, settler colonial order (Flores & Alfaro, 2023; Maynard, 2017). Pasternak (2022) has observed that settler colonial advancement in places like Canada and the United States is contingent on the conquest, removal, and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their lands. One part of this colonial practice is to exclude Indigenous Peoples from public life by controlling and criminalizing their bodies and naturalizing their disappearance and removal from these spaces (Ford, 2010). This practice is exemplified in the case study of Loreal Tsingine, 27-year-old Navajo woman with mental illness who was shot and killed by Officer Aarron Shipley in Arizona twenty-two seconds after meeting her (Razack, 2020). The practice of controlling and criminalizing "suspicious" and "out of place" Indigenous bodies also has a historical basis, given police's enforcement of colonial government policies, such as the removal of Indigenous children from their homes and placement into the residential school system (Cuneen, 2017; Razack, 2020).

At present, police narratives and actions are said to "communicate the position that Indigenous lives occupy in the settler colonial order" (Flores & Alfaro, 2023, p. 393). Police violence towards Indigenous peoples happens when they have "forgotten their appropriate place" (Aiello, 2023, p. 405) and when they demand or assert their rights (e.g., land defenders) (Ceric, 2020; Klippmark & Crowley, 2018). Yet,

it remains to be seen where and how these dynamics unfold within police-based MHER with Indigenous communities in Canada.

### Role and Function of Media Reporting

Within and beyond MHER, or police violence, media has long been complicit in perpetuating this racial settler and colonial order. Media reporting reinforces public opinions, attitudes, and gives consent for government policy making (Islam & Fitzgerald, 2016; Walker et al., 2019). Media also defines problems, diagnoses causes, makes moral judgements and suggest potential remedies. Yet Canadian media representations of Indigenous Peoples often construct public policy issues from the “prism of mainstream whiteness” (Burns & Shor, 2021, p. 16; Gilchrist, 2010; Scribe, 2017). Central to this prism is the tendency to de-contextualize accounts (as in the case of mental health reporting), medicalize socio-political distress, to individualize wrongdoing and to absolve settler colonial state harms by framing colonialism as a “past event” (Anderson, 2022; Walker, 2019).

According to Entman (1993) this transmission process from media to public consciousness occurs through “frames,” which select aspects of reality while omitting others, and transmitting this curated information to audiences in such a way that interacts with their previously held beliefs. Within the context of MHER, media frames have upheld public perceptions that conflate mental illness and Indigenous mental health with criminality (McGinty et al., 2016; Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991). Such racially stereotyped information about victims can sway public opinions about police violence, including how the victim and shooter (i.e., police officer) is perceived and what, if any, sentencing the shooter ought to receive (Dukes & Kahn, 2017).

Using Asao Inoue’s *habits of white language* mapped against mainstream media reports published in 2020 on the police use of lethal force in Ontario, Blyth (2021) found a high prevalence of themes tied to the maintenance of racial hierarchies. These themes were evident through 1) *privileging certain voices* over others (such as emphasis on special interrogation units, despite conflicts of interests in charging police officers and low criminal conviction rates), 2) *hyper-individualism*, where focus on police actions, agency or blame is deferred, 3) a *stance of neutrality*—through distancing, clinical and detached language, and where lethal force is presented as “apolitical and commonplace”, 4) *focus on an individualized, rational self*, which emphasizes incriminating descriptions and discourse surrounding the victim (blaming those who have been harmed and justifying it through an emphasis on their faults), 5) *rule-governed relationships*, which emphasize the apolitical, individual rights and positive descriptions of police, promoting the idea that harm done through policing is “commonplace” and “necessary” in a lawful society, and 6) *clarity, order, and control*—whereby tightly prescribed, standardized language is used to establish distance from the dead, whether through omission, indirect, or clinical language, removing attention from the person who has been harmed.

Beyond Blyth’s (2021) study, these habits of white language are perpetuated in media discourse on MHER and police involvement with Indigenous Peoples. Within MHER, *privileging certain voices* is reflected in the tendency of media reporting discourse to be domineeringly shaped by police departments (Boyd & Kerr, 2016). This emphasis on police narratives promotes the construction and advancement of “strategic police ideologies” (Duncan & Walby, 2022, p. 95), and legitimizes police

violence while suppressing public discourse that challenges the existing social order (Helms & Costanza, 2020).

Within the second theme, *hyper-individualism*, a callous disregard and unwillingness to investigate leads or act on evidence for MMIWGs is central. Here police routinely claim, “there’s nothing we can do” (Flores & Alfaro, 2023). Even when police violence is linked to the faults of police, legislators and police administrators are often given light-handed responses (Pitts, 2022). Following the death of Australian Aboriginal woman Ms. Dhu, who died in police custody, the coroner’s inquest (which was emphasized in subsequent media reports), police and medical professionals’ dereliction of duties were reframed as “procedural and operational failures,” and the result deemed from “individual failures to act with concern with human life.” Gray (2016) argues that this emphasis on coronial reports reproduces settler colonial violence by failing to contextualize deaths through the “social and structural effects of colonialism” nor to the historical and ongoing activities of specific institutions (p.81).

With regard to the third theme, police often use euphemisms that obscure details about the use of force and offer up vague references to the incident in question (Walby & Alabi, 2022). Within the case of Loreal Tsingine, the Arizona Police Department instructed Officer Aaron Shipley to “say nothing” (Razack, 2020). The refusal of police to share pertinent details with community or family members has been brought up consistently through interviewing and national inquiries about MMIWGs (Flores & Alfaro, 2023). Within the deadly use of force, this tendency to omit information also precludes the ability to properly contextualize violence nor name the systemic nature of incidents producing inequitable police harms (Blyth, 2021). By some accounts, this lack of information sharing prevents opportunities for victims to find closure, denies Indigenous Peoples’ calls for justice, and makes opportunities for healing through mourning, impossible (Flores & Alfaro, 2023).

Fourthly, In the case of Loreal Tsingine, discursive attention to “pill bottles” were used by the media to reframe notions of threat and danger around the victim’s mental illness (Razack, 2020). Such police narratives are consistently found in the racist, classist, and gendered frames of police (as exemplified in media) towards MMIWGs, which emphasize the self-destructive nature of the victim to explain away, and disregard violence inflicted upon them (Flores & Alfaro, 2023). In each of these cases, state responsibility is ignored. Further, these narratives frame deaths as not due to historical and ongoing settler colonial oppression but rather the result of risky behaviours and problems adjusting to settler society (Garcia-Del Moral, 2018).

