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Risk factors and chronic conditions among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations

by Lisa Lix, Sharon Bruce, Joykrishna Sarkar and T. Kue Young

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Abstract

Background

In Canada, the prevalence of behavioural risk factors and chronic conditions differs for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, but little research has examined changes over time. This study compares several major risk factors and chronic conditions in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations not living on reserves in the North (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut) and in southern Canada at two time points.

Data and methods

The data are from cycle 1.1 (2000/2001) and cycle 3.1 (2005/2006) of the Canadian Community Health Survey: 115,990 respondents aged 20 or older, and 118,716 respondents, respectively. Overall, 3.8% of respondents reported Aboriginal cultural or racial background. Crude prevalence estimates, adjusted odds ratios, and bootstrap-derived confidence intervals were calculated for seven risk factors and nine chronic conditions at each time point.

Results

In 2000/2001, Aboriginal people in the North were more likely than those in southern Canada to be obese, smoke daily and have infrequent physical activity, but less likely report a number of chronic conditions. Between 2000/2001 and 2005/2006, the odds of reporting risk factors increased among Aboriginal people in the North, and differences in the prevalence of chronic diseases were less pronounced. Few differences between non-Aboriginal respondents in the North and in southern Canada were observed.

Interpretation

Compared with southern Canada, the profile of health is changing more rapidly for Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal populations in the North, and appears to be worsening for the former.

Keywords

chronic disease, drinking behaviour, exercise, health surveys, morbidity, obesity, smoking

Findings

In Canada, the prevalence of behavioural risk factors and chronic conditions varies between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, with Aboriginal people generally having less favourable outcomes. For example, obesity and overweight are more common among Aboriginal people than among other groups. Also, the likelihood of having at least one chronic condition and specific conditions such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes is higher among Aboriginal

people, even when differences in sociodemographic characteristics are taken into account.
[\[Full text\]](#)

Authors

Lisa M. Lix (1-306-966-1617; lisa.lix@usask.ca) is with the School of Public Health, University of Saskatchewan, 107 Wiggins Road, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 5E5; **Sharon Bruce** and **Joykrishna Sarkar** are with the Department of Community Health Sciences, University of Manitoba; and **T. Kue Young** is with the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto.

What is already known on this subject?

- On many measures of health, Aboriginal populations in Canada have less favourable outcomes than do non-Aboriginal populations.
- Aboriginal populations in the North are experiencing rapid change in their social, cultural, and physical environments.
- Relatively little is known about changes in the prevalence of risk factors and chronic conditions among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in the North, compared with those in southern Canada.

What does this study add?

- Differences in self-reported measures of obesity, smoking, drinking, and physical activity between Aboriginal populations in the North and in southern Canada were significant.
- Changes from 2000/2001 to 2005/2006 indicate a growing gap between the two groups on many risk factors.
- In 2000/2001, Aboriginal people in the North were less likely than those in southern Canada to report specific chronic conditions, including arthritis, hypertension, asthma and diabetes, as well as having one or more chronic conditions. By 2005/2006, this was true only for arthritis and having one or more chronic conditions.
- By comparison, there were fewer differences between non-Aboriginal people in the North and in southern Canada, and less evidence of a widening gap over time.

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