

The Poor Living Conditions in Nunavut and its Effect on the Healthy Development of  
Preschool-Aged Inuit Children

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The history of Canada has been established through the welcoming nature of the Indigenous people, since they settled in Canada before the arrival of the Europeans. However, the contact of the Europeans led to the exploitation of the Indigenous people (Anzovino, Oresar, & Boutilier, 2019). The text *Walk a Mile* demonstrated a trend of the Canadian government neglecting the issues present in the Indigenous community, despite the government promising to improve the well-being of the First Nations. The dismissal of the Indigenous rights has contributed to institutional racism which is “behaviour, policies, or practices that disadvantage racialized persons” (Anzovino, Oresar, & Boutilier, 2019, p.119 ) while the Europeans benefited from this ideology. In the 21st century, institutional racism manifests in the mistreatment of the Indigenous group in Canada. For instance, there is a disparity in the living conditions between the Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. In a household, Aboriginal people experience food insecurity, three times more than their non-aboriginal counterpart (Statistics Canada, 2015). Additionally, Inuit are ten times more likely to live in crowded homes (Statistics Canada, 2015), and access to water is easy for most Canadians but is not for many Aboriginal people (H. R. W., 2016). In Nunavut, Inuit households are impoverished and have to endure poor living conditions such as food insecurity, overcrowding and the inaccessibility to clean water which disturbs the healthy development of preschool age children. As a result, the Government of Canada should prioritize the living complications pertaining to the First Nations. This paper focuses on preschoolers because, in the Inuit population, there has been an increase due to birth rate (Daley, Castleden, Jamieson, Furgal, & Ell, 2015). Therefore, the Inuit community is expecting to increase in the future; however, the life expectancy will be problematic if the concerns of the

living conditions are unresolved. In addition, as a developed country, these impoverished living conditions should not be prevalent in Canada.

### **Literature Review**

*Food insecurity among Inuit preschoolers* concentrated on the prevalence of food insecurity in the Inuit community located in Nunavut. The text was based on a survey conducted with preschoolers between the ages of three to five years, and this survey investigated the health status of 388 children in 16 Nunavut communities (Egeland, Pacey, Cao, & Sobol, 2010). In addition, classifications were implemented on the levels of food insecurity among children and the overall levels of food insecurity the child's household experience. The levels of child food insecurity and of household food security were calculated, a majority of the preschoolers, 70%, were living in a food-insecure household. In general, the survey revealed that 31.0% of children were moderately food insecure and 25.1% were severely food insecure (Egeland, Pacey, Cao, & Sobol, 2010). In households that children experience severe food insecurity, the primary caretakers disclosed that their children often skipped meals, went hungry or did not eat for a day because of the insufficient amount of money. The outcome of this survey displayed that there should be an intervention in the food insecurity predicament, which assists in living a healthier lifestyle. This article reinforces the negative consequences of food insecurity in Inuit children, and it highlights the recurring concern of children starving. Furthermore, the article reveals that the government is not intervening these concerns which infer that the practices of the governing system intentionally place Inuit children at a disadvantage.

The seventh chapter of the text *Walk a Mile*, was informative concerning the history of the Indigenous people of Canada. The text discussed the lifestyle of the Indigenous people prior

to the encounter of white-Europeans and after the Europeans settled in Canada. *Walk a Mile* demonstrated a trend of the Canadian government neglecting the issues that First Nations experience (Anzovino, Oresar, & Boutilier, 2019), despite Canada proclaiming to strive for equality, the country marginalizes the Indigenous community. The Canadian Government does not acknowledge the problems affecting the Indigenous people. The First Nations experiences issues such as the MMIW (Missing and murdered Indigenous Women), the disparity in income wages between Indigenous Canadians and non-Indigenous Canadians, the lack of employability and the limited education (Anzovino, Oresar, & Boutilier, 2019). This text relates to the analysis because the negligence of the Government of Canada manifests in the poor living conditions that will be discussed as a form of institutionalized racism.

