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Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network | Réseau de connaissances des Autochtones en milieu urbain
Prairie Research Centre

UAKN Prairie Research Centre: Comparing the Lived Experience of Urban Aboriginal Peoples with Canadian Rights to Quality of Life

KEY FINDINGS:

- Despite government recognition of the importance of improving Quality of Life (QoL) significant barriers remain for Aboriginal peoples.
- The findings in this study underline the need to focus not only on meeting basic survival needs of the urban Aboriginal population, but also that their cultural and spiritual needs are addressed which are the foundation of QoL.
- Major findings of this research are that discrimination; the legacies of residential schools, and social problems further marginalize urban Aboriginal people. Decreased social inclusion, even alienation from their own culture and traditional teachings adversely affected one's Quality of Life.
- Significant gaps in QoL of various socio-economic groups in Canada and underlines the disproportionate impact on Aboriginal peoples in health, education, employment, poverty rates as well as their over-representation in the criminal justice system.
- Survey results revealed in this study show that that increasing education and training, improving the justice system, increasing the understanding of Aboriginal culture and rights, increasing employment opportunities, increasing community/social service funding and increasing cultural and spiritual places are either "extremely important" or "very important" for improving the QoL for Aboriginal people.
- Participants identified increasing education and training as the most important factor in improving one's quality of life.
- The respondents indicated that the four major obstacles to their quality of life are: marginalization and subjugation (40%), cost of living (34%), health issues (13%), and lack of access to appropriate services and supports (12%).
- Quality of Life is an important policy issue at all levels of government: Federal, provincial, and municipal governments frequently identify improvements to the QoL of their citizens as priority areas for policy development.

- Decreased social inclusion, alienation from one's culture and traditional teachings adversely affected one's Quality of Life.
- Urban Aboriginal organizations such as Friendship Centres need enhanced support to provide the sort of safe social spaces and community services so necessary to QoL
- Policy on education and skills training should adopt a cultural and decolonizing lens to ensure that education and employment opportunities are meaningful and necessary resources are in place.

INTRODUCTION:

This study examines the lived experiences of urban Aboriginal peoples in relation to quality of life (QoL) in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in 2013-14. Over the past decade, Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) has charted what QoL means to the citizens of Saskatoon. This study builds on that body of research with Aboriginal organizations and communities by assessing QoL issues specific to urban Aboriginal peoples in Saskatoon.

The second purpose is to produce usable knowledge about the QoL and the experienced barriers to it by Aboriginal people that will help them and others in fostering constructive policy development relative to their own lives. The central goal of this study is to assess the lived experiences of urban Aboriginal peoples as they relate to their QoL, and to compare these findings with discourse emerging from governmental agencies on improving QoL for the general Canadian population or specifically for Aboriginal peoples.

PARTNERSHIPS:

Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Techonologies
Saskatoon Urban Aboriginal Strategy
University of Saskatchewan

METHODOLOGY :

Research priorities were to ensure this study was designed by, with, and for Aboriginal peoples. This study establishes baseline information about QoL for urban Aboriginal peoples using the mixed-methods research approach of CUISR's QoL research iterations, integrating CUISR's collaborative community-based action research approach.

This study looked at the following research questions:
- What are the most important components of Quality of Life for Aboriginal people?
- How do urban Aboriginal peoples rate their Quality of Life?
- What do urban Aboriginal peoples consider major barriers to improving their Quality of Life?
- What do urban Aboriginal peoples consider to be key factors, if any, which have contributed to improvements in their QoL?
- What do urban Aboriginals believe should be done to improve the Quality of Life of those living below what is considered a positive Quality of Life standard?

- Is there a case that can be made based on provisions in the numbered treaties, in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or in any statutory, policy, or normative frameworks that various orders of government should be doing more to improve the Quality of Life of urban Aboriginal people?

In collecting baseline information for this study, three means were used: a web-based survey with a total of 105 respondents, a set of semi-structured in-person interviews, and faciliated focus group discussions. The data collected through these three means on the lived experiences of urban Aboriginal peoples' QoL in Saskatoon represent a valuable resource to identify the QoL experiences of Urban Aboriginal peoples and compare them with the related Canadian QoL standards emerging from governmental discourse.

MAIN FINDINGS:

Despite government recognition of the importance of improving Quality of Life (QoL) significant barriers remain for Aboriginal peoples. Importantly, findings underline the need to focus not only on meeting basic survival needs of Aboriginal persons, but also on their cultural and spiritual needs which are the foundation of QoL. 6-11% of participants reported their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being as excellent.

