

Labrador Inuit Women's Realities

AnânuKatiget Tumingit Regional Inuit Women's Association

Labrador Inuit Women's Realities

Voices of Women in Nain and Hopedale

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Introduction

This paper considers a number of various indicators: economic, social, health, education and cultural. It is interesting that during a recent Needs Assessment women have not spoken about some issues that traditionally affect women's economic security such as addictions, family violence and abuse. Family status has been spoken about in relation to children and day care and school leaving but the responsibilities of family and extended family and some of the challenges people live with such as addictions and violence has not been discussed to date and this may reflect the stigma attached to the issues.

Inuit Sensitive Gender Based Analysis

Pauktuutit, the national Inuit women's organization has been developing an Inuit Sensitive Gender Based Analysis tool. That tool was used, along with other gender analysis processes and consultation with Inuit women to begin to understand the impact of key issues on Inuit women. The key points that inform the Inuit Sensitive Gender Based Analysis perspective are:

Inuit world view

It is important that this project work from a culturally sensitive framework. For Inuit, wellbeing occurs through individual fulfillment of basic social obligations as a member of larger group. Individual and community wellbeing occur in tandem. Wisdom is gained by engaging in life; honoring one's heritage and mastering skills necessary for independence. For Inuit learning and living are the same and knowledge judgement and skill and not separated.

Inuit GBA Indicators

- It is important to keep in mind the paid and unpaid work lives
- Out on the land time for women
- Amount of time male partner is engaged in hunting and fishing (affects his sense of well being and identity and therefore affects family by association)
- Nutrition; child care.
- Engagement in civic decision making; Control over one's destiny, how many women in positions of authority.

Housing

- Household space that allows women to sew, quilt, weave and crafts:
- Housing conditions and links to health education and attainment and economic prosperity.
- Some health indicators suggest overcrowding contributes to poor health, and relationship stressors and violence.

Economic activity

What the household consumes and produces is linked in informal economy; women's sense of identity; Jobs or crafts as it contributes to the family income.

Education

- Need to consider not only formal education, but also informal education; the frequency and quality of access to elders and teaching about Inuit culture, traditions and skills.

Violence

- Multigenerational cycles of abuse and the impact of residential school experience.

Elders, culture and language

- Land and country food
- Canadian economy, institutions and government; how do Inuit engage with them.
- Experience of, and engagement in, sharing practice.

Highlights

The things that contribute to strong cultural identity and good mental health like time out on the land for women and hunting time for men are becoming a challenge for many due to the cost.

From a culture perspective, the strength of family connections and ties to community often present challenges if individuals need to leave the community to further their education and training.

From an Inuit sensitive perspective, the multigenerational impacts of trauma and loss of culture affect both men and women and indeed entire communities. The effects of this trauma are barriers to school completion, training and being able to attend and stay focused on work. When an individual's family connection keeps them close to others who struggle with addictions, mental health issues, violence and suicide – this has an impact on their day to day economic security.

The northern environment, while on one hand a source of personal and spiritual connection and competence, also influences activities like participation in activities and fundamental issues like getting children to child care. It can contribute to isolation and social exclusion.

The housing stock is often inadequate in terms of physical structure, energy efficiency and availability. Subsequently the cost of heating a home and having sufficient space for sewing crafts for women is often not a reality.

Teenage pregnancy and completing high school are clearly issues that affect women's long term economic security. The understanding of this issue needs to be deepened, and consultation with stakeholders such as schools and public health needs to be undertaken.

The income support data from the province demonstrates that men and women under age 34 are most represented (50+%) in the income support statistics. If the age group 35-44 are included then the rates are 65.3% for Hopedale and 73.8% for Nain. These are prime working/earning years generally so the over representation in income support statistics is concerning.

Economic Indicators

There are limited jobs in the community and most are attached to Nunatsiavut Government, health, education and service industries (hotel, stores), industries where women tend to be more highly represented. The Inuit Community Government (ICG) regularly gets Employment Enhancement Program money that helps individuals get enough weeks employment to be eligible for Employment Insurance (EI), however it is not an entry point providing enough work weeks in total for first qualifiers. While this is critically important for many men and women in the community it primarily allows families to survive not thrive. The fishery provided seasonal work for men and fish plants provided seasonal work for women. There have been significant changes though and now the fish plant in Nain is only open for a month a summer which doesn't provide enough work hours to even qualify for Employment Insurance.

