



**Barriers to Forensic Mental
Health Services:
Investigating Systemic Inequities for First Nations,
Inuit, and Métis People
in Manitoba**

M.A. Thesis Oral Defense
Sarah J.W. Brown
University of Manitoba
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Positionality





Presentation Overview

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Hypotheses
- 3 Methodology
- 4 Participants
- 5 Results
- 6 Discussion
- 7 Recommendations



Systemic Inequities faced by FNIM individuals

Overrepresentation in the Criminal Legal System (CLS)

- First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) people represent 25-35% of those incarcerated, 4-5% of the adult population
- The number of FNIM adults in custody increased by 22.5% between 2012-2022

High rates of mental health difficulties

- Suicide rate 2-9 times greater than non-Indigenous populations
- Rate of hospitalization for mental illness is 2-3 times greater

Intergenerational Impacts of Colonialism

Systemic Bias

- 1.34x more likely to be held in pre-trial custody
- 14% more likely to be found guilty
- 30% more likely to receive a custodial sentence
- Less likely to be able to access resources

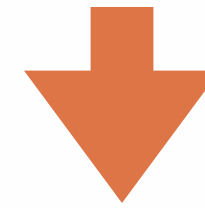
Social Determinants of Criminalization

- Placement in foster care
- Lower educational attainment
- Earlier contact with police
- Addiction and unsupported mental illness
- Living in/coming from disadvantaged location
- Homelessness



Ongoing impacts of Colonialism

biased and racist systems
unequal social factors
intergenerational trauma



Overrepresentation in CLS

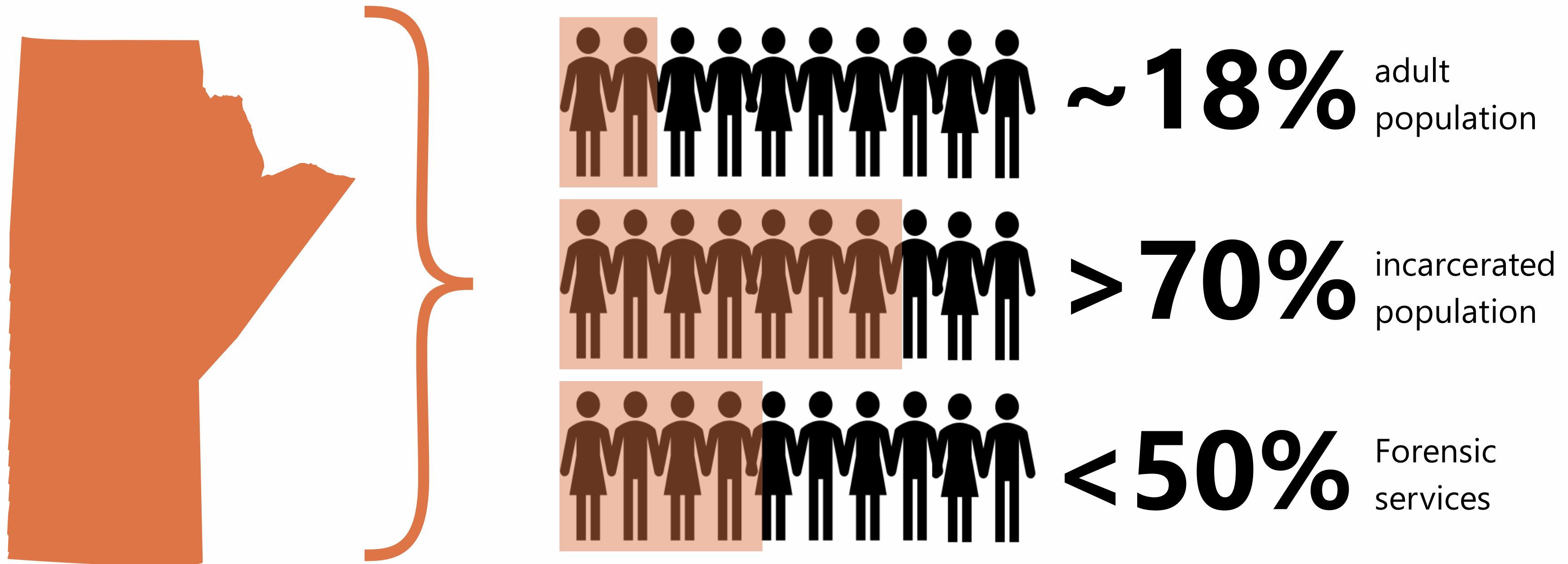
Mental health difficulties



FNIM individuals are underrepresented in Forensic Mental Health Services

(Boksa et al., 2015; Clark, 2019; Hanson et al., 2020; Kim, 2019; Meikle & Comack, 2024; Monchalin, 2016; Moyser, 2017; Nicholls et al., 2023; Perdacher et al., 2019; Reading & Wein, 2013; Snyder et al., 2024; TRC, 2015)

Forensic Mental Health Services in Manitoba





Research Question

Do FNIM individuals face systemic and social inequities that influence access to forensic services in Manitoba compared to White people, and at what stage of the pathway into forensic services (pre-forensic contact or during the forensic assessment process) do these disparities arise?