### **Rationale for the Study**

Though police violence in the Canadian settler society is palpable at the intersection of mental illness and indigeneity, the nature of contextual factors and circumstances giving rise to these incidents remains elusive (Jun et al., 2020). Consequently, this study sought to illuminate the contextual realities of police-based MHER, as well as the circumstances giving rise to traumatic and lethal outcomes (Frankham, 2020; Glaser & Laudel, 2013; McKenzie, 2020).

While the lack of adequate databases on MHER hinders understanding and under-report police killings, media reporting has emerged as a viable alternative (Blyth, 2021). Despite concerns of sensationalism

and/or over-identification with police narratives, media has successfully shed light on situations giving rise to police's excessive use of force, such as when police greatly outnumber the victim, and when the victim is a racialized male (Pitts, 2022). With this illuminating capacity in sight, Helms and Costanza (2020) argue that media can provide structurally informed accounts of police violence.

At the same time, the intent of this media analysis was not only to better understand the role of police in MHER, the actions they take, but the narratives they fall back on when accused of misconduct, as well as their impact. While Canadian media coverage has a long history of supporting the normative racial politics of policing, current empirical support for these claims is drawn from disparate populations (i.e., racial minorities, Indigenous people affected by water and environmental issues [Lam et al., 2017; Lowan-Trudeau, 2021; Moraca & DeNuntiis, 2022], MMIWGs), single person case studies, timelines, and countries. Further, Frankham (2020) found that racial minority (i.e., Latinx or Black) status attenuates, not amplifies the chance of media use criminalizing (i.e., victim-blaming) frames towards victims. By examining Canadian media coverage over a long-time frame may help to clarify the extent that these victim-blaming and colonial settler narratives (vis-à-vis perspectives aligned with Inoue's habits of white language) have changed or apply to police-based MHER involving Indigenous Peoples. This clarification is vital amidst calls to decolonize journalist education, more fully contextualize circumstances leading to police violence and improve media's representations of Indigenous Peoples (McCue, 2022; United Nations, 2012).

**Research Question:** This study sought to answer the following research question: What are the predominant themes that emerge from police interactions with Indigenous people where mental health was an initial or eventual concern as described in media accounts of these interactions?

## Methods

**Overview:** Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to guide analysis as it facilitates the identification of themes in the dataset through reflective engagement with the data and the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Central to RTA is meaningfulness and recurrence, which pays attention to themes associated with the research question, and themes repeating throughout the dataset (Byrne, 2022).

**Data Sources:** A sample of 158 Canadian online available text and print-based media articles published between 2000 and 2022 were included in the final analysis. These articles were taken from a larger database of 168 articles published since 1970. Including articles from this time ensured the volume of data was manageable and supported the systemic collection of data (Neal, 2013). Articles were captured across the spectrum of political views. Articles included Canadian mainstream print media. Media sources from Indigenous outlets, such as APTN news, were included to help counter hegemonic discourses that have long obscured historical, political, and contextual realities or issues facing Indigenous people in Canada (Walker et al. 2019) and promote more Indigenous voices in the public sphere (Lowan-Trudeau, 2021; Moraca & Nuntiis, 2022).

**Selection or Inclusion Criteria:** A purposeful sampling approach was used to select information-rich cases (which each represent a unit of analysis), which "illuminate the inquiry question being



investigated” (Patton, 2015, p. 265). All articles included within our sample must have focused on Indigenous persons interacting with police in Canada, where mental health was or became an eventual concern. To enhance the analytic specificity of “mental health” (Barnard, 2022), each of these articles included for review documented some combination of : a) a health emergency (i.e., a sudden or unexpected threat to physical health or well-being that required immediate action—note: each example must have included some indication of psychological, suicidal and/or substance-related distress), b) a wellness check (i.e., where police are called to interact with someone to assess their mental health and safety), c) social infractions (whereby Indigenous people are alleging violating some law or statute and are at risk of being criminalized). For optimal data accuracy, news stories with fewer than 100 words, books reviews, and obituaries were excluded. Further, the most recent published article for each incident was sought. Local articles were also prioritized as they contained the richest information about police involved in situations related to MHER (Frankham, 2020).

**Analytic Strategy:** RTA was structured in accordance with Braun and Clarke’s 6-phase approach (2006, 2020). Initial codes were generated and revised through the analytic process, then generated into themes, revised, defined, and named, and produced in a final manuscript (Byrne, 2022). An inductive open coding process by three coders was used to capture, document, and revise themes from each article (Burns & Shor, 2021). Key concepts were operationalized and defined with an associated list of key words for each theme which assisted reliable and consistent coding (Neal, 2013; Stoneham et al., 2014). Once the final codebook was developed by all coders (Braun & Clarke, 2013), a subset of articles was independently coded by a sole coder and compared with the support of a senior researcher (Stoneham et al. 2014). Discrepancies were resolved through consensus (Stoneham et al., 2014).

**Search Strategy:** A media scan using google news, google search, news website, and OMNI searches were employed. We used this approach given the anticipated lack of news stories in alternative search channels, with single incidents in some cases captured by multiple sources. Multiple search term combinations were used to maximize coverage of relevant articles. This approach was iteratively refined until significant coverage was provided across the political spectrum of reporting media outlets, jurisdictions, and time periods. In addition to the search strategy, a full list of articles, incidents, and media sources (as well as frequency counts) are included in the tables below.