### **Analysis**

Food insecurity hinders the physical development of children; for instance, in an Inuit household, 70% of pre-school children are food insecure. Reports indicated that of the children who have experienced food insecurity, 75.8% skipped meals, 90.4% went hungry, or 60.1% did not eat for a day (Egeland, Pacey, Cao, & Sobol, 2010) due to the lack of money. Food insecurity is related to the development of children because of the need to fulfill their dietary requirements. In the Inuit community, food insecurity and the inaccessibility of healthy food is connected to the socioeconomic challenges and is prevalent in Nunavut (Galloway, Young, & Egeland, 2010). Therefore, preschool-age children are subjected to consume energy-dense food due to the inexpensive price, which leads to the exposure of obesity. Obesity has become a primary challenge to public health in preschool-age children, a study deduced that Inuit children are at risk of being obese (28.0%) and overweight (39.3%) due to food insecurity (Huh, Rifas-Shiman,

Taveras, Oken, & Gillman, 2011). Children who eat a nutritious diet at a young age will maintain the habit in the future and healthy eating becomes intergeneration. To conclude, healthy eating habit must be implemented in the Inuit children by the Canadian government creating a system that provides nourishing food for the Inuit families that are unable to afford the food catering to their dietary requirement.

Overcrowded housing is common in Nunavut and affects the healthy development of Inuit preschoolers (Findlay & Janz, 2012). In comparison to the world, Inuit infants have the highest reported rate of hospital admission because of lower respiratory tract infection, and the contributions to the infection are overcrowded housing and reduced ventilation. The reduction of ventilation in a household may increase the concentration of airborne virus and overcrowding allows the infection to transmit at a quicker rate (Kovesi et al., 2007). Furthermore, despite socioeconomic status, the infection is common in households that occupy seven or more people. Since the average number of people living in an Inuit household is 6.1 (Kovesi et al., 2007), this data indicates that a majority of preschoolers are exposed to the risk of suffering from respiratory infections. The consequence of the respiratory infections is bronchiolitis, and the hospital admission rate of bronchiolitis for infants is 19.7 per 100 (Kovesi et al., 2007). In the future, when the children start school, it will be difficult to attend on a regular basis because of the constant admission to the hospital. In conclusion, the Canadian Government should provide efficient methods to improve home ventilation, or increase the number of houses built in Nunavut, to reduce the crisis of respiratory infection (Kovesi et al., 2007).

The lack of clean water in Nunavut attributes to the health risks Inuit preschool children will experience. In the Inuit population, people have died yearly of preventable deaths because of

the scarcity of safe drinking water, which creates exposure pathways that communicable disease can be contracted and abruptly spread between people (Ashbolt, 2004). This reality corresponds to children because if they are unable to access water, then it poses a threat to their health and it compels them to consume untreated drinking water. As a result, the children will be exposed to the contaminants within their community which leads to two possibilities, they either die early or they survive (Daley, Castleden, Jamieson, Furgal, & Ell, 2015). However, the latter possibility will be problematic to their health in the future, as the use of unsafe drinking water could result in waterborne disease outbreak (Daley, Castleden, Jamieson, Furgal, & Ell, 2015). Water management, in comparison to food insecurity and housing shortage, is not prioritized, and as a result, less funding is administered to address the issue of unsanitary water (Daley, Castleden, Jamieson, Furgal, & Ell, 2015). The disregard of clean water indicates that the Inuit children are restrained from healthy development. Therefore, the Government of Canada should prioritize water, considering that water is a primary source of life.

In the 21st century, the concept of institutionalized racism is relevant in examining the issue of food insecurity, overcrowded housing, and inaccessibility to clean water experienced by Inuit children located in Nunavut. These issues contribute to the depletion of the healthy development of the children. Canada, a developed country, has a majority of its citizens living in standard conditions, yet Indigenous people are impoverished and exist as a second-class citizen. In conclusion, the disparity is constructed to prevent the Indigenous people from attaining their rights; therefore, it is the responsibility of the Canadian Government to be committed to reconciling with the Indigenous community.

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