



We hope that this document will help to fill a gap by giving a stronger voice to Inuit men and their issues, and will contribute to discussions about how health and social programs can better serve Inuit men.

“We need each other to start dealing with our problems and I think that’s the message that we should really try and get out there. It’s ‘we need each other to start helping ourselves and our families and our communities.’ If we start helping ourselves, it leads to helping your family and also leads to helping your community... ” (Nunavik participant)





Background: Cultural Change and Health Problems

Inuit men have higher rates of suicide, incarceration, violent behaviour, substance abuse, and other wellness problems than other men in Canada. They may also have problems of unemployment and low rates of formal education. These problems – and the underlying stressors that help create them – affect their physical and emotional health. Increasingly, public forums, reports, newspaper articles, and organizations are recognizing that attention must be paid to the root causes of mental, emotional and physical wellness problems among Inuit men, so that health and social services can better address men's needs.

Massive Cultural Change in Just Two Generations

The change that Inuit men are experiencing from their traditional roles to their roles in modern society is an important factor in their overall wellness. Arctic life has changed drastically in just two generations. The grandfathers of today's working-age men

lived almost entirely off the land. Working hand-in-hand with their wives, they provided the necessities to feed, clothe and educate their children. Traditionally, men built the homes, handled all the transportation, helped with birthing and sick children, had excellent land skills, and were an integral part of the family.¹³ However, since the 1950s, southern forms of government, southern approaches to justice and new religions have altered traditional community and family relations. These days, says the organization Nunavut Wellness, men only experience empowerment when they are engaged in land-based activities.¹³ For many men, adapting to the new social structure has been traumatic.

Compounding the problem, many of today's adult men attended church-run residential schools as children, and while this was a positive experience for some, others experienced isolation, abuse and neglect. All students faced a lack of appreciation from teachers and administrators for their culture and language. The Ilisaqsivik Centre in Clyde River, Nunavut, which developed a men's

healing program, states, “the most significant cultural change has occurred for the men in Nunavut, rather than for women... Support groups of all kinds have sprung up [for women]... Men, however, are only just beginning their healing journey.”¹³

A Disconnect Between Traditional and “Modern” Skills

Some people have suggested that Inuit women’s traditional skills were more easily transferable to modern life than men’s. In an interview for an article on “Why Inuit men are falling behind,” Abraham Tagalik and Archie Angnakak discuss how differences in men’s and women’s traditional communication styles and skills, expectations and roles may have prepared women to adapt more rapidly to the needs of modern life. They suggest that girls are usually put to work on household chores, and therefore develop skills in setting priorities and coping with problems, while boys are not asked to contribute to the household. Further, some of the traditional skills that boys learn as hunters directly conflict with those needed for the modern-day workplace or classroom:

My whole generation went through this.... We were expected to ask questions in school. And then, when we got out of school, when we go out on the land with mom and dad, we’re expected to keep our mouths shut and learn by watching, so we couldn’t ask.¹¹

In the same vein, elders have pointed to differences in men’s opportunities to develop interpersonal skills and relationships. For example, in discussing suicide prevention and resilience, one group of elders noted,

Previously men did not have to relate in larger groups as they were out hunting, and perhaps girls had learned how to live in groups better. The move to living in settlements and communities meant men were constantly exposed to more complex relationships in their new environment yet they lacked previous experience in this regard. On the other hand, women had historically functioned in groups, and may have developed a broader range of coping skills and strategies which aided them in adapting to newer, complicated and busier circumstances.³

The Need to Provide More Services for Inuit Men

That Inuit men are experiencing extreme distress is shown in their high suicide rates. Eighty-three per cent of Inuit suicides are by men, and almost all of these take place before the age of 30.⁶ In Nunavut, the suicide rate among Inuit males age 15–19 was 45 times the comparable rate for Canadian teens (817 per 100,000 over the years 1999–2003, compared to 18.2 per 100,000 for Canadian teens in 1998).⁷ The gap at older ages was less marked, but

still large, with Inuit rates far higher than the Canadian average for all ages up to 45 years.

Based on these and other statistics, the Canadian Mental Health Association's North-west Territories division (2006) states that men's mental health is in crisis. Yet despite this, little attention has been paid to men's health and wellness needs,¹² and the existing services are not always well adapted to the needs of Inuit men. Asked about services to help men heal, staff and inmates at the Fenbrook Centre Violent Sexual Offender program listed some of the problems that Inuit offenders face:

- Literacy and language gaps that can make it difficult for offenders to understand what is being said in counselling and education programs.
- Low educational levels that make it difficult to find employment after prisoners are released.
- A lack of programs and intensive community support systems for offenders.
- A shortage of community-based correctional services in the North, resulting in men having to attend programs in Ottawa or Montreal, where they are isolated from family and community life.

