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Care Providers of Indigenous Children and Youth in the Child Welfare System: A Scoping Review

Amanda R. Ervin[1] | Anika J. Dirk[1] | Hannah I. Odekina[1] | Fatemeh Sahlehi Shahrabi[1] | Chloe E. Luck[2] | Mary C. Greenshields[3] | Janice M. Victor[1]

[1]Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada | [2]Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada | [3]School of Global, Urban, and Social Studies, RMIT University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Correspondence: Janice M. Victor (janice.victor@uleth.ca)

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous children continue to be significantly over-represented in child welfare systems in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. This scoping review represents a subset of a larger review, the objective of which was to consolidate the extant literature on Indigenous child welfare. The results from the broader review were categorized into 10 different subtopics, of which care provider experiences, the topic of this article, is just one. This review summarizes research pertaining to foster parents and kinship caregivers of Indigenous children within the child welfare system. Key findings included caregivers' financial challenges, rewards of fostering, barriers to providing Indigenous cultural and relational connections, barriers to recruiting Indigenous foster parents and mistrust of the child welfare system. Recommendations emphasized Indigenous-run programmes, education and training for service workers and recruiting foster families willing to maintain youth connections to family and culture. This review further identifies a small but growing collection of Indigenous-led or co-authored scholarship that is bringing more balance and knowledge to a topic still dominated by Western research models and biases.

1 | Introduction

The historical and ongoing impact of the child welfare system continues to detrimentally affect Indigenous children and youth (Quinn et al. 2022). As one of many colonial injustices, the residential school system that operated in Canada from 1831 to 1996 forcibly separated Indigenous children from their families, initiating a legacy of neglect, systemic abuses and intergenerational trauma (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) 2015). In the 1950s, the child welfare system took over as the primary strategy for assimilation, and the separation of children from their families continues unabated to this day (Blackstock et al. 2020). Compared to non-Indigenous children, Indigenous children are disproportionately investigated and removed from their homes, with neglect and perceived risk being the most reported rationale (Sinha et al. 2013). Neglect is more an issue of systemic poverty and historical trauma stemming from colonial policies than it is intentional maltreatment. Many Indigenous children in care endure poverty, abuse, trauma and separation from their families and cultural roots, perpetuating the cycle of trauma and consequent disparities within their communities (Quinn et al. 2022).

There is an urgent need for increased attention and action to reform the child welfare system. The final report from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC 2015) identifies

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some of the most important recommendations directed at Indigenous child welfare. Of the Report's 94 Calls to Action, the first five are directed towards child welfare. These calls ask the federal, provincial/territorial and, when relevant, local governments to (1) prevent apprehensions by monitoring investigations based upon claims of neglect, providing resources for family supports and provide training for system workers and decision makers to be properly informed on the history and impacts of residential schools and culturally appropriate solutions; (2) to prepare annual reports on the number of Indigenous children in care, investigations and spending; (3) wholly implement Jordan's Principle so medical services are not delayed due to jurisdictional disputes; (4) establish legislation with national standards for child apprehension and affirm the rights of Indigenous governments to operate their own systems; and (5) develop culturally appropriate parenting programmes. To date, only one of these five calls has received partial completion (Jewell and Mosby 2023). An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth, and Families (2019) was implemented to allow Indigenous governments to develop their own policies and re-establish control over children's services; but there are still no national standards nor a guarantee of additional government funding to support changes (Blackstock 2019).

In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled in favour of a 2007 human rights complaint that the Government of Canada was guilty of discriminating against Indigenous children by systemically underfunding their child welfare services (Blackstock 2011). However, the Government of Canada balked at recompense and legislative or policy changes and received over 20 non-compliance orders from the Tribunal (Blackstock et al. 2023). It took until early 2025 for a mutually acceptable settlement agreement to be made.

This scoping review consolidates the extant research on care providers within Indigenous child welfare to highlight current knowledge, gaps and recommendations, especially those coming from Indigenous scholars. Scoping reviews are useful for exploring broad topics or specific fields of interest. They examine the extent, range and nature of research findings and can identify gaps in the existing literature (Peters et al. 2021; Tricco et al. 2018). Given the dire outcomes associated with child welfare, it is essential to establish strategies for social workers, foster parents and policymakers to mitigate the cultural and relational disruptions that Indigenous children face in such care settings (Oliver 2020). Mobilizing Indigenous knowledge has the capacity to address the complex factors contributing to high rates of Indigenous child apprehensions by child welfare systems and the ongoing adversities faced by Indigenous children and families. This scoping review assessed and synthesized research pertaining to the perspectives and experiences of the care providers of Indigenous children taken into care while highlighting Indigenous scholarship and knowledge.

2 | Care Providers in Indigenous Child Welfare

Foster parenting can be challenging. When asked, foster parents reported that they may quit if they are not provided with enough information about the children in their care or if they lack adequate financial support (Brown 2008). Further, complications with the child's biological parents accompanied with the fear of losing foster children also added significant stress. Foster parents reported feeling undervalued due to inadequate pay and described being treated like glorified babysitters (Brown 1999; Brown 2008). Stress, emotional strain, fatigue, being overworked and experiencing feelings of having no support from the foster care system can lead to burnout and, at times, cause foster parents to quit (Brown 1999). Indigenous foster families continue to be under-represented, thereby limiting the chances a child will be placed with a family that will support their cultural needs, suggesting that re-evaluating recruitment procedures along with trust-building be considered (Day et al. 2023).

Kinship care providers described their ability to care for relatives' children (Denby et al. 2015) while also reporting financial hardships and disrespectful interactions with child welfare professionals (McPherson et al. 2022). Indigenous grandparent kinship care providers may face emotional and financial challenges along with a strong need for preserving children's cultural identity through teachings and culturally relevant support (Cross and Day 2008). Kinship care, particularly with grandparents, can at times provide children with a connection to their cultural heritage, offer familiarity and ensure continuity, all of which has been associated with well-being (Cross and Day 2008). Compiling research on foster and kinship care providers to highlight recommendations and knowledge gaps is important for recruiting and retaining quality care providers.