Income

The following analysis considers the communities of Nain and Hopedale.

Table 2009 Income Statistics from Statistics Canada

Community	Nain		Hopedale		Province of NL	
Median Income (half above and half below)						
Gender	Male	23,000	Male	19,000	Male	31,300
	Female	18,900	Female	19,400	Female	19,900
Couple	67,700		47,000		67,600	
Lone Parent	20,000		20,400		29,800	
Average Couple Income	74,400		56,900		82,500	
Employment income Number of people reporting employment income	550 people reporting		260 people reporting		285,380 reporting	
Average Gross Income	29,300		25,400		34,000	
Employment Insurance Number of people claiming	160		100			
Average yearly income	8,600		8,200			
Income Assistance Number of people claiming	170		100			
Average yearly income	5,600		6,000			

It is important to note that "Median" means half the population is above and half is below.

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In Nain the median income statistics suggest women make 21% less than men, which is significantly better than the provincial average where the median income for women is 39% less than men. This may reflect that median income does not adjust for income status (part time or full time work for example which may be a bigger part of the picture).

In Hopedale, females do slightly better than men in terms of median income with males having .09% less median income than females. The on the ground information in Hopedale suggests that women are more represented in the full time full year jobs in the health, social and service categories and these jobs are generally government jobs with reasonable compensation. Men are more readily represented in the seasonal industries such as construction, and resource harvesting. For some seasonal work is a good fit with having time to invest in traditional activities that also support financial wellbeing such as getting wood, hunting and fishing.

Notable is that the median couple income in Nain is in line with the province. However this income indicator is \$20,700 higher in Nain than Hopedale. The population of Nain is significantly higher than Hopedale and this may reflect that many of the couples reporting income in Nain are in professional positions with good salaries with Nunatsiavut government, service industries or involved in the mining industry. When average couple income is considered, the picture changes substantially, with 74,400 being the average couple income in Nain and the province at 82,500. Hopedale is significantly lower for couple income at 56,900.

In average gross income from employment Nain residents are higher than Hopedale. This lower employment income for Hopedale residents is given context when the incidence of Employment Insurance Claims is considered (proportionately higher for Hopedale) and the average amount received is lower for Hopedale which suggests lower pay initially. The less satisfying economic conditions for Hopedale is also indicated by the proportionately higher number of claims for Income Assistance and higher yearly income from this source; clearly indicating greater dependence and lower overall income.

Generally the economic picture for both Nain and Hopedale is that those who have good full time full year jobs and are part of a couples with good jobs - your economic security is much better than most of the others in your community. The cost of living, fuel, food and housing is high for all but a much greater burden for those on reduced incomes.

The Provincial Department of Advanced Skills and Education, the department responsible for Income Support, provided 2012 statistics – which show some interesting trends. Notable is that from the perspective of that Department's operations, the communities of Nunatsiavut are divided in two districts; Nain and Hopedale. The Hopedale District includes Makkovik, Postville, and Rigolet. Given the 2009 Statistics Canada information suggests 5 or less families on income support in the other three communities it is reasonable to assume that the majority of Income support cases are in Hopedale.

Table 2012 Income Support Statistics

2012 Income Support Statistics	Nain	Hopedale
Number of cases	193	136
Single Individuals	62.1%	63.9%
Single parents on caseload	18.6%	11.7%
Couples with Children	.08%	16.1%
Age of head of Household	18-24 (37) 19%	18-24 (34) 25%

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	25-34 (64) 33.1%	25-34 (39) 28.6%
	35-44 (42) 21.7%	35-44 (16) 11.7%
	45-54 (28) 14.5%	45-54 (27) 19.8%
	55-64 (22) 11.3%	55-64 (20) 14.7%
Gender of Head of Household		
Men	49.74%	55.1%
Women	49.74%	44.0%

Employment

There are limited jobs in Nunatsiavut communities and most are attached to Nunatsiavut Government, health, education and service industries (hotel, stores). Jobs in the community tend to be for those with skills and training such as professional positions, service oriented (hotel and grocery stores) or low skilled labour such as cleaning and janitorial work.