Objective 1: Pre-Forensic Contact

Do FNIM individuals face systemic and social inequities **prior to their contact** with forensic services that disproportionately impact their access to forensic services in Manitoba?

I hypothesized that FNIM individuals would...

- ① be **less likely to be referred** for court-ordered NCR assessments than White individuals
- ② be exposed to significantly **more social determinants of criminalization** at the time of referral for court-ordered NCR assessment than white individuals



Objective 2: During Forensic Assessment Process

Do FNIM individuals face systemic and social inequities **during the forensic assessment process** that disproportionately impact their access to forensic mental health treatment and services?

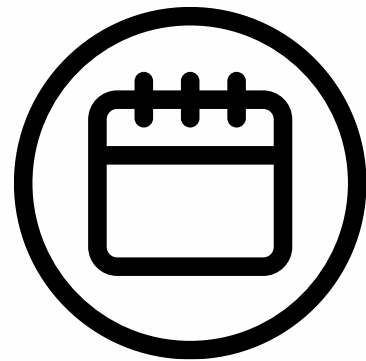
I hypothesized that...

- ① FNIM individuals would experience **longer periods of time** between assessment order and report completion than White individuals
- ② FNIM individuals would be less likely to have an **expert recommend NCR eligibility** compared to White individuals
- ③ The relationship between NCR recommendation and ethnicity would be **mediated by the total number of social determinants of criminalization**

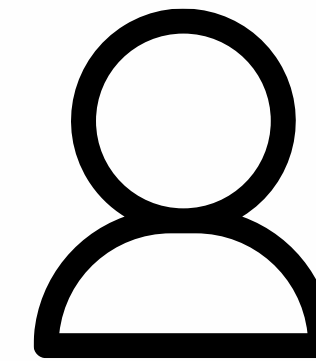
Sample



The data was drawn from a larger, retrospective review of Adult Forensic Service (AFS) in Manitoba, Canada



Referred for NCR assessment between January 1, 2003 and December 31, 2019



Ethnicity distinctly FNIM or White



$n = 222$

FNIM individuals



$n = 174$

White individuals



Procedure

Ethical Approval

University of
Manitoba Bannatyne
Research Ethics
Board (REB) in 2020

Research Assistants

Undergraduate and
graduate level
Research Assistants
from 2020-2022

Coding

Demographic,
mental health,
criminological, and
expert opinion data
drawn from forensic
files

Open Science

Research questions,
methodology & analysis
plan were pre-registered
on OSF:
[10.17605/OSF.IO/U2XKA](https://osf.io/U2XKA)

FNIM Research Consultation



- Consultation with members from the **North Hawk Elder Circle** to seek their guidance on research questions, study design, methodology, and analyses. Our partners advised me to:
 - Frame results in colonial and structural inequities
 - Focus on person-centered care, FNIM ways of healing, cultural safety
- A second consultation will take place following the defense

Variables of Interest

Ethnicity (Proxy)

FNIM, White

Social determinants of criminalization

Educational Attainment
Past/current substance use diagnosis
Early contact with CLS

Time between assessment order & completion

Time (in days) between assessment order and report completion

Expert recommendation of NCR-eligibility

NCR-eligible for one or more offences
Not eligible for NCR

Data Analysis: Preparation

Missing data & Outliers

- $n=5$ excluded due to $>10\%$ missing data
- First language and age at first diagnosis were not analyzed



Assumption checking

- Non-parametric alternatives used when assumptions violated



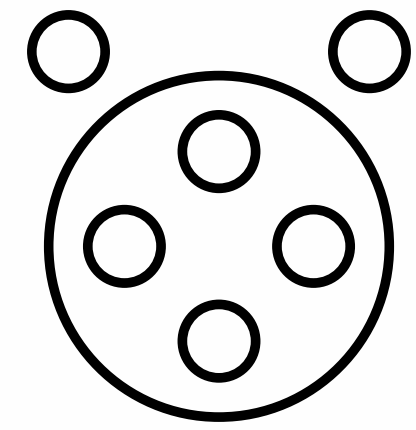
Exploratory Analyses

- Timing variable: pre-post 2013



Theoretical Considerations

- Temporal order of variables in mediation analysis
- Indirect and direct effects





Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses

H1

Frequencies

H2

Mann-Whitney U-test

H3

Mann-Whitney U-test

H4

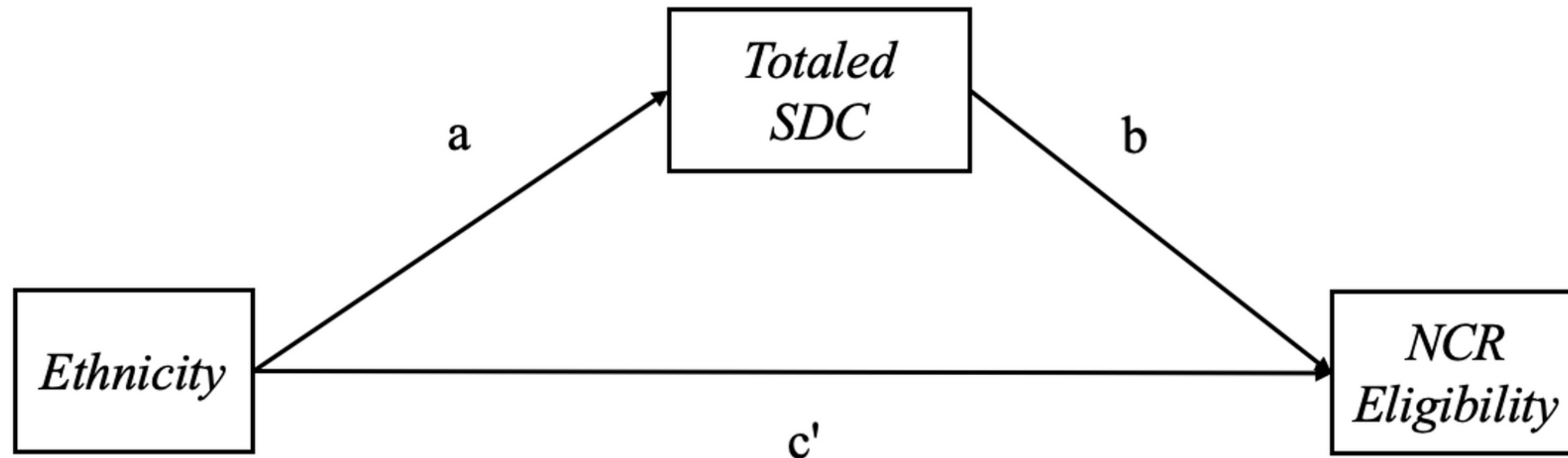
Chi-Square test

➔ Logistic regression controlling for age, index offence, primary mental health diagnosis, substance use at time of index offense

H5

Bootstrap mediation analyses

Mediation Model



a = the effect of independent variable on mediator

b = the effect of mediators on outcome variable

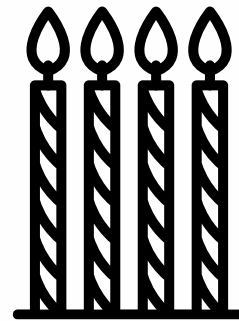
c' = the effect of the independent on the dependent variable

Participants ($N = 396$)



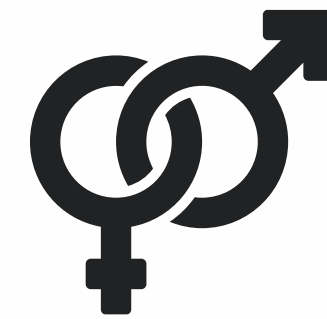
56%

FNIM individuals



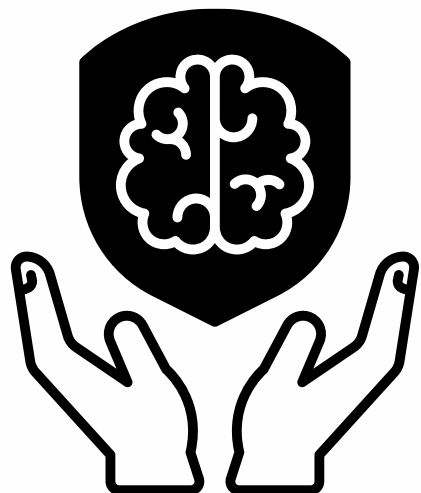
33.4

years old



82%

male



Diagnosed with:

