

The cultural meaning of Sámi language, costume, and food to the Sámi, from the perspective of well-being

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ABSTRACT

The Sámi people, a northern indigenous people, have a statutory right to receive social and health services, which should take cultural characteristics into consideration. Cultural sensitivity is integral to the ethical principles of social and health care; however, based on previous research, the Sámi's cultural rights have not been recognised. To reinforce their language rights and develop culturally sensitive health care, research is needed to determine what Sámi cultural characteristics mean to Sámi people's well-being. The aim of this study was to describe and understand the meaning of cultural characteristics to the well-being of different generations of Sámi. In this research two Sámi experts described what the Sámi language, costume and food meant to them from a well-being perspective. Data-driven content analysis was applied to their responses. During everyday life, to the Sámi their cultural characteristics represent safety, awareness of one's roots, inner strength, the ability to be oneself, continuity, and communality. These meanings are interconnected with changing environment for the different generations and reflect Sámi people's lived experiences. Consideration of their cultural characteristics in the provision of social and health care will support the Sámi peoples' integrity and cultural uniqueness, empowering both individual Sámi and their society.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 21 March 2022
Revised: 22 August 2022
Accepted: 04 October 2022

KEYWORDS

Sámi; indigenous people;
well-being; health;
ethnography

Introduction

The Sámi people are the only ethnic group classified as an indigenous people in the European Union. There are approximately more than 370 million indigenous people living all over the world. Indigenous peoples descend from the population that originally inhabited a country; they are usually in a subdominant position, and their culture clearly differs from those of other people's living in the same area. In addition, by self-determination, indigenous peoples consider themselves indigenous [1]. According to the United Nations rather than to define indigenous peoples, the most fruitful approach is to identify, which includes self-identification as a fundamental criterion [2]. Indigenous peoples' perception of daily life, health and well-being is affected variously by their cultural characteristics [3,4]. Cultural characteristics are e.g. language, clothing, and traditional food, which are the subjects of this ethnographic research.

The Sámi people inhabit an area (Sápmi) extending from mid-Norway and mid-Sweden through northern Finland to the Kola Peninsula. The total Sámi population is estimated to be from 75 000 to 100 000, with majority living in Norway. In Finland, there are about

10000 Sámi, most of them living outside the Sámi Homeland. The main Sámi culture specific characteristics are relationship with nature, traditional livelihoods, language, food, costume, habits, and art [5]. The traditional Sámi livelihoods are fishing, gathering, handicrafts, hunting and reindeer herding. Reindeer herding is the most known Sámi culture symbol, even though all Sámi have never been reindeer herders [6]. The reindeer herding means to Sámi lifestyle and culture, traditions, and food. In Finland, most reindeer herders are not Sámi people, whereas in Norway and Sweden reindeer herding is legislated as Sámi livelihood [6].

Before the Second World War, Sámi culture was viewed as traditional, but after the Second World War Sámi culture experienced a period of refusal and denial. Until the 1960s and 1970s, Scandinavian assimilation policies threatened to destroy Sámi culture and language [7]. The colonial practices have varied at different times and in different places in Sápmi having many kinds of impacts to Sámi well-being and health across generations. This transgenerational trauma may undermine for example mental health and identity of Sámi youths [8,9].

Since the 1960s, the Sámi have started to defend their cultural uniqueness and have worked actively to

return and promote rights of their own and the other indigenous peoples. The past few decades represent a period of intensification of Sámi culture [7,10]. As a result, since the turn of the 1990s, the Sámi have been included in the constitutions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland as an indigenous people. The Sámi have constitutional rights as indigenous people to maintain and develop their language and culture. During last decades several acts concerning linguistics rights have been made, e.g. Language Act [11], the Acts of Patients' and Customs' Rights [12,13] and Health Care Act [14]. As a result of legislation, the formally discrimination has ended in Sápmi. However, several studies from Norway and Sweden have documented widespread ethnic discrimination, prejudices, and attitudes to both young and adult Sámi [9]. According to Hansen [9] there may be structural or systemic barriers in Sápmi that preclude Sámi people from attaining ethnic equality across main domains, e.g. education and health. In Finland, modernisation and constructing of welfare state have integrated Sámi people as a part of Finnish service system, where up to the last decades Sámi peoples' own language and culture have been less considered [9,15].

