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Community Conditions as Factors of Health, Economic Outlook, and Mobility: Survey Data and Aboriginal People in Manitoba¹

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Introduction

On January 27, 2009, Canada’s Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty, stood up in the House of Commons to give his budget speech to the nation. Included was a commitment that, over the following two years, the federal government would “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.”² The response by the then 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.” However, he qualified this by raising concerns about poverty and the future of young Aboriginal people.³

This paper focuses on many of these community conditions and how they connect to the well-being of Aboriginal people in Manitoba in terms of personal health, family finances, and economic outlook. Furthermore, it provides an assessment of how specific community conditions might be linked to mobility among Aboriginal people.

1. Aboriginal People in Manitoba—A Diversity of Communities

Most First Nations people in Manitoba belong to one of the following Aboriginal peoples: Cree, Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Dakota, or Dene. There are sixty-three First Nations (otherwise termed “Status Indian” by the federal government) communities in the provinces encompassing 103 reserves.⁴ Approximately half of the First Nations people in Manitoba reside off-reserve (or spend the principal amount of each year living off-reserve). Another Aboriginal population group in Manitoba are the Métis people, many of whom are descendents of individuals of mixed ancestry who were involved in the fur trade.⁵ In addition to these major groupings, there are also a small minority of individuals who identify themselves as “non-status” First Nations and an even smaller number who are Inuit. **Table 1.1** provides

a snapshot based on the 2006 census of the size of these Aboriginal populations for both Winnipeg and Manitoba, and as a percentage of the general population.

2. Methodology

Data for this study regarding the links between community conditions, health, financial well-being, and economic outlook are based on two sources of survey data. 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 were Aboriginal, and, if so, they were then asked if they were Métis or Status Indian (as well as off- or on-reserve) or something else. Those who qualified were then asked a number of questions regarding community conditions and their well-being. For remote First Nations communities, where residential telephones are far less prevalent, the research team also extensively used print and local radio advertisements asking on-reserve residents to “call in” to do the survey, with a compensation of fifteen dollars per household.⁶ Using a methodology that combines telephone-based probability random sampling with an on-reserve quota sampling strategy, a total of 1,020 self-identified Aboriginal people were interviewed.⁷

3. Perceptions Regarding Community Conditions

Attitudes about seven specific community conditions are studied in this paper:

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

Four of these were highlighted in relation to Aboriginal peoples in the aforementioned 2009 budget speech: housing, drinking water, schools, and health-care access. Streets and roads and recreational facilities were also mentioned in the budget speech, but in reference to the general population, which would have some impact on many of the neighbourhoods where Aboriginal people reside. Public safety has been identified as a federal priority in other government statements.

For each of these community-related elements, each respondent was asked “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?”⁸

How do Aboriginal people in Manitoba rate these seven community attributes? **Table 1.2** breaks up the results according to those who score high levels of

Table 1.1: Manitoba 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: Aboriginal Population, 2006 Census, Statistics Canada.

Table 1.2: Ratings for Community Conditions

Community Attribute	Ratings	Aboriginal Total (1,020) %	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

satisfaction (8, 9, or 10 out of 10) and those who score low levels of satisfaction (1, 2, 3 out of 10). The results are provided according to the total Aboriginal population surveyed, as well as according to the following three populations: on-reserve First Nations, off-reserve First Nations, and Métis.⁹ Among the conditions that are rated especially poorly by First Nations people who live on-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.

4. Perceptions Regarding Well-Being

Three indicators of well-being are used in this study. These are the extent to which one's family finances are improving, perceptions about the local community's economic future, and how individuals feel about their personal health. The first indicator is based on asking respondents whether or not their families are better off financially than they were twelve months ago. The question posed to respondents was, "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 second indicator is measured by asking respondents to report their perceptions about their local community's economic future, worded as "Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the economic future of your community?"¹⁰ The third indicator, personal health, is measured by asking 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?"

Table 1.3 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- and 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 are more optimistic than the two other populations about the economic future of their local community.

5. Correlations: Well-Being and Community Conditions

While one can be critical of a community's condition without suffering serious personal effects (one only has to listen to radio talk shows to hear middle-class residents complain about potholes to confirm this), 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,¹¹ 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

Table 1.3: Indicators of Personal Well-Being

Community Attribute	Ratings	Aboriginal Total (1020) %	On-Reserve First Nations (302) %	Off-Reserve First Nations (290) %	Métis (415) %
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
Personal health	Good health (8, 9, 10)	45	42	42	49
	Poor health (1, 2, 3)	7	6	9	5

population groupings. **Table 1.4** provides the survey results with only those with a confidence level of 95% shown ($p < .05$). Highlighted are the correlations that exceed the .1 level.

Overall, small yet statistically significant associations are found within the overall Aboriginal population (Aboriginal Total) 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, 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, 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). While few links are found for personal health and how

Table 1.4: Correlations of Community Conditions and Well-Being

Community Attribute	Ratings	Aboriginal Total (1,020)	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				

people rate community conditions among First Nations people (and keeping in mind that one does not have to be ill to recognize the existence of unhealthy conditions), among Métis people there are a number of community attributes that correlate in a statistically significant way with how individuals rated their personal health. This includes household drinking water (+.214), housing (+.149), street and roads (+.118), and access to recreational facilities (+.138).

