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Colonization and Health of Indigenous Peoples  
Summer Teaching Institute on Indigenizing Teaching
Defining Aboriginal People – Legislated Identity

Aboriginal is defined as “Indian, Inuit and Métis people of Canada” (s. 35.1 of the Canadian Constitution).

Aboriginal people are very diverse. Identities have been shaped, and continue to be shaped by colonial and neo-colonial policy. The attempted assimilation (cultural genocide) of Aboriginal peoples continues to impact all Aboriginal people today but women in particular.
The Indian Act

Between 1876 and 1985 one’s “Indianness” was traced through the male line. Indian women who married non-Indians ceased to be Indians under the Act. These women were not Indians according to the Act but neither were they considered to be Canadian citizens between 1876 and 1960. Indian men could not lose status through marriage, in fact, if they married non-status women, those women GAINED status under the Act.
Bill C-31 (1985) – A Revision to the Indian Act

In 1985, the Act was revised because it conflicted with the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The revision exasperated rather than repaired the problem. Although assimilation was “officially abolished” in 1973, many consider assimilation policy to be alive and well.

Consider the following chart:

6 (1) – means you had Indian status in 1985
6 (2) – had to apply to regain status in or after 1985
6 (1) + NS = 6 (2)
6 (2) + NS = NS

BUT:
6 (1) + 6 (2) = 6 (1)
6 (2) + 6 (2) = 6 (1)
**Assimilation** – occurs when one group changes so completely that it becomes fully integrated into the dominant

Assimilation policy official government policy from 1876-1973. Assimilation policy begins with the *Constitution Act, 1867* and is carried out in legislation and policy such as the *Indian Act, 1876.*

“It was a policy designed to move communities, and eventually all Aboriginal peoples, from their helpless 'savage' state to one of self-reliant 'civilization' and thus to make in Canada but one community — a non-Aboriginal, Christian one.” RCAP, 1996,


Definition of Genocide – The International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on December 9, 1948 as set out by the United Nations:
(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (United Nations, 1994).

[http://www.teachgenocide.org/files/UN%20Definition%20of%20Genocide.pdf](http://www.teachgenocide.org/files/UN%20Definition%20of%20Genocide.pdf)
Did genocide happen in Canada?

- Assimilation policy occurred via legislation and policy particularly the Indian Act.
- Pass and permit system (1886-1940s)
- Residential Schools (mid-1800s-1996)
- Unable to hire a lawyer (1920-1951)
- Prohibition of ceremonies and dress (1884-1951)
- Indian Agent controlled every aspect of reserve life
- Work for Rations Policy (instituted in 1879)
Residential Schools

• “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that this country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone. That is my whole point. Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department and that is the whole object of this Bill.” Duncan Campbell Scott, Head, Dept. Of Indian Affairs, 1920, quoted in Titely, E. Brian. A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986, p. 50.
Between 1800 and 1990 over 130 residential or boarding schools were in existence at one time or another. The number of active schools peaked at 80 in 1931. In the early 1900s about 1/6 of children between the ages of 6 and 15 attended these schools. By the 1940s about 8,000 children (about half the First Nations student population) were enrolled in 76 schools across the country. In some regions the averages/numbers were higher (i.e. The prairie provinces) The Child Welfare System took over where Residential Schools left off. In 1992, there were approximately 93,000 former students alive. (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, *The Healing has Begun*, 2002, p. 2; http://www.ahf.ca/downloads/the-healing-has-begun.pdf)

While Métis were largely excluded there is evidence that they attended residential schools in considerable numbers. At least 9% of those who attended residential schools identified as Métis. Most Métis were excluded from official education until 1930 (much later in Saskatchewan) as neither the federal nor provincial governments wished to pay for their education.  

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

“Justice Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, has declared that Canada's Indian residential school system was an act of genocide ... The Indian residential school system, in both its stated intent and its observable effects, meets the definition of genocide specified in the United Nations Genocide Convention of 1948. Article 2 of that convention defines genocide as certain acts ‘committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such,’ and includes in the specified acts, ‘forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.’” By: Christopher Powell (mug sent to photo) Posted: 02/24/2012 http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/westview/sinclair-is-correct----it-was-genocide-140272423.html
Truth and Reconciliation Committee

The 1996 Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and various other reports and inquiries have documented the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse that many children experienced during their school years. Beginning in the mid-1990s, thousands of former students took legal action against the churches that ran the schools and the federal government that funded them. These civil lawsuits sought compensation for the injuries that individuals had sustained, and for loss of language and culture. They were the basis of several large class-action suits that were resolved in 2007 with the implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history.