- 46.0% psychotic disorder
- 23.5% personality disorder

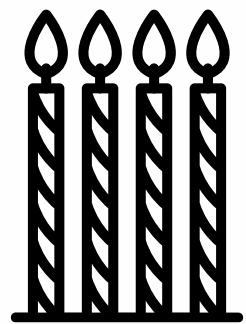


Most severe Index Offense

- Murder: 6.6%
- Assault: 43.4%

Victim in index offence: 83.8%

Sociodemographic, Clinical, and Criminological Characteristics of FNIM and White individuals

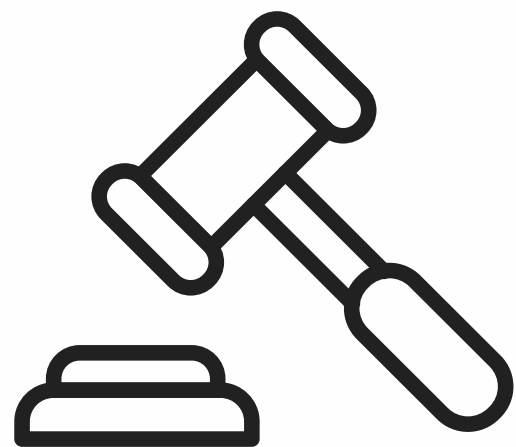


- **FNIM individuals were younger**

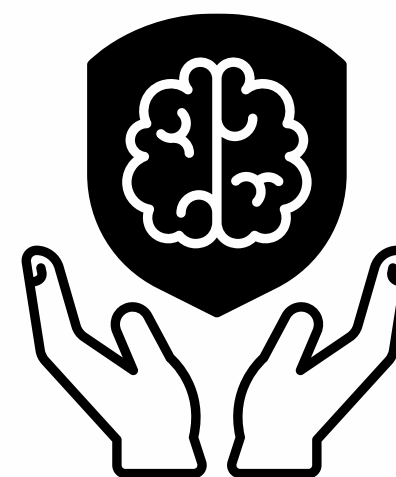
$M=29.50$ ($SD=9.91$) vs.
 $M=38.43$ ($SD=12.63$)



- **FNIM individuals were ~2x more likely to have a past or current substance-related diagnosis**
- **FNIM were more likely (63.5% vs 41.0%) to have been using substances during index offence**



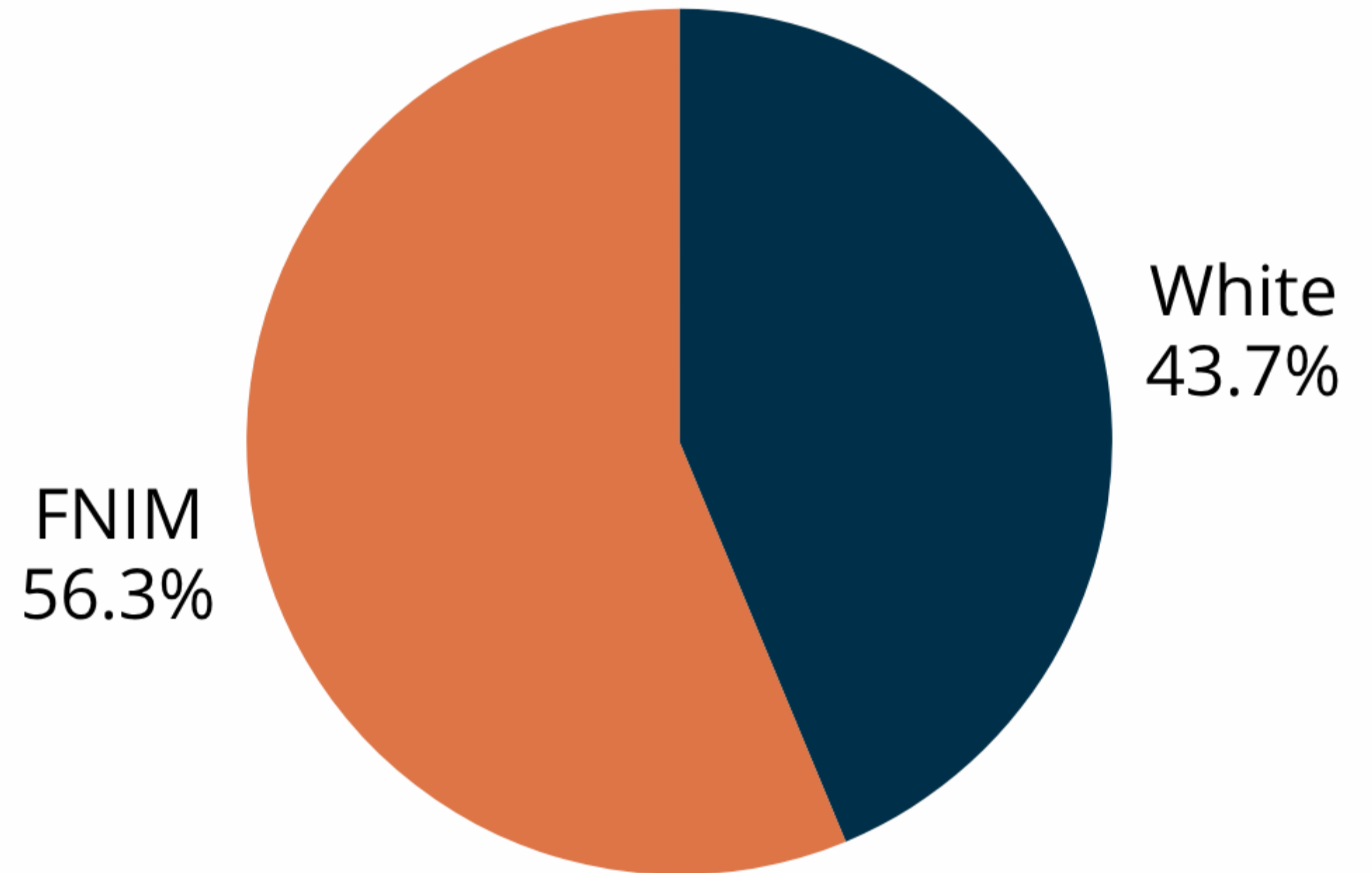
- No differences index offence murder/attempted murder/manslaughter or assault/aggravated assault