One explanation could be that First Nation individuals, especially those who reside on-reserve, overwhelmingly live in relatively 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, and should therefore exhibit a wider variability of well-being. One indicator of this is provided in **Table 1.5**, which shows how household income disparities exist between the different population groups (with chi square <.05 when comparing First Nations to Métis), with a large majority of First Nations people having a household income of less than

Table 1.5: Aboriginal Manitobans - Household Income Distributions

Annual Household	Total Aboriginal %	On-Reserve First Nations %	Off-Reserve First Nations %	Métis %
<\$10,000	19	35	19	5
\$10,000 - \$29,000	30	35	39	20
\$30,000 - \$59,000	28	19	22	39
\$60,000 - \$79,000	10	6	9	14
\$80,000 +	14	6	11	22

Source: Probe Research, Indigenous Voices database, 2005-2008 (N=1020)

\$30,000, while Métis people tend to be more evenly spread across all five income categories, with very few at the under \$10,000 household income level.

6. Correlations and Winnipeg Community Conditions

Of the 694,668 residents of Winnipeg (roughly 60% of the total provincial population), 68,380 are Aboriginal which is close to 10% (this is shown in **Table 1.1**). Provided here is a focused examination regarding how urban Aboriginal people 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, 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.¹²

Results shown in **Table 1.6** 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. Within the downtown core area respondents, many of these links increase in strength. This includes ratings for the quality of household drinking water and personal health (+.326), road conditions and family finances (+.294), and the 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 the downtown core area includes a large number of local parks, wading pools, riverfront bike paths, a YMCA, as well as skateboarding and ice skating facilities at the Forks. Having access to these facilities and making use of them may be two different things and is worth exploring with future research.¹³

7. 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

Table 1.6: Correlations of Community Conditions and Well-Being in Winnipeg

Community Attribute	Ratings	Non-Winnipeg (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		

Source: Probe Research, Indigenous Voices database, 2005–2008 (N=1000)

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—one-third saying they are likely—and Métis respondents being the least likely.

In order to assess the link between community conditions and mobility, **Table 1.8** provides correlations by which the “likelihood to move” variable was converted into a “dummy variable” (with those reporting a 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

Table 1.7: Likelihood of Moving in Next Twelve Months

	Total Aboriginal (1,020) %	On-Reserve First Nations (311) %	Off-Reserve First Nations (150) %	Métis (435) %
Likely	25	28	33	17
Not likely	75	72	67	83

Table 1.8: Correlations of “Likelihood to Move” with Community Conditions

Community Attribute	Aboriginal Total (996)	On-Reserve First Nations (300)	Winnipeg (370)	Children aged <12 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

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, but statistically significant, association between how Aboriginal people in Winnipeg rate each of the seven community conditions and their likelihood of moving, 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 1.8**, reveal a statistically significant association between all community conditions and the likelihood to move for respondents who have children under the age of twelve 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 access to recreational facilities (.032). Unfortunately, the results are affected by two things. First, the age of children was not asked, signifying an inability to differentiate between those who have school-aged children rather than those with preschool-aged children. Second, many respondents might reside in a household with children, but may not have child-care-related responsibilities.

Conclusion

Using survey data based on interviews with Aboriginal people residing in communities all across Manitoba, this paper has provided an exploratory examination of measures regarding financial and personal well-being and how these might be linked to the rating of seven community conditions. While the measures of association did not reveal any strong associations (that is, higher than .7 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 is warranted. Of particular interest might be an in-depth analysis of what the data results can tell us about a specific community condition, such as the quality of local housing, and such characteristics as gender, employment status, and age. Probe Research continues to conduct surveys with Aboriginal people in Manitoba, and by 2010, will have compiled over 1,500 interviews with Aboriginal people. Thanks to those individuals who gave their time to provide input regarding their personal well-being and their views about local community conditions.

Endnotes

- 1 I wish to thank Scott MacKay, President of Probe Research, and Harvey Bostrom, Deputy Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Manitoba, for providing permission to use data results for this paper. I also wish to thank Loleen Berdahl for providing comments on portions of this paper. All errors or omissions remain mine.
- 2 Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance, Budget Speech, January 27, 2009.
- 3 Assembly of First Nations, News Release, January 27, 2009. <www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=4406>. Accessed February 1, 2009.
- 4 Brownlie, Robert Jarvis. 2007. "First Peoples in Manitoba," In *The Encyclopedia of Manitoba*, Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, pp. 215–217; McMillan, 1995, p. xxii.
- 5 Brownlie, "First Peoples in Manitoba," pp. 217–219. There are many ways by which Métis can be defined. In this paper the simplest approach will be used: self-identification.
- 6 To qualify, respondents had to reside in a First Nations community. Only one cheque was given per mailing address, with limits also placed on the number of calls that would be received from each community.
- 7 For a discussion of quota samples and probability sampling methods, see Christopher Adams, "Pushing the Hot Buttons." In *Vue: The Magazine of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association*, August 2008.
- 8 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..."
- 9 Of course, there are First Nations 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.
- 10 Winnipeg respondents were asked about "Winnipeg" instead of "your community."
- 11 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.
- 12 The following postal forward sorting areas (FSAs) are used to categorize respondent residents as being part of the core area: 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 Wolseley neighbourhood, which tends to have large pockets of upper-income professionals.
- 13 The survey does include questions about recreational activities, exercise, and team sports. However, work with regard to this area needs to be left to a later date.

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