

2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations



Traditional Uses of Tobacco
[SEMAA] among the Two-Spirit
Urban Indigenous Communities
in Toronto, Ontario, Canada

September 30, 2021

SEMAA Research Project

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Sincerely,

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Traditional Use of Tobacco [SEMAA] among the Two-Spirited Urban Indigenous Communities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) was a part of the RETRAC2: Research on Commercial Tobacco Reduction in Aboriginal Communities supported by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) and led by the University of Toronto in collaboration with 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations. It was a pilot project to assess existing knowledge and practices of SEMAA use as well as knowledge sharing practices among Two-Spirit Urban Indigenous communities. This program was aimed to reconnect urban Indigenous communities with the traditional knowledge, heritage, cultural ceremonies, and practices. The glamorous advertisement, aggressive marketing strategies, and easy accessibility of commercial tobacco have been attracting adolescent youth and young Indigenous people towards these commercial tobacco consumptions across the Turtle Island. Colonizers are using commercial tobacco to destroy the Indigenous culture as well as the health of adolescents and young adults. Research suggests that tobacco misused rates among Canadian Indigenous youths and adults are much higher than for their non-Indigenous cohort, which is already alarming to the Indigenous health system.

Smoking cigarettes is the most common form of tobacco misuse and has induced numerous non-communicable diseases among the Indigenous population. Hence, the primary objective of this project was to make SEMAA and associated teachings more accessible to the community members by organizing frequent talking circles, and community consultations by inviting Knowledge Keepers and Elders, delivering SEMAA to the community members. At the same time, the project was aimed to collect ethnographic information on Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAPs) of SEMAA Use among the 2-Spirited Urban Indigenous communities to fulfill its overarching goal of identifying the intervention strategy to reduce commercial use of tobacco. The study was conducted between October 2019 to August 2021. Though the project was designed for a year, due to COVID, it was extended over a year.

This study had used mixed methods to collect the ethnographic information on knowledge, attitude, and practices of SEMAA among the Two-spirit urban Indigenous communities in Toronto. Pre-test and post-test surveys were conducted to collect the data. A semi-structured and open-ended questionnaire was administered virtually to collect quantitative data. Various ethnographic data collection methods were adopted that include virtual two-week long talking circles named Mskiki Corner, virtual SEMAA growing and harvesting workshops by a traditional SEMAA grower to collect qualitative data. On top of that, in-person drumming, videography, and photoshoot events were organized to develop information, education, and communication materials on SEMAA. To develop



information, education, and communication materials (IEC), 14 Knowledge Keepers were recruited as SEMAA Ambassadors who developed their education material in the form of photography, video, poem, story, and testimonies. These IEC materials were delivered to the community members home along with the traditional medicine bundles, food hampers, COVID-19 related resources and HIV/AIDS, safe sex, and harm reduction supplies throughout the year.

As of February 2021, over 1000 medicine bundles and resource hampers were delivered to 370 Two-Spirit Urban Indigenous families. As well, we called 100 virtual surveys from community members living within the GTA voluntarily. Within a week, 106 communities filled the survey voluntarily. For the next six months, we released the IEC material developed by the SEMAA Ambassadors as well as organized a series of talking circles along with delivering SEMAA and medicine bundles, as well as printed 2-Spirited newsletters. In August 2021, we again called. For the Post-test survey, where 65 community members responded to the survey within a week.

The survey was conducted among the Two-Spirit Urban Indigenous communities living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Due to COVID, in-person surveys and interactions were not possible. Hence, semi-structured and open-ended questionnaires were created on google form and called 100 communities to fill voluntarily on the first come first serve basis within 7 days. Clear inclusion criteria were set to avoid irrelevant respondents. Total 106 community members participated in the pre-test survey where 2 were located out of GTA and were further eliminated while analyzing the findings. After six months, a post-test survey was called among those who participated in the pre-test, a total of 64 community members filled the post-test survey within the given 7 days. One additional member who was not in the pre-test also filled the survey, we eliminated them while analyzing the findings. On top of that, qualitative data and testimonies were collected during the 14 days long Mskiki Corner community talking circles to support the virtual survey.

In the survey, more than half of respondents identified themselves as female and Two-spirit people, where 60% plus identified as living single. Academically, one-third of the community members reported that they have received traditional teachings along with some post-secondary and post-secondary graduation followed by primary education. Almost half of the respondents were unemployed, and half had partial employment and other sources of income. Many of the community members live in apartment and community housing, where few have lived on the street and have precarious housing.



Almost all the community members are familiar with SEMAA and are using it at least once a month. Mostly non-profit Indigenous focused agencies are promoting SEMAA providing SEMAA for community access and providing related teachings. SEMAA is commonly used at home, work, sweat lodges, sacred fire, talking circle, drumming circle. Most community members offer SEMAA to sacred fire, land, water, rock, drum, longhouse, funerals. Tobacco ties were extensively used among the community members at drumming circles and cultural programs. Community members are using it as an honour and offering.

About 60% of community members reported having their traditional teaching and knowledge on SEMAA given by their family and relatives. Almost 90% of the community members responded that it is the sacred medicine given by the creator. It has a significant role and place in the Indigenous culture. While asking the difference between the commercial use of tobacco and SEMAA, 80% of community members replied that it is all about Intention. SEMAA is a special kind of tobacco that is being harvested by a community Knowledge Keeper with good intention, following cultural rituals and harvesting ceremonies at the traditional land in the traditional way using genetically unmodified organic seeds which have been handed over the several generations for spiritual and cultural purpose.

The intention plays a significant role while using the SEMAA and tobacco. It has pure intention to use for rituals and ceremonies, however distributing commercial tobacco which is grown on industrial farming land by deploying modern machines, pesticides, fertilizers, and genetically modified seeds for larger profit-oriented production. Most industries grow commercial tobacco outside Canada using various harmful chemicals to optimize the production and profits. This commercial tobacco has nothing to do with the spiritual worldviews of the Indigenous culture.

Community members also informed that Indigenous adolescents and youth are actively engaging in the knowledge creation, sharing, and practicing the use of SEMAA where Knowledge Keepers and Indigenous agencies are supporting it. The survey suggested that if we educate our Indigenous children about SEMAA and its sacred value at an early age, they will develop spiritual bonding with SEMAA and would not misuse commercial tobacco. Hence, it is recommended to educate every Indigenous child about this medicine, its use, and related teachings.

