



**Downe, Pamela. (2021). Collective Care: Indigenous Motherhood, Family, and HIV/AIDS  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press.**

Reviewed by: Anza Mirza, MacEwan University

Pamela Downe's book, "Collective Care: Indigenous Motherhood, Family, and HIV/AIDS," is an insightful composition of research that utilizes one-on-one engagement, credible sources, and authenticity to present issues of Indigenous mothers living with HIV/AIDS. Downe illuminates several struggles these women face daily and portrays them to her audience through specific themes within the book. This review will focus on three central themes of community cohesion, motherhood, and the ways the government has failed Indigenous individuals while dissecting the ways in which Downe has presented them. The themes discussed will be motherhood, community cohesion, and the ways in which the government has failed Indigenous individuals.

Downe had a desire to discover more about the ethnography of Indigenous mothers struggling with HIV/AIDS specifically within AIDS Saskatoon (p. 14). Her search was propelled forward as a team of researchers was assembled, and secure funding was provided after a research proposal was formulated with the help of staff from AIDS Saskatoon, PWAS, and University Social Sciences. After a year, the search began to answer the desired question, "What does it mean to be a mother in the context of HIV/AIDS?" (p. 3). Downe and her research assistants approximately spent eight hours within PWAS to get to know her participant's and the environment itself (p. 14), heightening the credibility of her research.



Community cohesion is a significant factor within the lives of many Indigenous individuals as it not only results in safe environments but creates a sense of belonging and familial relationships. An important concept and one that Downe makes clear throughout the book is that familial relationships do not necessarily mean blood-related. As a research participant explains, "Don't matter if it's blood or not, you love somebody like family, then you got a home with them..." (p. 26). Near the beginning of the book, Downe illustrates she learned what "family" meant within the PWAS (p. 14). This honesty from the start creates a respectable sense of transparency to her readers, therefore increasing her credibility. Downe does an exceptional job in utilizing the tool of repetition to continuously reinstate the significance of family within the PWAS and going into detail about past Indigenous ways of life. Indigenous mothers affected with HIV/AIDS often rely on each other to help their children when needed. For instance, one of the research participants, Sally, relies on her friends from PWAS to help keep her youngest daughter in check (p. 51). The fact that women within the PWAS can depend on each other and create such close bonds is illustrated clearly by Downe through her inclusion of multiple one-on-one conversations. For example, Downe engages in discussions with Lis and Sally, HIV/AIDS affected mothers of PWAS, who both express the theme of the significance of cohesion within their PWAS community (p. 22). Community cohesion is a significant force within the lives of many PWAS community members as it allows physical and emotional support.

From the start of the book, Downe clarifies to the reader that the book's primary focus will be the effect of HIV/AIDS on Indigenous mothers (p. 2). The majority of the content from the book consists of Downe's one-on-one conversations with these mothers who open-heartily express their hardships and struggles. The genuinity of these conversations is excellently portrayed by Downe as she includes specific emotions and body language she witnesses from participants when speaking about difficult topics. Examples of such words include "crying and upset" (p. 37) and "begg[ing]" (p. 37). In addition, Downe includes when other participants chime into interviews, even if they are not being interviewed at the



moment, illustrating a natural flow of conversation. Downe demonstrates a multitude of struggles Indigenous mothers affected with HIV/AIDS face, such as drug addiction, child apprehension, and misinterpretation of emotions while recognizing how draining these challenges can be on mothers as they fight a painful battle with HIV/AIDS. A significant concept Downe illuminates for her readers is that of intensive motherhood and the adverse effects that stem from this form of motherhood. As referred to in the book, intensive motherhood is "child-centered, expert-guided" (p.43). The intensive form of motherhood leaves mothers drained from solely concentrating on their child, with little regard for themselves (p. 43). Downe references a variety of credible sources, such as one from psychologist Shari Thurer, that refer to intensive motherhood as a glorified image of motherhood that is often hard to achieve. Through powerful arrays of quotes from credible sources, Downe is further able to depict this unachievable role of motherhood. An example of this stems from Shari Thurer, where she explains that this form of motherhood "makes a scapegoat of mom; [and] it leads to an over-emphasis on what she does, at the expense of a broader understanding of child development" (p. 45). Motherhood is a central aspect of this book. Downe does an exceptional job in continuously relating back to motherhood while interviewing her participants, introducing new concepts and struggles related to motherhood, and referencing credible sources to reinforce her ideas.

Through her use of rich examples, Downe illustrates the ways in which the government has proven to fail Indigenous peoples. Downe does an excellent job of referencing and informing her readers about bodies of law that have discriminated against Indigenous individuals. Examples of this are her explanations of the Gradual Civilization Act, which led to residential schools, The Constitution Act, and the Indian Act (p. 6). Downe also utilizes powerful quotes such as one from Thomas King. He explains that The Indian act "does more than just define Legal Indians. It has been the main mechanism for controlling the lives and destinies of Legal Indians in Canada..." (p. 6). Quotes such as this reinforce the ways in which the government has proven to fail Indigenous peoples. However, it does not stop here. Downe goes on further



to explain other harmful colonial policies illustrating the detrimental effects of the government, such as how families were forced off of their own land, individuals were disenfranchised from political office, and women were forced to give up their Indian status if they married non-aboriginal men (p. 8). Downe strategically explains these hardships before introducing the concept of intergenerational trauma, a form of trauma prevalent in Indigenous communities today. This transition from providing the information needed to understand the concept of intergenerational trauma creates a smooth and concise flow of ideas, allowing readers to comprehend Dawne's points. To illustrate the negative impact of intergenerational trauma, Downe again utilizes credible sources, such as The Aboriginal Healing Foundation. This source states that intergenerational trauma has affected the health of individuals and has also disrupted family cohesion (p. 7).

To illustrate an example of the current ways the government has failed Indigenous women struggling with HIV/AIDS in particular, Downe engages in several one-on-one conversations with HIV/AIDS positive Indigenous women. The conversations depict the difficulties the government has created for them in order to avoid child apprehension. The highest court in Canada has ruled that CFS workers are able to apprehend children they *believe* are in danger (p. 92). This means no warrant is necessary. As one can imagine, and as Downe has made very clear through multiple one-on-one conversations, the apprehension of children from Indigenous mothers based solely on belief has resulted in invalid apprehension based on discrimination. In the case of these women, CFS workers discriminate based on their race and their status of HIV positive. Downe illustrates this through stated heartfelt conversations with multiple women such as Charlotte, who feel like their world is crashing when their child has the chance of being apprehended (p. 91). The emotions present and the rich language used to describe the emotion allow the readers to fully acknowledge the distress these women face, as well as the multiple ways the government imposes negativity on these women.

When she wrote this book, Downe intended to provide her readers insight into the true struggle



Indigenous mothers affected with HIV/AIDS experience every day. The type of academic audience that would be interested in reading this book would be anthropologists looking to gain more knowledge of the matter at hand. This book could act as a basis of understanding, which other anthropologists could potentially apply to their work. Downe did an exceptional job writing this book. I do not believe there is much room for improvement within this book. The ways in which she utilized methods of one-on-one engagement with participants, providing credible sources, and honestly to fully encapsulate the true purpose of her research resulted in a well-rounded book. Through the three main themes of motherhood, community cohesion, and government failure, Downe illustrated her skills in conducting valuable research.