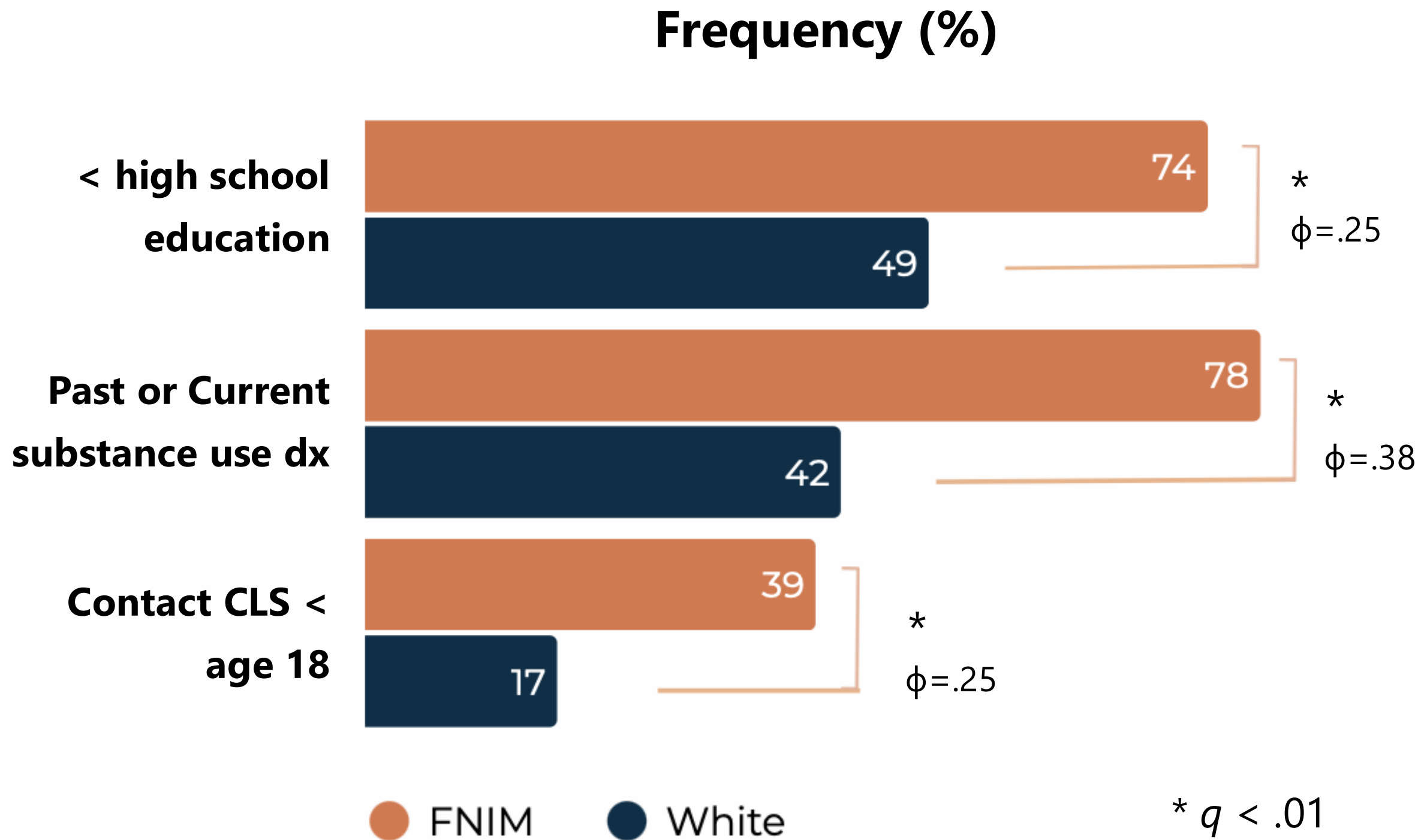
- **FNIM were more likely (10.4% vs 2.3%) to have Intellectual Disability/ Neurocognitive disorder**
- No differences regarding psychotic disorder