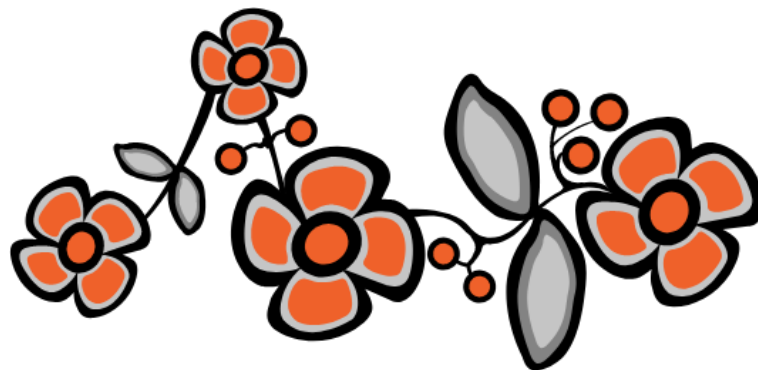


The knowledge, attitude and practices towards SEMAA has been significantly changed among the community members during the pre-test and post-test of the study. Most community members were able to hold significant knowledge and developed their relationship with SEMAA in the presence of Knowledge Keepers and Elders during the consultation and education campaign throughout the project. In the post-test, most of the community members firmly stated that SEMAA was given by the Creator to connect them with their ancestors, not for abuse. It is a sacred and pure plant that is used for healing. It is colonizers who commercialized the sacred SEMAA to tobacco and have been promoting its use to young people. Community consequently agreed on the point that teachings related to SEMAA have been fading away due to unavailability of SEMAA during ceremonies as well as aggressive advertisement, supply, and market strategies for industrial tobacco. The negative stereotype related to commercial tobacco also creates stigma towards SEMAA. Hence, if we start educating our youth on SEMAA, its authentic use, and teachings associated with SEMAA, new generations will build a healthy relationship with SEMAA, and chances of tobacco abuse could be reduced significantly.



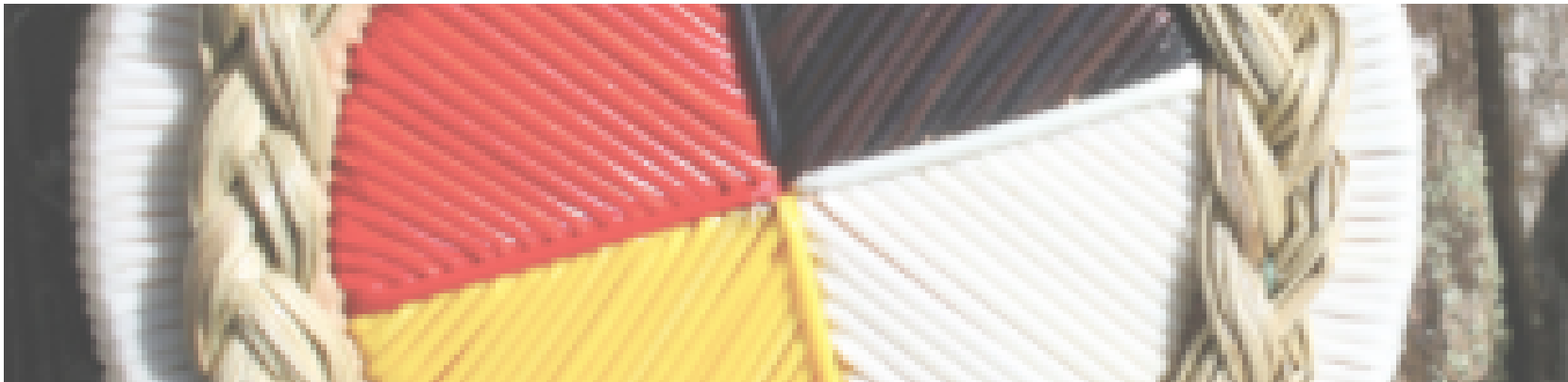
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Two-Spirit Urban Indigenous communities are gradually reclaiming the cultural teachings and knowledge relating to SEMAA. It is recommended to make these teachings easily available and accessible to the community.
2. Due to the aggressive marketing strategies and abundant supplies, commercial tobacco is gradually replacing SEMAA. It is recommended to make SEMAA more accessible and affordable to the community.
3. There are extensive Indigenous adolescent and youth targeted commercial tobacco advertising and campaigns that are promoting colonial culture and hampering Indigenous teachings associated with SEMAA and its sacredness. It is strongly recommended to halt this kind of targeted advertising and marketing campaign as well as start wider dissemination of SEMAA and related teachings.
4. Urban Indigenous people are discouraged to smudge and practice their culture in the name of fire and safety protocol. It is strongly recommended to set up designated space in every public space for smudging and prayer for Indigenous communities.
5. There is a strong negative connotation towards the use of tobacco. It is strongly recommended to launch an awareness raising campaign to educate the community on the difference between commercial tobacco and SEMAA and its uses.
6. It is recommended to organize an annual community SEMAA garden to educate the new generation to grow, harvest and build the relationship with the SEMAA and related teachings.
7. It is suggested that if we educate Indigenous children about SEMAA and its sacred value at an early age, they will develop spiritual bonding with SEMAA and will not misuse commercial tobacco. Hence, it is strongly recommended to continue the SEMAA education campaign and educate every Indigenous child from an early age on Indigenous medicines and their ceremonies.





1. Background





Indigenous communities have been using Tobacco known as SEMAA as an integral part of their tradition on the Turtle Island since immortal. It is one of the four sacred plant-based medicines given by the ancestors to the Indigenous people. The SEMAA has a significant spiritual value due to its sacredness in Indigenous culture and spirituality. It is a key component of a traditional medicine bag - the special pouch with different sacred items of supernatural power including cedar, sage, sweetgrass to carry 'medicine', or symbols of spirits used for good fortune, prosperity, life or treating sickness and disease. The native community believes that SEMAA helps them to connect with the Creator and to express their gratitude. Traditionally, the most powerful way of communicating with the Spirit World is to burn and smoke SEMAA in sacred pipes during ceremonies.

When SEMAA burns and is offered, it helps people to get connected with their ancestors and spirits. Smoking from traditional SEMAA pipes is also used to cleanse or purify the person participating in a ceremony.

However, some individuals do see a relationship between a shared pipe ceremony and smoking commercial tobacco among friends that creates confusion. At the same time, practices of substituting SEMAA with commercial cigarettes due to easy accessibility of cigarettes and unavailability of SEMAA also creates confusion between them and fading away from the spiritual values of SEMAA. At the same time across the globe, Indigenous populations have remarkably high rates of commercial tobacco consumption compared to non-Indigenous groups. The high rates of commercial tobacco use in Indigenous populations have led to a wide range of health-related issues and lower life expectancy than the general population.

This study of the traditional use of tobacco [SEMAA] among the Indigenous communities was a part of the RETRAC2: research on commercial tobacco reduction in aboriginal communities supported by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) and led by the University of Toronto in collaboration with 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations. The overarching goal of the project was to identify and implement initiatives that are effective in reducing non-traditional tobacco use in Indigenous populations in Canada. At the same time, this project was aimed to share strategy and information to reduce commercial use of tobacco among First Nations, Inuit, Metis and urban Indigenous communities in Ontario.



2. Project Description





2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations is a community-led organization for the Two-spirit community of the First Nations, Metis, Inuit, who are living with or at risk for HIV and related co-infections in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). 2- Spirited People of the 1st Nations have envisioned seeing strong healthy and independent Two-spirit communities where HIV is rare and Two-spirit people live with pride in their Indigenous heritage. Adhering to its Strategic Plan, 2- Spirited People of the 1st Nations is providing programs and services under its five different service delivery areas (SDA) that include a) Indigenous Harm Reduction Services b) Positive Living and HIV/AIDS Education, Prevention and Support Program, c) Cultural Practices and Community Building d) Community Development e) Crosscutting and referral services as well as a COVID-19 support program.