The Inuit Community Governments (ICGs) regularly gets Community Enhancement Program money that helps individuals get enough weeks employment to be eligible for Employment Insurance (EI). While this is critically important for many men and women in the community, it primarily allows families to survive and does not allow for long term economic security. It is common for women and men to work sufficient hours to become Employment Insurance eligible and then leave work to make room for another who needs to get some extra hours. This work pattern, while better than income assistance, still means a low cash income for the fiscal year and limited opportunity to "get ahead". Because the scope of positions in the community is limited, both men and women do not get much opportunity for exposure to different kinds of jobs/work and possibilities.

Women's Realities:

Median Lone Parent income for Nain and Hopedale is similar (20,000 and 20,400 respectively) and the province at 29,800 – significantly higher than either community. Since women are most often the head of household for single parent families it is a reasonable assumption that they struggle deeply with financial security.

Insufficient income impacts a woman's ability to care for children, to rent a home – all of which can impact child custody. Insufficient income also means that some women continue to live in unhealthy and violent relationships and households because they do not have financial independence.

Challenging life experiences and opportunities, or lack of, means many women do not have the self confidence to promote their needs and interests. For young mothers in particular – confidence building, finishing school, getting trained for real jobs and having child care available is essential to economic security. It is possible that, for those who face considerable challenges and barriers, the motivation to attain high school completion is impacted by the reality that once high school completion is achieved there are few job opportunities.

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The requirement of a Certificate of Conduct from the police can be a barrier. The individual may need help and financial assistance to remove this barrier so they can proceed with building greater economic and social wellbeing.

The economic reality for seniors in general and senior women in particular is challenging for some. Total monthly income is most often defined by Old Age Security rates and these rates are set. The federal pension is the same for all seniors regardless of whether you live in the north or in an urban city. In Nain, many seniors may live in Torngat Housing, however home heating can be a high cost. Country food is not readily available all the time and buying food at the grocery store is expensive.

Social and Health Indicators

A number of social and health indicators are examined in this section and each cluster is considered in terms of women's realities.

Housing

Housing, accessibility, affordability and adequacy is a major in both Nain and Hopedale. Much of the current housing stock is not surviving the freezing and thawing that is happening with climate change. The foundations of houses are shifting, pipes are freezing and breaking and mould has also been identified as an issue of concern. The overall integrity and air tightness of some housing stock is questionable and this affects fuel costs as well. Because there is insufficient housing available it is common for multiple families to live in one household in crowded conditions. The crowded conditions cause family stress, contribute to family violence and likely contribute to children not performing well at school. "Got to pay for sitters, and plus where there's 12 of us living in our house, and has to buy foods, and when I buys food with my check, the food only last couple of days, and if it was only me and my son it would last a while". Once you have a house you are not inclined to give up that security and this is affecting women's choices about leaving the community to get training. If they have the security of a home through social housing then leaving to go to school means giving up that housing and maybe not being able to get it back.

"cause there's not too many that will make the leap to go to school and get their trades, especially if they have kids, and same like if they do go to school, if they got an apartment, you'd lose it [if you go away to school] and you don't want to lose it. And then, if I go and get my trade, will there be a job for me? I want to go to school, but will there be work for me"?

The housing stock in Nain is not adequate for the numbers of families and individuals needing homes. Torngat Housing has been building a limited number of houses for years and these are available to low income families with a rent to own agreement of \$100 per month. The homes are generally small bungalows with no basement. Individuals must apply yearly and the number of requests far exceeds availability. Often people simply stop applying because they do not believe they will ever get a house. Often more than one family/generation is living in a house at one time. Newfoundland and Labrador Housing has some properties they rent and these are rent controlled to 25% of gross income. For some, employment means increased rent and this is prohibitive as there is no sense of getting ahead. For those not considered low income, the cost of building a home is prohibitive. The physical environment requires considerable and costly building lot preparation and installation of water and sewer -even before building supplies and construction are taken into account. Single adults have few options as there are limited rental properties.