There are nine Sámi languages and three of them are spoken in Finland. Regarding revitalisation acts all Sámi languages are endangered to varying degrees [16]. Although there has been developmental work (e.g.17,18) regarding language rights, the Sámi Language Act has failed to materialise [19], nor have recommendations made in 2004–2006 been implemented [20]. According to Heikkilä *et al.*, many services are still unavailable in the Sámi language, highlighting the need to develop culturally sensitive practice [15,21]. Similar results have been found in studies in other Nordic countries [22–24].

A Sámi costume (*Gákti* in north Sámi language) is one of the most central cultural symbols of Sámi culture [10,25]. The roots of the *Gákti* are in everyday clothing suitable to Nordic circumstances and having gradually taken the shape of a cultural symbol, telling us stories about generations, kinship, change and continuity. The Sámi costume strengthens Sámi communities because of double communication. It is part of contemporary life and retains strong links to old Sámi traditions [25].

Traditional food is an essential part of health culture, including physical, mental, and social dimensions [26]. Elderly Sami experience well-being “by preparing and eating reindeer meat, which by some of the participants was regarded as the only *real food*” [27]. The dietary customs of northern indigenous peoples have changed over the last few decades [28,29], the consequences of which are visible as changes in the health of the population and the risk of falling ill [30]. According to Casi [31],

traditional Sami food and livelihoods relate to the natural environment and are part of their way of life; they are interlinked with the Sami people's identity and dignity. According to research identifying dietary patterns of inhabitants in north Norway, ethnicity did not play a major role in predicting patterns, even though the reindeer pattern was emphasised in the inland areas where more than 70% of the subjects had strong Sámi background [32]. Kvitberg's ethnographic research reflects on the relationship between food, health, and body in the context of efforts to maintain a traditional lifestyle that is threatened by an encroaching state politics. According to her research the stories of Nordic indigenous people reflects the pain being the result of discrimination. For example, lack of access to local food can intensify elderly women's feelings of marginalisation [33].

Sámi people now have the statutory right to live in accordance with their own culture but, to our knowledge, Sámi health and well-being as cultural phenomena have not previously been studied within the field of nursing science in Finland, and very little in other northern countries. This study is part of an ethnographic research project with the aim of describing and understanding Sámi health as a cultural phenomenon [34–36]. We will explore the deeper cultural meanings of daily activities that were essential from the point of view of well-being: Sámi language, Sámi costume and Sámi food. To reinforce their language rights and develop culturally sensitive health care, research is needed to determine what Sámi cultural characteristics mean to Sámi people's well-being. In this study, health is seen as a phenomenon related to Sámi culture and as a part of their everyday life; for example, as nutritional habits, clothing, and a possibility to use Sámi language. Health as a cultural phenomenon signifies acquired conceptions, habits and customs of different peoples, populations or ethnic groups regarding health, health promotion and health care [37,38]. The cultural viewpoint of health also implies the principal of multiculturalism in organising welfare services [39], recognition of cultural factors concerning nursing and nursing societies, i.e. culture sensitivity [40], and intercultural competence as a requirement for health care professionals [41].

Aim

The research methodology was devised to answer the following research questions.

- (1) What does Sámi language mean to Sámi from the perspective of well-being?
- (2) What does Sámi costume mean to Sámi from the perspective of well-being?

- (3) What does Sámi food mean to Sámi from the perspective of well-being

Methods

Participants and data collection

The study was carried out using ethnographic fieldwork method, as described by Hammersley and Atkinson [42] and Roper and Shapira [43]. According to the classic ethnography the researcher (the first author) lived several periods in the Sámi area, which included home stays of varying lengths of periods, and took part in Sámi peoples' everyday life activities and festive occasions. After the intensive fieldwork period (years 2001–2007), the two interviews of this study were conducted in 2009.

The participants represented two generations of Sámi people, one having been born in the 1940s and one in the 1980s. Both participants were female, and they were selected based on their suitability as determined by the researcher. In presenting the results, the participants are referred to as Sámi experts, to signify their role in this study. During the interviews, we explored the deeper cultural meanings of daily activities that were essential from the point of view of well-being: Sámi language, Sámi costume and Sámi food.

The interviews were relatively informal conversations guided by the research themes [42,43]. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, because the researcher's (the first author) Sámi language skills were not sufficient. The researcher's studies of Sámi language and culture helped her to communicate with Sámi people, and some short Sámi language conversations were held in the area. Both interviewees spoke and understood Finnish without problems.

