VOICES OF MANITOBA'S ABORIGINAL PEOPLES: LINKS TO PERCEPTIONS ON HEALTH, ECONOMIC OUTLOOK AND MOBILITY*

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ABSTRACT / RÉSUMÉ

This article focuses on how Aboriginal people in Manitoba perceive the quality of their local community conditions, including drinking water, housing, local public schools, recreation facilities, and access to medical services. Tested is the extent to which these perceptions are associated to three measures of well-being: self-assessed personal health, reported improvements in family finances, and optimism regarding the community's economy. Included in the analysis are breakouts according to specific population segments, including those who identify as being a First Nation person (including on- and off-reserve), Métis, Winnipeg and non-Winnipeg, gender, having children in the household, and likelihood of moving in the next twelve months. The analysis is based on telephone surveys conducted between 2005 and 2008 by Probe Research with a representative sample of over 1,000 self-identified Aboriginal respondents.

Cet article porte sur la manière dont le peuple autochtone du Manitoba perçoit la qualité de ses conditions de vie communautaires locales, notamment concernant l'eau potable, le logement, les écoles publiques locales, les installations de loisirs et l'accès aux services médicaux. Il examine la mesure dans laquelle ces perceptions sont associées aux trois mesures du bien-être : autoévaluation de la santé personnelle, améliorations déclarées des finances familiales et optimisme concernant l'économie communautaire. L'analyse comprend des divisions en fonction de certains segments de population particuliers, déterminés notamment selon l'appartenance à une Première nation (vivant dans une réserve ou à l'extérieur) ou à la Nation métisse, le fait de vivre à Winnipeg ou à l'extérieur, le sexe, la présence d'enfants à la maison ou la probabilité d'un déménagement au cours des douze prochains mois. L'analyse est basée sur des sondages téléphoniques menés entre 2005 et 2008 par Probe Research à partir d'un échantillon représentatif de plus de 1 000 répondants autochtones déclarés.

INTRODUCTION

On January 27, 2009, Canada's Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty, stood up in the House of Commons to give his Budget Statement to the nation. Included was a commitment that "over the next two years" the federal government "will make major, new investments in Aboriginal communities, to build and renovate schools and health services facilities, to improve wastewater treatment, and to provide safe drinking water" (Flaherty 2009). The response by the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine, was quick yet positive: "Today's federal budget provides a fair and helpful response in terms of First Nations infrastructure because we need to build houses and schools." He qualified his support by raising concerns about poverty and the future of young Aboriginal people (AFN 2009).

This article focuses on perceptions of Aboriginal people in Manitoba about their local community conditions and how they connect to well-being, both in terms of personal health, family finances, and economic outlook. Furthermore, it provides an assessment on how perceptions about these specific community conditions vary significantly within specific segments of the Aboriginal population; and might be linked also to mobility among Aboriginal people.

TABLE 1: Manitoba's Aboriginal Population – Based on Self-identification.

	WINNIPEG	MANITOBA
North American Indian	25,900	101,815
On-Reserve	–	51,965
Off-Reserve	–	49,850
Métis	40,980	71,810
Inuit	350	560
Other/Multiple Identity	1,150	2,375
Total Aboriginal Identity	68,380	175,390
Total Provincial Population	694,668	1,148,401
% Identify as Aboriginal	9.8%	15.3%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a survey database compiled by Probe Research. From March 2005 to December 2008, a total of 12,000 Manitoban adults were randomly contacted by Probe Research via telephone and asked whether or not they would identify themselves as Aboriginal, and if so, they were then asked if they would be identified as being Métis, Status Indian (off- or on-reserve) or something else. Those who qualified to be interviewed were then asked a number of questions regarding local community conditions as well as how they rate their own well-being along a number of dimensions. For remote First Nations communities, where residential telephones are far less prevalent, the research team augmented the random outbound telephoning methodology by implementing an extensive print and radio campaign asking on-reserve residents to "call in" to do the survey, with a compensation of 15 dollars per household.[2] Using this combined methodology of telephone-based probability random sampling and on-reserve quota sampling,[3] a total of 1,019 self-identified Aboriginal people were interviewed.[4] For reference purposes, Table 1 provides a snapshot, based on the 2006 Census, of the actual size of these Aboriginal populations for both Winnipeg and Manitoba, and as a percent of the general population.