Heating

An extended winter, very cold temperatures and low income is not a good recipe for staying warm in winter. A regular two bedroom home in Nain using electric heat can have winter heating bills of \$1000. If a household uses oil furnace for heat then it can take 2 barrels of oil a month to keep the house heated. A barrel of oil can cost over \$350. The furnace oil is not delivered and has to be transported by snow machine in winter and it is a significant weight for anybody to move around and hook up. This is especially difficult for women and seniors.

Food/Cost of Living

As with northern communities across the country, the cost of living is very high in both Nain and Hopedale. People are more dependent on store bought food and perishable food is brought to the community by ship in the fall and non-perishable food is flown into the communities for approximately 6 months of the year – depending on ice conditions. Accessibility and availability all contribute to cost. The quality of fresh food and the cost of it in the north are legendary as are the choices often made to purchase less costly and less nutritious food. The changes in climate, subsequent changes in the availability of wildlife within reasonable distance of the community and the cost of travel in terms of snow machines, boats and fuel have all impacted Inuit and their traditional harvesting activities.

Women's Realities

- Overcrowding in homes can negatively impact time and space and ability to attend to studies and prevent high school completion. It also means that for Inuit women, there is little space to complete crafts and sewing etc, this informal economy is often an important part of their contribution to the household income.
- Costs of home heating in the north are high and staying warm can mean high costs. Keeping parts of the house cool result in mould, damage to infrastructure and more costs.
- Too little housing availability can result in pressures and a sense of obligation for Inuit women to welcome and care for other family members or friends and neighbours who are homeless.
- Women in abusive relationships often feel they have no option or reasonable alternative but stay in the abusive relationship because there is no other long term housing available in the community.
- The effects of trauma- from one's personal history, multi generational impacts dislocation and residential school - often means that individuals self medicate with alcohol and drugs. Substance abuse by anybody whose income is essential to the household causes stress.
- Access to low income housing (Torngat or NLH) is awarded along reasonable criteria which include level of income and number of children.

An unintended impact of the criteria is women; particularly those with limited education, training and expectation of low wages; have a better chance of getting housing if they stay low income and have children. For some women, the 25 % of gross income rent rule of NLH, means they see no way to really get ahead or do better if the increased income is going to go to rent. NLH rental is not transferable and there is no guarantee that once you leave the community you will get access NLH on return.

The same perceived barrier does not exist with Torngat Housing because the monthly payment stays the same. However the long waits can mean that there are more responsibilities for children and less confidence about returning to school or training. Once obtained, Torngat housing, keeps a woman anchored to the community unless her absence is six months or less. This timing does not allow for most training programs that occur outside the community.

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However, according to the Chair person for Torngat Housing (Margie Fox) seasonal could mean more than a year. Training falls under education and tenants are able to temporarily vacate their home for training opportunities.

- The lack of stable housing also affects families when children are taken into care by Child Youth and Family Services. The mothers cannot regain custody of children without having a place for them to live. Many women experience considerable stress and trauma when their children are removed from their custody. Children themselves also feel the loss of being with their family and sometimes are not placed with Inuit families and so the loss of culture is a risk. The long term and potential multigenerational impacts of these disruptions are clear and housing availability is a contributing factor.

The Nunatsiavut Government has completed an extensive research study on housing in Nunatsiavut communities. The release of the report is anticipated within the next few months. Housing is the top priority for women in Hopedale though anticipated actions on this priority will be on hold until the Housing Report is released. It is not expected that there will have been a gender based analysis of the data collected.

Transportation

As stated earlier in this report, transportation to and from communities on the north coast of Labrador is generally by air, with boats in summer as an option and snow machines in winter for some. The roads in Nunatsiavut communities are not plowed in winter which means that people have to walk or travel on snow machines. For many, ownership of a snow machine and the ability to purchase gas for the machine is simply not financially possible. The distance from one end of the community to the other could be as much as 2 miles. This presents considerable challenges for getting around the community, attending appointments, meetings, participating in community events, getting to work and children getting to day care and school. Walking on unplowed roads in snow machine paths is not easy. In poor weather conditions walking is not comfortable and probably not very safe. In fact in poor weather conditions (wind and cold) it is challenging to even travel by snow machine because visibility is impaired, weather conditions can change quickly and the increased wind chill of an open air transportation system is challenging. Transportation issues, considered along with severe weather conditions, contribute to people staying at home and to greater isolation.