The Use of SEMAA among the Two-spirit urban Indigenous communities was a pilot project to reclaim Indigenous cultural teachings, and knowledge on SEMAA. This program was aimed to reconnect urban Indigenous communities with Indigenous heritage and cultural ceremonies and practices. The primary objective of this project was to make SEMAA and associated teachings more accessible to the community members as well as to collect information on Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAPs) to fulfill its overarching goal of identifying the intervention strategy to reduce commercial use of tobacco. As a community implementor, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations delivered traditional SEMAA bundles to community members for the year, organized many community knowledge sharing sessions, developed printed and visual education materials to educate community members and collected the ethnographical information on existing knowledge, attitude and practices of SEMAA among the Two-spirit urban Indigenous communities using various community research strategies.



2.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS

SEMAA is a sacred medicine in many Indigenous cultures and has been used traditionally in ceremonies, rituals, and prayers for thousands of years. It is believed that this sacred plant had been given to Indigenous communities by the creator and the community has been using it to be reconnected with their spirits, ancestors and to the creator. It is a means of spiritual communication to pass individual message to their higher spirits and creator. It has significant spiritual values and is considered as sacred gifts of the Creator given to the human beings as a tool to reconnect to their ancestors, and spirits as well as to purify the body and soul.

Along with the western encroachment across the Turtle Island, European colonizers industrialized SEMAA and started mass production by genetically modifying SEMAA to commercial tobacco for recreational use. Those recreational tobacco are highly genetically modified that makes them more addictive and harmful. The glamorous advertisement, aggressive marketing strategies and easy accessibility rapidly attracted adolescent youths and young Indigenous people towards these commercial tobacco consumptions across the Turtle Island. Research suggests that tobacco misuse rates among Canadian Indigenous youth and adults are much higher than for their non-Indigenous cohort, which is alarming to the Indigenous health system. Tobacco misuse is defined as the non-traditional and habitual use of commercial tobacco products that includes cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and chewing tobacco. Smoking cigarettes is the most common form of tobacco misuse and has induced numerous non-communicable diseases among the Indigenous populations.

The study was aimed to collect the knowledge, attitude, and current practices of SEMAA use among urban Indigenous communities with the overarching aim to design and implement an awareness-raising campaign against commercial tobacco use.

2.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

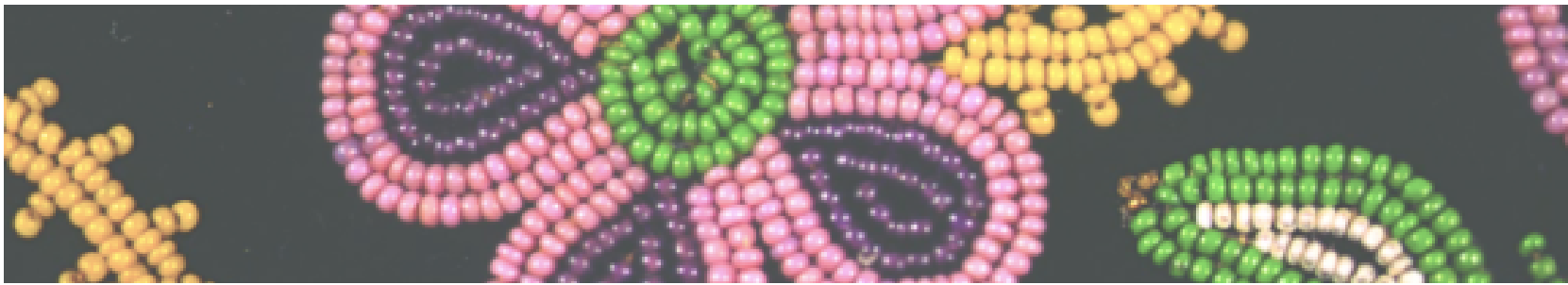
The general objectives of the study were to identify and to implement initiatives that are effective in reducing commercial tobacco use in the urban Indigenous communities in Canada whereas the specific objectives are as following:

1. Share teachings on traditional and cultural use of SEMAA among urban Two-spirit Indigenous communities.
2. Reclaim and reproduce the education, knowledge, and resources on cultural teachings on SEMAA use.
3. Provide traditional medicine and teachings freely to the community members during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. To document current knowledge, attitude, and practices of SEMAA use among urban Indigenous communities in GTA.





3. Methodology





This survey had used mixed methods to collect the ethnographic information on knowledge, attitude and practices of SEMAA among the Two-spirit urban Indigenous communities in Toronto. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to collect quantitative data and various ethnographic methods including talking circles, storytelling, songs and poetry were collected to gather qualitative information.

3.1 Epistemology, Ontology and Axiology of the Study

The epistemology of the study was positivistic and partly interpretative. The study has collected qualitative data through semi-structured discussion, observation and conversation with Knowledge Keepers, Elders and SEMAA ambassadors in the community. Ontologically, it was largely objective. The major premise of the study is SEMAA is an integral part of the Indigenous world view and western colonial values have commodified it that has overshadowed and devalued the cultural values of SEMAA. Axiologically, this study was partially value-laden, particularly on the spiritual aspect of SEMAA and its use among Indigenous communities. Based on field data, axiology has been determined to be largely factual.

What is found in the field, that has been documented, and conclusion has been derived based on community response and data analysis.

3.2 Selection of respondents

As of February 2021, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations provided food hampers, traditional medicine bundles, COVID-19 related resources to 375 Two-spirit urban Indigenous families in GTA that consist of at least 1000 urban Indigenous persons. Among those service users, the survey was shared. All together over 1000 hampers were delivered through 2- Spirited People of the 1st Nations.

The survey was conducted in two-phases and community members participated in the survey voluntarily on a first come first serve basis. The survey was posted on the social media platform of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations through a Google Form link.

The survey has set clear inclusion criteria. The responses must either:

1. Two spirited people from GTA
2. Beneficiaries of the 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nation
3. Family of the Two-spirit people who have received at least one service from 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations in the last one year.

3.3 NATURE OF THE DATE

After the first phase of the survey, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations released the education material created by the SEMAA Ambassadors which includes photos and postcards, video documentaries, songs and poems as well as the newsletter and conducted the SEMAA campaign till June 2021. After six months of the campaign, we called the post survey among the same individuals.

3.3 Nature of the Date

This study has used all the first-hand qualitative data based on community consultation, talking circles and an online self-administered survey among Two-spirit community members, Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

3.4 Unit of Analysis

Units of analysis are both individual as well as institutional. At An individual level, the study has collected the experiences of individuals as beneficiary, individual as community members, individual as an Elder and their experiences of urban living as a Two-spirit member. In the institutional level, the study has collected the information with Elders and Knowledge Keepers as well as purposely selected SEMAA Ambassadors.

3.5 Research Designs, Sample Size and Selection of Respondents

3.5.1. Research Design

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 period – March 2019 - August 2021. As a result, a large portion of this project was conducted virtually. Mostly, this was a qualitative study with participatory observation and storytelling. The project was designed very microscopically and went through various stages to create education materials, delivering medicine bundles and support with cultural teaching, organizing taking circles before releasing self-administrated semi-structured questionnaires.



A. SEMAA Ambassadors

In the first year, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations introduced this project by recruiting SEMAA Ambassadors and collecting their testimonies on SEMAA and their relationship with it. In total 14 SEMAA Ambassadors were identified and recruited ensuring the participation of First Nations, Metis and Innu communities. The Ambassadors developed their personalized education materials – their relationship with SEMAA in the form of photographs, poems and songs. These materials were compiled and developed as resources and delivered to the community members along with the SEMAA bundle. At the same time, the materials developed with SEMAA Ambassadors were mailed to community members along with the food hampers. The materials were promoted on the 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations social media platforms to educate community members on the traditional use of SEMAA.