Pre-Contact Results: Court-ordered Referral for NCR Assessment

The likelihood of referral for NCR assessment **did not differ** between FNIM and White individuals



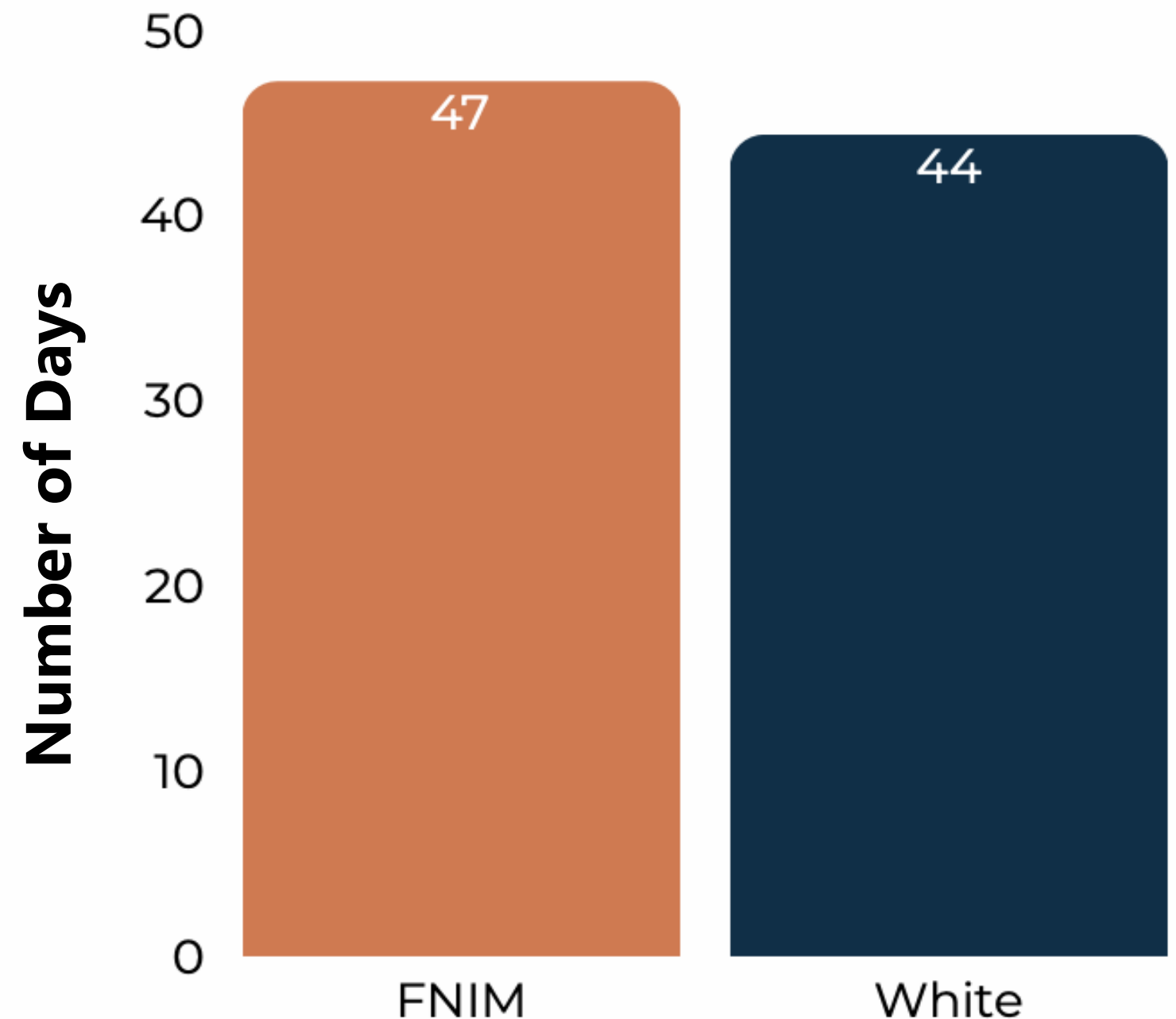
Pre-Contact Results: Social Determinants of Criminalization