**Table 1. Search Strategy**

Search Terms Included	Databases
Police, Indigenous, Crime, Canada, Assault,	Google News
Police Arrest + Province, “” + Dense City,	Google Search
Indigenous Arrest, [name of Indigenous person]	OMNI Search
+ Indigenous + Canada, Crime, Victim, Police	

**Table 2. Characteristics of Individual-Incidents and Affiliated Media Sources.**

Name of Person	Year	News Station	Totals
			Articles (2000-2022)
Pacey Dumas 1	2021	Edmonton Journal	N = 158
Greg Ritchie 2	2020	CBC	Articles
Randall May 3	2020	CBC	CBC = 69
Freda Huson 4	2020	STRAIGHT	Edmonton Journal = 5
Candace Sero 5	2022	CTV	CTV = 11
Dawamuxw (Larry Patsy)6	2020	CBC	Edmonton Sun = 1
Danny Sand 7	2003	CBC	Globe and Mail = 5
Dusty Sand 8	2014	Edmonton Sun	Global News = 6
Kenneth Standingready-McKay 9	2009	CBC	Calgary Herald = 1
Harry Haineault 10	2008	The Globe and Mail	APTN = 31
Cyrus Green 11	2014	CBC	Vice = 4
Cavin Poucette 12	2017	Calgary Herald	BBC = 2
Angela Lavoie 13	2010	CBC	Meadowlake Now = 1
Rodney Jackson 14	2011	CBC	RSF = 1
David Sappa 15	2018	APTN	Calgary Sun = 1
Joshua Nixon 16	2021	Globe and Mail	Yahoo = 1
Colten Boushie’s Mother 17	2021	No URL	Aljazeera = 2
Chad Williams 18	2019	CBC	City News = 2
Lucian Silverquill 19	2021	CBC	North Shore News = 1
Unknown 20	2021	No URL	Georgia Straight = 1
Charles Qirngnirq 21	2021	APTN	Times Colonist = 1
Eisha Hudson 22	2020	Global News	Two Rows Times = 1
John-Joseph Harper 23	2020	CBC	Hoser = 1
			Ricochet Media = 1
			Timmins = 1

Gitxsan Chief Spookwx 24	2020	APTN	Sask Today = 1 The Independent = 1 Surrey Now Leader = 1 Toronto Star = 1 Straight = 1 No access to article/no link = 3
Anthony Gargan 25	2020	APTN	
Darlene Bughhins 26	2020	APTN	
Daniel Charland 27	2015	Edmonton Journal	
Dwayne Dustyhorn 28	2009	CBC	
Melvin Bigsky 29	2018	CBC	
Keldon McMillan 30	2001	CBC	
Delbert Pelletier 31	2009	CBC	
Jeremy Nuvviaq 32	2022	CBC	
Lionel Ernest Grey 33	2021	Vice	
Elliot McLeod 34	2021	Edmonton Journal	
Allan Adam 35	2020	BBC	
Jason Collins 36	2021	CBC	
Randy Cochrane 37	2021	CTV	
Dale Culver 38	2021	APTN	
Adrian Lacquette 39	2018	CBC	
Geoff Morris 40	2021	CTV	
Cody Severight 41	2018	CBC	
Ross Sterling Cardinal 42	2018	CBC	
Benjamin Richard 43	2020	CBC	
Robin Fiddler 44	2020	Meadowlake Now	
Patrick Everett 45	2020	CBC	
Karl Dockstader 46	2020	RSF	
Emily Kammermayer 47	2021	CBC	
Evan Penner 48	2022	Global News	
Jonathan Henoche 49	2020	Global News	
Sara Pitawanakwat 50	2021	CBC	
Elliot Houle 52	2021	CTV	
Kyle Albright 53	2019	Calgary Sun	
Sonny Crazy Bull 54	2021	Yahoo	
Arlene Lagimodiere 55	2022	APTN	
Serena Hickes 56	2021	APTN	
Chad George 57	2020	APTN	
Clayton Willey 58	2020	APTN	
William Ahmo 59	2022	APTN	
Genesta Garson 60	2020	APTN	
Jimmy Sivuak Eliyassialuk 61	2020	APTN	
Debra Chrisjohn 62	2020	APTN	

Regis Korchinski-Paquet 63	2020	BBC	
Rodney Levi 64	2021	Aljazeera	
Josephine Pelletier 65	2021	Aljazeera	
Maxwell Johnson 66	2022	City News	
Unknown Child (Maxwell Johnson granddaughter) 67	2022	City News	
Rodrigue Vachon 68	2021	APTN	
Brenda Michell 69	2020	Georgia Straight	
Gwininitxw (Yvonne Lattie) 70	2020	APTN	
Don Mamakwa 71	2021	APTN	
Roland McKay 72	2021	APTN	
Ryan Jacobs 73	2014	North Shore News	
James Butters 74	2020	Times Colonist	
Sandy Michel 75	2016	CBC	
Jôvan Williams 76	2021	CBC	
Daniel Legarde 77	2020	CBC	
Illutak Anautak 78	2018	CBC	
Unknown 79	2020	CBC	
Dennis St. Paul 80	2006	CBC	
Clark Whitehouse 81	2005	CBC	
Corwin Peeace 82	2012	CTV	
Craig McDougall 83	2017	CBC	
Eric Daniels 84	2018	CBC	
Paul Duck 85	2016	CBC	
Paulsey Alphonse 86	2003	Globe and Mail	
Naytanie Atadjuat 87	2004	CBC	
Felix Taqqaugaq 88	2016	CBC	
Kyle Tait 89	2008	Globe and Mail	
Jay Louis 90	2020	CBC	
Douglas Heagle 91	2020	CBC	
Sammy Alook 92	2020	CBC	
Unknown 93	2022	Two Row Times	
Geldert-Hautala 94	2022	Hoser	
Unknown 95	2018	CBC	
Darcy Seekascootch 96	2021	Ricochet Media	
Unknown 97	2020	APTN	
Unknown 98	2022	CTV	
Unknown 99	2022	CTV	
Unknown 100	2022	CTV	

Julian Jones 101	2021	Global News	
Chantel Moore 102	2021	CBC	
Brydon Whitstone 103	2018	Global News	
Vernon Stone 104	2001	CBC	
Austin Eaglechief 105	2019	CBC	
Evan Caron 106	2017	CTV	
Jacqueline Montgrand 107	2010	CBC	
Ralph Stephens 108	2019	CTV	
Sean Thompson 109	2019	CBC	
Lance Cutarm 110	2017	CBC	
Joey Knapaysweet 111	2019	Timmins Today	
Dillon McDonald 112	2021	CBC	
Jordan McKay 113	2022	APTN	
Kyla Frenchman 114	2022	Sask Today	
Julian Shackelly 115	2021	CBC	
Josh Skookum 116	2016	CBC	
Wayne Hare 117	2011	APTN	
Travis Jerome 118	2020	CBC	
Ashevak Montague 119	2020	APTN	
Emily Wolfrey 120	2017	The Independent	
Candice Sero 121	2022	No URL	
Herbert Daniels 122	2020	Global News	
Flinn Dorion 123	2020	CBC	
Mike Isnardy 124	2020	APTN	
Shane Robertson 125	2020	APTN	
Kanahus Manuel 126	2019	APTN	
Nigel Bosum 127	2018	APTN	
Bradley Greene 128	2018	APTN	
Abraham Natanine 129	2020	APTN	
James Pitawanakwat 130	2016	Vice	
Geronimo Fobister 131	2020	Vice	
Romeo Wesley 132	2020	Edmonton Journal	
Debralee Chrisjohn 133	2020	Edmonton Journal	
Stewart Andrews 134	2020	CBC	
Darryl Night 135	2021	CBC	
Aaron Keeshig 136	2020	CBC	
Luc Picard 137	2021	APTN	
Dino Kwandibens 138	2021	APTN	
Michael Payne 139	2020	APTN	
Karen Lander 140	2018	CBC	

