This study focused on Social Service practitioners and their perspectives on indigenous mental health, the challenges of providing services, and the need for more current approaches on mental health services. This qualitative study used a narrative design approach and analyzed data collected through interviews with five social service practitioners, which included two Child and Youth workers, and three Social workers who are also Registered Early Childhood Educators. Six themes emerged from the interviews: need for advocacy and awareness of indigenous knowledge and communities, lack of accessible and quality resources, overrepresentation of indigenous youth in Government services, insufficient Government support, intergenerational trauma, and identity loss. Participant four expressed the need for advocacy and awareness by highlighting the importance of trust, validity, and relatability between youth and social service practitioners in the field of quality services, “the government needs to help the community to give those services because they understand that they’ve lived the generational poverty they’ve gone through, and they want to relate on a more personal level, we have to be more diverse, and have more diversity within our organization.” Participant four, Interview, January 30, 2020. Participant two and four stressed on lack of accessible quality resources as well as the need for more indigenous social service workers to support indigenous youth and communities that may need mental health services.

Results

This research study supports current literature, and offers diverse viewpoints of the social service practitioners that participated in the study. The process of data analysis resulted in the emergence of six major themes: need for advocacy and awareness of indigenous knowledge and communities, lack of accessible and quality resources, overrepresentation of indigenous youth in Government services, insufficient Government support, intergenerational trauma, and identity loss. Participant four emphasized the need for advocacy and awareness by highlighting the importance of trust, validity, and relatability between youth and social service practitioners in the field of quality services, “the government needs to help the community to give those services because they understand that they’ve lived the generational poverty they’ve gone through, and they want to relate on a more personal level, we have to be more diverse, and have more diversity within our organization.” Participant four, Interview, January 30, 2020. Participant two and four stressed on lack of accessible quality resources as well as the need for more indigenous social service workers to support indigenous youth and communities that may need mental health services.

Discussion

One limitation is that the researcher knows all five participants, and though there has never been a power relationship between the researcher and any of the participants, this could have been a source of potential bias. Another limitation is that there were only five participants, and only one of the participants has indigenous descent. This research study supports the high demand for more indigenous social service workers in the field as it is extremely beneficial for indigenous youth and communities that seek mental health services. Implications for future research would be to conduct research on indigenous social service workers in the field as well as assessing the methods of practice of an indigenous social service practitioner who influences the mental health of indigenous youth and communities. Additionally, this research study supports the need for current methods of practice to be re-evaluated and reformed to express cultural knowledge and sensitivity to meet the needs of indigenous communities.

Figure 1.4: Bridging the Gap of mental health services for indigenous youth and communities