Beyond these obvious problems, there may be others having to do with the way that services are currently structured. In informal discussions, some service providers and

community members state that men tend not to seek help or information, and that existing opportunities, services and programs do not 'hook' men. For example, men may begin educational programs or support groups but they tend to drop out before completion. This suggests a need to adapt programs to be more relevant and useful to male clients.

Since men's and women's lives are inextricably linked, helping men to heal will benefit both men and women. This is particularly true with respect to family violence. In its report on violence and abuse prevention, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada discusses the reasons why some individuals develop the anger and despair that leads to abuse and violence. These reasons include a lack of opportunities, low self-esteem, financial stresses, a sense of having no control over one's own life, and a lack of positive role models. Recognizing that reducing violence towards women means addressing these root causes of ill-health for men, Pauktuutit has developed follow-up projects that incorporate men's ideas and involvement. Such projects are a first step in answering the question posed in one letter to the Editor of *Nunatsiaq News*:

“What help exists in communities to assist Inuit men in their daunting struggle to bridge the Inuit traditional and modern lifestyle, especially when they cave in under the stress of it all?”⁹



The purpose of the community visits was to engage local Inuit men in the project.

Inuit organizations, youth organizations, and the Inuvik residential school counselling centre. In Baker Lake, interviews were carried out at the National Inuit Elders and Youth Summit. In Happy Valley-Goose Bay, a participant was recruited through local contacts. Interviews were conducted in the location of the respondent's choice, and in either English or Inuktitut.

Besides these interviews, the original plan called for two focus groups: one with wardens and inmates enrolled in the *Tupiq* program at the Fenbrook Institution in Gravenhurst (Ontario), and another with urban Inuit attending Ottawa's Tungasuvvingat Inuit Mamisarvik Healing Centre. In practice, time did not permit a focus group at Fenbrook Institute, but some discussions were held with wardens and inmates. Few men responded to the invitation to attend a focus group at the Mamisarvik Centre, so in the end only one urban participant from Ottawa was interviewed.

Conducting the Interviews

The interviewer began by describing the project and the protocols for protecting respondents' privacy. A consent form was read to the participants (in either English or Inuktitut).* People participating in face-to-face interviews signed the consent form; those being interviewed by telephone gave

verbal consent. Personal interviews and some of the telephone interviews were recorded on a digital recorder; in a few situations where recording was not possible because of technical problems, the interviewer wrote down the participant's answers.

The interviews covered general physical health and mental wellness, as well as education and employment. A questionnaire provided a broad framework for the interview, and participants were encouraged to elaborate on their own personal experiences and opinions. When necessary, the interviewer asked additional questions to clarify responses and gather relevant information.

About the Participants

A total of 20 people† were interviewed for this report. Their ages varied widely: some had grown up following traditional ways, while others represented the perspective of the younger generation. Representation from three of the four regions was fairly equal. The interviewees included:

- One person from Labrador (Happy Valley-Goose Bay).
- Five people from Nunavik (Kuuujuaq).
- Eight people from Nunavut.

* Copies of the consent form and the interview questionnaire are included in Appendix 1 and 2.

† This total includes 19 men, and one woman who believed it was important that the project also include women's input. Her responses have been used only in the general description, and not in the results by theme presented later in this paper.

“Without being educated in both Inuit and White ways, they can’t be successful. They need to be knowledgeable in Inuit culture and be educated to be successful.” (Nunavut participant)



They need to be challenged.... We sell our kids short way too much. We don't challenge them enough. Because English or French is the second or third language of the child, the teachers or the people who are in the system tend to think OK, we've got to go soft on these kids because it's not their first language. But if you prepare a child at an early age like in kindergarten and Grade 1 and 2, you challenge them enough, I think their coping skills will be a lot stronger later on and they will be able to find ways to deal with whatever issues they might have at a later age; in teenage years and high school. (Nunavik participant)

Employment

This is why I started to teach about our culture and traditions. Since we got our own government and their emphasis was on using Inuit culture and traditions, this is what I have been working on, to teach our ways. It is not until you learn and understand your culture and complete your education, will you be able to get a job. (Nunavut participant)

UNEMPLOYMENT AND DISTRESS

Employment and occupation have a profound influence on both physical and mental health. Most of the men interviewed (14 out of 19, or 74 per cent) had been unemployed at some

point in their lives; only five had never been out of work. All agreed that not having work created very negative emotions. The men spoke of feeling unhappy with themselves, stressed and worried about being able to provide for their families. While unemployed, they felt worthless and discouraged, and many said they were angry or embarrassed about their situation. Several noted that unemployment can leave men with no sense of direction, and lead to them turning to negative habits. Some even said that friends of theirs had committed suicide because they could not find a job.