Naverone Woods 141	2017	CBC	
James McIntyre 142	2016	CBC	
Marvel Woodhouse 143	2016	Surrey-Now Leader	
John Simon 144	2012	CBC	
Donald Miles 145	2020	CBC	
Howard Fleury 146	2020	CBC	
Bernadette Auger 147	2013	CTV	
Bernard Giroux Jr 148	2020	CBC	
Kinling Fire 149	2017	CBC	
Michael Langan 150	2016	CBC	
Lance Muir 151	2018	CBC	
Lorraine Moon/Loraine Jacobson 152	2003	The Globe and Mail	
Byron Debassige 153	2008	Toronto Star	
Gerald Chenery 154	2006	CBC	
Johnny Michel-Dumont 155 Jr.	2016	CBC	
Sandy Tarzan Michel 156	2016	CBC	
Maurice Linklater 157	2020	CBC	
Sandy Salowatfeak 158	2020	CBC	
Davyn Calfchild 159	2013	Vice	

## Results

Through the inclusion and analysis of the entire database and sample, two themes, and seven subthemes were established. The first theme pertained to affective realities, issues, harms, and consequences caused by police involvement, and the second theme was normative practices that perpetuate police impunity. Each theme is discussed in further detail below.

### **Theme 1: Affective Realities, Issues, Harms and Consequences Caused by Police Involvement**

This theme focused on the affective realities, issues, harms, and consequences produced by police involvement with Indigenous persons in situations where mental health was or became an eventual concern. Several sub-themes were also captured, including a) police mishandling of MHER when acting as first responders, b) traumatic effects of police intervention, c) disposability and devaluing of Indigenous lives, and d) resistance to police.

**Police Mishandling of Mental Health Emergencies When Acting as First Responders:** This sub-theme highlights the prevalence of reporting on police involvement in MHER where an individual's wellbeing worsened upon police arrival and/or led to more violent or lethal outcomes. This sub-theme took two main forms throughout media coverage. First, police were found to be escalating crises and/or

exacerbating distress for Indigenous persons involved. Examples of escalation and exacerbation included the excessive use of force (e.g., multiple gun shots, shooting instead of disarming, calling several officers as backup for one individual, assaulting someone who is unarmed or complaint). In considering this excessive use of force and death of Greg Ritchie in 2019, one news story quoted the Chief of the Ontario Coalition of Indigenous Peoples:

"Why did they have to kill him? . . . They could've shot him in the arm, shot him in the leg, anywhere. But to shoot nine times at a person—that is ridiculous" (Goodwin, 2020, para. 17)

Greg Ritchie was tasered and struck by three bullets fired by two constables because he was carrying a "40-centimetre-long stick with a rock attached to one end" (Goodwin, 2020, para. 15). The police were called because the item appeared "suspicious," despite this being an item Ritchie had made to honour his Indigenous heritage and to comfort himself. Ritchie allegedly swung the item at the officers before he was killed in a parking lot in Elmvale Acres Shopping Centre in Ottawa. Across cases, police also refused to engage in de-escalation (e.g., dismissing Indigenous person's pleas, provide reason for apprehension, or address individual's concerns). Darcy Seekaskootch from Montreal recounted the trauma of being handcuffed for hours because a friend called the ambulance after noticing self-harm injuries on Darcy during an active period of suicidal ideation:

"I knew they would send the cops and, once you've already dialed 911, you can't roll that back," Seekasootch said. "What turned out to be an . . . awful suicidal episode for me snowballed into something that could have been worse. I am terrified of the police." (Curtis, 2021, para. 7)

When the police arrived in response to the call, Seekasootch's roommate explained to the officer that they would not like police intervention because Seekasootch was "freaked out" and yelling "no cops" (Curtis, 2021, para. 7). Still, the police forcibly entered, and the roommate was "tackled by four police officers, choked, handcuffed and charged with a crime" (Curtis 2021, para. 2), which he called "the most absurd response to someone asking for help" (Curtis, 2021, para. 3). Police were there for an hour before the ambulance came and Darcy remained handcuffed the entire time.

The second feature of this sub-theme was that poor health outcomes of Indigenous persons were accelerated due to officer's deliberate refusal or negligence to ensure access to needed health, mental health, or rehabilitative services. Malpractice towards medical needs also encompassed improper or illegal behaviour. Examples of malpractice included "not bring[ing] an ambulance or first aid kit to the scene" (CBC News, 2011, para. 8), not following up on injuries sustained by police's use of force and refusing to take victims to the hospital despite requests for medical assistance. In the case of Mike Isnardy, an unhoused Indigenous person, the Royal Canadian Mountain Police (RCMP) use of excessive force and medical negligence led to his permanent disability. In this incident, Isnardy was speaking with his friends at a parking lot of a liquor store in downtown Williams Lake, B.C. RCMP constables asked for identification, while attempting to get his ID, an officer grabbed Isnardy, "put him in a chokehold and threw him against the back of a police car." Isnardy sustained further injuries when the officer landed on him after choking and throwing his body to ground. These officers "failed to provide the medical practitioners with the details of the detention and takedown, which frustrated and

delayed their ability to assist [him]” (Martens, 2020, para. 14) and resulted in Mike Isnardy’s permanent use of a wheelchair that required daily personal care assistance.