B. Information, Education and Communication Materials

All together two 15 min videos, as well as 14 different types of postcards with SEMAA Quotes, were developed along with a monthly newsletter throughout the year. These resources were mailed to individual community member's houses as well as released on 2-Spirited social media platform.

C. Delivering Personalized Medicine Bundle to Community Members

2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations delivered more than 1000 traditional medicine bundles along with grocery and food support, COVID-19 related information, communication materials along with face mask, hand sanitizer, safe sex and harm reduction supplies (both western and traditional), personal hygiene materials along with baby diapers and pet food to 2-Spirits community members.

D. Mskiki Corner – 2-Spirited Elders’ Teaching on Traditional Use of SEMAA

Mskiki Corner - a 14 day long virtual session conducted by Two-spirit Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Teaching was conducted on SEMAA use among the Urban Indigenous People. This was a two hour long teaching and sharing program for continuous 14 days led by the Two-spirit Elders and SEMAA Ambassadors conducted between January 29, 2021- February 12, 2021. A total of 150 community members participated. The virtual community corner is mainly discussed on “Use Our Sacred Medicine/Mskiki SEMAA among the Urban Indigenous Communities’.





E. Community Talking Circle on SEMAA Project

Community consultation and sharing session on “Wholistic Life Cycle of SEMAA Plant” was conducted by a Two-spirit SEMAA grower. In this talking circle, they discussed the complete life cycle of the SEMAA plant that includes seeding, growing, harvesting and use in different aspects of daily life. All together 150 community members including Two-spirit Knowledge Keepers and Elders participated throughout the event.

F. 2-Spirited SEMAA Garden

In the summer of 2020 and 2021, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations set up a SEMAA garden in collaboration with community members anticipating that community members can visit and learn more about growing SEMAA at their own home and garden. Total 46 SEMAA plants fully harvested in the first year. In the second year, less plants were fully harvested. The product is used to smudge and share among community members at the office.

G Social Media Campaign on Traditional Use of SEMAA and related teachings

A six-month-long social media campaign was conducted on the use of SEMAA among the Urban Indigenous community through various social media platforms of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations. Official website of the 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, its Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn pages were used for the campaign. On top of this, postcards were printed with SEMAA teachings and mailed to the community members.

3.5.2. Sample Size and Selection of Respondents

The survey was open to the community members who were invited to take part voluntarily. To be eligible to take part in the survey, the person must be a service user of the 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations and self-identified as a Two-spirit person or family or partner of a Two-spirit person living in the GTA.

Data was collected in the two phases. In February 2021, the first set of questionnaires was released where 104 community members self-administered the survey. The same survey with additional 3 questions was released in July 2021 where 64 community members self-administered the survey. A total of 40 respondents did not answer the survey in the second phase.

3.6 ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH & RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The survey deployed a wide range of research instruments to collect information that includes:

1. Community sharing circle
2. Storytelling
3. Elder and Knowledge Keepers sharing
4. Lived experiences sharing
5. Multimedia- audio/ video and photography
6. Online Survey questionnaire administration

3.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Since the survey has used various unstructured data collection techniques as well as semi-structured survey questionnaires on google documents, quantitative data were tabled and analysed through a google form. The qualitative data from Elders and Knowledge Keepers sharing teachings, personal testimonies, and field notes as well as field observation were analysed thematically and triangulated with quantitative data. Qualitative data were coded, decoded, and triangulated with quantitative data.

3.8 Research Questions

To address the overarching objectives of the study, the study had asked the following probing questions under three thematic categories: Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of Traditional Use of Tobacco during COVID -19 pandemic as following:

1. What is your Traditional knowledge on the use of Traditional Tobacco?
2. Are the knowledge and traditional teachings of tobacco accessible to you in your community?
3. Do you believe we could minimize the harm commercial tobacco has on youth if there was more knowledge and teachings of traditional tobacco use widely available?
4. Do you believe there needs to be more knowledge and traditional teachings of tobacco shared within the community?
5. Is traditional tobacco accessible to you in your community?
6. Who in your given or chosen family uses traditional tobacco?
7. How often do you personally use it?
8. Where do you use it?
9. What is the difference between commercial and traditional tobacco to you?
10. Have you seen advertisements for commercial tobacco?
11. Is traditional/commercial tobacco helping you get through COVID-19, and if so, how?
12. Do you feel traditional and land-based teachings would strengthen the community's connection with traditional tobacco?

3.9 LIMITATIONS

This was a knowledge sharing and community support initiative among the Two-spirit Urban Indigenous Communities in Toronto on Traditional Use of Tobacco (SEMAA). This project was aimed to collect Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAPs) of the traditional use of traditional SEMAA among the Two-spirit First Nations, Metis and Inuit Communities by providing traditional teachings on SEMAA, support to reclaim traditional teachings, knowledge and practices as well as easy availability of traditional medicine bundles among the Two-spirit Urban Indigenous communities amid the COVID-19 Pandemic. Hence, it may not fit into the western paradigm of academic research and Knowledge creation.

We Indigenous communities believe that knowledge and teachings are passing through generation to generation in the form of oral stories and songs. None of the individuals or agencies hold the authorship on that knowledge and practices. Hence, we have cited neither person nor agency throughout the report except the pseudo name of the knowledge keeper and community members who shared their stories, knowledge and their teachings related to SEMAA during this project.

Third, beside the objectives of the study, various cross cutting and cultural issues and topics were discussed during the community circle that include SEMAA growing and harvesting at home, collecting local SEMAA seeds and community distribution for preservation, role of medicine bundles during COVID-19, stigma and discriminations as well as barrier towards SEMAA use and smudging urban setting, which may not be relevant to analyse in this study. These additional topics will be analysed and shared in the different community forums. Hence in this report, we have only analysed the findings of primary objectives of the study- Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of SEMAA use among the Urban Two-spirit Indigenous Communities in GTA.

3.10 COVID-19 and its impact on the Project

Initially, the program was envisioned to be implemented in person among the Two-spirit urban Indigenous communities. But right after program launch, the COVID pandemic restricted us from implementing programs in person. Later, following the COVID-19 protocol, most of the activities were carried out virtually except for the photo and video shoot. All the talking circles, drumming and teachings on SEMAA were turned virtually where SEMAA and medicine bundles were delivered to the community members house. Those community members who are without a house, 2-Spirits Harm reduction team distributed tobacco ties, and medicine bundles were distributed through Moss Park. All the education campaigns were conducted through zoom, Facebook and the official website of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations. Both pre-test and post-test surveys were self-administrated virtually. Hence, the result and the impact of the project may be different from the originally anticipated in person activities.



Findings:

The Changing Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of SEMAA Use among Two Spirited Urban Indigenous Communities in Toronto





4.1 Demographic Information of the Study

The survey was conducted in the two-phase a) pre-campaign and post-campaign. In the pre-test survey, a total 106 members participated; where in the post-test, 65 participated where two participants in the pre-test and one in post-test were out of GTA. The out of GTA respondents were eliminated during the data analysis process. Hence, all together 104 in Pre-test, 64 in Post-test and 40 missing.