3 | Research Questions

The goal of this review was to consolidate research that could be used to leverage Indigenous knowledge in providing optimal care for Indigenous children while avoiding further harm by preserving their connections to family and culture. Rooted in colonialism, the structural challenges perpetuated by historical and present child welfare practices present a multifaceted challenge that necessitates a systemic approach to contextualize it within the widespread inequities across various sectors and institutions. Furthermore, governments have demonstrated both a reluctance to act and a tendency to impose colonial strategies, whereas research continues to privilege knowledge derived through a Western paradigm (Blackstock et al. 2023; Williams and Shipley 2023). Given this context, it was important to examine who was producing knowledge in the research literature: Indigenous scholars and communities or non-Indigenous scholars. This review was derived from a more expansive scoping review that asked, 'What is the current state of documented knowledge and research pertaining to Indigenous children in government care in Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia (1990 to 2022)?' Three subquestions followed:

a. What topics are addressed and in what quantity?
b. What Indigenous peoples are represented, and who is writing about them?
c. What are the paradigms and methodologies represented in the literature? To what extent is Indigenous knowledge represented?

The present review came about as a subject identified from the first sub-question. Care provider experiences was identified as one of 10 themes derived from this broader investigation.

In this review, care providers refer to foster parents, kinship care providers, respite providers or any other group or individual responsible for the care and protection of children removed from their family of origin by a child welfare service. This research explores care provider experiences, including their motivations, recruitment and screening processes, as well as the challenges and rewards they encounter. It also examines training, supports, financial compensation and other conditions related to their role on behalf of the state.

4 | Methods

This scoping review followed the methodological framework and protocols defined by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) and the PRISMA extension for scoping reviews checklist (Peters et al. 2021; Tricco et al. 2018). The search protocol was based on context and population. Concept, frequently included as a third search parameter, was omitted at this stage because the goal was to identify the breadth and depth of topics or concepts included at the time in Indigenous child welfare research. Child welfare concepts were introduced in the later categorization of sources into subtopics. Population search terms included generalized terms used to distinguish Indigenous identities in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand including: Aboriginal, Alaska* Indian*, Alaska* Native*, Aleut*, American Indian*, Eskimo*, First Nation*, Indigenous, Inuit, Métis, Māori, Native American*, Native* and Pacific Islander. After testing various search terms in the context of child welfare, search terms were narrowed to three key terms: 'foster care family', 'foster home*' and 'child* welfare'. Although 'child protection' was initially tested, it did not yield new sources, and terms related to adoption generated too many irrelevant results. These search terms were chosen for the overarching review of all topics pertaining to Indigenous child welfare. The search terms were applied to several databases: Academic Search Complete, Canadian Business, Gender Studies, Global Health, JSTOR, PsycINFO, Social Services Abstracts, SocINDEX, Sociological Abstracts, ProQuest Dissertations and Web of Science. The search was limited to English-language sources published between 1990 and 2022. A librarian supported and executed the search activities. Distiller SR software was used to screen, organize and track data extraction.

Inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed or grey literature limited to empirical and theoretical articles, theses and dissertations and research reports from Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Sources needed to explicitly include Indigenous populations as part of their research objective or question, rather than reporting Indigenous results incidentally within a general population sample. Books, chapters from edited volumes, editorials, investigative reviews of specific incidents and brief reports of previously published research were excluded from the review. Although including books and edited volumes could have provided additional knowledge and research synthesis, their inclusion was simply not feasible due to the potential for duplicated research and the expanded scope of review required. All sources related to the legal discipline, such as case law or legal arguments, were excluded.

The research team consisted of the lead investigator (Euro-Canadian) and five research assistants: one undergraduate (Métis), three graduate students at least midway through their programmes (two international and one Euro-Canadian), one recent Masters graduate (Euro-Canadian) and one librarian (Euro-Canadian). Recognizing the underrepresentation of Indigenous knowledge and scholarship in policy development and research on this topic, one of the goals for the project was to assess the degree of under-representation while also highlighting Indigenous contributions to the overall body of scholarship.

Five reviewers are more than recommended for scoping reviews, but this number was necessary given the magnitude of the project, the number of articles to be screened and reviewed and because not all research assistants stayed on for the entire duration of the project. Research assistants received training at every stage of the project: first, for screening, then review and data extraction, and finally for compiling the results. Training focused on correctly identifying inclusion and exclusion criteria, research questions, methodologies, authorship and summarizing main findings. A group practice session was held for screening and determining inclusion, especially due to the nuanced criteria described in the next paragraph. The team worked in close communication, convening when questions about specific sources arose and when second or third opinions were sought. Consequently, early screening errors were easily caught, remedied and communicated to all reviewers. This consensus-based approach with the lead investigator being the final arbiter maintained interrater reliability.

Initial screening began by reviewing titles and abstracts of the full data set to eliminate sources not focused on child welfare systems and not referencing Indigenous populations. Articles discussing adoption were screened out. Many sources were not explicitly Indigenous-focused but still reported results for Indigenous populations, often as incidental to a general population sample. These sources were outside of the inclusion criteria, and separating them from relevant sources was resolved by defining parameters, so only sources that explicitly addressed Indigenous populations or racial/ethnic differences in the research question or sampling method were included. The full text of sources was reviewed in second level screening further excluding irrelevant sources. The screening and data extraction questions used are presented in Table 1. The PRISMA chart depicting this process is in Figure 1. Beginning with full-text screening, sources were initially assigned one to three labels that were then reviewed and refined during data extraction. This iterative labelling process involved assessing recorded keywords, objectives and research questions by at least two reviewers at three different points in the screening and extraction process. Once completed, topic labels were reduced to a final keyword using constant comparison and basic thematic analysis. Most sources fell within one label, but occasionally an article would bridge two subtopics. Once working with a reduced data set, in this case, care provider experiences, first authors performed a confirmatory screening of each sources' research questions, objectives and keyword to ensure they were aligned with subtopic to which it was assigned.