To justify reasons for police escalation, coverage explained that police responded inappropriately due to victims having symptoms (e.g., psychiatric, neurodevelopmental, etc.) that they viewed as “suspicious” (e.g., perceptions of strangeness from differences in psychomotor functioning, gait, etc.), and were often subsequently criminalized. In one example, Joshua Nixon, an autistic Indigenous young man, was charged with resisting arrest because he could not hear two Stratford officers through his noise-cancelling headphones (which he wore to assist in the management of sensory regulation). The officers responded by punching Nixon to the ground and breaking his headphones. The “tactic” was deemed “reasonable” because Nixon had “pulled away,” as was explained in a subsequent report published by the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) (Hayes, 2021, para. 20) despite Nixon ending up with a “mild concussion, cuts to his face and a black eye” (Hayes, 2021, para. 9). The officers’ lack of awareness and skills in dealing with people with disabilities is further highlighted by Nixon’s sister:

“It’s obvious just by the way that Joshua was wearing his headphones, speaks, and carries his body, that if you had any training or knowledge about people with disabilities, you would be able to spot that this person probably has autism or something that makes it difficult to communicate,” she said. “And they didn’t respect that. They just accosted him. They kept pushing him, they kept scaring him. And for what? Walking across the train tracks?” (Hayes, 2021, para. 15).

**The Traumatic Effects of Police Intervention.** This subtheme underscores the traumatic impacts of police interventions in MHER, as considered by media coverage. Traumatic effects included various combinations of psychological, emotional (e.g., anxiety, fear, paranoia, worry), and physical injuries (e.g., fractures, concussions, difficulties walking, admittance to the hospital for injuries). The reported impacts of traumatic distress were experienced by survivors and victims of police violence, partners, family, and community members. Throughout coverage, traumatization was both past and present and may or may not have resulted in the communication of a psychiatric diagnosis, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Being targeted by police was a commonly cited precursor to this trauma. In Alberta of August 2020, Arlene Lagimodiere was not the suspect of interest, and yet police pushed a police canine’s head towards her body, which resulted in the dog biting her leg and causing significant injury. The police received a tip that an armed male suspect was selling substances, but when they saw Lagimodiere by the site, the handler justified having the dog attack her because he feared she may have also been armed, which was proven false. Lagimodiere explains how “the experience was extremely traumatizing” and how it impacted her relationship with her own dog:

“It was so horrible. I have nightmares all the time about this . . . I’m terrified of my own [huskie] dog now.” (Forester, 2022, para. 3)

By January 2022, media reported that Lagimodiere was undergoing rehabilitation. The severity of the altercation, and its consequences, are reflected in the quote below:



“The injuries were so severe that the plaintiff required in patient hospital care for approximately one month and reconstructive surgery to graft skin over the areas of the injury.” (Forester, 2022, para. 6)

Jordan Geldert-Hautala (Pesaruk, 2022), Luc Picard (Richardson & Bacon, 2021), and Rodrigue Vachon (Richardson & Bacon, 2021) were similarly misidentified by police as suspects for crimes they did not commit. None were given reasons for their arrest and suffered symptoms of traumatic distress following their altercations with the police (e.g., insomnia, nightmares, flashbacks). Communal level impacts were seen in the traumas and traumatic bereavement created for partners, families, and community. Such communal level impacts were evident when individuals confronted with police intervention responded in fear because a parent, child, or relative were hurt or killed previously. It was also common among family members of the deceased to develop fear of interacting with police, which Rodney Levi’s sister, Lisa, explained:

“A week after Rodney was killed, I was driving down the highway and a cop pulled out behind me. I was sweating, started to get anxious. Even though my vehicle was insured and registered, I didn’t feel safe because I’m Indigenous.” (Mortin, 2021, para. 60)

Communal impacts also referenced intergenerational trauma, such as with Sara Pitawanakwat when police presence brought up traumas from police officers forcibly removed children during the Sixties Scoop into residential schools (Ricci, 2021, para. 10). Two Toronto police officers came to her house accusing her of hiding a fugitive. Officers threatened to arrest her and her son when she said they had the wrong address. Officers threatened to get warrants and “bust down [their] door,” so she let them in to check her apartment. Sarah said the incident brought up previous collective trauma from the Sixties Scoop.

**Disposability and Devaluing of Indigenous Persons.** This sub-theme centered on the discursive, cognitive, affective processes, and behaviours employed that indicated a disposability and devaluing of Indigenous life by police, as gleaned through media coverage. It involved selective discursive moves by police where they emphasized the death of police dogs rather than attending to or acknowledging harms brought to Indigenous person themselves. In some instances, vicious police dog attacks were reframed to emphasize the officer’s concern for their personal safety. It included Indigenous victims and family’s recounting events and beliefs about how incidents would not have happened if they had been white; highlighting the insidious effects of anti-Indigenous racism.

At a psychological or cognitive level, stereotyping and bias were a major dimension of this sub-theme. Examples are seen in the commonly expressed concerns about systemic racism, racial profiling, and police officer bias (by victims, families, coroner reports, etc.). Police speculated that Indigenous persons were intoxicated or using substances, including Darlene Bughhins, from Hay River, Northwest Territories, whose medical pleas were neglected by police by saying, “she’s just lying” (Forester, 2020, para. 32). Bughhins called the police because her common law partner made her fear for her safety; the police instead arrested her, forcibly shut a door on her ankle and left her seven-year-old daughter unaccompanied on the side of the road. Michael Payne, too, was similarly refused medical attention and was accused of lying:

“I was yelling out in pain, and telling the officers I couldn’t breathe. I was screaming for help as much as I could. I heard one of the RCMP officers say that I was just faking it and that I was drunk.” (Forester, 2020, para. 17)

Payne was further exposed to verbal abuse including derogatory language and racial slurs. Colten Boushie’s mother faced similar treatment (i.e., mother of son who was fatally shot when he arrived on scene to a farmhouse when asking for assistance), when police came to inform her of her son’s death:

“Instead of comforting the grieving mother, they asked if she had been drinking and told her to ‘get it together’ . . . One or more RCMP members smelled her breath” apparently for signs of alcohol.” (Austen & 2021, para. 15)

Disposability and devaluing of Indigenous life were also evident. Specifically, media indicated police would force Indigenous people to inhumane or dangerous conditions. Two Anishnaabe brothers, Randall May and Aaron Keeshig, were arrested in May’s front lawn in Ramara, a township about two hours north of Toronto. Officers did not inform them of the reason for arrest but later claimed the arrest was for “public intoxication” though evidence from a cellphone video showed that May was not carrying a can of beer, nor had he fell off his bike, which was the basis of the false accusation. May shared his experience of police neglecting his rights to hygiene after they tasered him to the point of excreting himself:

“They threw [him] in the back of this car and [where he] was just full of excrement . . . The OPP did not provide him with a change of clothes or any blankets while he was in the holding cell overnight. He was forced to wash his soiled clothes in the toilet bowl, which he couldn’t flush, he said. Never informed of reason for arrest . . . [He] basically slept beside [his] own excrement.” (Barrera, 2020, para. 35-37)

In attempts to make sense of the situation, May added that “they were trying to humiliate [him]” (Barrera, 2020, para. 38). In the B.C. case of Clayton Willey, video footage of his mistreatment while in custody was released 10 years later. Media subsequently commented:

“[it] shows Willey being hog tied, dragged along the hallways in the detachment, banged against the elevator, and eventually Tasered by two officers. He died hours later in hospital . . . [yet the] coroner’s report that said Willey died of heart failure due to cocaine overdose.” (Wilson, 2020, para. 19-20)

Independent investigation concluded that the RCMP officers did not get Willey medical help quick enough, noting how he was treated like an animal or “hog”. The report also argues that the RCMP did not properly investigate his death (e.g., not interviewing in timely manner, cleaning police vehicle prior to examination). The context of the altercation was vague, with only mentions of Willey causing “disturbance” on the streets while high on cocaine. Genesta Garson’s lawyers also indicated that no formal investigation took place when RCMP and community safety officers stripped her over suspected intoxication (DePatie, 2020, para. 7). “There is no reason for someone in Genesa’s case to have to remove articles of clothing like her bra”, said her lawyer. Degrading conditions also took place outside of

police departments or holding cells. There are numerous reports of deaths from Saskatoon police officers picking up and leaving Indigenous persons in freezing temperatures overnight—such as Neil Stonechild, Lloyd Dusty Horn, Rodney Naistus and Lawrence Kim Wegner (Morin, 2021); a practice so common that it is now referred to as the “Starlight Tours.” Despite police actions, “the jury decided that Lloyd Dusty Horn’s death had been caused by hypothermia (Morin, 2021, para. 36).

**Resistance to Police.** This sub-theme described media reporting on resistance to police violence against victims and persons affected. This theme elucidated concerns about the justice system’s handling of inquests and public inquiries that resulted in unfavourable outcomes for families bearing witnesses to injustices perpetuated by police. Witnesses in the community, families, and friends of Indigenous persons being accused or apprehended by police used video footage to document police misconduct, which was a central to their attempts to enhance accountability. Community members recorded interactions on their cell phones and posted videos on social media in real-time (e.g., Facebook live) or post-incident to raise awareness of police brutality. Recordings also included footage generated through police body cameras and security footages.

These recordings had a range of effects, especially in court proceedings. Video footage was used as evidence in investigations to refute statements made by police. Witnesses of Eishia Hudson’s death uploaded recordings of the shooting to showcase how the statement from the Winnipeg officer did “not match up with video evidence from the scene” (Unger, 2021, para. 25). The officer who killed her was cleared of any charges, despite a video showing that Hudson did not steer the wheels of a stolen Jeep towards the officer and his partner, which was what allegedly prompted the officer to shoot Hudson out of “fear [of] grievous bodily harm or death.” As discussed earlier, the case of Keeshig and May, also used cellphone recording to disprove an officer’s allegations of public intoxication:

“Officers falsely claimed that Keeshig fell off his bike when he arrived at May’s home and was carrying an open can of beer. The video clearly shows he was walking his bike when he arrived and was not holding a can of beer . . . The officers also falsely alleged that Keeshig tried to interfere with the arrest . . . [Yet,] Keeshig was never anywhere near Mr. May and fully complied with the instructions to stay back . . . as supported by the cellphone video.” (Barrera, 2020, para. 46-48)

The officer in question used this allegation to justify tasing and physically assaulting Keeshig and May. The use of video to resist police accusations, in some cases, resulted in police being subsequently charged or acquitted. In other cases, retributive charges against the person involved were stayed. Police attempted to destroy evidence, block video capture, fought attempts to have video evidence submitted in the courts, and leveraged or relied on the lack of video footage to relinquish responsibility for their actions. Consider the inquest of Don Mamakwa (APTN News, 2021), where legal representation for the Thunder Bay Police Department presented a motion to remove a video capturing police officers dragging and taunting another First Nation man, Dino Kwandibens, at the same station that Mamakwa was brought into custody. The video footage was subsequently deemed “irrelevant” and “outside the scope” of the inquest (APTN News, 2021, para. 7).

The second key dimension of this sub-theme was a focus on organizing action and protests by family or community members following police actions or court ruling. In numerous cases, protests resulted in further police use of force or violence. Consider the fatal shooting of Sandy Tarzan Michel (Shingler, 2016), who was struck by a patrol car for brandishing a weapon; witnesses claim that police dragged him and shot him four times even after he was disarmed. Several dozen residents of Lac-Simon, Quebec, confronted police and blocked them from getting near Sandy's body. Similarly, in the case of Sean Thompson (Hoye, 2019), around eighty people protested outside of the Winnipeg police station as family and community members demanded answers about how a healthy person could die due to "medical distress" while in custody. Not much information is released about what led to Thompson's condition. Furthermore, the family was not notified until 30 hours after he died. In their peaceful protest, Indigenous people sang, engaged in ceremony, and called for reform (e.g., body cameras). In August 2020 outside of Thunder Bay's police department, protestors demanded Indigenous-led oversight and jurisdiction over Indigenous deaths. Demonstrations also aided in the collective grieving of individuals.

Vigils also served to raise awareness of police brutality and impunity as the constable was not held accountable, rather promoted. Family and friends of Byron Debassige marched in Toronto while carrying a lemon, to bring attention to fatal police intervention against Debassige, who struggled with mental health challenges, substance use, and houselessness, and was accused of stealing a lemon from a convenience store and shot several times for carrying a knife (Doolittle, 2008). Similarly, one hundred Lac-Simon community members showed up in solidarity for Sandy Tarzan Michel, and his brother, Johny Michel-Dumont Jr (Northcott & Laframboise 2016), who were both shot by police on separate accounts for allegedly carrying a knife (2016 and 2009, respectively).

## **Theme 2: Normative Practices that Perpetuate Police Impunity.**

This theme described the normative practices, including behavioural patterns, cultural factors, assumptions and logics, communicative and discursive tendencies, legislative mechanisms, and procedures, that perpetuated, incentivized, and rewarded police for their actions without accountability (e.g., use of force, lethal force, assault, etc.). Several dimensions were prevalent in media coverage.