The first participant, born in the 1940s, was interviewed at the participant's residence and the interview took 80 minutes. The second participant, born in the 1980s, was interviewed at the researcher's workplace, and the interview took 60 minutes. According to Hammersley and Atkinson [42], an ethnographer gathers "whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry". To support the interview data and its analysis, photographs, and fictional and non-fictional literature regarding Sámi culture, including newspaper articles and TV documentaries, were used, as well as the practical experience gained of the researcher as a health care teacher in the Sámi area. Although the supporting data was not analysed it may have indirect influence on the findings.

Data analysis

Data-driven content analysis (e.g. 43) was used, and categorised by theme. The interviews were listened to and transcribed immediately after they had been held. When both interviews were transcribed, the tapes were listened to several times to form an idea of the material. Consequently, the data was reduced, classified, and themed. After thematic coding, the data was simplified and grouped into subcategories that linked the main categories (themes). Table 1 provides an example of the analysis trajectory. The results were based on direct quotations from the interviewees' responses.

Ethical considerations

As the target of the study was an indigenous people with a minority status, the research plan was submitted to the Finnish Sámi Parliament for ethical consideration. The Sámi Parliament recommended contacting the Sámi social and health care association, which gave approval. It was significant that the researcher was acquainted with the Sámi people's history, culture, and language [42]: the researcher prepared herself for the fieldwork by studying the Sámi language and culture and familiarising herself with the research environment and the Sámi living in the area [35].

Participation in the study was agreed by telephone. During the telephone conversation, background information about the study was provided, and the more specific purpose and themes of the proposed interviews. The participants took part voluntarily, and their anonymity was guaranteed. Both participants viewed the research positively.

Results

We have used several quotes in the results section. All the quotes are taken from the two interviewees.

Sámi language from the point of view of well-being

The two Sámi experts spoke both Sámi and Finnish, and one of them also spoke Norwegian. One of the participants had studied the Sámi language and had received Sámi lessons. For both, Sámi was the language spoken at home; Finnish and Norwegian were used as required when communicating with others. The participants were sufficiently bilingual that they could even switch language in the middle of a sentence.

Table 1. An example of the progress of analysis of interview data.

The study question	Original expressions	Reduced expressions	Subcategory	Main category/theme
What does Sámi language mean for Sámi?	In Finnish one cannot express one's inner matters. Language of thoughts and feelings. A person can acquire things better in one's own language.	Possibility to discuss inner matters	Tool with to communicate holistically	Overall communication
	It is the norm that family matters and difficult issues are not discussed with outsiders. An expert of one's own culture can interpret this and organise services accordingly. Important care instructions were misunderstood. When the subject is not understood, one cannot follow the instructions. The content of terms was not understood. First, they have to be translated into one's own language. My own appreciation has risen. Would not be in contact with the relatives. Sámi language connects to the family. I could not communicate with my relatives if I did not speak Sámi.	Everything does not have to be expressed through words Difficulties in understanding	Cultures inner codes Being understood Having understood	Intercultural communication Safety
		Connecting the relatives over boundaries. Relatives, family, tradition and roots	Becoming part of a larger entity	Belonging together Continuity

The perspective of a Sámi expert born in the 1940s

Sámi had been the interviewee's only language until school age. It was the only language spoken at home, and communication with the grandchildren was in Sámi. Sámi was the predominate language in the workplace, but work-related correspondence was mainly in Finnish, giving rise to some challenges: *"When it comes to writing in Finnish, I struggle a lot – I still write like I think in Sámi"*.

From the point of view of well-being, the Sámi language meant overall and intercultural communication and safety for her. The Sámi language is the *"language of thoughts and feelings and the possibility to express things as one experience them oneself"*. Using the native language involves understanding the inner cultural symbols, which is important, for instance, for patient–nurse relationships. The norm in Sámi culture is that internal family matters are not discussed with an outsider. Another Sámi expert, however, can intuitively understand incidental messages during a conversation. *"It is the norm that family matters and difficult issues are not discussed with outsiders. An expert of one's own culture can interpret them and organize services accordingly"*.

"For Sámi it is important that everything does not have to be expressed through words".

Within the Finnish health care service, there is *"a true risk of both sides misunderstanding the other"*, especially with older Sámi people. According to the interviewee, this is because you think and translate in your mind all the time, based on what has been said in your own language and trying to understand the subject in your own language.

Another risk of misunderstanding arises from the time allocated to services. The traditional Sámi concept of time differs substantially from the western concept of time. The issue of being understood has been discussed with many Sámi, and enabling Sámi to use their own language would improve customer orientation, effectiveness, and quality:

"From society's point of view, it is not effective either if one ends up in a spiral of expensive care because the instructions were misunderstood".