Women's Realities:

Isolation, in harsh northern environments can be very challenging for all. For women with family responsibilities and no transportation, and sometimes no phone, it is challenging to be engaged with community activities, to get to appointments and to pick up groceries and such. Access to country food is an issue for some as well. These issues are compounded for senior women.

Mental Health

Economic opportunity, social problems, isolation and the complexity of issues contribute to mental health concerns.

Intergenerational Trauma

The Labrador Inuit have also suffered from residential school experiences and the intergenerational trauma that has been well documented across the country. Many individuals who attended residential

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school were traumatized and did not experience being parented. They lost their language, connections to home community and families. Families left at home were traumatized because their children were taken from them. As a consequence many coped by using substances and this in turn lead to other social problems, mental health issues, children with FASD and violence. Families and children have suffered deeply, and significant resources and effort have been applied to address problems and promote healing. As with the process of cultural, family and personal disintegration, the process of healing and wholeness will take time. Every family has been affected in some way by this intergenerational trauma and its effects.

Clearly the mental health of the population of Inuit communities are affected by the intergenerational trauma of residential schools, the pressures of living in isolated communities, the social problems of substance use, family violence, sexual abuse and child neglect and abuse. The high cost of living, low incomes for many and the lack of future options also contribute. Many of the women interviews spoke of the value of work to their mental health, self esteem and self confidence and how depression is associated with not working.

Suicide

Suicide, particularly youth suicide, is a major concern and source of deep suffering for the people in both Nain and Hopedale. This is blatantly clear when the median age of death is considered. The Statistics for 2004-2011 give the median age of death for Nain as 39 years and Hopedale 35 years. The median age of death for the province is 78 years. Makkovik, a Nunatsiavut community with more prosperity and employment, is closer to the provincial statistics with a median age of death at 76 years of age. The grief associated with suicide and the long term impact is significant. Many families are related to each other by birth or marriage and otherwise know each other because the communities are small and isolated. This sense of family, by blood or by Inuit identity means that all are affected by the despair and hopelessness associated with suicide. One woman interviewed explains the long term impact well, "I was accepted to go to University, I graduated (from high school), but that same year, all my cousins committed suicide; I was accepted to Memorial University of Newfoundland, so I cancelled it, I never did reapply".

Women's Realities

Generally women are relational in nature – it is their sense of connectedness to others that is at their core. Responsibility for keeping families together and caring for families are some of messages that women get – and this is very true of Inuit culture.

There is considerable social stigma regarding women and addictions issues. Research on gender and treatment programs has consistently highlighted that the kinds of programs that work best for women, gender sensitive programs, are different and include child care, flexible programming, and concentrates on relationship. Current addictions programs are not women specific.

Care for children and care for seniors if most often considered women's work, and these responsibilities prevent women from seeking help, attending appointments, or travelling for treatment programs. While Inuit have a strong sense of family and sharing, if your family is not healthy they may not be able to help you, and in fact from an Inuit culture perspective you may feel the obligation to take care of them.

Contributing to the family income either through employment or the sale of crafts gives a sense of status, motivation to keep going and is better for families and children. It is not unusual however for

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young women to have children in their teens and given the limited opportunities for employment they stay on income support for extended periods.

Education

For a number of reasons there are many women in the community who do not finish high school. Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses are available. Generally participants in ABE programs will complete the program in spurts, stopping and starting according to the dynamics of their lives, be they sick children, an opportunity for short term employment or other issues. Most participants in the ABE program will receive some pay while attending.