TABLE 1 | Screening and data extraction questions.

Screening Level 1: Abstract Level 2: Full text	Does the source specifically research a topic pertaining to child welfare or protection in Canada, United States, Australia or New Zealand? (Yes, no) Does the source focus directly on Indigenous/Aboriginal populations? (Yes, no) Is this a peer-reviewed source? (Yes, no) What type of document is this source? (Empirical study, theoretical or position paper, grey literature, thesis or dissertation, book or book chapter, news media, other) Country of research (Canada, United States, Australia, New Zealand) What topic-related codes or keywords can you assign to this source?
Data extraction	
Objectives and methods	What is the stated purpose or objective of this source? What is the research question being investigated in this study? (Empirical sources only) What methodological paradigm(s) is being used in the source? (Empirical sources only)
Indigenous contributions	Was Indigenous knowledge included to inform this study? From which Indigenous group did the knowledge come from? In what way(s) did Indigenous knowledge inform the study? How many of the author(s) identify as Indigenous? (All, some, none, not indicated) Does the article acknowledge non-authored contributions from Indigenous individuals or entities (e.g., groups, non-profit organizations or tribal councils)?
Population	What population is represented in this source? (Children/youth receiving services, child welfare 'alumni', biological family, caregivers, social and caseworkers, other)
Theory and outcomes	What were the main theories or theoretical framework(s) used? List up to 3 What were the results/outcomes? What were the recommendations, if any?
Topic codes	Review the labels assigned to this source. Identify the most relevant label for this source Any additional comments on any aspect of screening or data extraction?

PRISMA chart

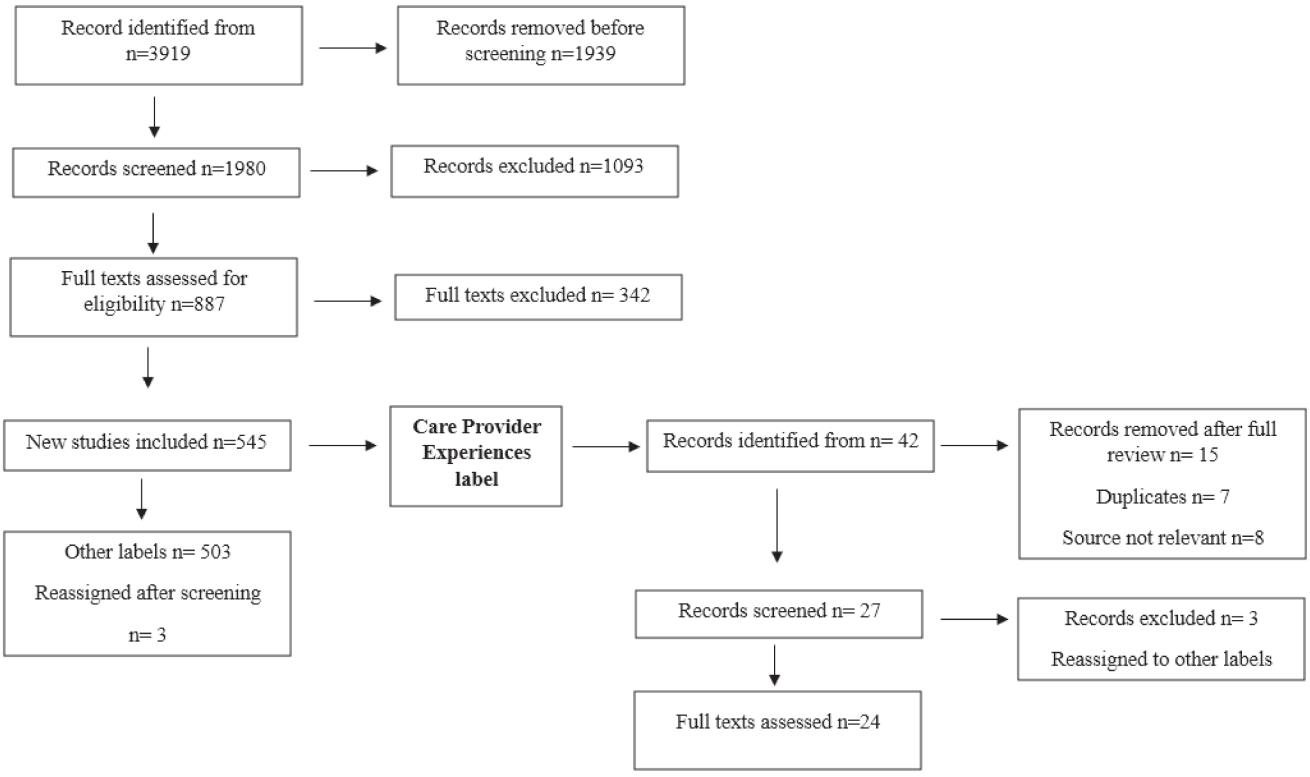

FIGURE 1 | PRISMA chart.

Indigenous knowledge contributions were reported where applicable, organized by the form of involvement in the research process ranging from research design to just consultation. The contribution of Indigenous knowledge was evaluated using questions related to Indigenous consultation, research design and authorship. Where possible, Indigenous authorship was determined by the author's self-identification within the source. When such declarations were missing, an Internet search was conducted in effort to determine the author's heritage. There are limitations to this approach for assessing Indigenous authorship and knowledge contribution. First, the absence of a self-declaration or the failure to locate confirmation of Indigeneity does not necessarily indicate one does not identify as Indigenous. Second, self-identification does not automatically imply the contribution of Indigenous traditional knowledge, as many Indigenous scholars work within Western knowledge systems. Third, there is a possibility that some authors may be falsely claiming an Indigenous identity. Despite these limitations, this method offers a rough estimate Indigenous research contributions over time.