Final report was recently released with 94 key recommendations:
The “Sixties Scoop”

Prior to 1960, Aboriginal children made up only one percent of children in care. By the late 1960s, Aboriginal children made up 30% to 40% of children in care. Aboriginal children from across Canada were taken from their homes and communities and placed with white middle class Christian families. One of the justifications was based on income and another on Christian beliefs and practices, that is children would be removed if the family was not practicing Christianity. Practiced continued into the 1980s. In Manitoba alone over 3,400 children were removed between 1971 and 1980.
Sterilization

Alberta passed the *Alberta Sexual Sterilization Act* in 1928 (lasted until 1972 where 2800 sterilization (optional and compulsory) procedures were performed on women considered to be “unfit” by the government. The First Nations community represented 2.5% of the general population in Alberta ...First Nations and Métis people made up 25% of the sterilizations performed and those of First Nations and Métis ancestry were disproportionately assigned the “mentally deficient” rating which denied them legal rights and made them eligible for sterilization without consent. The government of Alberta apologized in 1999 and settled with over 600 victims.

A similar program operated in B.C. (beginning in 1933) where victims of the procedure sued the government in 2003 for sexual assault. (NAHO, 2006)
Contemporary Implications?

The ‘determinants of health’ as recognized by Health Canada are useful and pertinent to Aboriginal peoples but they do not illuminate fully the poor health status and prospects this group finds itself in. For this reason, colonization, globalization, migration, cultural continuity, territory, access, poverty and self-determination need special attention and analysis (NAHO, 2001: 13).


Some, but not all health determinants are commonly referred to as social determinants of health. They include: gender, Aboriginal status, minority status, early life, education, employment and working conditions, food security, health care services, housing, income and income distribution, social safety net, social exclusion/inclusion, unemployment and employment security. (Raphael, 2004: 6).

Raphael, Dennis. 2004. Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc.
Contemporary Implications?

Canadian Institute for Health Information notes that social and economic conditions have “had a profound impact on the health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada ... The contemporary health and well-being of Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples must be viewed in this broad historical and social context” (CIHI, 2004: 75).

Canadian Institute for Health Information. 2004. *Improving the Health of Canadians*. Ottawa: Canadian Institute for Health Information.
Census Data

According to the 2006 Census, Aboriginal people comprised 3.7% of the population, up from 2.8% only ten years prior.

- Aboriginal Population in Sask. 14.9% (up from 13.5%)
- Projections: 20% by 2015 and 28% by 2035

Of Sask. Pop (grew by 28% between 1996 and 2006 vs. 6% growth in general Canadian population):
- First Nations (64%) (grew by 25% in past decade)
- Métis (34%) (grew by 34% in past decade)
- Inuit (0.2%) (grew by 26% in past decade)
- Other (non-status) (1.8%)

47% live in urban centres
- Saskatoon (9%)
- Regina (9%)
- Prince Albert (34%)
- North Battleford 21%
- Lloydminster 13%

(Statistics Canada, 2010)
On average, the Aboriginal population is considerably younger than the non-Aboriginal population. Nearly half (47%) of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 25, compared to less than one-third (30%) of the non-Aboriginal population. (Statistics Canada, 2010)

53% of First Nations live on-reserve
The median age of the Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan was 22 years in 2006, compared with 41 years for non-Aboriginal people in the province. The median age is the point where exactly one-half of the population is older, and the other half is younger.

Children and youth aged 24 and under made up more than half (55%) of all Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan, compared with less than a third (31%) of the non-Aboriginal population. On the other hand, seniors aged 55 and above accounted for only 8% of all Aboriginal people in the province, compared with 28% of the non-Aboriginal population.
“Research has continually shown that SES can have a profound impact on prevalence and mortality of disease ... The impacts of poverty and poor SES on chronic diseases are included here to emphasize the intergenerational and cyclical nature of poverty: child poverty is family poverty, is community poverty, is generational poverty. That is, poverty rarely affects just one individual, at one time, but is an issue that transcends age and time” (Reading, 2009).