Inclusion Criteria	Pre-Test (n:104) [In percentage]	Post Test (n:64) [In percentage]
Do you receive services?	95.19%	95.31%
Do you identify as two-spirit and Indigenous?	75%	89.06%
Are you or your chosen family/friend's part of 2SLGBTQ+ communities?	98.08%	96.88%
Living at GTA?	100%	100%



Gender Identity	Pre- Test	Post Test
Two Spirits	30.77%	26.56%
Male	11.54%	17.19%
Female	52.88%	53.13%
Gender Diverse and the Non-Binary	2.89%	1.56%
Trans woman	0.96%	1.56%
Other	0.96%	0%

Age of Participant	Pre- Test	Post Test
16-23	11.54%	10.94%
24-30	22.12%	23.44%
31-40	24.04%	25%
41-51	25%	18.75%
51-61	12.5%	18.75%
61-70	2.88%	3.13%
70+	0%	0%
Missing	0.96%	0%

Area of residence	Pre- Test	Post Test
Toronto Downtown	47.12%	34.38%
Scarborough	37.5%	42.19%
GTA (Outside Core)	15.27%	23.44%
Outside of STA (Eliminated during Analysis)	1.92%	1.56%

Family Composition	Pre-Test	Post Test
Single	60.58%	64.06%
Married	16.35%	34.38%
In a Relationship	14.42%	9.38%
61-70	8.65%	7.81%



Education Level	Pre- Test	Post Test
Traditional Teachings	35.58%	26.56%
Some Primary Education	22.12%	31.25%
Primary Education	18.27%	25%
Some Secondary Education	25%	15.63%
Secondary Education Graduate	37.5%	29.69%
Some Post-Secondary	21.15%	26.56%
Post-Secondary Education Graduate	0%	0%



Housing	Pre-Test	Post Test
Apartment	66.35%	56.25%
Community Housing	25%	32.81%
Street Living/ Without House	2.88%	3.13%
Precarious Housing	3.85%	3.13%
Homeowner	1.92%	4.69%

Gender wise, most of our respondents identified as female. In the pre-campaign survey, 52.88% respondents identified themselves as female followed by 30.77% Two-spirit, 11.54% males, 2.89% nonbinary and 0.96% transwoman. In the post campaign survey, 53.13% of respondents identified as female followed by 26.56% Two-spirit, 17.9% male, 1.56% non-binary and 1.56% transwoman. Age wise, 31-50 cohort has the highest representation in both pre, and post campaign survey followed by 24 – 30 and 60- 51 years old cohort. 60.58% of respondents reported single, 16.35% married and 14.42% in relationship in pre-campaign survey whereas 64.06% respondents reported being single, 34.38% married and 9.38% in relationship in post campaign survey. Almost two thirds of them do not have dependent children. About 10 percent of the respondents have dependent siblings but do not have their own children.

4.2 KNOWLEDGE ON SEMAA USE AMONG TWO SPIRITED URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN TORONTO

In the pre-campaign survey, about 60 % community members shared their own knowledge on SEMAA and its use. To most of them, it is a token given by ancestors to get connected with them. It is a means of communication, it is kind of telephone to get connected with their ancestors, spirits and creator.



Knowledge on SEMAA use	Pre- Test (n:104)	Post Test (n:104)
Part of Medicine Bundle	59.62%	93.75%
Given by Creator to Connect Them	59.62%	95.31%
Means of Communication with Ancestor & Spirits	57.69%	95.31%
Token of love to offer land, water, fire, and elders	57.69%	92.19%
Used during ceremonies	56.73%	90.63%
My parents use it, but I do not know much	40.38%	92.19%
It is a part of spiritual gift exchange	40.38%	85.94%
Offer to the land and water before harvest	40.38%	85.94%
It is part of my tobacco tie	41.35%	85.94%
Prayer delivered through SEMAA smoke	11.54%	93.75%



Regarding, the question “are there any other words you use for SEMAA”, most address it as SEMAA, Medicine, and a couple of members stated smudge, cigarette, stress reliever and Kinnikinnick. But in the post campaign survey, almost all of them refer to it as SEMAA and Medicine. Regarding receiving teachings on SEMAA, In the pre-campaign survey, almost half of participants stated that they received from their parents, Elders and community members while the remaining half stated that they really do not have specific teachings. But in the post campaign survey, almost all the respondents stated that they got their teachings from Elders, community Knowledge Keepers as well as SEMAA plant growers. At the same time, the majority of the community members responded that traditional knowledge on medicine is available in the society but there is not clear teachings. Different Elders and Knowledge Keepers have different teachings and practices on SEMAA.

“ SEMAA can be used to absorb negative energies when having discussions around trauma the tobacco is usually burned with a prayer after. When offering to an elder SEMAA protects the elder in that interaction from negative issues arising from imbalance of offerings in the exchange. It works from the heart so it should be used from the left side. It’s a masculine energy. SEMAA can also be used as protection. It can be used in medicine pouches or tobacco ties. Alcohol spirits should be kept away from tobacco as they can corrupt the sacredness of the tobacco. I’ve been given instructions not to use tobacco on my moon time as its pointless and we take the power from it during this time. I’ve heard of SEMAA being used to protect one’s speech as a by-product of carrying it, but I’ve only heard this once ”

Regarding seeing advertisements and marketing of SEMAA and Tobacco, less than 15% community members said they have seen advertisements of SEMAA Toronto where 100 % respondents replied that they have seen advertisements of commercial tobacco in various forms. While asking how they feel about Tobacco advertisements, most of the community members stated that they glamorize cigarettes and make it more acceptable even after seeking the warning labels on products.

4.3 ATTITUDE ON SEMAA USE AMONG TWO SPIRITED URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN TORONTO

While talking about the attitude on SEMAA, almost 90% of the community members responded that it is the sacred medicine given by the creator. It has a significant role and place in the Indigenous culture. At the same time, commercial tobacco was also extensively popular among the community. While asking the difference between the commercial use of tobacco and SEMAA, 80% above community members replied that it is all about Intention. SEMAA is a special kind of tobacco that is being harvested by a community knowledge keeper with good intention, following cultural rituals and harvesting ceremonies on traditional land in traditional way using genetically unmodified organic seeds which has been handed over the several generations for the spiritual and cultural purpose. It has pure intention to use for rituals and ceremonies by distributing among community members and bands. That is why it is so sacred and pure. On the other hand, commercial tobacco is grown on industrial farming land by deploying modern machines, pesticides, fertilizers and genetically modified seeds for larger profit-oriented production. Most industries grow commercial tobacco outside Canada using various harmful chemicals to optimize the production and profits. This commercial tobacco has nothing to do with spiritual worldviews of the Indigenous culture.

“ Well, SEMAA wasn't discovered, it was always here. So, it was put here from the Creator. And from our instructions, our original instructions, we were showing where it was and how to use it and which was to use it as a method of an offering. And to give thanks, so for instance, when you're, if you're going to go hunting, so you take that tobacco and you offer it to the animals, to the spirit of that animal that you're hunting, and ask it to give its life and so that tobacco becomes a request. That offering of tobacco becomes a request for one of our four blankets to provide for you, your sustainability for your life ”

Community members also shared their lived experiences that in some place's commercial tobacco – cigarettes have been used during ceremonies like funerals, powwows and drumming circles in the absence of SEMAA. It is mainly due to lack of availability of SEMAA and extensive availability. Majority of the community members at the talking circle agreed on the fact that uncompromising marketing and supplies of the commercial tobacco among Indigenous communities is another form of colonialism and systemic racism that has been gradually destroying Indigenous culture, rituals and ceremonies which is very threatening.