5 | Results

The initial broad search resulted in 3919 sources for screening that were reduced to 545 by removing duplicates, irrelevant topics and sources that fell within the exclusion criteria (see Figure 1). The thematic categorization and labelling process produced 10 subtopics: system models and approaches, system workers, Indigenous culture, family and community factors, abuse and neglect, intervention and prevention strategies, disabilities and special needs, care provider experiences and psychosocial conditions and factors (submitted, in review) and research methods. Two subtopics were broken down further. System models and approaches included history, policy and legislation, theories and models of care, out-of-home care, Indigenous control and implementation, transitions to independence (submitted, in review) and best practices. Given the magnitude of results, subtopics were chosen for publication based on the size of results and ease of confirmatory screening. After a final confirmatory screening, 24 items fell under care provider experiences as defined earlier. Of these 24 articles (see Table 2), 14 were peer-reviewed, 12 featured Canadian authors, eight featured American authors, and four featured Australian authors. There were no articles from New Zealand. All 24 articles were empirical, as opposed to theoretical, in nature. Ten articles included Indigenous authorship, and three credited non-author Indigenous contributions, two from individuals and one from a group. Only one article used an Indigenous methodology whereby Indigenous storytelling was employed to learn what Indigenous child welfare agencies needed to ensure cultural planning was available for their children in care (Grzybowski 2012). Another two incorporated storytelling (Brown 2017) or explicitly described research that was grounded in the '4R' principles of research with Indigenous communities: respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (Oliver 2020). Figure 2 illustrates that there was no indication of Indigenous authorship in any of the articles from 1990 to 2000, followed by some co-authorship from 2001 to 2010, then the growth of sole Indigenous authorship starting in 2011.

Thematic analysis of the main topics of the 24 sources resulted in their categorization into four subtopics: caregiver experience, cultural value, placement factors and options and system factors. Several articles met the criteria for more than one subtopic. Reviewing the research questions, conclusions, recommendations and results of the articles revealed that care providers are likely to experience factors within all four of these groupings.

5.1 | Caregiver Experience

Twelve articles fell under the subtopic of caregiver experience (Brown 2017; Callahan et al. 2004; Cameron 2012; Halverson et al. 2002; Herrera-White 2008; Herzberg 2020; Hill 2016; Huntinghawk 2012; Irizarry et al. 2016; Ivanova and Brown 2010; McPherson et al. 2022; Wright et al. 2006), and four were placed here as a secondary subtopic (Day et al. 2021; Denby et al. 2015; Begay and Wilczynski 2018; Oliver 2020). Further, articles under caregiver experience were categorized into the following sections: kinship care providers and foster families. Depending on the type of caregiver, their experience varied greatly. For example, where foster families reported struggling to provide cultural connections for Indigenous children in their care, kinship care providers often reported financial barriers and a feeling of obligation to provide care to their young family members facing crisis (Irizarry et al. 2016; Oliver 2020). Although non-Indigenous foster families reported less financial strain, when compared to Indigenous foster families and/or kinship care providers, disparities were noted when looking specifically at willingness or abilities to provide culturally competent care (Brown et al. 2010; Callahan et al. 2004; Day et al. 2021; Denby et al. 2015; Oliver 2020).

5.2 | Kinship Care Providers

5.2.1 | Grandmothers

Of the articles that discussed the caregivers' experience, three are specific to Indigenous grandmothers' experiences with kinship care (Brown 2017; Callahan et al. 2004; Hill 2016). Indigenous grandmothers face a unique set of circumstances. Hill (2016) described that grandmother oftentimes felt the need to protect their grandchildren from potential harm associated with the child's biological parents or to prevent the child from going into the foster care system. Further, Hill (2016) shared that grandmothers' experiences encompass both challenges and rewards; they serve as pivotal matriarchal figures within their communities, actively striving to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma. Callahan et al. (2004) reported similar findings, revealing that Indigenous grandmothers were likely to face significant challenges such as trying to navigate the child welfare system although they are strained even more than most others, with access to fewer available and suitable resources. Callahan et al. (2004) identified the private challenges faced by grandmothers raising their grandchildren are unlikely to be recognized as public issues, highlighting a significant gap in policy alignment concerning their circumstances. Brown (2017) discussed how the role of an Indigenous grandmother in a caretaker role is multifaceted. This is largely in part due to concerns for the well-being of grandchildren. This added responsibility can oftentimes place the grandmothers' health and well-being at risk and, importantly, can

TABLE 2 | Summary of results.

Author(s)	Year	Country	Indigenous authorship	Indigenous contribution	Methodology	Subtopic(s)
Begay, S. & Wilczynski, J.	2018	United States	Yes		QUAL	CE, PFO
Brown, J., et al.	2010	Canada			MIXED	CV
Brown, M.	2017	Canada			MIXED	CE
Callahan, M., et al.	2004	Canada		G	QUAL	CE
Cameron, J.	2012	Canada	Yes	I	MIXED	CE
Day, A., et al.	2021	United States	Yes		MIXED	CV, CE
Denby, R., et al.	2015	United States			QUANT	CV, CE
Grzybowski, K.	2012	Canada	Yes	I	IM	SF
Halverson, K., et al.	2002	United States	Yes	I	QUAL	CE
Hanna, M., et al.	2017	United States			QUAL/EVAL	PFO
Harbour, C.	2014	United States			QUANT	PFO
Herrera-White, M.	2008	United States			QUAL	CE
Herzberg, L.	2020	United States	Yes		QUAL	CE
Higgins, D., et al.	2006	Australia		I	QUAL	CV
Hill, L.	2016	Canada	Yes	I	QUAL	CE
Huntinghawk, L.	2012	Canada	Yes	I	QUAL	CE
Irizarry, C., et al.	2016	Australia			IM/QUAL	CE
Ivanova, V., & Brown, J.	2010	Canada			QUAL	CE
Johnston, P., et al.	2022	Canada	Yes	I	QUAL	SF
McPherson, L., et al.	2022	Australia	Yes	G	MIXED	CE
Oliver, C.	2020	Canada		I	QUAL	CE, CV
Spence, N.	2004	Australia			QUAL	SF
Watson, V.	2010	Canada			QUANT	CV
Wright, A., et al.	2006	Canada	Yes		QUAL	CE

Note: Blanks under Indigenous authorship represent either 'no' or 'not indicated'.
Abbreviations: CE = caregiver experience; CV = cultural value; E = group non-author contributions; EVAL = evaluation paper; I = individual non-author contributions; IM = Indigenous methods; Mixed = mixed methods; PFO = placement factors and options; QUAL = qualitative; QUANT = quantitative; SF = system factors; THEO = theoretical or position paper.

