Adolescent Career Development in Urban-Residing Aboriginal Families in Canada

Key Details

KEY WORDS
Teenagers, counseling, Native North Americans, narratives, Metis, families and family life, children and youth, parents and parenting, community, employment, labour force

POPULATION GROUP
Indigenous Youth

STEPPING UP THEMES
Strong, Supportive Friends & Families; Employment & Entrepreneurship; Coordinated & Youth Friendly Communities

RESEARCH ORIGIN
Canada

SOURCE
Academic Article (peer-reviewed)

"Systemic problems for Aboriginal youth within the educational and labor force sectors point to the importance of studying adolescents' career development."

1. What is the research about?

Historically, Indigenous youth have tended to fare worse economically when compared to non-indigenous peers due to the systematic challenges they have experienced in educational and work contexts. Despite recommendations that practitioners include family and community members in career planning with North American Indigenous youth, there is a lack of research on the role that these families play in the career development of adolescents.

This study looks at the joint action of adolescents, parents, and their social supports in facilitating the career development of Indigenous youth.

The research questions were:

- How do Indigenous families work together in order to further adolescents' career development?
- Are there other projects that are important for the adolescents and their parents? How are these projects prioritized?

2. Where did the research take place?

The study took place in a large western Canadian city. An urban area was chosen as a meaningful context because most off-reserve First Nations and Métis people live in urban areas.

3. Who is this research about?

The participants of this study were required to meet the following criteria:

- Adolescents and their parents who self-identified as either status or non-status North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit
- Lived in an urban center with a population greater than 100,000 and off-reserve for more than 6 months before taking part in the research project
- Adolescents between 13 and 16 years old

4. How was the research done?

Prior to the study, consultations with Indigenous community members regarding the concerns about the future of adolescent Indigenous youth were used to guide the research process. Participants were recruited through advertisements in various First Nations social agencies in a large western Canadian city.

The researchers followed four phases of data collection and analysis:

- Observations and analysis of parent-adolescent conversations about the adolescent's future

- Participant review of analysis

- Telephone interviews were conducted with the parent-adolescent pair over a 6-month period

- Talking circle interviews were held with the participants and other family members and/or social supports they wanted to invite, in order to provide feedback on the project's findings

Talking circle interviews are understood as a communication process used in the First Nations community for problem solving, education and healing. The data was summarized and analyzed by the research team and preliminary findings were shared with two community leaders to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the community.

5. What are the key findings?
The study found that families invest in the following priorities in order to support the career development of adolescent youth:

- **Navigating toward a safe future**: taking short-term steps such as living a drug-free life or avoiding dangerous work environments in order to achieve longer term career goals
- **Negotiating school continuity**: ongoing reinforcement and commitment to completing of formal education
- **Intergenerational continuity through tradition of care:** ensuring that one can support themselves and their families financially while preserving a sense of cultural and family identity

The study also found that family and youth made a primary investment in securing and attending to their basic needs. For example, a number of families experienced challenging life events such as deaths of family members or friends, housing insecurity, and health problems of family members, which made it difficult to focus on the future of adolescent family members.

Additionally, the researchers found that although mothers placed great value on staying in school in order to avoid negative cultural stereotypes, the adolescents lacked positive experiences at school.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?
This study shows that career development is not an individual task, but instead a joint project that is taken on with family and community members. It also illustrates that considerations about career development are complex and much broader than simply choosing a given occupation.

The researchers recommend using the research method in this study as a form of career development intervention during family counseling. The joint narratives that are produced in such interventions give clients a chance to reflect on their own actions and intentions. It also allows parents to have a better understanding of the roles they play in their children's career development.

Lastly, there are several issues in this study that can be further explored. The researchers found that while the parents were heavily invested in the futures of their children, the adolescents often placed limits on the level of their parents' involvement. Further research can explore the cases where Indigenous youth may rely more on their parents' input in deciding their future. Additionally, most of the adolescents in the study were either out of school or wanting to leave, which indicates that Indigenous adolescents are experiencing challenges at school. Future studies can explore the reasons behind their lack of commitment to mainstream education, and the factors driving such mentality.

Marshall, S. K., Young, R. A., Stevens, A., Spence, W., Deyell, S., Easterbrook, A., & Brokenleg, M. (2011). Adolescent career development in urban-residing Aboriginal families in Canada. *The Career Development Quarterly, 59*(6), 539-558.

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