Socio-Economic Status

In 2006, the unemployment rate in Saskatchewan was 4% (aged 15 and older)
The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people was 10% (aged 15 and older)
Also, Aboriginal people were less likely to be employed (46% compared to 64% - general SK pop)
Aboriginal people more likely to be out of the labour force (44% compared to 34% - general SK pop) despite the young Aboriginal pop.
Of concern, non-Aboriginal people b/w age 25-34 had an employment rate of 84% versus 52% for Aboriginal people (32% gap) and non-Aboriginal people b/w age 45-54 had an employment rate of 88% versus 64% for Aboriginal people (24% gap)
By 2030, 1 in 4 new entrants into the labour force will be Aboriginal.
(employed – those working full, part-time or in self-employed paid work;
unemployed – those who are not working but are actively looking and available to work; everyone else considered “not in the labour force” – could be retired, on social support, etc.)
www.sasktrends.ca Doug Elliott, June 2009
Education

72% of non-Aboriginal SK residents completed high school compared to 44% of First Nations and 61% of Métis people.

45% of non-Aboriginal SK residents completed post-secondary education compared to 25% of First Nations and 34% of Métis people.

Levels of completed education are slightly higher for women compared to men – 31% of Aboriginal women have a post-secondary education versus 26% of Aboriginal men; 54% of Aboriginal women have a grade 12 diploma compared to 46% of Aboriginal men.

www.sasktrends.ca Doug Elliott, June 2009
### Income (off-reserve) National

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Income %</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
<th>First Nations</th>
<th>Metis</th>
<th>Inuit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000-$19,999</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>$20,000-29,999</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>$30,000-39,999</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000-49,999</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-59,000</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Median income for Aboriginal people in Canada was $18,962 – 30% lower than the rest of Canadians at $27,097. The difference of $8,135 is marginally smaller than the difference in 2001 ($9,035) and 1996 ($9,428) but it would take 63 years to close the gap at the current rate.


Aboriginal peoples with university degrees have overcome much of the income gap between them and the rest of Canadians. The income gap between Aboriginal peoples and the rest of Canadians who have earned a Bachelor’s degree diminished from $3,382 in 1996 to just $648 by 2006. But there remains a significant gap in the number of Aboriginal peoples obtaining a Bachelor’s degree — 8% of Aboriginal peoples have a bachelor degree or higher — and the rest of Canadians — 22%. Aboriginal women who have obtained at least a Bachelor’s degree actually have higher median incomes than non-Aboriginal Canadian women with equivalent education. This is the only segment of Aboriginal society that exceeds the median incomes of their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

In 2006, 54% of all Métis over the age of 15 reported having been diagnosed with a chronic condition (about the same as reported in 2001). Of those who were diagnosed, 25% reported having one chronic condition while 28% reported having two or more chronic conditions.


Avg. non-Aboriginal life expectancy: 81 yrs (female) vs. 75 yrs (male) – Aboriginal – 7.4 yrs less for men and 5.2 yrs less for women.

IMR – 2x national avg. (14 deaths per 1,000 live births vs. 7 per 1,000) – has declined from 200 per 1,000 in the 1920s but ratio same today as it was then.

First cohort study that tracked Métis and First Nations mortality rates (tracked a 15% sample of respondents 25 years and older from the 1991 to 2001 census):

Life expectancy at age 25 was 3.3 and 5.5 years shorter for Métis men and women respectively and 4.4 and 6.3 years shorter for Registered Status Indians (First Nations).

Mortality rates for Métis men were elevated for circulatory, respiratory and digestive system diseases and for Métis women circulatory system diseases, cancers, and digestive and respiratory system diseases.

Mortality rates for Métis were much higher compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians’ – especially for women.

Among both Métis and First Nations people socio-economic factors such as income, education and occupation explained roughly 2/3 of the excess mortality for men and roughly 30% for women.

Some Dissertation Findings

- non-Aboriginal people have an average income of $27,647.84 per year, while the average income of Métis is $20,986.76 per year.
- Métis people have a higher number of respondents who fall below the LICO – 30.7% versus only 16.4% for non-Aboriginal people.
- Métis unemployment stands at 9.9% versus 4.7% for non-Aboriginal respondents
- Approximately 60.4% of Métis reported that they are employed while 61.8% of non-Aboriginal people reported the same.
- Métis had poorer self-rated health compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians particularly in lower income categories.

- Colonization has resulted in inter-generational effects for Indigenous people
- Indigenous people are resilient
- While Indigenous people may still experience those impacts they also hold the solutions
- The issues are not historical they are continuing through policy today and affect more than just Indigenous people
- They are systemic in nature
- Go back and think about the definition of genocide ... did it happen and if it did how do we heal as a community and nation?
Megweetch, Thank you, Questions?

- Special thanks to my Kookum, Elder Betty McKenna and departed Mushum Clifford LaRocque

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