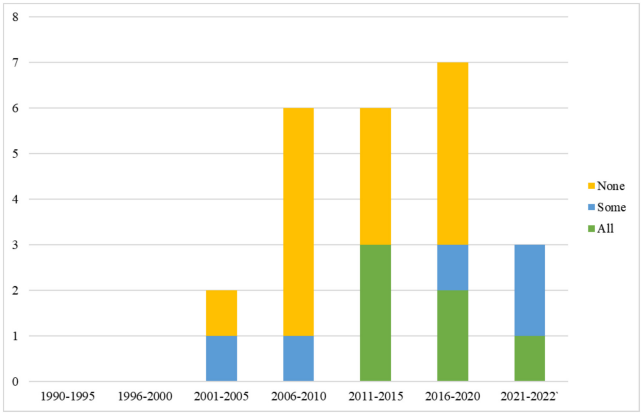

FIGURE 2 | Indigenous authorship over time. None = no Indigenous authorship identified; Some = some Indigenous authorship identified; All = all authors were identified as Indigenous.

also come with negative financial implications (Brown 2017). A notable and significant gap in literature appears pertaining to research on an Indigenous grandfather's experience and involvement regarding kinship care.

Colonization caused significant impacts within Indigenous communities. As such, Indigenous grandmothers often make sacrifices to try and ensure their grandchildren feel loved and grow up to have healthy and productive lives (Hill 2016). Indigenous grandmothers have long been integral to the upbringing of their grandchildren, yet there is limited understanding of how they navigate the role of becoming a kinship care provider (Brown 2017). The role of an Indigenous grandmother as a kinship care provider is complex and often involves making personal sacrifices to ensure the well-being of their grandchildren (Brown 2017). As care providers, grandmothers may face challenges that impact their health and financial stability, as they

navigate difficult relationships with their adult children, who may be struggling with issues like addiction and unstable relationships (Brown 2017).

For social workers and other professionals, it is crucial to understand the profound effects of colonization on Indigenous families and how grandmothers are striving to break the cycle of trauma that has persisted for generations (Brown 2017). Each grandmother's journey is unique, and acknowledging this individuality is key to offering the right support. Consequently, it is important to recognize that full-time care providing among Indigenous families is distinct from traditional societal views of parenting and requires specialized support (Brown 2017). Although this familial connection is seen as beneficial for the child, this review has established that the expectation of kinship care does bring some form of stress to Indigenous grandmothers taking on the role of primary caregiver (Brown 2017; Callahan et al. 2004; Hill 2016).

5.2.2 | Indigenous Family Members as Care Providers

Two studies focused on Indigenous family members as kinship care providers (McPherson et al. 2022; Wright et al. 2006). One study aimed to increase knowledge about the distinctive needs of kinship carers, as opposed to foster carers, based on their experiences of caring for their kin and interacting with the professional service system (McPherson et al. 2022). Much like what has been reported with Indigenous grandmothers, other kinship care providers may also experience feelings of stress, lack of structural support and financial disadvantage when they have agreed to caring for the children of their extended families (McPherson et al. 2022). Wright et al. (2006) sought to explore the factors (child, youth, family and community) influencing positive outcomes in kinship care. They highlighted a significant knowledge gap regarding the effectiveness of kinship care placements and the absence of systematic evaluations of kinship care programmes throughout Canada. Kinship care providers consistently reported that becoming a caregiver was not a planned life choice and stepping into the role of carer arose from an emergency or crisis (Callahan et al. 2004; Irizarry et al. 2016; McPherson et al. 2022).

5.2.3 | Foster Families

5.2.3.1 | Indigenous Foster Families. Three articles discussed the experiences of Indigenous foster families (Begay and Wilczynski 2018; Halverson et al. 2002; Herrera-White 2008). Herrera-White (2008) explored the attitudes and beliefs of Indigenous foster parents. Here, it was discovered that Indigenous foster mothers describe a rewarding experience because they had the chance to be a child's mother. Childrearing practices that were beneficial included attentive listening, having unconditional love and teaching their foster children about their Indigenous culture by living it—going to powwows, gatherings and talking (Herrera-White 2008). This research highlighted the importance of additional training for Indigenous foster parents to obtain advanced skills supporting children with special needs, the need for greater financial assistance, and it recommended incorporating talking circles (Herrera-White 2008). Great importance was noted in regard to embedding cultural elements into counselling and therapeutic services and advocating for more intensive therapeutic support due to the trauma often experienced by both foster parents and children (Herrera-White 2008).

When inquiring about the recruitment of Indigenous foster families, Begay and Wilczynski (2018) identified personal expenses or lack of financial support, lack of systematic resources, judgement and bias, lack of cultural awareness and distrust of the government as all barriers. Further, Indigenous foster parenting recruitment has not been prioritized in the way that it needs to be. Halverson et al. (2002) described how foster care is a demanding and a complex undertaking, especially in urban Indigenous families. Again, it is described that Indigenous foster families face adversities and confrontation when interacting with the child welfare system, and services for Indigenous children are generally not provided in culturally appropriate ways (Halverson et al. 2002).

