

ABORIGINAL ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND SMOKING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY





ABORIGINAL ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND SMOKING

- Welcome and introductions
- Presentation
 - Pauline Janyst
 - Background, need for study, project goals, methodology
 - Sandrina de Finney
 - Overview, key findings in relation to gender/ culture and recommendations



Funding

- CIHR - Canadian Institute of Health Research
- Women's Health Research Institute (WHRI)



Background

- Need for study
 - Aboriginal girls over-represented
 - Honour your Health Challenge
- Project design
 - Community engagement & support
 - CBC role



Community Partners

Kermode Friendship Society

Sliammon First Nation

Laichwiltach Family Life Society

Port Alberni Friendship Center

Penticton Indian Band

Metlakatla Band



Why this matters

I had to grow up pretty quickly, I guess that's why I started drinking and smoking. So if there was someone there I guess I wouldn't have started, just someone to talk to me about it.



Study Goals

- To increase knowledge of factors that influence smoking amongst Aboriginal girls;
- To define the influence of gender and cultural identity regarding smoking;
- To identify young Aboriginal women and junior researchers for future research projects;
- Strengthen the presence of Aboriginal knowledge in smoking-related research;
- Influence policy and programming



Methodology - Pauline

- Training
- Research questions
- Interview process (50 girls, 5 CBCs)
- Focus groups (23 girls)
- Dissemination



Methodology - Sandrina

- Findings: descriptive/exploratory -



Out of 50 girls:

- 58% of girls smoke or are former smokers
- 32% currently smoke
- 7% of current smokers are cutting back
- Almost 45% of former smokers quit before 19 –some tried quitting up to 15 times
- Majority started age 12-13 (grades 7-8)
- Several girls reported trying before age 6
- 60% of all girls have tried other substances such as alcohol or marijuana



Reasons for Smoking

1. **Stress relief:** Girls deal with a range of emotions such as anger, grief, sadness, isolation, moodiness, the pressures of “being a girl”, as well as conflict with family, friends, and school:

I had to watch [baby-sit] my brother a lot

A loss of loved ones

My family is (...) all messed up



Stress: A Spectrum Concept

anger; moodiness; PMS; conflict;
abuse; pressure; anxiety; isolation;
lethargy; depression; sadness; violence;
trauma; coping; cravings; teary;
discrimination/racism; failure; structure;
defiance; avoidance; tiredness, etc.



Reasons for Smoking

2. Curiosity and experimentation

“just to try it”

Things that make girls smoke is stress and curiosity

Curiosity at first, then I just got hooked



Reasons for Smoking

3. When drinking and partying

At house parties you drink, smoke together

- 60% use or have tried other substances
- Many were drinking before or when they started smoking
- Smoke more when drinking
- Girls drink alcohol for other reasons than they smoke: *to socialize, let loose, party, have fun, loose control, forget*
- Marijuana use not clearly linked to tobacco use



Reasons for Smoking

4. Smoking to Fit In: Two Trends

- i. Secrecy (peer pressure)
- ii. Normalization (relational pressure)



2. Normalization

- Normalized in families and community
- Explicit family enabling
- Tacit acceptance, non interference

I grew up around it. My mum smokes, my dad smokes, my [two] grandmas smoke

My mom and dad buy us cigarettes

- Some adults model a “partying” lifestyle by drinking and smoking:

My mom smokes when she’s drinking

My dad smokes when he drinks



Gender

- Boys “have it easier”, “have more choices” and “more freedom”
- Mixed messages “girls have to be everything”
- Gendered stress: Cooking, cleaning, and taking care of siblings and family responsibilities



Cultural Identity

- No traditional or spiritual use
- Diverse backgrounds
- Knowledge of culture seems to matter; 62% who are S or FS report not knowing a lot, vs. 38% of non smokers
- Learning about culture contributes to a positive sense of pride and knowledge of teachings and values



Cultural Identity

Two Trends:

- i. Ambiguity: “I’m not too sure”
- ii. Engagement: “I have good teachers”



1. “I’m not too sure”

- Ambiguity and disconnection
- Mobile/transient
- Mixed backgrounds
- Impacts access to community resources

*My mom’s from Winnipeg and I don’t know the band’s name
I don’t really know too much about [my native background]
because we stayed in town and moved a lot*



2. “I have good teachers”

- Culturally engaged
- Rooted in specific teachings
- Access community supports/resources

I'm very proud to be First Nations

They teach our language at school

Like the sweats, I just came back from canoeing



Summary

- Stress is gendered and racialized
 - Cultural identity is a spectrum
 - Family uprootedness/displacement
 - Essentialized/culturalist approaches do not work
 - Gender inequities key stress factor
 - Pervasive colonial effects



Prevention/Intervention

- Start much earlier
- Relevant role models
- Girl engagement
- Provide alternatives
- Girl-specific programs
- Gendered/racialized “stress”
- Community healing



Challenges

- *Training*
- *CBC's leaving*
- *Keeping the girls interest*
- *Recording*
- *Community relationships*