People without work I think start to lose purpose in life, become aimless, directionless, frustrated when they are not able to provide the things that they want to provide to those that they care about. When the people that they care about are suddenly in need of help but they don't have the resources or the ability to provide that help, maybe leading to a sense of helplessness. So I think it leads to all sorts of negative impacts. (Nunavut participant)

TYPES OF WORK AND SATISFACTION WITH WORK

The respondents' employment experiences ranged from jobs in manual labour, municipal services, and government, to traditional, land-based occupations. The jobs mentioned included boat builder, cook, truck driver, wildlife officer, store clerk, administrative assistant, communications director, computer technician, translator, corrections officer,



“I think all the visible problems that we see are a result of a much deeper problem that men have. You can have an alcohol problem, a drug problem, a jealousy problem, low self-esteem problem. You can be violent, there are so many problems out there that we can see. However, much is related to a deeper problem. A deeper problem of separation, alienation, intimidation, neglect kind of. Men have deep problems like that, lacking feeling of involvement, loss of identity, loss of control.” (Nunavik participant)



Views on Personal and Family Problems

Housing is probably the single biggest problem creating issues in our regions in the North. Housing, single-handedly... 10 people in a four-bedroom house with little kids running around screaming all the time with no privacy or you don't have your own space. At whatever cost it is, if we provide every single family that needs a house, a house,... our problems would be a lot easier to solve. Because even if a certain project or program is done properly... the person who went through that program and did really well and they are gung ho and think they are going to be okay now, but because their housing situation hasn't changed they are just going to go back to square one. (Nunavik participant)

Participants were asked to talk about the personal and family problems that create stress in their lives and affect their mental wellness.

Although a difficult subject at times, the men in the study were able to share some of their problems and give us insight into the personal and family problems they have faced themselves or seen in others. In their descriptions, many of the problems were tied to a loss of identity, low self-esteem, feelings of loss of control over their lives, and other forms of stress. Often, these personal problems were interconnected.

Coping with Personal Problems

The personal problems that were mentioned most frequently were jealousy, anger, unemployment, and alcoholism (with the alcohol problems attributed to underlying issues such as anger). Most respondents talked of jealousy on the part of their spouses, that is, female jealousy toward the male partner, but there were also examples of their own jealous tendencies. Participants also mentioned inability to manage anger as a common problem, and cited concerns about a lack of anger-management programs.

EXPERIENCE OF PERSONAL PROBLEMS

PROBLEM	NUMBER	PER CENT*
Jealousy	9	47%
Anger	6	32%
Unemployment	5	26%
Alcoholism	4	21%
Lack of communication	3	16%
Stress	2	11%
Loss of identity	2	11%
Other issues	1	5%

*Respondents could name more than one problem

These Inuit men deal with personal problems in a variety of ways:

- Talk about it with friends/
talk to someone/talk to family.
- Let it out, swear, or cry.
- Stay social, try not to be alone.
- Pray.
- Think about the problem.
- Swallow it up.
- Go out on the land/snowmobiling/camping.

Many men hesitate to seek professional help for their problems, because of concerns about privacy, unfamiliarity with the counsellor or the counselling method, and lack of trust. About half the respondents indicated that they would turn to a professional, while the others preferred to get help from family or friends, or to deal with their problems alone by trying to forget them, thinking them through, or going out on the land. Older men with established relationships often said they

would seek help for family problems from their partner first, and turn to a professional if that did not work. Some of the younger respondents said they would be reluctant even to turn to someone close for help.

Nonetheless, certain situations – especially family problems – would prompt men to actively seek out help. The men said they would seek help to deal with:

- Family problems.
- Loss of friend or family.
- Feelings of being overwhelmed.
- Unemployment.
- Physical illnesses that they couldn't deal with by themselves.
- Communication problems.

SOURCES OF HELP FOR PERSONAL PROBLEMS

... Men today need help because their lives have changed. They no longer follow a traditional lifestyle and I talk and visit with imprisoned men about that.... We used to have a men's circle, but because of funding problems, we no longer have a men's group. (Nunavut participant)

Although men were aware that there is help for personal and family problems in their community, they were often unsure precisely where to find this help. Social services was

suicides. This could include talking to friends or family when you notice a change in their attitude, or approaching people who seem to be at risk.

