



Toronto Aboriginal Research Project: Aboriginal Children and Youth Chapter

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Aboriginal Cultural Identity, Child and Youth Services, Education, Employment, Positive Contributors, Socio-economic stressors, Unmet Needs

POPULATION GROUP

Aboriginal Youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Health and Wellness; Strong, Supportive Friends & Families; Education, Training & Apprenticeships; Employment & Entrepreneurship; Diversity Social Inclusion & Safety; Civic engagement and youth leadership

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

LINK IF OPEN ACCESS

<http://www.tassc.ca/assets/tarp-final-report2011.pdf>

“Aboriginal youth have articulated a sentiment to connect to their Aboriginal culture through a desire to learn from Elders and traditional people to learn about cultural teachings and ceremonies. In some cases, they are attempting to lead a revitalization of the culture.”

1. What is the research about?

This research studied the current circumstances, objectives, and challenges facing Aboriginal children and youth living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Although the Toronto Aboriginal population is young (mean age of 32 years) and growing, there is little systematic in-depth research about their experiences. In addition to addressing a knowledge gap related to the experiences of Aboriginal people living in the GTA, this report provides specific recommendations that can be implemented by policy makers, agencies, and program officers, to better meet the needs of urban Aboriginal youth who live in the GTA.

2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place in the GTA, which has the largest Aboriginal population (31, 910) in Ontario. The GTA comprises 13% of all Aboriginal people in Ontario.

3. Who is this research about?

This research focuses on the needs of Aboriginal children and youth who live in the GTA. Total study respondents (1, 059) identified as being of Anishnawbe, Haudenosaunee, Metis, or Cree decent. Youth respondents were either students (55%) or unemployed (12%), and represent subsample of the study’s larger data set.

4. How was the research done?

This study used a community-based approach to research — it was overseen by representatives of the Toronto Aboriginal community (e.g., Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council and the Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) Research Steering Committee), and designed to be useful (e.g., provide practical recommendations). In addition, it followed a number of ethical guidelines (e.g., ownership, control, access, and possession) to ensure the research was respectful to the Aboriginal communities, and their cultural traditions and practices.

The research used the following quantitative and qualitative methods:

1. TARP community survey: An 88-item questionnaire containing closed and open-ended questions on various topics pertaining to the Aboriginal community (e.g., demographics, housing, and cultural identity) was administered to 623 Aboriginal people.
2. Interviews with key informants: A 133-item interview guide containing closed and open-ended questions was used to conduct in-person interviews with 287 Aboriginal people.

3. Focus groups: Three youth specific focus groups, consisting of 12 participants, engaged in semi-structured conversations on topics that were guided and recorded by a facilitator.

4. Organizational case studies review: An extensive study of cases from the Native Child and Family Services Toronto, using various methods (e.g., document review, interviews with staff, board members and clients, and observations).

5. Comparative data: Statistics Canada data and findings from other relevant studies were used for comparative purposes.

5. What are the key findings?

This research provided the following key findings related to the experiences of Aboriginal children and youth who live in the GTA:

- Knowledge of Aboriginal culture leads to educational success, positive identity formation, and personal development
- Aboriginal cultural identity is attained through traditional teachings, the practice of ceremony, involvement in Aboriginal activities, and working with Elders, which contributes to positive community involvement
- Aboriginal employment programs (e.g., Life Skills Program at Native Child and Family Services) are offering a wide range of professional and personal development courses that are helping youth gain the skills, knowledge, and work experience to become employed full-time; however, many programs focus on 'at-risk' youth and do not include youth who are more socially stable
- Poverty, lack of parenting skills, and alcohol and drug abuse are the top three stressors that contribute to challenging living circumstances
- Trauma within the home, feelings of alienation and isolation, along with one or more of the top three stressors increases the likelihood of gang involvement
- There are several unmet needs relating to: Education, Parenting, Housing, Cultural Programming, and Sense of Community

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

This research provides findings and recommendations that can be used to develop, advocate for, and implement effective policies, initiatives and programs that better assist Toronto Aboriginal children and youth.

The report offers the following key recommendations:

- Develop a permanent 'Aboriginal Youth Council' to give youth a space to voice their concerns and issues
- In order to address the risk of homelessness and gang-involvement, provide 'transitional' housing programs for youth moving to Toronto without their families
- Develop opportunities for youth to connect with Aboriginal culture
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations need to work better together to improve service coordination for youth.



McCaskill, D., FitzMaurice, K., & Cidro, J. (2011). *Aboriginal Children and Youth. Toronto Aboriginal Research Project: Final Report* (pp. 100-120). Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council.