Almost all the respondents in the post campaign survey as well as Mskiki Corner and talking circles agreed on the point that Urban Indigenous communities need more and more cultural teachings, knowledge sharing and opportunities to use SEMAA. Some community members also stated that there is huge stigma associated with smudging in the urban setting due to fire and safety policies. Even the Indigenous agency, often face challenges and confrontation with the landlord and building manager over the issues of smudging.

4.4 PRACTICES OF SEMAA USE AMONG TWO SPIRITED URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN TORONTO

During the consultation, we also asked – there are several negative stereotypes of commercial tobacco, does these stereotypes affected your views on SEMAA? Majority of the respondents replied that it is contextual. Of course it is badly affecting our new generations who do not have access to sacred teachings of SEMAA and teachings. Participants also reiterate the fact that these are totally two separate things – one is profit ordained and second is spiritual. Money and financial gain are associated with tobacco whereas spiritual blessing and connectedness is with SEMAA. It is all about intention – why and how you utilize it. Unfortunately, due to limited availability of SEMAA and the abundance of cigarettes as well as different teachings related to traditional tobacco is making things complicated. Similarly, Participants also expressed their dissatisfaction with the saying, “smudging my lungs”. Until and unless we educate our new generation about SEMAA and its sacredness, it will be almost impossible to stop young people from using commercial tobacco. The more we educate our youth and connect them with SEMAA, the more we can stop our youth from commercial tobacco use.

“ Horrible. It makes me think about my future and my family's future more. Cancer is a scary thing, and tobacco is highly addictive. It tastes disgusting but we chase that head rush, it hurts our breathing in the long run. I can't imagine my close relatives like my parents having cancer, but it makes it easier to happen. And half the time we don't even read the label, we just open and smoke it which is ridiculous. Nasty because smoking is bad for you ”

During the community consultation and talking circles, all the participants agreed on the fact that if children build a healthy relationship with traditional tobacco at an early age, they may be less likely to use commercial tobacco as adults. At the same time everyone believed that we could minimize the harm commercial tobacco has on youth if there is more knowledge and teachings of traditional tobacco use widely available.

4.4. Practices of SEMAA Use among two spirited Urban Indigenous community in Toronto

Mostly, all the community members stated that they have used SEMAA some point of their life - knowingly and unknowingly the spiritual aspects and teaching related to it.



Use Of SEMAA	Pre-Test (n: 104) (in percentage)	Post Test (n: 104) (in percentage)
Daily	14.42%	54.69%
Twice a week	22.12%	15.63%
Once a week	21.15%	17.19%
Once a month	29.81%	7.81%
Occasionally	7.69%	4.69%
Rarely	4.81%	0%

Among those who use SEMAA, almost all the community members reported that they used SEMAA in various forms in their daily life that includes offering to the water, putting down to the tree, smudging, putting into the tobacco tie, putting down to drums during drumming circle, offering to the community members as a promise or token of agreement. They stated that they are used at various places that include at home and in community, Outdoors, and at home/work/ In sweat lodges/ Sacred fire/ talking circles/ With Nature/ Fires/ land/water/ rock/ Funerals/ during dance/ longhouse.



During the community consultation and talking circles, most community members stated that they burned SEMAA to send a message to the creator. SEMAA is a powerful medicine used in many ceremonies. SEMAA is used for spiritual use and medicinal healing. It's used to promote physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. SEMAA can be burned in a fire, generally not meant to be inhaled. Similarly, community members also stated that SEMAA is primarily used to give gifts to healers and community members during ceremonies and prayers.

“ I use SEMAA Gift to a healer. I offer SEMAA when I want to ask the creator something. I use in a tie and loose for an offering. I hold in on my hand closest to your heart and put on fire, so they burn and have a better guidance in my life. It is a part of my bundle, I use it when on the land and when I take anything from the land. Growing up my dad would take me hunting and fishing and I would always see him laying tobacco after an animal was killed and saying a prayer of thanks. I use it to connect with those in the spirit world and give it as an offering of gratitude to those around me (i.e., Elders, community members, friends, family) ”

Similarly, a group of community members who are affiliated with the drumming circle stated that they receive tobacco ties regularly as hand drummers in the community. They use it in smudge, in prayer, and when birthing a drum. They also used it as an offering to ask an Elder for their spirit name. They also stated that they offer SEMAA when a loved one passes or gets ill or is in trouble.

“ I use SEMAA to protect my spirits and myself. I have been taught it is a way to connect with Spirit and mostly because it is tangible. When I hold it in my hand and offer my prayers, I feel it accepting them. And when I lay it on Mother Earth, I just know my prayers are accepted. I have NEVER EVER laid SEMAA with intention and not had my prayer answered in the best way possible. I also use SEMAA to share my thoughts and prayers and protect me from angry spirits. I was taught through teaching the importance of SEMAA so when I'm in ceremonies it's important to use and acknowledge the SEMAA also when praying or picking medical it important to use to give thanks for picking the medicine from mother earth. To feel connected to Creator, my Elders, my friends, family and community”

While reviewing the knowledge of growing SEMAA, more than half community members stated that they do not know how to grow SEMAA. About 40 % community members stated that 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations grow their own SEMAA. At the same time Less than 10 % of community members stated that they also grow their own SEMAA at their house and 25% reported that their family and relatives grow SEMAA.

4.5 PERSONAL TESTIMONIES OF 2-SPIRITED URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES ON THEIR RELATION AND REACHING AROUND SEMAA

The following are the selected personal testimonies of the community members on their knowledge, attitude and practices as well as their teachings related to the SEMAA. These are the actual words of the community members extracted from the conversations we had during the consultation and talking circles:

- SEMAA is a sacred medicine. It is sacred to our people. I was taught about the four sacred medicines and tobacco being one of them. SEMAA was given to us to communicate with the spirit world
- Well as I say it's the first medicine that was given to us from the creator so in our teachings it was told to us that if you want something you have to offer something excuse me that offering is SEMAA because the first medicine so when you offer that tobacco the creator listens to what you're asking for.
- SEMAA is a medicine given to us from Mother Earth. SEMAA is our medicine used to offer creator and creation
- SEMAA is different from regular tobacco and should be used in prayer and offerings. Tobacco is used as an offering in exchange for taking something from the land.
- Tobacco is sacred, the medicine is strong enough to protect itself. It is a connection to our land, our people and our ancestors.
- SEMAA is meant to be used for prayer not to abuse.
- It has healing powers. We use it in ceremonies and help to bring spirits in. Hold it and put your intention that you want to pass to your spirit, Creator, and ancestors.
- SEMAA is a spiritual telephone for sending messages to the Creator. It helps me to connect with all my relations. It helps me to take my prayers to my ancestors, my spirits, Creator.
- They are an offering/ kind of like a contract between two people. It allows you to communicate to the other side.
- SEMAA is burned and the smoke from SEMAA takes those prayers up. We offer tobacco to mother earth when we gather medicines. we use tobacco during a full moon ceremony, when we make our ties, we are putting our prayers and thoughts into those ties.
- I don't have many other than it's used as an offering to say thank you or pray
- It's a medicine that can be offered for spiritual well-being, it can only be touched when you are not on your period I think, you must have a good attitude and thoughts.
- It is to be respected and treated with care. That it is one of our sacred Medicines. We use it to offer our intentions in prayers.
- SEMAA is one of the highest prayers used in our culture. Respect the SEMAA, do not put out while under the influence, hold in the left hand closest to your heart. Put SEMAA out at ceremony, sweat lodge, lake, rock, or tree.