"Not just the language – but when and what kinds of things can be raised. Even though one does not speak the language, a cultural understanding; sensitivity and understanding should be required so that no doors are closed".

The perspective of a Sámi expert born in the 1980s

The home language of the second interviewee was also Sámi and she became familiar with Finnish during childhood *"through talking with the children in the village and through TV"*. In grade school, Sámi children were taught

more Sámi, and in secondary school religion, history, biology, and geography were taught in Sámi. The interviewee's current *"everyday life is bilingual, with friends I speak Northern Sámi, with Finns Finnish, at home Sámi and partly Finnish, with an emphasis however on Sámi"*.

The Sámi language had added value to her life: *"My own appreciation has grown. Nowadays I value Sámi language very much because in everyday life I am part of an environment where Sámi is not the main language"*. Friends' attitudes were mainly appreciative, although there was some denigration. Sámi language meant feeling involved and belonging to a society: *"Sámi language emphasizes the family; I would not be able to communicate with my relatives if I did not speak Sámi. There would be no communication with the family"*.

Sámi language also reinforced and provided meaning to life: *"It is a part of the culture"*. It provided a temporal perspective to everyday life: it refers to *"roots and traditions"* and represents a *"shared identity over the state boundary too"*. Both interviewees thought that the Sámi language has a positive future. Using their own language *"reinforces inwardly both the individual and the whole Sámi community"*.

The Sámi costume from the point of view well-being

The perspective of a Sámi expert born in the 1940s

Everyday clothing is influenced by the person's age; according to all the data in the study part of the oldest Sámi generations wears the Sámi costume every day. On festive occasions regardless of age or gender everyone wears a Sámi costume. The interviewee wore the Sámi costume *"less in everyday life but always on festive occasions"*. Sámi clothing showed and reinforced their identity: *"Sámi costume is more than a piece of clothing; it is a part of me"*. When wearing Sámi clothing, Sámi feel more themselves, who they really are; complete, secure, and natural.

"I feel myself whole when I am wearing my own costume".

"It is easier and safer to express matters to outsiders when you are wearing your own costume".

"The costume is part of me, I could not even think of anything else when I am going to a wedding or a christening".

The Sámi costume represented wordless communication from the wearer's standpoint: *"Based on the costume we can see where the person is from and which family the person belongs to. Little details count too"*. It was extremely important that different costumes from different areas were not mixed up, particularly the costumes of men and women. *"This can happen to a person"*.

who is not familiar with the costume culture – for Sámi this will not happen". At school, the interviewee had been ridiculed for wearing Sámi clothing. For this reason, his/her children were given the newest designer clothes, in line with the national population. On festive occasions, however, they always wore Sámi clothing.

The perspective of a Sámi expert born in the 1980s

A typical view in a Sámi village was that the majority's clothing had elements from the original Sámi costume, scarf, headgear, or footwear. *"I tend to wear a shawl, a scarf, a nutukhai (shoes made from reindeer skin) – in everyday life I combine Sámi clothing with Lanta (Finnish) clothing ... and if there is something special in the workplace, I put on the Sámi costume"* – also described the expert, born in the 1980s. For a younger Sámi, Sámi clothing held largely the same meaning as for an older person. In everyday life, the interviewee combined Lanta (Finnish) clothes with Sámi clothes but *"ahku (grandmother) wears Sámi clothing on a daily basis"*. However, the Sámi costume was still part of her identity, and indicated to herself and outsiders what her roots were:

"They immediately see where you are from".

"I get a feeling when I am wearing the costume that I belong to somewhere, I have a tradition that I can carry on. At least I belong to somewhere, I have roots".

Younger people had been taught that *"with the scarf you have to be really dignified, arrange riskut (silver brooches) really well so that they are in the right place"*, and that the accessories are used in accordance with the current situation: *"riskut (silver brooches) vary, for example at a funeral there are not many riskut (silver brooches)"*.

