

Mental Health

Information from the national and regional reports of the 1997 *First Nations and Inuit Regional Health Surveys*



What Questions Did The Regional Health Surveys Ask About Mental health?

The Regional Health Surveys (RHS) included some questions that were the same across the whole country and some questions that were only asked in particular regions. The national portion did not have any questions about adults' mental health, but Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan asked about it. The regional surveys asked about topics like:

- Happiness, depression and self-esteem
- Experiences during childhood
- Thoughts of suicide
- Availability of help for mental health problems

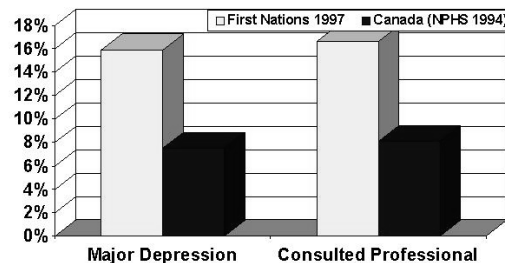
Each region asked slightly different questions, so the result is a bit of a patchwork. However, the 1997 RHS was the first large survey to explore issues of mental health in First Nations Peoples and Inuit, so the results are groundbreaking. This Fact Sheet tries to identify the common threads from the regional reports.



Happiness and Self-Esteem

About three-quarters of First Nations Peoples and Inuit said they are usually happy and have good self-esteem. But it seems the remaining quarter have periods of depression, sometimes severe. In Ontario, 13 to 18 per cent of adults met the criteria for major depression in the previous year – a higher proportion than the Canadian average. First Nations adults in Ontario were also more likely than average to have seen a health professional about their mental health and to say that depression interfered with their activities.

Depression and Mental Health
Ontario First Nations Compared to Canadian Average





all of it severe. Unlike physical abuse, most sexual abuse was attributed to other people or other relatives rather than parents.



Experiences in Childhood

Ontario’s survey explored parenting and experience of abuse during childhood in some detail. Although most adults said their parents had usually taken care of them, protected them and made them feel loved, a significant proportion did not agree. Thirteen to 25 per cent of people reported that when they were children, their parents didn’t like them; didn’t care where they were; frightened them; or called them things like stupid, lazy, or ugly.

Reported rates of physical and sexual abuse during childhood were high with 59 per cent reporting physical abuse, much of it severe. Men were considerably more likely than women to report being physically abused during childhood. Parents were most frequently named as the people who had physically abused the child.

In addition to physical abuse, 34 per cent of the respondents in Ontario reported sexual abuse during childhood, almost

Thoughts of Suicide

Suicide rates are known to be high among First Nations People and Inuit. Labrador and Manitoba’s surveys asked people about this issue. The results were similar in both regions. About 25 per cent of people had felt suicidal at some time in their lives and about 15 per cent had actually attempted suicide at some point.



Ontario First Nations Adult Reports of Sexual Abuse During Childhood			
Did anyone ever do any of these things to you?	Yes	No	Refused/ Missing
Exposed themselves to you more than once	17%	80%	4%
Threatened to have sex with you	15%	81%	4%
Touched the sex parts of your body	26%	71%	3%
Tried to have sex with you or sexually attacked you	25%	72%	3%





Maintaining and Improving Mental Health

Saskatchewan's survey took a different approach to the issue of mental health. It asked people which of a list of factors they thought were most important for maintaining good mental health. The ones that people chose most frequently were:

- Alcohol or drug abuse;
- Lack of trust; and
- Acknowledging problems.

Surprisingly, people were slightly less likely to agree that physical or sexual abuse had a big impact on mental health.

Three regions also asked people about whether help is available for mental health problems and whom they turn to for help. Friends and family were most frequently mentioned as a source of help, followed by health professionals. About a quarter of adults reported problems in getting the help they needed with mental health problems.



About the Regional Health Surveys

The statistics in this Fact Sheet are drawn from the reports of the 1997 *First Nations and Inuit Regional Health Surveys* for five regions:

Labrador
Nova Scotia
Ontario
Manitoba
Saskatchewan

The surveys covered people living in First Nations communities and in the Inuit communities of Labrador. They did not include people living off-reserve or in the northern Territories.

Although the surveys were done face-to-face, 870 adults in Ontario also filled out a confidential written questionnaire about their experiences during childhood. The statistics on childhood victimization shown here are based on those 870 questionnaires.

Sampling methods varied from one region to another. Also, the definition of adult varied. Some regions considered anyone older than 15 years to be an adult while other regions used 18 years as the cut-off point.