- I should not refuse SEMAA. It should not be sold, it needs to grow.
- My auntie showed me at feasts at night and in the morning or whenever you need to talk to creator
- SEMAA can be used to absorb negative energies when having discussions around trauma; the SEMAA is usually burned with a prayer after. When offering to an Elder tobacco protects the elder in that interaction from negative issues arising from imbalance of offerings in the exchange. SEMAA works from the heart so it should be used from the left side. It's a masculine energy. SEMAA can also be used as protection. It can be used in medicine pouches or Tobacco ties. Alcohol spirits should be kept away from SEMAA as they can corrupt the sacredness of tobacco. I've been given instructions not to use SEMAA on my moontime as it's pointless and we take the power from it during this time. I've heard of tobacco being used to protect one's speech as a by-product of carrying it but I've only heard this once.
- SEMAA helps break down the barrier between the physical world and the spiritual world.
- I truly believe in the power of SEMAA in terms of the ceremonial use
- I just loved ceremonies, and I love the traditional way of life. And it's just like, it saved my life and like, it's done so much good for me that way.
- SEMAA helps me to access traditional and cultural knowledge.
- I didn't see SEMAA for the first time until actually 2- Spirited people of the 1st Nations dropped off one of the care packages and they included traditional medicine in it.
- It's a way for me to send prayer in my sacred fires
- We share SEMAA amongst each other. It's just a way to connect with not just the Creator but with other community members.
- When I go outside and if I need to pray in more detail to get a better connection, I go outside and I pray I lay my SEMAA I put my intention out to my prayer to the Creator.
- I really believe that it like sets the intentions for meeting and whatnot. SEMAA listens to your intentions.
- I use SEMAA as an offering. I use it in prayer. I use it when I would like to gain knowledge from an Elder.
- I use SEMAA to open my mind or use it to open ceremonies. I use it to thank people or like to give it as an offering before somebody gives me teachings.
- The teaching I was given was that SEMAA breaks down the barrier like it helps set the intention for whatever you're going to do.
- It's all about your mindset. When you sit down to pray with tobacco, that's a way for you to release energy with good intention, it's going to come through as good intention, good energy positive atmospheres.



- I think it's a matter of teaching people to reclaim that traditional SEMAA teachings as part of their inherent right
- SEMAA wasn't planted with the intent of using it commercially as it is a secret medicine
- It's one of our sacred medicines and our new generations must be educated on how we use it and when we use it and why we use it.
- I think that introducing commercial tobacco is like a form of systemic racism that is used to control and destroy the Indigenous culture and people.
- SEMAA was meant for peaceful things. It's meant to help a person. And commercial tobacco is meant to harm people, abuse resources and humanity in general.
- Kind of connects the world that kind of connects the universe because the roots of the plant are so deep, and the smoke goes so high in the air. So it's like a connector. From our instructions, our original instructions, we were showing where it was and how to use it and which was to use it as a method of an offering, so you take that tobacco and you offer it to the animals, to the spirit of that animal that you are hunting, and ask it to give its life, for your life.
- I was just taught it's a connector between Creator and a connector between all forms of men.
- It's like such a powerful thing that everyone takes for granted like if you weren't taught what it represents
- So prior is to ask the spirit of the animal to appear, and then afterwards to thank that animal that did appear that you took its life.
- Really the youth are the ones who are reclaiming their teachings, Youth are reclaiming it, now it's becoming something important again, in their lifestyle. concept of reconnecting to my culture using SEMAA honoring that memory and, those teachings
- You know, up until about a year ago I did, but since then the youth are picking up those teachings and carrying them forward.
- I know that they have been doing some so at Wandering Spirit School they have those cultural teachings built into the curriculum.
- I mean, really kids should be taught the tradition, like the SEMAA but also the differences between the two. I do believe they would be less likely to smoke, because they would use traditional tobacco as medicine and know the difference between the two.
- Maybe a video growing SEMAA from a seed All the way up to harvest and drying to, you know, then photos of that tobacco being distributed in community or being used in ceremony will help largely to educate the new generation on SEMAA.
- The sacred tobacco is much better for the environment for us anyway because it's sacred to us.
- Yeah, cigarette tobacco affects the views on SEMAA. It's not the same tobacco that we are smoking in cigarettes.



- My fire, I burned that tie to send that energy and that prayer and that thought up into the atmosphere of the universe, sending it out to wherever it needed to go.
- In meditation, I want to send out good energies and good thoughts. I use it to show appreciation to my Elders and my facilitators in the community who are giving me knowledge and teachings
- I'll just untie it from my drum. It sits with a lot of song energy and really good vibes. When I do go to burn it, it just it's a way to release all of those good energies and that medicine
- One of my first real interactions with SEMAA was when I joined a 2-Spirits hand drum group. I saw sacred SEMAA there. It was so pure and healing.
- I think a big thing for me would be educating people about SEMAA, the connection that you can have with the plant as it grows, to when you harvest it to when you use it.
- I think a big thing for me would be educating people about traditional tobacco and the ways to cultivate your own tobaccos, the connection that you can have with the plant as it grows, to when you harvest it to when you use it. Because that's all something that has come from you and your hands or you and your community. Being a part of cultivating the lands that the tobacco grows on to the drawing process to the use of it, or even being able to distribute your tobacco. It brings like a full circle aspect where you've gone from point A to point B all the way around and been able to do something to benefit rather than destroy or harm others. I have to think a lot more, because I could probably come up with some other ideas to help, like having people more connected and understanding of traditional tobacco. But off the top of my head, I think a big one is growing your own plants and having that process because it means a lot to a lot of people, when they're able to start something from a seed all the way to harvest like they get very invested in it. And they look at it as a completely different source. Because now they're realizing like this was a living, actual life forms this tobacco plant that has given me something to then give back to an elder or give to a sick family member or using my own ceremony, so you have a deeper connection with it through that process.





Discussion





In the survey, two thirds of the respondents identified themselves as Two-spirit and female. Almost half of the respondents were between 30 -51 years of age group and almost one third of the respondents were below age of 30 years old which is an encouraging factor. The participation of young people in traditional teachings, cultural learning and use of SEMAA itself is a positive aspect. Most respondents were from downtown Toronto and Scarborough, that shows the catchment area of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations. More than a half of the respondents identified themselves as single and living at the apartment. Almost one third of the community members have received the traditional teachings along with some other primary and secondary level of education. During the consultation, mostly community members expressed anxiety, loneliness and social displacements that are in line with the survey data too.