All told, the men suggested a wide range of approaches to reducing suicide, including:

- Promoting more communication with family and friends.
- Being more open.
- Bringing families closer together through counselling on well-being.
- Using role models to promote pride and encourage success.
- Providing mentors at the school level to increase motivation and build self-esteem and self-sufficiency.
- Introducing more extracurricular activities such as athletics or hunting.

Violence

Violence and anger were other topics discussed with our Inuit male interviewees. The men agreed that violence is a widespread problem, and that it is not an appropriate way to deal with issues.

UNDERLYING CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

It was apparent in talking with the men that they see a need for a place to go to receive help and guidance in dealing with personal issues. What is most repeated in the North

is that Inuit men have lost their sense of identity and this is causing many of the problems in Inuit society. The respondents listed the following reasons why many Inuit men are violent:

- They have few resources, in terms of finances and food.
- They live in overcrowded housing.
- They have lost their culture.
- They learned the behaviour by seeing violence in their own home.
- They are affected by negative experiences from early childhood.
- Violence is their way of dealing with other problems like addictions or fear.
- Violence is the only way they know to express their feelings.

The respondents acknowledged that many men in their communities have grown up with violence and tolerate it as an acceptable reaction to anger. As a participant from the Inuvialuit Settlement Region said,

They've seen it before, so they figure it's okay. That's another thing for education. People have to be taught that it's not okay to hit someone.... It's wrong and somebody has to go up to them and literally tell them that it is wrong. Just because your parents did it doesn't give you the right to do

Discussion



There has been a recent emphasis on gender-specific medicine – the understanding that because of differences in biology, social roles and awareness, men and women may require different approaches to health care. The concept has its roots in the recognition that medicine, which has often been based on studies of male biology, must take into account that women’s symptoms, treatments, reactions, etc. may be different from men’s.

The other side of this is that men, too, need health services adapted to their unique needs.

The fact that few services exist to really help Inuit men was the initial spark for this research. Inuit communities voiced their concerns that Inuit men were not getting the services needed for their emotional and social problems, and that it wasn’t until they were incarcerated that they received the help that they were seeking.

The results from this study underline the need for approaches to physical health care and emotional wellness that are male-specific.

Education

We need to get across to our young people, students, how hard life used to be. How Inuit had to cope without our modern conveniences, houses, skidoos and equipment.... Our culture is very resilient, you had to be resilient in order to survive. You always had to fight against the environment, the hardships, the starvation and find tools, create tools in order just to survive and I think that’s something that we don’t teach our kids enough.... They need to be challenged more in education, to make them more resilient academically...

(Nunavik participant)

GENDER GAPS IN EDUCATION

We know that education plays an important role in people’s overall health and wellness.² For example, those with higher education are able to access more health information and understand it better; and higher levels of education can lead to increased employment opportunities, which can lead to higher incomes, better self-esteem and other benefits. Yet we also know that in many Inuit communities, high school dropout rates are

They wanted this information to be easily available, and as abundant as the information about women's health issues.

Personal and Family Problems

Past research has found that the erosion of Inuit culture – caused by the imposition of different cultural and social values – has had a negative effect on Inuit men. Seltzer¹⁴ attributes the increase in mental illness among Inuit males to the significant cultural changes they have witnessed. The damage to the Inuk male identity may lead to low self-esteem, negative self image and other symptoms of ill health. Trying to cope with these psychological difficulties can lead Inuit to substance abuse and violence.

Consistent with Seltzer's research, the men we talked to described having experienced a variety of emotional difficulties, including jealousy, anger, feelings of loss of control, and stress. The most frequently mentioned cause of these emotional problems was their loss of culture. Our respondents also made the link between men's emotional problems and other factors such as addictions, physical and emotional abuse during childhood, and crowded housing.

All the men, regardless of age, emphasized the importance of creating a stronger male cultural identity through men's groups or land excursions. This, they said, could significantly boost Inuit men's sense of pride.

They also said that traditional skills teach independence, responsibility and discipline – qualities important in other aspects of life.

The results of the study indicate that Inuit men are ready and willing to look for help, when they are aware of their problems. Of the 19 interviewees, 17 had in fact sought help through counselling. The difficulty is that there often is little help available to them. What is also very apparent from our interviews is that men often do not know where to seek the help they need for personal and family problems. This point came through clearly when respondents were asked where they could go for help: some of the men said that they would turn to sources such as the police, the “drunk tank,” or a women's shelter for help with their emotional problems.



Mental wellness was an important topic that arose in these interviews. Many of the men understood that there are common issues that need to be dealt with such as anger management, substance abuse, communication, and family life. What was very clear from our interviews is that Inuit men don't always know how to deal with these problems, or lack the resources to do so, even though they are willing to participate in counselling or programs, if they are available.