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING COMMUNITY CONDITIONS

Attitudes about seven specific community conditions are studied here:

1. Quality of household drinking water
2. Condition of housing in the community
3. Condition of community's streets and roads
4. Local public schools and quality of education
5. Access to recreational facilities such as swimming pools and arenas
6. Safety of citizens in the community at night
7. Ability to access local medical services in the community

With regard to Aboriginal people, four of the above seven attributes were specifically mentioned by Finance Minister Flaherty in the aforementioned 2009 Budget Speech: housing, drinking water, schools, and healthcare access. With regard to the general population, streets and roads, as well as recreational facilities were also mentioned, which of course would have some impact on a number of neighbourhoods where Aboriginal people reside. This leaves public safety as the only item not mentioned in the budget speech, yet this too has been articulated as a priority at other times by the current government.[5]

How do Aboriginal people in Manitoba rate these seven community attributes? Table 2 breaks out the results according to those who score high levels of satisfaction (8, 9, 10 out of 10) and those who score low levels of satisfaction (1, 2, 3 out of 10).[6] Shown also are these results as they arise from the total Aboriginal population surveyed, and according to the following three

TABLE 2: Ratings for Community Conditions.

COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTE	RATINGS	ABORIGINAL TOTAL (1019) %	ON-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS (302) %	OFF-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS (290) %	MÉTIS (415) %
Household drinking water	High ratings (8,9,10)	42	34	42	49
	Low ratings (1,2,3)	18	30	15	11
Housing in the community	High ratings (8,9,10)	34	15	34	47
	Low ratings (1,2,3)	22	40	21	9
Condition of streets and roads	High ratings (8,9,10)	23	17	29	23
	Low ratings (1,2,3)	27	37	27	21
Local public schools and education	High ratings (8,9,10)	42	33	42	48
	Low ratings (1,2,3)	13	23	11	7
Access to recreational facilities	High ratings (8,9,10)	35	17	35	48
	Low ratings (1,2,3)	28	47	25	15
Safety in the community at night	High ratings (8,9,10)	35	24	30	46
	Low ratings (1,2,3)	22	27	27	15
Access to local medical services	High ratings (8,9,10)	45	36	46	52
	Low ratings (1,2,3)	18	24	16	15

populations: on-reserve First Nations, off-reserve First Nations and Métis.[7] Among the conditions that are rated especially poorly by First Nations people who live on a reserve are: access to recreational facilities (47% give very poor ratings), housing (40%), streets and roads (37%) and household drinking water (30%). As shown in the two columns on the right, very low ratings are less prevalent among off-reserve First Nations people and Métis.

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING WELL-BEING

Three indicators of well-being are used in this study: how individuals rate their personal health, the extent to which one's family finances have improved and perceptions about the local community's economic future. The first indicator, personal health, can be measured in a number of ways (Canada 2002). For this article, it is measured simply by asking respondents the following question: "In general, and on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very poor health and a 10 being very good health, how would you rate your own physical health today?" The second indicator is based on the following question: "Would you say that you and your family are better off, worse off, or just the same financially as you were a year ago?" The third indicator is measured by asking respondents to report their perceptions about their local community's economic future: "Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the economic future of your community?"[9]

Table 3 below provides an overall picture of perceptions of Aboriginal people regarding these three measures. Generally speaking, Métis respondents are more likely to rate their health as good compared to First Nations respondents, with only small differences between those who reside on- or off-reserve. At the same time, First Nations individuals who reside off-reserve are more likely to report improving family finances when compared to the other population groupings, and Métis respondents

TABLE 3: Indicators of Personal Well-being.

COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTE	RATINGS	ABORIGINAL TOTAL (1019)	ON-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS (302)	OFF-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS (290)	MÉTIS (415)
Personal health	Good health (8,9,10)	45	42	42	49
	Poor health (1,2,3)	7	6	9	5
Family finances compared to last year	Better off	33	30	37	32
	Worse off	17	17	16	18
Optimism regarding community's economy	Very/Somewhat optimistic	67	61	65	72
	Very/Somewhat pessimistic	27	29	31	23

are more optimistic than the two other populations about the economic future of their local community.