Major findings of this research are that discrimination; the legacies of residential schools, and social problems further marginalize urban Aboriginal people. Decreased social inclusion, even alienation from one's culture and traditional teachings adversely affected one's Quality of Life. Survey results also revealed in this study show that that increasing education and training, improving the justice system, increasing the understanding of Aboriginal culture and rights, increasing employment opportunities, increasing community/social service funding and increasing cultural and spiritual places are either "extremely important" or "very important" for improving the QoL for Aboriginal people.

The summary of analysis of findings from the web-based online survey revealed the following when looking at the topics surrounding the QoL, here are some of the highlights:

- In describing their "overall quality of life" a total of 87% indicated it was either excellent (13%), very good (39%), or good (35%).
- When asked how you would rate your QoL, the percentage of respondents who rated their well-being as very good or excellent (ranging from 40%-49%) was substantially higher than those who rate it as fair or poor (ranging from 16% to 27%).
- The respondents indicated that the four major obstacles to their quality of life are: marginalization and subjugation (40%), cost of living (34%), health issues (13%), and lack of access to appropriate services and supports (12%).
- In terms of the basic survival needs, the highest ranked factor was 'Good Health' with a total of 95% indicating it was either extremely important (58%) or very important (37%). The second highest was 'Adequate Housing' with a total of 93% indicating it was either extremely important (50%) or very important (43%). The

third highest ranked factor was 'Employment' with a total of 89% indicated it was either extremely important (51%) or very important (38%).

- In terms of the factors related to social needs, they were quite similar in degree of importance attached to them. The highest ranked factor was "Warm Welcoming and Caring Communities' with a total of 83% indicating it was either extremely important (47%) or very important (36%). The second was 'Family Relationships' with a total of 81% indicating it was either extremely important (69%) or very important (22%). The third was 'Friendships' with 81% indicating it was either extremely important (42%) or (39%).
- Factors that enhance one's QoL – interviews revealed that family, a sense of belonging, cultural traditions, treaty promises, education and employment, housing, and social spaces where people feel safe and welcomed, and the resources to were high on the list of responses.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Quality of Life is an important policy issue at all levels of government*:* Federal, provincial, and municipal governments frequently identify improvements to the QoL of their citizens as priority areas for policy development. Many recommendations from this research study were brought forth to address the gaps and barriers preventing to improve urban Aboriginal people's quality of life:

- Anti-racist education initiatives need to be better coordinated and resourced (including Treaty education, cultural diversity, and Aboriginal awareness training)
- Policy on education and skills training should adopt a cultural and decolonizing lens to ensure that education and employment opportunities are meaningful and necessary resources are in place.
- School boards and postsecondary institutions need to build their capacities to meet obligations and opportunity to deliver culturally appropriate and empowering education (both content and delivery methods).
- Employment strategies need to focus as much on the readiness of the workplace to make the most of Aboriginal capacities as on the readiness of Aboriginal people for the workplace.
- Urban Aboriginal organizations such as Friendship Centres need enhanced support to provide the sort of safe social spaces and community services so necessary to QoL.
- Affordable housing requires a coordinated approach across levels of government to create welcoming, respectful neighbourhoods.
- The Criminal justice system needs to build on and implement more effectively efforts such as the Gladue decision (and related reports) to address the over-representation of Aboriginal peoples.

This study concludes that those involved in improving the Quality of Life of Aboriginal peoples should devote extensive attention to the following factors that go beyond basic

survival needs and look to increase education and training, improving the justice system, increase understanding of Aboriginal culture and rights, increase employment opportunities, increase community/social service funding and increase cultural and spiritual places.

This research explored current issues that relate to one's understanding of treaty, constitutional, statutory, and normative frameworks that are significant for QoL issues in Saskatoon and can be applied to Canada. Recognizing the unique impacts of colonization on Aboriginal life is key to decolonizing and to further understand what needs to be done. Comparing the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples with Canadian rights to a quality of life is significant in achieving social justice. Furthermore, the development of a theory of the lived experiences of Aboriginal people in relation to Canadian rights to a quality of life is critical in achieving decolonization and social justice.

This research further concludes that there are still some significant gaps in QoL of various socio-economic groups in Canada and underlines the disproportionate impact on Aboriginal peoples in health, education, employment, poverty rates as well as their over-representation in the criminal justice system.

For more information on this project, please visit:

http://uakn.org/research-project/comparing-the-lived-experiences-of-urban-aboriginal-peoples-with-canadian-rights-to-a-quality-of-life/

About Us:

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The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: www.uakn.org

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