The themes of culture and tradition permeated all of these interviews, recurring in the discussions of all aspects of men's lives and health. Time and again, our informants emphasized that many of the problems Inuit men face are the result of a loss of culture and a feeling of uncertainty about their role within their families and communities. What is most needed, the men urged, is a stronger feeling of identity, of belonging, and of pride in their Inuit culture and heritage.

Men need a voice. They have important things to say and contributions to make.

Through the Inuit Tuttarvingat's community workshops and regional visits, Inuit voiced their concerns about the lack of help available to Inuit men. The people at the Inuit Tuttarvingat hope that by providing this information on the men's experiences, stories and opinions, they have given a stronger voice to Inuit men and their issues.

We need the opportunity, more chances, to share and say what is on our mind. Not just through research, but through men's groups; this would be better and it would help us too.

(Nunatsiavut participant)

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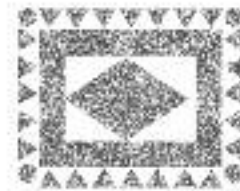
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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Men seem to have many problems, and in many communities, Inuit are saying that there isn't enough help for men, that we need to help men. We'd like your ideas about what's happening with men and what's needed for men.

Generally, we'd like to know what you have to say about:

- What kinds of problems are men having?
- Why do you think these problems are happening?
- What do men need today, so that these problems don't happen?

Some of the specific things we're interested in are:

PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES:

Are there health issues that worry you?
.....

What kinds of physical activities do you do...sports, on-land, etc.?

If none or not much: Why not (e.g., don't feel like it, nothing available...)?

For those men who don't do much physical activity, what might be the best way to get them more physically active?
.....

For what kinds of health problems would you go to a doctor or the health centre?
.....

How do you feel when you do go to the doctor...comfortable, awkward... ?

If not comfortable: Why not? What would make you feel more comfortable?
.....

Too many young Inuit men commit suicide.

Why do you think this happens?

What do you think would be helpful in preventing suicides?

.....

Too often, people get angry with each other and that leads to violence... men violent with women, or guys violent with each other. Why do you think that happens?

What do you think would help men not be violent?

.....

If people have alcohol and drug problems in your community, what kind of help is available for them?

[If there is nothing available]: What do you think would be helpful?

[If something is available]: If you had a drug or alcohol problem yourself, would you go to this service? Why or why not?

.....

EDUCATION NEEDS:

Have you finished high school?

If no: Why did you drop out?

.....

Have you taken any courses or programs at college or some other training?

Did you finish?

If not: Why not?

.....

Appendix 2: Consent Form

MEN'S NEEDS PROJECT

Interviewer:

National Aboriginal Health Organization, Ajunnginiq Centre*
220 Laurier Ave W., Ottawa, ON K1P 5Z9

Inuit want to improve the health and wellness of community members. Many problems involve and affect men – health services, family problems, suicide, violence and abuse, drugs and alcohol, low levels of education and employment, and so on. But communities have also said that there are not enough services and programs that help men. The Ajunnginiq Centre would like men's experiences and ideas about:

- what you think the most important problems are;
- why problems happen; and
- what is needed to make things better.

The stories you tell us will be part of a report by the Ajunnginiq Centre, which will be printed and also posted on our Internet website. We hope this report will be useful when communities and governments are planning for services and programs.

The interviews will be done in person or by phone. They will be recorded on tape so that we will have your exact words. Your name will not be used – no one will know whose stories these are.

If you are willing to tell us your ideas, we ask you to give your permission by reading the section below and signing your name.

- The purpose of the project has been fully explained to me. I understand the purpose and agree to be interviewed.
- I understand that my name or any other identifying information (for example, what community I live in) will not be made known to anyone except the interviewer.
- I understand that the interviews will be audiotaped. The tape will be heard only by the interviewer and his research partners at the Ajunnginiq Centre. The tapes will be destroyed after they have been written up.
- I understand that I will have a chance to read my words before they are made public, to make sure that the report is accurate.
- I understand that I can change my mind and not be part of this project. I understand that anything I have said at any time will not be used if I don't want it used.
- I understand that the ideas and information I talk about will be written up and included in a report that will be printed as well as posted on the Ajunnginiq Centre website. I understand that my words will therefore be seen by many people.

NAME (PRINT)

SIGNATURE

WITNESS SIGNATURE

DATE

* At the time of this research project, the Inuit-specific centre at the National Aboriginal Health Organization was known as the Ajunnginiq Centre. In October 2008, the Ajunnginiq Centre changed its name to Inuit Tuttarvingat.