CORRELATIONS: WELL-BEING AND COMMUNITY CONDITIONS

No doubt one can be critical of a community's condition without personally suffering from its effects, yet it is worthwhile to see if there are specific community conditions that are linked to how respondents rate the three indicators of well-being. Using correlations,[8] here we explore the extent to which each of the seven community attributes may be linked to personal well-being, and whether or not such linkages appear within each of the three major population groupings. Table 4 provides the survey results for only those with a confidence level of 95% shown ($p<.05$), and highlighted are those correlations that exceed the .1 level.

Overall, small yet statistically significant associations are found within the overall Aboriginal population (column 3) when examining indicators of well-being and most of the community attributes, with the strongest link appearing between how one views the economic outlook for the local community and the condition of local public schools (.205). Among on-reserve First Nations respondents (column 4), the link between economic outlook for the local community and ratings for the condition of local public schools strengthens to .292. At the same time, a small yet statistically significant link among on-reserve residents also appears with this community economic outlook variable and access to recreational facilities (.174). A link also appears among on-reserve respondents with regards to the association between how individuals rate improvements in their own family's financial well-being and the quality of local schools (.170).

Among First Nations people who reside off-reserve (column 5), the strongest associations appear with regard to community conditions and access to local medical services (.259) and the condition of roads and streets (.241). Associations also exist between community outlook and safety at night (.175) and the quality of local public schools (.164). Few links are found for personal health and how people rate community conditions among First Nations people, keeping in mind that one does not have to be ill to recognize the existence of unhealthy conditions.

Among Métis people (column 6) there are a number of community attributes that correlate in a statistically

TABLE 4: Correlations of Community Conditions and Well-being.

COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTE	RATINGS	ABORIGINAL TOTAL (1019)	ON-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS (302)	OFF-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS (290)	MÉTIS (415)
Household drinking water	Family finances	.065			**.105**
	Community outlook	.067			
	Personal health	**.137**		**.131**	**.214**
Housing in the community	Family finances	.093			**.116**
	Community outlook	**.137**			**.147**
	Personal health	**.106**			**.149**
Condition of streets and roads	Family finances	**.131**		**.125**	**.173**
	Community outlook	**.134**		**.241**	**.145**
	Personal health	**.105**			**.118**
Local public schools and education	Family finances	**.126**	**.170**		**.113**
	Community outlook	**.205**	**.292**	**.164**	**.103**
	Personal health	.079			
Access to recreational facilities	Family finances				**.153**
	Community outlook	**.121**	**.174**		
	Personal health	.078			**.138**
Safety in the community at night	Family finances				
	Community outlook	**.117**		**.175**	
	Personal health	.091		**.131**	
Access to local medical services	Family finances				**.101**
	Community outlook	**.163**		**.259**	**.134**
	Personal health				

TABLE 5: Aboriginal Manitobans – Household Income Distributions.

ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD	TOTAL ABORIGINAL %	ON-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS %	OFF-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS %	MÉTIS %
<10k	19	35	19	5
10k-29k	30	35	39	20
30k-59k	28	19	22	39
60-79k	10	6	9	14
80k+	14	6	11	22

Source: Probe Research, Indigenous Voices database, 2005-2008 (N=1019).
Column totals may exceed 100% due to rounding.

significant way with how individuals rated their personal health. This includes household drinking water (.214), housing (.149), street and roads (.118), and access to recreation facilities (.138). One explanation for these more numerous statistically significant correlations for Métis people is that First Nation people, especially those who reside on-reserve, overwhelmingly live in comparably low income households and poor living conditions which do not vary significantly across the population, whereas Métis people tend to live in a wide range of community conditions, both in low-income and higher-income communities, which should therefore translate into a wider variability for well-being. This is demonstrated by the survey results in Table 5 below which show how household income disparities exist between the different population groups (with chi square <.05 when comparing First Nations to Métis). A majority of adult First Nations people operate with less than $30,000 in household income, while over one-third of on-reserve First Nations people report living with less than $10,000 in household income. At the same time, Métis people tend to be more evenly spread across all five income categories, with very few at the under $10,000 household income level.