5.2.3.2 | Non-Indigenous Foster Families. Three articles discussed the experiences of non-Indigenous foster families (Cameron 2012; Huntinghawk 2012; Ivanova and Brown 2010). Ivanova and Brown (2010) described that non-Indigenous foster families benefit when foster parents can make connections with children and have previous experience and knowledge in the area of child development. Worth noting, oftentimes non-Indigenous foster families become involved with Indigenous children in times of crisis (Cameron 2012). Another study aimed to describe the perspectives of a foster family that ultimately adopted an Indigenous child by investigating the experiences of non-Native adoptive parents who adopted Native children during the 1960s–1980s (Huntinghawk 2012). Connecting to the subtopic of cultural value, Huntinghawk confirmed that when adopted and fostered children are not connected with their family of origin, emotional strife can begin. Raising children of Indigenous heritage presented foster parents with a range of challenges and emotional struggles. Whereas initial hopes and dreams of fostering were often filled with optimism, the reality of raising a child, especially during adolescence, were at times marked by feelings of self-blame and guilt (Huntinghawk 2012). Further, many of these long-term foster parents grappled with feelings of inadequacy and despair as they watched their children face identity crises, behavioural issues and difficulties in school. Specifically, one respondent reported that the child in their care expressed confusion about her Native identity, which led to strained relationships. Similarly, another respondent expressed struggles navigating their child's ethnic identity and behavioural issues, causing them to question their parenting abilities. These challenges were compounded by the sense of responsibility and self-blame these foster parents felt, especially when their children's behaviour differed significantly from their expectations or experiences with their biological children (Huntinghawk 2012).

In addition to internal struggles, these families also encountered external pressures, particularly in the form of racism and societal prejudice. Foster parents faced hurtful, racist attitudes from extended family members and close friends, which added another layer of difficulty to their parenting journey (Huntinghawk 2012). This prejudice often forced parents to be more protective and conscious of how their children were perceived and treated by

others. (Huntinghawk 2012) Despite these challenges, parents remained fiercely protective of their children, striving to shield them from racism while grappling with the complexities of their own emotions (Huntinghawk 2012). The concept of reunification with biological parents presented another set of challenges, as foster parents navigated mixed emotions towards the possibility of these reunions (Huntinghawk 2012). Although some foster parents supported their child's quest to connect with their biological family, it was reported that this process was fraught with uncertainty and the fear of the potential to reopen emotional wounds (Huntinghawk 2012).

5.3 | Family of Origin

Only one study documented the experiences of parents whose children were placed into foster care in the United States (Herzberg 2020). This study established that the child protection system is complicated, and the goal of foster placement should be to return children to their parents. However, not enough has been done by the child welfare system in that jurisdiction to promote this goal (Herzberg 2020). Grief, loss, systemic racism and historical trauma were all identified as a part of the family of origin's experience with the child welfare system. Herzberg (2020) proposed that prioritizing ongoing research on all facets of foster care, including the experiences of biological parents, is crucial for society to effectively address these issues in a professional manner.

5.4 | Cultural Value

Three articles were categorized under the subtopic of cultural value (Brown et al. 2010; Higgins et al. 2006; Watson 2010), and three were organized here as a secondary subtopic (Day et al. 2021; Denby et al. 2015; Oliver 2020). Cultural value was used to describe literature that specifically focused on the importance and influence of, need for, and oftentimes lack of cultural support Indigenous children and care providers face while in care. Oliver (2020) asked how foster parents support the relational and cultural connections of Indigenous children in care. Brown et al. (2010) investigated the benefits of fostering children who have different values, beliefs and traditions, whereas Denby et al. (2015) aimed to learn more about the intersections between ethnicity, perceptions of well-being, stress and strain experienced by care providers in a kinship care-based relationship. Across all five of these articles, one message remained the same: that cultural connection and involvement are vitally important for both the care provider and Indigenous children in care (Brown et al. 2010; Day et al. 2021; Denby et al. 2015; Oliver 2020; Watson 2010).

5.4.1 | Cultural Value and Foster Families

The ability to ensure cultural connection for Indigenous children in care was noted as a great point of stress for foster families (Day et al. 2021). Interestingly, many articles spoke about the powerful influence that a foster family's willingness to involve themselves with Indigenous culture has on the child's experience (Brown et al. 2010; Day et al. 2021; Denby et al. 2015; Oliver 2020). Brown et al. (2010) suggested that non-Aboriginal foster parents should be asked about their understanding of children from Aboriginal-identifying families and communities and their willingness to put additional efforts into the care of those foster children. Evaluations of potential foster parents should encompass their eagerness to learn about different cultures, openness to diversity and readiness to support the child in participating in cultural practices aligned with their heritage (Brown et al. 2010). This approach may safeguard foster children from placements that could restrict their cultural engagement (Brown et al. 2010).

In Manitoba, Canada, Watson (2010) investigated whether a workshop titled 'Perpetuating Colonization of Aboriginal People' could reduce negative racial attitudes and enhance foster parents' adoption of inclusive care strategies. Despite 91% of foster parents participating in cultural awareness training, Watson (2010) found a significant disparity between training and practical implementation of culturally appropriate resources for children in their care. Notably, the most inclusive activity to promote cultural connection for Indigenous children in care was inviting a child's family of origin into the foster home for visiting; yet it was also the least common, suggesting that persistent racial attitudes within foster care settings may inhibit cultural connection (Watson 2010).

Further supporting the importance of connecting with families of origin, Oliver (2020) suggested foster families facilitate homecoming trips to the child's territory. These visits were shown to be beneficial for children by connecting with key relatives and the unique cultural knowledge within their community and assisted foster parents to enhance the child's relational and cultural connection. Indigenous foster parents who are connected to cultural knowledge, practices and community proved to provide additional benefits for the children in their care (Oliver 2020). Cultural connections are more easily supported when Indigenous foster parents can visit children's traditional territories and utilize their own initiative, lived experiences and a variety of multi-purpose and school-based cultural engagement opportunities (Oliver 2020). Higgins et al. (2006) explored the perspectives of caregivers of Indigenous youth regarding their experiences, needs and challenges. Care providers highlighted a demand for cultural mentoring, support in navigating interactions with the child's biological family and training in cultural sensitivity (Higgins et al. 2006).