FNIM individuals had **significantly more** ($M = 1.91, SD = 0.83$) **social determinants of criminalization** present at time of assessment as compared to White individuals ($M = 1.09, SD = 0.92; r = -.426; q = .002$)

Assessment Process Results: Wait Time for Assessment Completion

FNIM individuals **did not experience a significantly longer wait time** ($M = 47.23$; $SD = 34.73$) between assessment order and completion of court-ordered NCR assessment compared to White individuals ($M = 44.36$; $SD = 49.06$), $r = .10$; $q = .156$



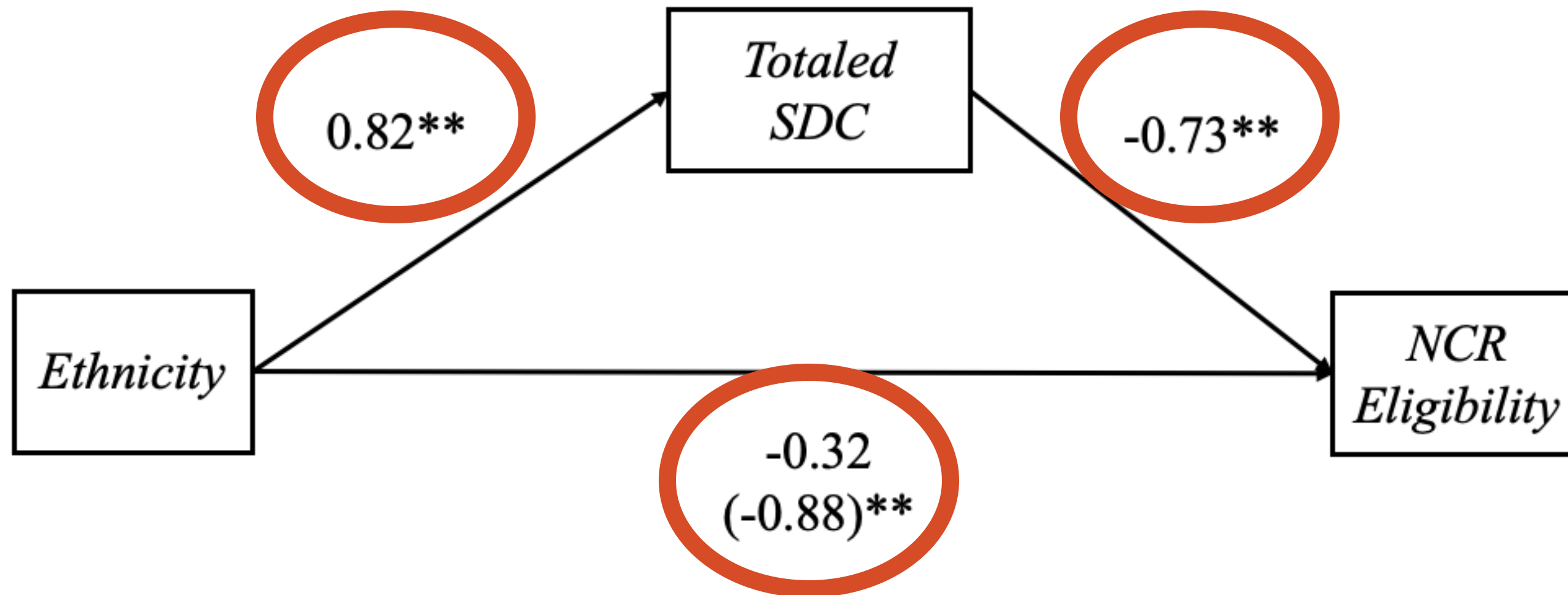
Assessment Process Results: Recommendation for NCR Eligibility

Variable	<i>B</i>	χ^2	<i>q</i>
Ethnicity: FNIM	-0.85	5.06	.047
Age	-0.01	0.23	.708
Substance Use at IO	-1.52	18.08	.002
Most Severe IO	--	9.42	.446
Diagnosis	--	28.76	.002

FNIM individuals were 57.1% less likely than White individuals **to be recommended for NCR eligibility** even after controlling for age, primary mental health diagnosis, substance use at time of offense, and most severe offense

Note. IO = Index offence. B = unstandardized beta coefficient; q-value = adjusted p-value after false discovery rate analysis. 1Reference category = murder, attempted murder, manslaughter; 2Reference category = psychotic disorder.






