

CIET

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Summary Report
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Canada

First Nations youth inquiry into tobacco use

Canada: First Nations Youth Enquiry into Tobacco Use

WUNSKA, a collective of First Nations teachers of Social Work, and CIET implemented an innovative community-based enquiry into tobacco use among native youth on-Reserve. The approach blends modern epidemiological research tools with qualitative methods adapted to a First Nations cultural paradigm.

A key project objective was to empower First Nations youth and communities by building capacities to undertake scientific research based on First Nations knowledge, values and skills. In addition to the results produced by the survey, the first of its kind in Canada, Native people received basic training in how to research their own problems and how to analyse and interpret the results themselves. Nearly 200 Community-Based Researchers (CBRs) from reserves across the country were trained in data collection, analysis and community action planning. Field work began in November 1995 and was completed in March 1996.

An individual questionnaire provided details on attitudes and smoking habits. This was linked to semi-structured key informant interviews with Elders and to Talking Circles (an indigenous discussion format similar to the nominal group technique). Data were gathered on knowledge of effects of tobacco, proposed strategies to reduce prevalence of abuse, reasons for smoking, access to cigarettes, parental influence, relation of tobacco abuse to traditional teachings and activities, and the coverage of public education programmes.

A total of 4,090 youths aged 10 to 14 years from 96 communities responded to the questionnaire. There were 189 youth discussion circles, each composed of six to ten youth; 539 key informants and 338 Elders were also interviewed.

Some key findings

A youth *who does not drink* is seven times more likely to resist smoking than a youth who drinks alcohol.

A youth with *few friends who smoke* is 4 times more likely to resist smoking than a youth with many friends who smoke.

A youth who finds it *easy to say no* when offered a cigarette is three times more likely to resist smoking than one who finds it hard.

A youth whose *parents disapprove* of young people smoking is twice as likely to resist smoking as one whose parents do approve.

Three in every ten youths surveyed indicated they smoked. Roughly one in ten (9%) was a daily smoker and a further two (21%) smoked occasionally. The proportion of smokers increases gradually from the age of 10 to 14 years (from 12% to 51%) and is higher among females than males in almost all age groups: overall, a male youth is 40% more resilient to smoking than a female (95%CI 1.2-1.6). The average age of smoking uptake is 10 years. The average amount of money spent on tobacco in the week preceding the survey was eight Canadian dollars, among those who spent money on tobacco. Almost 70% of smokers consume less than a pack per week.

One in four youths associates smoking with peer pressure; other key factors are drinking and parental role modeling. The youth resilient to smoking is one who does not drink, who has few friends who smoke, who finds it easy to say no when offered a cigarette and whose parents disapprove of young people smoking.

Four of every five youth smokers (81%) want to quit. Their preferred method of giving up is again related to peers: staying away from smokers (11%) and friends quitting (7%). Information from Elders, key informants, and the youth discussion circles confirms the dominant importance of peer pressure.

“Resilience analysis” indicated that a program successfully addressing the drinking factor might help some 34% of smokers resist smoking (95%CI 31-38%). A smoking reduction program successfully addressing peer pressure might help 25% of smokers resist smoking (95%CI 22%-28%). Initiatives addressing the issue of parental role modeling might help 12% of smokers resist smoking (95%CI 8-15%).

The enquiry confirmed that information on the dangers of smoking does reach most indigenous youth on-Reserve. Discussion revealed that young people feel they need more specific information and would like to see information geared more to their age group. When key informants were asked whether they thought existing or past smoking education programmes had worked, only one in ten (11%) said "yes". Many youths said they wanted to know more about traditional use of tobacco and traditions in general. In their interviews, Elders expressed interest in assisting in this process.

Key informant interviews suggested it is possible to relate individual smoking patterns with places where smoking is banned, such as offices and community facilities. A youth living near a "smoke-free" facility was considerably less likely to smoke (odds ratio 0.65, 95%CI 0.55-0.77) than one who lived near a smoking facility. The role, both positive and negative, of community leaders could be identified when linking qualitative environmental factors with direct reports of individual youth.

Concerns with racism and discrimination were found in most communities. When key informants were asked, “Does your community experience racism/ discrimination”, the key informants said "yes" in 90% of the communities. But less than one in three thought it affected youth smoking behaviour.

Once analysed by the CBRs, the information was organized so it could be returned to the communities for interpretation. The feedback process by the CBRs involved three aspects: 1) reporting back to community leaders, 2) presenting the results to the community as a whole, and 3) action planning.

CBRs were trained to facilitate feedback circles on the results with Elders, 10-14 year-old youth, and other members of the community to involve the public in interpretation of those results and discussion of possible community actions. Other communication strategies were tailored to the circumstances of each community.

Capacity building

If a community decides it wants to develop an action plan based on the results of the enquiry, the CBRs were trained to assist in: identifying and forming a Planning Group, developing a Community Action Plan, and planning for community involvement in the Action Plan.

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The most common suggestion for action plans, and one which fits with the conclusions of the data analysis, is the need to develop programmes to help youth cope with peer pressure. This suggestion came from all segments of the survey. All segments suggested more sports, recreational activities and facilities for youth as alternatives to negative behaviour.

The survey was funded by Health and Welfare Canada.

The full report is forthcoming.