The Sámi food from the point of view of well-being

The perspective of a Sámi expert born in the 1940s

The Sámi food meant especially the continuity and learning of traditions. The interviewee described Sámi food as: *"Meat soup is surely one of these, the reindeer loin soup is then of course in another league. Then about reindeer's shinbones. That marrow, you must get it. I am ready to give up any food but not that, and that is what my grandchildren have learned to eat too. A child must learn to eat meat soup ... to grab that bone from the soup. Then there is of course dried meat in the spring and smoked meat in the autumn that is smoked in the laavu a grill hut."*

The main food ingredients were: *"Salted fish ... either powan or char – powan on this side (of the Sámi area). Reindeer meat depending on the season: reindeer loin soup, sautéed reindeer, roasted, cooked, minced.*

Reindeer meat, fish, bread, grits, carrots sometimes, rarely tomatoes and cucumber. Rutabaga is usually the vegetable that we buy. We are trying to learn to use lower fats. Eggs we do eat sometimes".

The main dish of the Sámi living in the Sámi area on weekdays and during festive occasions consisted of reindeer or fish. For Sámi meat equals reindeer meat. Reindeer was used as nutrition in several ways: sautéed reindeer, reindeer soup, reindeer loin soup, minced in a macaroni casserole, sausages, smoked, reindeer tongue, liver steak or fried on a fire. The utilisation of reindeer as nutrition and other items in a versatile manner Sámi are showing respect to the reindeer: *"It would be shameful to throw away some parts of it (reindeer) for the ravens to eat"*.

The perspective of a Sámi expert born in the 1980s

During the week, the younger Sámi ate a combination of Sámi and Finnish food; for example, *"My dining habits have changed but when I leave home, I take reindeer meat with me. I make Finnish versions from it"*. Sámi food meant reindeer meat and fish, and few vegetables. The meaning of Sámi food encompassed the origin of the food and something that had been earned through work:

"Work and the effort that has been made to earn the food and that one knows where it has come from. In a way you take care of them (reindeer) and make the effort, you know that. You appreciate that you know where it came from. You know exactly and you have put in the effort for it".

Sámi food also implied social values: *"I like when my mother makes reindeer sausages, they are outrageously good. Reindeer tongue ... smoked meat is quite good ... it is an awesome feeling when my dad is smoking the meat in the yard, and I am waiting inside"*.

Discussion

This study was a continuation part of an ethnographic field research made in Finland's Sámi area in the years 2000–2007 [34–36]. According to ethnography approach, the fieldwork started with quite open research plan and the research questions became more specific during the process [42]. The need to carry out this study raised at the stage an overall perception of health as a Sámi culture phenomenon had been constituted [36]. These two interviews were made held to elicit the views of Sámi people from different age groups and stages of life about the central cultural dimensions.

According to this study, for the older Sámi generation, the Sámi language is primarily the language of

thoughts, feelings and being understood. The native language as an inner language has been emphasised also by Sámi writers [10,44]. Humans perceive their world as feelings and images that are closely related to their native language; a foreign language does not have the same depth of meaning [44]. Younger Sámi are naturally bilingual; being understood is not as much of a problem for them, compared with older Sámi. For the younger Sámi, their own language represents belonging to the family and crossed state boundaries, adding value to their lives.

As a result of socioeconomic and technological development, and policies pursued by national states over the past few decades, the experience of current Sámi generations differs according to the prevailing Sámi culture of their time [3,8]. Until school age, the older generations only spoke Sámi, whereas for younger generations the prevailing non-indigenous language (Finnish) has been a part of their lives since before school age. For the older generations, the national language has come from the outside, replacing their native language in a “forced” way. The issue of language raised specific, difficult experiences for the post-war generations. Sámi children were taken from their homes to live in dormitories; they were placed in a completely different cultural environment, with a strange language, and were forbidden to use their own language at the risk of being punished [45]. In the Sámi area, there are still parents who find it challenging to support their children’s language and cultural skills, because of their own experiences [17]. Other northern indigenous peoples, for example the Canadian Inuit, have had the same type of experience: “kidnapping children into the civilisation” [45,46]. In contrast, for the younger generations, the national language has been encountered before school age in a more natural way, by playing with other children and watching TV. Those born in the 1980s have lived in an environment that is constantly trying to revive the Sámi language and culture.

