

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Cultural depression

During the recent papal visit to Canada, the major purpose of which was to apologize for the role that the Catholic Church played in the boarding school system for Indigenous children in Canada (a similar system was also present in U.S.), he used the term cultural genocide.

This term reminded me of my experiences at the University of Manitoba in the late 1960s where I completed my residency in psychiatry. One of our teaching faculty, a very dedicated psychiatrist, was providing psychiatric care at the First Nation Reserves in Manitoba. In addition to describing individual cases, he also talked about a “cultural depression” which pervaded the reserves.

I wasn't quite sure how that might manifest itself until much later when, in partnership with the University of Manitoba and the support of the tribal leaders, we were conducting our first NIA-supported epidemiological study with the elderly Cree living in the reserves (Hendrie *et al.*, 1993).

We were interviewing a very gentle grandmother who was accompanied with her granddaughter.

We were asking her about her current mood when she became quite sad, looked down at her granddaughter and sighed “What will become of our children” and the local staff nodded.

And then I understood.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Reference

Hendrie, H. C. *et al.* (1993). Alzheimer's disease is rare in Cree. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 5, 5–14.

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