CORRELATIONS AND WINNIPEG COMMUNITY CONDITIONS

Of its 694,668 residents, roughly 60% of the total provincial population, Winnipeg's Aboriginal population consists of 68,380 individuals.[10] Provided here is a focused examination regarding how Aboriginal people residing in Winnipeg rate their local community conditions and how these might be linked to their economic or personal well-being. Within the Probe Research survey data,

TABLE 6: Correlations of Community Conditions and Well-being in Winnipeg.

COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTE	RATINGS	NON-WPG (649)	WINNIPEG(370)	CORE AREA (119)
Household drinking water	Family finances		**.181**	**.315**
	Community outlook			**.287**
	Personal health	.090	**.238**	**.326**
Housing in the community	Family finances		**.122**	**.221**
	Community outlook	**.104**	**.162**	
	Personal health	.094	**.119**	**.201**
Condition of streets and roads	Family finances	**.104**	**.179**	**.294**
	Community outlook	.080	**.241**	**.281**
	Personal health	.099	**.113**	
Local public schools and education	Family finances	**.107**	**.162**	**.187**
	Community outlook	**.203**	**.181**	**.220**
	Personal health		**.126**	
Access to recreational facilities	Family finances			
	Community outlook	**.103**	**.105**	
	Personal health	**.120**		**-.229**
Safety in the community at night	Family finances			
	Community outlook	.091	**.170**	**.279**
	Personal health		**.166**	
Access to local medical services	Family finances			
	Community outlook	**.131**	**.204**	
	Personal health	**.101**		

370 respondents claimed Winnipeg to be their main location of residence. And, of those, 119 reported residing in the city's downtown "core area," an area chiefly marked by low-income rental properties, including rooming houses (Silver 2008).[11]

Results shown in Table 6 reveal a number of small yet statistically significant relationships between how respondents rate each of the seven community attributes and their own personal well-being. Among core area respondents many of these links increase in strength. This includes links between ratings for the quality of household drinking water and personal health (.326), road conditions and family finances (.294) as well as with community's economic outlook (.281) and safety in the community and community outlook (.279). A curiosity is the negative association that appears between having access to recreational facilities and personal health (-.229). This is probably due to the fact that Winnipeg's downtown includes a large number of local parks, wading pools, river front bike paths, a YMCA, as well as skateboarding and ice skating facilities at the Forks. This author believes that having access to these facilities and making use of them may be two different things, and are therefore worth exploring in another study.[12]

MOBILITY AND COMMUNITY CONDITIONS

To what extent might each of the seven community conditions be linked to Aboriginal mobility in Manitoba? To measure mobility-related issues, respondents were asked the following question: "Thinking about the next twelve months, how likely is it that you will be moving to a different neighbourhood or community?" The results show that one-quarter of Aboriginal adults report that they are likely to move, with off-reserve First Nations being the most likely to move (with one-third saying they are likely) and Métis respondents being the least likely to move.

TABLE 7: Likelihood of Moving in Next 12 Months.

	TOTAL ABORIGINAL (1019) %	ON-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS (302) %	OFF-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS (290) %	MÉTIS (415) %
Likely	25	28	33	16
Not likely	75	72	67	84

Source: Probe Research, Indigenous Voices database, 2005-2008.

In order to assess the link between community conditions and mobility, Table 8 provides correlations by which the "likelihood to move" variable was converted into a "dummy variable" (with those reporting likelihood of moving coded with a "1" and those who are not likely to move coded as "2"). A correlation analysis was then used to see if satisfaction scores with community attributes might be connected to not being likely to move. That is, as satisfaction increases, does the likelihood of *not* moving also increase?

The results show that there is a small yet statistically significant association between how Aboriginal people in Winnipeg rate each of the seven community conditions and their likelihood to move, whereas the only statistically significant association that appears among on-reserve First Nations residents is with the quality of local schools.

Because respondents who do not have children in their homes might be unconcerned about the condition of their local schools, a second data processing step was taken to see if Aboriginal people who have children in their household exhibit a statistical link between how they rate their community conditions and their likelihood to move. The results, which appear in the right hand column of Table 8, reveal a statistically significant association between *all* community conditions and the likelihood to move for respondents who have children under the age of 15 in the household, with safety at night (.130), housing (.180) and water quality (.113) having the strongest associations. Oddly, these are all stronger than the link between mobility and quality of schools (.082), access to medical services (.041) and recreational facilities (.032). Unfortunately, the age of children in the household was not asked, signifying an inability to differentiate between those who have school-age children and those who only have preschool aged children (furthermore, many respondents might reside in a household with children, but may not have childcare-related responsibilities).