This study confirms that the Sámi’s costume reinforces their identity (e.g. 10,25,47). For both age groups, Sámi clothing signifies a person’s place in the community, and in society in general. The Sámi costume displays the ethnic origin of an individual, to outsiders and to other Sámi people, indicating where they are from and what family they belong to. Moreover, wearing a Sámi costume strengthens an individual’s identity and supports the cultural tradition: “*I feel myself whole when I am wearing my own costume*”, told the older interviewee. Although everyday clothing for the Sámi can now be described as encompassing a cultural spectrum, there is still a generation for which the Sámi costume has always

been the only clothing. From the point of view of Sámi identity, this issue has been ignored in several Sámi care homes. “*When their clothing is a part of their identity, it can be asked, what is left of a person when they are dressed in pyjamas in a care home*”, asked the older interviewee. Conversely, however, for the older generation, wearing the Sámi costume is also associated with the burden of being bullied, along with using the Sámi language. In this study, interviewee born 1940s had dressed her school-age children exactly according to Finnish style. We can only consider the consequences for their Sámi identity and well-being.

Regarding dietary changes, traditional food has a remarkable role in the well-being of indigenous people [31,46]. This study confirms these results. Older generations prepare their food from traditional Sámi ingredients, occasionally complemented with other elements, such as vegetables, in line with official nutritional recommendations. Younger Sámi prepare Finnish versions of Sámi meals using traditional ingredients. Passing the food tradition from one generation to another and experiencing the family connection when preparing food is significant for all age groups.

In this study, health has been examined in the context of Sámi peoples’ everyday life and the Sámi culture. The Sámi people’s rights as indigenous people to have culture sensitive social and healthcare services has formed the background to this study. The two interviewees told us what Sámi language, costume and food means them from the point of well-being. According to this study the cultural characteristics are important part of Sámi peoples’ daily well-being. Sámi language, costume, and food, from the perspective of these two Sámi experts’ well-being, meant overall and intercultural communication, safety, awareness of one’s roots, inner strength, the ability to be oneself, continuity, and communality. As a summary of the results, the experiences of well-being are shaping Sámi values, wherein family and kinship are in core. In addition, perceived well-being relates to changing cultural environment, connection between identity, health and culture, and painful experiences of assimilation policies.

The validity of the study

The validity of this study is based on ethnographic research criteria: credibility, confirmability, reflectivity, and transferability [48,49]. Credibility was established by data and method triangulation, ensuring careful preparation before data collection, data collection from various sources using a variety of methods, and durable results. Confirmability was achieved by selecting research methods suitable for the study. Application

of the ethnography method facilitated investigation of the study's targeted phenomena in the context of the Sámi people's lived environment and experiences. Credibility and confirmability were supported by authentic representation within the research report of the Sámi participants' expressions.

Reflectivity was achieved by evaluating how the researcher biased her own data and research process. The idea and understanding of the phenomena under study were developed during the research period through critical thinking and contemplation. The transferability of the outcome to similar contexts will be decided by those using the study's results. The research process was carried out in the Sámi home area in cooperation with selected Sámi, and these findings need to be understood within a northern Finland context.

Study limitations

The small number of participants and interviews could be considered a limitation of the study. However, when using ethnography as a research method, i.e. a description of peoples' daily lives, a small number of participants, even just one or two, is acceptable [42]. Interviewing Sámi from two different generations deepened the knowledge gained in earlier stages of the research project and illustrated the context of well-being experience. At the time of interviews, the researcher had for over ten years' experience of cooperating with Sámi people in Sámi area. However, the interviews performed in Finnish may have had impacts on the nature of interaction between the researcher and interviewees [35].

The phenomena examined were bound up with the participants' lifestyles. Health and well-being from a cultural perspective are strongly context-sensitive phenomena. Giving voice to individuals from different generations enables us to rethink the meaning of cultural sensitivity, and what it includes, within the context of social and health care services. The timing of the interviews is a facet of the length of the research project, which is ongoing.

Conclusion

The data for this study was gathered during a period of Sámi culture intensification [7]; several acts have now been legislated [11–14], and accounts of Sámi people's rights for culturally sensitive social and health services have been published [15,17,18,20]. We have given voice to two Sámi experts, providing authentic stories from the beginning of the 2000s for different generations of

Sámi. Although we live in a multicultural society, and probably will even more so in the future, it is important to consider the cultural uniqueness of ethnic groups when using social and health services. It is also important to be aware that cultures are in a state of constant transformation and include individuals with their own unique experiences. By taking Sámi cultural characteristics into consideration within social and health care services, we can support each person's integrity and uniqueness. This is of empowering significance from the point of view of both individual and societal well-being. In addition, providing health care and social services in Sámi could also strengthen the multilingualism in society. The multilingualism is the result of the past assimilation policies. From the Indigenous peoples' perspectives, being multilingual is the norm, especially for the younger generations. It may be also important to mention how the protections of Sámi cultures and languages could be applied in the future.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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