First, police's actions, outcomes, wrongdoing, and lethality were often treated as "inevitable", without calling into question how police involvement or actions were a source of injustice or harm. Police indifference and lack of culpability manifested by individual officers, or their departments refusing to make statements or appear in press conferences or court proceedings about a loss of life.

A second dimension included laws, policies, and legislation that enabled or perpetuated police violence or behaviours with impunity. A few examples include the lack of case law available to charge officers, legislation like the Intoxicated Persons Detention Act (which was used to strip search an Indigenous female), and "shooting centre mass" policies, which undermined opportunities for de-escalation and the preservation of Indigenous life.

A third dimension included the lack of transparency in altercations and shootings. Specifically, media documented how police engaged in the purposeful use of counterfactuals, contradicting, or omitted

information that undermined opportunities for transparency, accountability, or factual reporting. It intersected with the resistance to police video footage subtheme, and included police's use of threats to media, and refusal to release video footage that would cast further light on the incident or provide families with opportunities for closure. In recalling the example of Greg Ritchie, who died in an Ottawa mall parking lot, police claimed that nonlethal use of force was employed first (i.e, taser), before resorting to gun use. However, 13 witnesses and video footages refuted this claim, yet this evidence was not used to bring accountability or charges against the officer. A lawyer representing Ritchie's family highlights the inconsistency in information concerning the incident: "witnesses reported seeing and hearing gunshots before 8 a.m., but one of the officers fired his taser at 8:07 a.m." (Goodwin, 2020, para. 12), which suggests that the shooting took place before the tasing.

A fourth dimension centred on justifying the use of force through minor infractions and false allegations. Media coverage highlighted how police employed accusations, alleged breach of social infractions, bystander laws (e.g, fraudulent Indian status cards, protesting land acquisitions), resisting arrest narratives, mental health labels or histories to justify involvement (including during wellness checks). In many cases, these actions gave rise to violence and death, even when the presenting person was peaceful.

There were several cases where police apprehended and/or physically abused Indigenous persons by misidentifying them as suspects and falsely accusing them of crimes they did not commit (e.g, public intoxication, theft, false suspicion of weapon use, resisting arrest, or assaulting an officer), including Arlene Lagimodiere (Forester, 2022), Aaron Keeshig (Barrera, 2020), Brydon Whitstone (Lesko, 2018), Chad Williams (Barghout, 2019), Joshua Nixon (Hayes, 2021), Kyla Frenchman (Djuric, 2021), Michael Payne (Forester, 2020), Pacey Dumas (Wakefield, 2021), Randall May (Barrera, 2020), and Shane Robertson (House, 2021). During court proceedings dealing with police misconduct, legal counsel representing officers normatively and discursively emphasized mental health histories or the acute consumption of substances as reasons for death, even when blunt force trauma was found in coroner reports and autopsies.

A fifth dimension included the use of amorphous systems improvement language, such as the need for increased funding, the use of "more training" narratives as a panacea or solution that also obscured opportunities to examine, problematize or question police actions and undermined opportunities for police accountability. This analysis of coverage also elucidated police's or health systems' refusal to implement recommendations to improve MHER, such as need for cultural safety, further improved police de-escalation training, or improved representation in crisis or pre-crisis response.

## Discussion

Across the 158 cases, media depictions illustrated largely negative affective realities and consequences from police involvement in MHER with Indigenous peoples: mishandling health emergencies, exacerbating symptoms, accelerating poor health outcomes due to medical negligence, and promulgating violence. Traumatic effects were also found, with the nature of violence sometimes resulting in mental health diagnoses (e.g, post-traumatic stress disorder), physical and neurological disabilities.

This analysis of media coverage revealed that police interception often started with police officers' surveillance and racial profiling (stereotyping and bias) and ended in forced exposure of Indigenous persons to degrading environmental conditions. This combination of affective realities, costs, and harms culminated in resistance to police—as exemplified by citizen video recordings seeking police accountability, and community-wide vigils and protests.

This study corroborates previous findings of police mishandling health emergencies and worsening outcomes for Indigenous people. For instance, in the case of Ms. Dhu, an Aboriginal woman from the Yamatji nation, who died in police custody in 2014 after being denied medical assistance despite severe injuries and septicemia (Klippmark & Crawley, 2018). Her case mirrors the pattern of police intervention leading to medical negligence and tragic outcomes observed in this analysis, highlighting the pervasive nature of police violence in MHER with Indigenous peoples.

Consistent with prior research, this study shows mental health impacts and trauma from police involvement in MHER, regardless of pre-existing mental health concerns (DeVylder, Fedina, & Link, 2020). Police involvement is linked to a 4 to 11-fold rise in suicide risk, even when accounting for lifetime interpersonal violence or abuse (DeVylder et al., 2017; DeVylder et al. 2018; Geller et al., 2014; Hirschtick et al. 2019). However, given the nature and extent of harms caused by police-based MHER with Indigenous people, these traumas are best understood as a type of historical trauma—which locates individual traumas within a constellation of historical, intergenerational, and collective ones (Braveheart et al., 2011). In this respect, police-based MHER is a “systemic noxious agent that create biological, physical, and psychosocial insults for Indigenous people that threaten biological integrity, feed inequities over the life course and multiple generations” (Walters et al., 2011, p. 185).

Disposability and devaluing of Indigenous life were also evident. While a more interpretive theme, media reporting of police racial bias and stereotyping was typified in police making accusations about intoxication based on race, which set the stage for subsequently cruel police behaviours such as hog tying beyond the point of defecation and leaving victims outside in freezing temperatures. Indigenous disposability worked alongside medical negligence, denial of services, and criminal dereliction of duties to forego opportunities for rehabilitation and the preservation of Indigenous life. These trends corroborate the presence of police violence through inequitable protection in MHER.

As discussed, settler states like Canada and Australia assert their sovereignty through the dispossession, over-incarceration, and biopolitical management of Indigenous people. Owusu-Bempah (2017) postulates that dehumanization excludes individuals from a “universe of obligations,” denying them legal protections and making them more vulnerable to violence. Haas (2022) similarly argues that dehumanization robs racialized people of their humanity, leaving them unprotected by the law and subject to police suspicion. This dehumanization is evident in media studies on Indigenous people, such as the Saskatchewan starlight tours (Razack, 2014), custodial deaths in Australia (Klippmark & Crawley, 2018), and missing and murdered Indigenous women (Bhandar, 2016). This dehumanization and negligence contribute to inequitable protection in MHER involving Indigenous Peoples (Zantigh et al., 2024).