Mediation Analysis



Totalled SDC is the underlying mechanism through which ethnicity is linked to expert recommendation for NCR eligibility

** $q < .01$

Hypothesis Summary

Hypothesis	Support for Hypothesis
1 FNIM individuals would be less likely to be referred for court-ordered NCR assessments than White individuals	
2 FNIM individuals would be exposed to significantly more SDCs at the time of referral for court-ordered NCR assessment than white individuals	
3 FNIM individuals would experience longer periods of time between assessment order and report completion than White individuals	
4 FNIM individuals would be less likely to have an expert recommend NCR eligibility compared to White individuals	
5 The relationship between NCR-recommendation and ethnicity will be mediated by the total number of social determinants of criminalization	



Summary of Findings

- First study to examine **points along the pathway into forensic services** where FNIM individuals face barriers to accessing services
- **Systematic and structural barriers** are the underpinning mechanisms impacting FNIM individuals' access to forensic services

Pre-contact

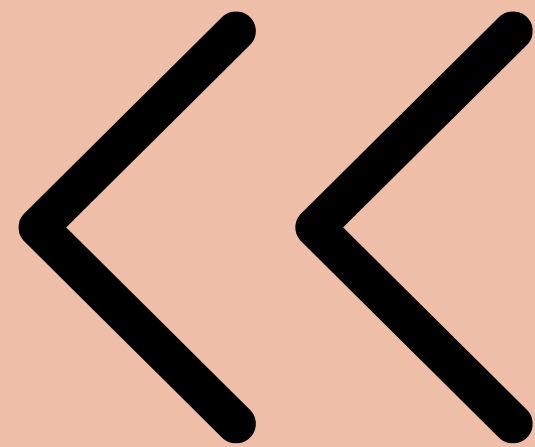
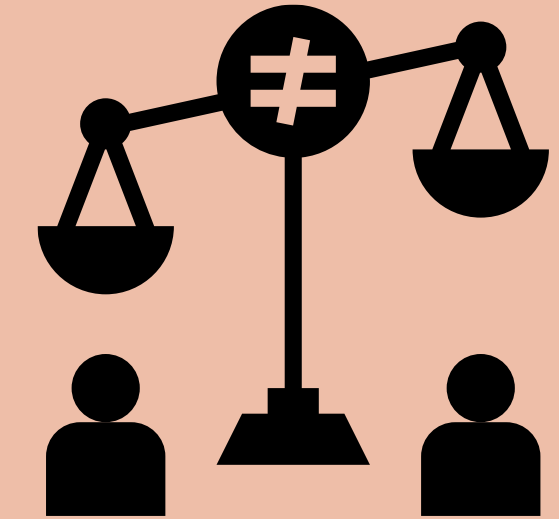
- Social determinants of criminalization (educational attainment, substance use diagnoses, early involvement in the CLS)
- Disproportionate referrals for assessment

During the assessment process


- When controlling for age, index offense, substance use at the time of the offense, or diagnosis, expert opinions on NCR eligibility still differed for FNIM individuals compared to White individuals

Take Home Messages

The same colonial legacies that increase an FNIM individual's risk of involvement in the CLS diminish their chances of receiving specialized mental health services



The forensic assessment process itself appears to be actively hindering reconciliation and equitable access to services



Study Considerations

Limitations

- Pan-Indigenous lens
- Operational definition of index offense severity, report quality
- Unmeasured confounding variables
- Missing data

Strengths

- Consultation with community
- Large sample size ($n = 396$)
- Broad scope of data
- FNIM versus White

Recommendations

Increase awareness of colonial legacies

- Legal training
- Outreach and education



Improve structural and cultural competency in assessment

- Psychology training
- Adapt assessment strategies



FNIM-led involvement + cultural safety in assessment

- Recruit FNIM employees
- Increase hours/resources



Alignment TRC Calls to Action

- Culturally safe model forensic mental health care
- Equity monitoring and reporting



Future Directions

- Meet with our partners from the North Hawk Elder Circle
- Examine barriers to accessing services in youth systems and individuals referred for fitness assessments
- Assess factors contributing to discrepancy in court-ordered referrals
- Examine if sociopolitical and colonial factors impact trajectory through services
- Assess presence and efficacy of culturally safe practices and environments in forensic services
- Assess the impact of covariates on the mediation model



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Study participants



University
of Manitoba



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Canada

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