CONCLUSION

In his "Message to Canadians," the Commissioner of the Task Force on Future of Health Care in Canada, Roy Romanow asserted that improvements to Canada's healthcare system necessitate that we go beyond discussions of doctors, nurses, and hospitals and adopt a broad understanding of community well-being. That is, healthy living requires a sufficiently developed community infrastructure that involves safe housing, clean water, quality schools, access to employment, physical recreation, as well as access to medical practitioners and healthcare facilities (Canada 2002). Using survey data based on interviews with Aboriginal people residing in communities across Manitoba, this article has provided an exploratory examination of measures of well-being, both economic and health-related, and how these might be linked to how each of seven community conditions is rated. While the measures of association did not reveal any strong

TABLE 8: Correlations of "Not Being Likely to Move" with Community Conditions.

COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTE	ABORIGINAL TOTAL (1019)	ON-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS (302)	WINNIPEG (370)	CHILDREN AGED <15 IN THE HOUSEHOLD (513)
Household drinking water	**.100**		**.127**	**.113**
Housing in the community	**.162**		**.128**	**.180**
Condition of streets and roads	.090		.041	.041
Local public schools and education	.092	.126	.073	.082
Access to recreational facilities	.059		.087	.032
Safety in the community at night	**.136**		.082	**.130**
Access to local medical services	.052		**.115**	.041

associations (that is, higher than .6 at the 95% confidence level), there were many small yet statistically significant associations found, most of which were around the +.1 level. These results indicate that further research might prove fruitful, such as in-depth analyses on a specific community condition, such as the quality of local housing, and such characteristics as gender, employment status and age. The author of this article and his colleagues at Probe Research continue to conduct surveys with Aboriginal people in Manitoba, and by 2010 will have compiled over 1,500 interviews with Aboriginal people.

NOTE

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Respondents had to reside in a First Nations community to qualify for the interview. Only one respondent per household could qualify for an interview (with only one cheque issued per mailing address), with limits also placed on the number of calls that would be received from each community.

[2] For a discussion of quota samples and probability sampling methods, see Adams (2008).

[3] Of the 1,019 individuals interviewed, 592 were First Nations, 415 Métis, 3 Inuit, 6 Non-Status, and 3 respondents said they were of "no category."

[4] See, for example, the Speech from the Throne, November 2008 (Canada 2008). Regarding the importance of housing conditions as an important influence on health, see Bryant (2003).

[5] The question is introduced in the following manner: "I'd like to ask you about the quality and condition of certain things in your community. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means you are very dissatisfied and a 10 means you are very satisfied, how would you rate the following features of your community?"

[6] Of course, there are First Nations individuals who move between locations. Individuals are asked to identify themselves as being either "on-reserve" or "off-reserve." Of the 415 Métis interviewed, 217 reside in Winnipeg, and 198 reside somewhere else in the province. Of the First Nations who reside "off-reserve," 149 reside in Winnipeg and 140 live somewhere else in the province.

[7] For Winnipeg respondents the phrase "of Winnipeg" was inserted into the question to replace "of your community."

[8] Pearson's r is used here, in which a perfect positive association between the two variables would produce a +1.0 score, and a perfect negative association would produce a -1.0 score.

[9] For a discussion of Aboriginal peoples within the Canadian urban context, the reader is referred to Loxley and Wien (2003) and Norris and Clatworthy (2003).

[10] The following postal forward sorting areas (FSAs) were used to categorize Core Area respondents in the analysis: R3G, R3E, R2X, R3C, R3B, R3A, R2W. Admittedly, the downtown region also includes a few small pockets of upper income condominium development as well as the neighbourhood of Wolseley, which has a mixture of income groups including large pockets of upper income professionals.

[11] The survey does include questions about recreational activities, exercise and

team sports. Work with regard to personal access to recreational facilities, lifestyle and personal health is left here for a later date.

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