During the pre-test survey and post-test survey, significant levels of changes on knowledge, attitude and practices of SEMAA use among the respondents were documented. In the pre-test, about 60% respondents stated that SEMAA is the part of the medicine bundle that is given by the creator for the spiritual purpose, where this number increased up to 98% in the post test survey. In the pre- test, almost 40% of respondents stated that though their parents and close family members used to use SEMAA, they really do not have any teachings and knowledge about SEMAA. In the post test survey, almost 95% respondents reported that they got their teaching, knowledge and established their relationship with SEMAA, which is very promising and encouraging findings. In the post test survey and community consultation, almost all the participants shared a relationship with SEMAA. Similarly, community members also shared that in recent days, lots of young adults and youths are getting teachings and cultural knowledge on SEMAA and traditional medicine, which is inspiring and encouraging.

After a year of virtual teaching, community engagement, and social campaign, 90% of respondents strongly admitted that SEMAA is given by the creator to connect them with their ancestor, and not for abuse. It is a sacred and pure plant that is used for healing. Community members also stated that new generations are gradually getting teachings on SEMAA, its use as well as skills to grow and harvest at home that is really inspiring. It will help new generations to establish their relationship with SEMAA that will reduce the level of abuse. Community members also identified the aggressive industrial advertisement on tobacco in various forms as well as the culture of cigarette smoking in public space as an acceptable behaviour. People smoke everywhere, including at work, restaurants, coffee shops and home. During the community consultation, almost all the community members reported that they have seen advertisements of commercial tobacco in various forms but less than 15% reported that they have seen advertisements on SEMAA and related teachings.



The community also agreed on the fact that it is another form of colonialism that has been destroying the Indigenous culture. On top of that, commercial tobacco is so easily available and accessible, people started to replace SEMAA with cigarettes, which is unfortunate, and the community reiterates the needs of educating young adolescent youths and new generations on it.

In Toronto, it is observed that SEMAA is available at the Indigenous agencies and practices during the ceremonies, drumming circle, Indigenous teaching and talking circles. At the same time, the urban Two-spirit community members are getting SEMAA and medicine bundles from 2-Spirited people of the 1st Nations. The COVID-19 also promoted the practices of Indigenous healing, cultural ceremonies and teaching events though virtually. During pre-test, mostly community members shared that they use SEMAA on a weekly basis during their visit at community circle and Indigenous agencies. Most community members stated that rather than burning SEMAA, they offered it to water, tree, drums, offering a talking circles, sacred fires, land, rock and longhouses. This practice shows that despite having restrictions on smudging, communities are finding ways to practice their medicine and practice their culture. On top of this, community members also stated that they are learning how to grow SEMAA at home and harvest property is fundamental. 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations have been setting up a SEMAA community garden that is supporting the community to gain skills and knowledge on cultivating SEMAA at home.





Conclusion





Traditional Tobacco known as SEMAA is an integral part of the Indigenous culture and ceremonies. These medicines are taken as a gift of the creator provided to get connected with their spirits, ancestors and Creator to themselves. But along with the colonial encroachment to Turtle Island, Westerners started commercial cultivation of tobacco by genetically modified the original SEMAA and adding additional fertilizers and chemicals that made this tobacco more harmful and toxic. At the same time, due to the assertive and glamorous advertisement of commercial tobacco along with the abundant flow of supplies, gradually these cigarettes started to get introduced into the ceremonies replacing SEMAA. The limited or no supplies of SEMAA and encourage the use of commercial tobacco in ceremonies. Western colonizers deliberately promoted these practices in Indigenous communities.

Elders and community Knowledge Keepers focused on the point that it is all about “the intention that we put on” to make a difference on commercial tobacco and SEMAA. Commercial tobacco is for recreational use, nothing to do with prayer and spiritual connection whereas SEMAA is purely spiritual and has a connection with spirits. It is all about your intention and what you put on. Fortunately, in recent days youth and young adult urban Indigenous communities are educating themselves on SEMAA. Communities are gradually reclaiming their traditional knowledge, teachings and ceremonies. Indigenous agencies like 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations are promoting traditional teaching and knowledge on SEMAA, medicine bundles and related teachings by bringing Elders, Knowledge Keepers and communities together. At the same time, they are setting up a community SEMAA garden every year that is helping communities to learn and develop their relationship with SEMAA and related teachings.



7.1 SEMAA COMMUNITY EDUCATION CAMPAIGN RESOURCES

**"I USE IT AS AN OFFERING. I USE IT IN
PRAYER. AND MOST IMPORTANTLY TO ME,
I USE IT WHEN I WOULD LIKE TO GAIN
KNOWLEDGE."
-JENNE**





"MY MEDICINE IS MY TELEPHONE TO CONNECT WITH MY ANCESTORS, TO ALL MY RELATIONS. I USE MY MEDICINE BOTH IN MY HAPPINESS AND SORROW MOMENTS." **-SHARON**



**2-Spirits
SEMAA PROJECT**



**TO LEARN MORE,
VISIT 2SPIRITS.ORG**



"I USE TOBACCO IN MY CEREMONY, WHETHER IT'S FIRE CEREMONY, DRUM CEREMONY, JUST GROUP CEREMONY, OR EVEN A GROUP TEACHING."

-PATRICIA



TO LEARN MORE, VISIT 2SPIRITS.ORG

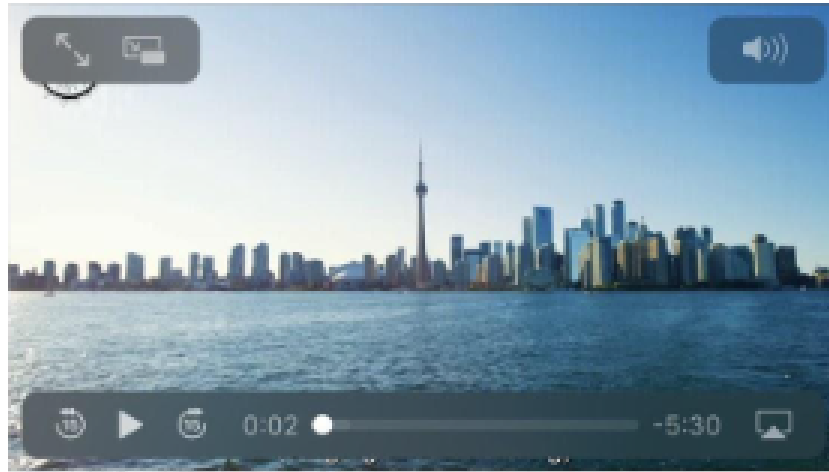


"I AM GIVEN TOBACCO TIES, IN ASKING FOR SONGS OF HEALING. I KEEP THESE TIES WITH ME WHILE SINGING AND PRAYING FOR THE ASKER."

-TRACY



TO LEARN MORE, VISIT 2SPIRITS.ORG



"MY MEDICINE IS MY TELEPHONE TO CONNECT WITH MY ANCESTORS, TO ALL MY RELATIONS. I USE MY MEDICINE BOTH IN MY HAPPINESS AND SORROW MOMENTS." -SHARON

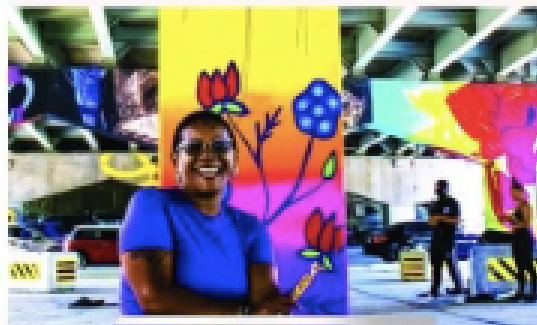




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