5.5 | Placement Factors and Options

Two articles fell under the subtopic of placement factors and options (Hanna et al. 2017; Harbour 2014), and one was placed here as a secondary subtopic (Begay and Wilczynski 2018). Articles were placed under this subtopic if they focused on barriers to Indigenous children being placed in care, described information about placement options or discussed actual recruitment efforts for placement options. Research questions here included: What are the targeted recruitment efforts for increasing the percentage of foster and adoptive families who are Indigenous? (Hanna et al. 2017); what are the differences in programme delivery and outcomes for two separate foster care programmes in Oregon state? (Harbour 2014); what are the barriers to recruiting Native American foster homes in urban areas?

(Begay and Wilczynski 2018). Across these articles, one message was strongly noted: Historical trauma, broken promises, lack of trust, systemic racism and unclear communication are huge barriers to recruitment efforts and placement options for Indigenous children within the welfare system (Begay and Wilczynski 2018; Hanna et al. 2017; Harbour 2014). Efforts to provide placement options will continue to fail unless Indigenous peoples are met with an opportunity to build meaningful and collaborative relationships with the government and with social workers (Begay and Wilczynski 2018).

5.6 | System Factors

Three articles fell under the subtopic of system factors (Grzybowski 2012; Johnston et al. 2002; Spence 2004). Articles were placed under this subtopic if they focused on agencies, policy and practice or if they described models of service delivery. Research questions here focused on the importance of culturally sensitive and community-driven approaches in child welfare practices: providing cultural planning for Indigenous children; incorporating Indigenous perspectives and leadership in decision-making; and developing policies that support kinship care while prioritizing cultural connections and family continuity (Grzybowski 2012; Johnston et al. 2002; Spence 2004).

Johnston et al. (2002) proposed that following a model centred on elder wisdom and teachings, provision of support during crises and interventions to enhance the well-being of children and biological families are essential for improving experiences within the Indigenous child welfare system. Furthermore, there is a recognized need to incorporate adequate financial resources for culturally appropriate services and supports, as well as worker training on the history of Aboriginal people and effective methods to support children in care (Grzybowski 2012). Lastly, there is a need for a distinct policy, specifically for kinship care, that eliminates the usual expectations associated with foster care practices and replaces them with a system that emphasizes family of origin and cultural connection as a key strategy in supporting children in care (Spence 2004). This change would undoubtedly encourage more family support.

6 | Discussion

This scoping review aimed to explore research on child welfare care providers' experiences in caring for Indigenous children and youth. Due to the many overlapping themes and results within the literature reviewed, it is important to recognize the interplay each topic has with each other. Key findings included frequent reports of inadequate cultural support, significant mistrust of the child welfare system, financial strain on Indigenous care providers, the critical need for cultural connections and the barriers imposed by a Western approach to childcare and protection. Kinship care from a grandfather's perspective was not seen, nor was a foster father's experience specifically documented. Additionally, it was not discussed how intergenerational trauma may be impacting care providers' and children's experiences within kinship care, as their grandparents and/or parents may have endured residential schools and the Sixties Scoop. Indigenous care providers may have also experienced removal and placement in child welfare as a child. These factors would undoubtedly affect their experiences with care providing. Of the 24 articles included in this review, only one focused specifically on the experiences of the parents of Indigenous children that were taken into the system (Grzybowski 2012). With only this one source investigating Indigenous families of origin and their experiences with child protection, it is clear more research that privileges their perspectives on interacting with the child welfare system is warranted. Métis families were only represented in one article (Brown 2017), as were Inuit/Alaskan Native peoples (Johnston et al. 2002).

Optimistically, Figure 2 displays an increasing frequency of Indigenous authorship beginning to take shape; but we caution that the final column, which shows that all sources in that time span did include Indigenous authors, represents only a 2- not 5-year duration like the other columns. However, much more Indigenous scholarship is needed, especially so with Indigenous methodologies. Only finding one article that used an Indigenous methodology highlights the necessity of advancing research within an Indigenous paradigm. Future research coming from Indigenous researchers and communities will contribute more knowledge and identify culturally relevant solutions that centralize relationality, multigenerational impacts and broader community development strategies (Blackstock 2009).

7 | Recommendations

An overarching recommendation is that a child's culture needs to be respected and supported, regardless of where or with whom they are placed. Research pertaining to Indigenous peoples generally should be done in close partnership with the community so as not to perpetuate bias and exclusion. Moreover, doing so in the form of Indigenous-led research and methodology will provide a more nuanced and in-depth exploration into how Indigenous peoples have been impacted by the child welfare system, as well as the interventions and preventions that need to occur to decrease the rate at which Indigenous children and youth are removed. Further research conducted by Indigenous groups that control policy and procedure surrounding the Indigenous welfare systems could aid in the development of best practices and approaches taken when working alongside Indigenous communities and families. Below, specific recommendations are presented for the different subtopics, noting that there is some overlap between them.

7.1 | Caregiver Experience

Partnerships with birth parents are critical to promoting placement stability and permanency. They aid both Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster parents to expose and support cultural knowledge and languages and better equip them to identify and relate to a child's culture (Day et al. 2021; Ivanova and Brown 2010). There is a significant gap between cultural training and the actual practice of supporting cultural needs for Indigenous children in care, suggesting that child welfare providers should track cultural matching of placements to address the discrepancy between ethnicity of foster care providers and the children for whom they provide care (Watson 2010).

Recognizing kinship carers, particularly grandparents, as 'experts' can help to resolve some of the respect and trust issues within the child welfare system (Irizarry et al. 2016). Research efforts should focus on exploring the evolving experiences of custodial grandparents over time including the unique perspectives of custodial grandfathers; investigating the experiences of Indigenous grandparents who have interacted with the child welfare system; exploring the crucial role of Indigenous grandmothers in caregiving; and breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma (Hill 2016). Healthcare providers, social workers, and foster care agencies must address the cultural needs of Indigenous foster parents and foster children, as both groups of individuals have stressed the importance of cultural preservation efforts (Herrera-White 2008). There is a critical need for research in policy development and service delivery improvements to explore supportive and culturally safe practices in kinship care (McPherson et al. 2022). Additionally, there is a demand for timely financial assistance, practical and emotional support, respectful relationships between departmental staff and caregivers and comprehensive preparation for the caregiving role (Higgins et al. 2006).