Women's Realities:

ABE however there are some significant barriers to women's participation and completion of ABE. They include:

- Some women do not meet entry level requirements for ABE
- Affordable and accessible Child Care is a barrier. As noted earlier in this report, transportation for children can be a huge issue. Both the Aboriginal Head Start and Family Resource child care spaces are attached to parental obligations to attend as well. Child care for children under two years is not available. This is a distinct barrier for women wanting to attend school/training or work.
- In the past the ABE programs have tolerated the stop and start of ABE programming on the part of women. This allows them to deal with various issues and problems that arise and then step back into training.

For young mothers in particular - finishing school, getting trained for real jobs and having child care available is essential to economic security.

Families and Children

Inuit culture values highly connection to family, extended family and community. Communities are small and consequently people in communities and all along the north coast are often related by blood or by marriage. What is happening in an extended family, either celebration or crisis, will be important to all and will command attention and focus – a fact that sometimes means engagement in other things are often subject to change at short notice.

Inuit have a higher birth rate and more children than other aboriginal people in Canada and higher than the national average. It is common for Inuit to be in relationships and have children but never “legally” marry, and so statistical information will often show half of the population as single. Having children without being in a marriage is therefore very common and teenage pregnancy is not unusual. Clearly the effects of having children prior to finishing schooling limit the chances of long term economic security for women.

Child care, availability, affordability, accessibility and safety profoundly affect women's lives and their economic security. As stated earlier it affects high school completion, the decision to pursue training or not, a woman's ability to keep a job or ensure she can get to her workplace consistently and on time, and her general ability to pursue interests outside the home.

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Child care responsibilities are traditionally thought of as women's responsibilities. The Inuit way is that families will take care of each other and child care responsibilities are shared. This Inuit way is disrupted however when families are not healthy and are often dealing with troubles related to alcohol, drugs, household overcrowding, violence and poverty.

Women's Realities:

When affordable, accessible and available child care is not available it affects women's economic security in many ways:

- Young women whose high school completion is interrupted by a pregnancy and the need to provide child care often do not complete high school. This lack of high school and child care responsibilities affects long term job training, post secondary education and therefore income over time.
- Mothers who cannot secure affordable and safe child care are often challenged to meet actually show up for work and complete their work well. When child care options are insecure a mother can be deeply stressed and it may be easier to simply live off income assistance and be home with your children. This can lead to loss of confidence and ambition and lead to a lifetime of low employment at best.
- It often means that women cannot choose to leave their home community for work in places like Voisey's Bay or leave the community for job training.
- Simply finding child care adds to the stress of parenting, especially for women who are lone parents.

Culture and Heritage

Inuit culture speaks to a strong connection to the land and sea, to depending on the environment for your needs and to knowing how to move about. Hunting and fishing were valued roles for Inuit men and the fish, fowl, eggs and animals harvested sustained their families. Women primarily took care of the family, and made the clothing, boots and utensils that were necessary for daily life and in fact the quality of these items can be considered art in our modern world. The Inuktitut language bound people to their culture and identity. Considerable effort is being made to retain the language and many do not speak Inuktitut. It is a tremendous loss for them.

Crafts

Inuit stone carvings and crafts are often part of the informal economy that helps bring money into a family as well as beautiful and often very useful articles into the possession of the purchaser. The making of traditional crafts is one way of preserving culture and connecting to the resilience of ancestors. Making traditional crafts serves many functions. Economically, sales of crafts allow women across the age spectrum to add to the household income. From a culture perspective, craft making is important as well, it has always been a valued part of women's work. The teaching of traditional craft making is also a time for women across the age span to share skills and knowledge. Women currently find they do not have ready access to raw materials and do not have certain access to markets. It is difficult to access raw seal pelts and expensive to buy tanned pelts. The preparation of seal pelts is a skill that is in danger of getting lost. Finding ways to increase sales for crafts that have good marketability (like traditional mitts and boots) would be very helpful.

Women's Realities:

Cultural factors such as attachment to family, sense of responsibility for family and connection to community make it very difficult for women with young children to leave the community to get advanced education and training.

Working from home in craft making and finding sales through family and friends are generally the way in which women have sold products. Often women do not value their own work and pricing can be very different between craft makers. Sometimes crafts are sold in craft stores. Currently there is no coordinated and supported effort to organize craft makers, find dependable and affordable sources for raw materials and develop markets that would support year round stable incomes for craft makers.