Despite the harms caused by police involvement in mental health cases, these findings highlight a complex array of behavioral patterns, cultural factors, core assumptions, communicative tendencies, and legislative mechanisms that incentivize and reward police actions without accountability.

Consistent with Blyth's (2021) themes tied to media's complicity in police's enforcement of racial hierarchies, *privileging certain voices* was reflected in an emphasis on reports from special interrogation units, despite conflicts of interests in charging police officers and low criminal conviction rates.

From the perspective of *hyperindividualism*, it was exemplified through minor infractions and false allegations, which provided a cover to justify the use of force. As seen with Frankham (2020) mental health histories or acute consumption of substances were narratives used to obfuscate underlying reasons for death, such as blunt force trauma. Police violence was also vindicated by reframing incidents as deaths by overdose. Mental illness labels were discursively employed by legal institutions to obscure police liability and vindicated ascent towards lethality. These tendencies are not dissimilar to Razack (2020), who found that violence directed towards Indigenous people is often attributed to individual psychopathology, and carefully "disconnected from the racial and structural context of settler colonialism" (p. 3), and her previous writings on alcoholism, which was used to explain away disparities in the number of Indigenous people dying in custody in British Columbia (Razack, 2013). Ansloos (2018) similarly observed medicalization of distress and suicidality perpetuates systemic violence towards Indigenous communities. Within this study, allegations, social infractions, and mental health calls were used to justify violence. Many higher order processes, legislative mechanisms and policies vindicated police and state actions. Similar to the "21-foot rule" used to justify violence by Officer Aaron Shipley (Razack, 2020), these normative practices were embedded in laws and legislation, such as a lack of case law, the intoxicated persons detention act, and shooting centre mass policies.

A *stance of neutrality* was reflected in the lack of police's transparency in the context of altercations or shooting, purposefully using counterfactuals, contradicting or omitting information, which undermined opportunities for transparency, accountability or factual reporting. Methods to get closure or justice, such as by coroner's inquests were often delayed or acquitted the officers responsible. This is not dissimilar to scholarship highlighting situations where police officers neglected the medical needs of Indigenous victims and were acquitted without consequence (Klippmark & Crawley 2018). In accordance with Klippmark and Crawley (2018), coroner's reports explained away police violence by exaggerating the Indigenous persons' poor social determinants of health. These normative practices that perpetuate police impunity ended up naturalizing Indigenous dispossession and death as "inevitable," and legitimized the state violence behind it (Garcia del Moral 2008; Klippmark & Crawley 2018).

Several themes captured reflected Blyth's (2021) *individualized, rational self*. As seen in this research, resisting arrest narratives were frequently used by law enforcement to legitimize their ascent towards violence and brutality (Laming as cited in Hayes, 2021). Though amorphous systems improvement language was applied, solutions offered were individualistic and myopically considered (Aiello, 2023). Chief among them were calls for more police training, which have been contested and deemed futile in reducing racial inequities in police violence (Lamb et al., 2014; Nortey, 2022). Further, Aiello (2023) asserts that police "harms are rendered invisible so long as it is portrayed through "a series of unpredictable individual decisions by front-line police officers" (p. 2). Many police institutions refused

to implement recommendations made after coroner's inquests. While this limited scope of inquiry and reactions failed to consider how police-based MHER reproduce the social and structural effects of colonialism, they also augment suggestions for independent bodies to investigate deaths caused by police (Gray, 2016; Helms & Costanza, 2020).

Resistance to policing was a culminated response to historical trauma, ongoing harms and fatalities, and the suite of discursive, legislative, and cultural practices used by police officers, institutions, and their procedural methods of non-accountability (e.g., inquests, etc.) to offset justice or retribution. Resistance to police, whether video capture of police actions, community vigils, and protests, was a mechanism of truth-telling—elucidated and augmented by media, against the layers of denial about state-induced traumas; it also spurred metaphorical action against dehumanization by the state (Klippmark & Crawley, 2018; Powell, 2015). While these acts of resistance were also subjected to further surveillance, criminalization, and threats of violence (Ceric, 2020), they offered an opportunity to humanize victims and challenge the state's presumed authority and jurisdiction over Indigenous bodies (Kimbark & Crawley, 2018). Similar to testimonies with MMIWGs, such civilian-based accounts may hold immense healing and political power by creating collective memories and challenging the settler status quo (Flores & Alfaro, 2023). These acts of resistance may also support healing by providing newfound places for mourning, making the “ungrievable” “grievable” and mitigating the impacts of police violence on Indigenous wellness in turn (McCaslin & Boyer, 2009; Walters et al., 2011).

## Conclusion

While Indigenous peoples are over-represented in the police use of force and racial inequities in police killings, MHER perniciously exemplifies these tendencies. In addition to longstanding over-policing, analysis of media reports over two decades revealed a pervasive degree of inequitable protection inherent to MHER with Indigenous Peoples. It also provided empirical support for police-based MHER as a form of historical trauma. Of consequence, this study echoes call for police abolition with emphasis on reinvestment of policing budgets to alternative forms of community safety and civilian-based MHER (Haag, 2022; Kaba, 2022). Despite police's exemplification of habits of white language (used to justify and promulgate violence and reinforce a racial hierarchy of a settler colonial state), media was still able to humanize victims (i.e., resistance to police themes), and document the nature and extent of harms enacted upon Indigenous communities involved in police-based MHER. These findings substantiate suggestions that incident-level media reports can be used to support the emancipatory public policy (i.e., symbolic and material) needs of Indigenous Peoples while also providing structural accounts of police violence (Helms & Costanza, 2020; United Nations, 2012).

## Limitations

Given the inherent limitations of news media publishing, it was not possible to systematically analyze all possible incidents involving Indigenous persons with police where mental health was or became an eventual concern (Frankham, 2020). Of consequence, the findings may not generalize or reflect all situations involving police, mental illness, and Indigenous people (McGinty et al., 2016). Further, as it was methodologically incongruent to count the themes associated discussed herein, further research should examine their relative frequency within the context of police-based MHER and quantify the



extent by which themes vary by the type of situation inviting police response and/or the fatal use of force.

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