7.2 | Cultural Value

This review highlights the importance of culture and cultural connections for Indigenous children in the child welfare system. One recommendation is to organize homecoming trips to a child's territory. These trips have proven beneficial for foster parents in strengthening a child's cultural and relational bonds post-visit while also facilitating connections for Indigenous children with important family members and cultural knowledge specific to their community (Oliver 2020). The recruitment of Indigenous foster parents who are connected to their own cultural knowledge, practices and community was also recommended (Oliver 2020). Foster parents can facilitate cultural connections by visiting their children's birth lands and using their initiative, lived experience and a variety of school-based and multi-purpose cultural engagement options (Oliver 2020). Specialized services, cultural mentorship, school-based support services, unofficial supports, planning for transitioning out of foster care, services for the biological families of the children, collaboration with agencies, connections with caseworkers, supporting contact with the child's biological family, readiness for caregiving, training and cultural sensitivity training are all necessary (Higgins et al. 2006).

Assessments of foster parents should include receptivity to diversity, interest in learning about another culture and willingness to help children engage in practices that are consistent with their culture in order to promote transcultural arrangements that protect foster children from the potential for a placement where they are not allowed to participate in their culture (Brown et al. 2010). Non-Aboriginal foster parents should be specifically questioned about their willingness to foster with these additional conditions and their knowledge of the culture to which the children belong (Brown et al. 2010).

7.3 | Placement Factors and Options

The most significant lesson learned from the diligent recruitment efforts of one study pointed to the importance of taking the time to develop a strong, trusting, mutual and collaborative relationship with the community the agency serves (Hanna et al. 2017). Recruitment efforts may be severely hampered by the community's long-standing mistrust of the child welfare system and its agencies, especially among Indigenous communities. Community leaders have a history of being frustrated and disappointed due to broken promises, slow responses and unclear communication, even though they may be willing to build a relationship (Hanna et al. 2017). Communities are more likely to accept the child welfare agency's presence if it presents itself with an attitude of servitude, admits its mistakes and maintains a consistent dedication to working together (Hanna et al. 2017). After placement, the foster care system's staff may focus on providing resources and support to help transcultural foster parents meet their informational and training needs while also helping the foster children get the outside help and relationships they require to stay connected to their cultural community (Brown et al. 2010).

7.4 | System Factors

Johnston et al. (2022) identified the need for a model that focuses on the guidance and teachings of elders, offers support during times of crisis and includes interventions aimed at enhancing the well-being of both children and families. The provision of operating funds for Aboriginal agencies seems to be at the forefront of all cultural planning, and evidence suggests that the federal government does not adequately fund provincial or Aboriginal child welfare agencies to enable them to offer culturally relevant services (Grzybowski 2012). Although programmes and policies designed to support the rise in kinship care are still very fragmented and limited, they indicate a growing recognition on the part of state and federal governments regarding the critical needs of children and relatives who are carers (Spence 2004).

8 | Limitations

Despite the comprehensive findings described within this review, limitations are noted. A significant one was the inability to review books and book chapters. This decision led to great deal of literature being missed from the review, an omission that is significant because Indigenous research is more likely to experience challenges with the peer review process due to epistemic discrimination and the privileging of the Western worldview (Williams and Shipley 2023). Consequently, a second review that is limited to books and edited volumes would be valuable. Another limitation concerned the labels given to each topic within the overarching review. The labelling process was at risk of subjectivity between the research assistants; however, to minimize this risk, each article was reviewed by at least two assistants, and specific criteria for the label were given to limit the potential for subjectivity. Additionally, articles were assessed multiple times during the data extraction process to confirm labelling. If reviewers disagreed in their assessments at any stage, a larger conversation was between team members to develop a consensus on inclusion and labelling. Due to the sheer size of the overarching review, reviewer fatigue was a concern when extracting data. Research assistants were encouraged to work closely together and take breaks to limit the degree of

fatigue they experienced. The high volume of search results also limited the capacity to search the reference lists of found sources. Last, there was interplay between the subtopics in this review that sometimes made it difficult to create specific categories for each specific heading.

9 | Conclusion

Cultural connection, caregivers' experiences, system factors and placement options and factors were the main topics discussed within the articles used in this scoping review. There were many overlapping themes within these subtopics, which required categorization of groups of care providers within each one. The most common areas of investigation presented connections between financial challenges and Indigenous care providers, non-Indigenous care providers and barriers to cultural connection, poor recruitment of Indigenous care providers and mistrust towards the welfare system. The most common recommendations included those that involved the implementation of Indigenous-run programmes, education of service workers and keeping youth connected to their family, community and culture. Indigenous knowledge and contributions were often not included in the research regarding Indigenous care providers. As more research is conducted on the positive and negative experiences care providers have while involved with the child welfare system, the incorporation and use of Indigenous knowledge and research conducted by Indigenous peoples will provide greater representation of the impacts children and youth are facing along with the actions required to reduce the rates they are removed from their families.

Author Contributions

Janice M. Victor conceptualized the main project. All authors contributed to this study's design and procedural development. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Amanda R. Ervin, Anika J. Dirk, Hannah I. Odekina, Fatemeh Sahlehi Shahrabi, Chloe E. Luck, Mary C. Greenshields and Janice M. Victor. The manuscript was drafted, revised and edited by Amanda R. Ervin, Anika J. Dirk and Janice M. Victor.

Ethics Statement

This scoping review does not require ethical approval. Data consisted of published articles in peer-reviewed journals, theses and dissertations, and grey literature research reports.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are in institutional libraries and the internet.

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