

INFLUENCES ON QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE OLDER ADULT IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

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Executive Summary

Quality of Life (QOL) of the older adult in the Northwest Territories has not been explored. Indeed there is a dearth of literature about aging in the north. With the aging trend in the territory, it is vital that we understand the influences on the livelihood of our older population which sits at greater than 10 percent of the territorial population (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Beginning in 2013, nurse educators/ researchers with Aurora Research Institute conducted a community based participatory action research (PAR) study with the NWT Seniors' Society. QOL is defined by WHO (1997) as "perception of position in life in the context of culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns" (p.1). The objectives of this study were to provide a rich background and context for 'influences on QOL of the older adult in the Northwest Territories (NWT)'; engage NWT older adults to identify current actual and potential influences upon and threats to their QOL; examine the history of the NWT Seniors' Society and changes to services and programming for older adults in the territory over the past 30 years; and provide older adults with information that could influence policy decisions related to QOL of older adults living in the NWT.

"It's rewarding to be regarded as an elder."

Methodology

This study used individual interviews, focus groups and town hall meetings to explore influences of QOL. As well, we conducted a modified Delphi to describe the history and achievements of the NWT Seniors' Society over the past 30 years. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Data was collected by telephone, face to face and email means. Data was analyzed using content analysis/thematic approach.



**Abbreviated Table 1:
Participant Characteristics
(n=92)**

Characteristics	%
Age	
60-69 years	32.6
70-79 years	38
Gender	
Female	72.8
Ethnicity	
Non-Aboriginal	33.6
Dene	40.2
Education Level	
Grade school	22.8
College or University	43.4
Annual Income	
\$10,000-\$20,000	40.2
Greater than \$50,000	28.2
Length of Time in NWT	
26 to 50 years	34.7
51+ to lifetime	45.6
Dependents	
Spouse/Partner	41.3
Children/Grandchildren	17.2
Lives alone	39.1

Findings

The influences on QOL for older adults are captured under good life, life struggles, current needs for a better life, most significant concerns, and changes *over* the past 30 years. NWT communities are culturally distinct and diverse. Their uniqueness cannot be understated and community contexts are determinants of the participants’ QOL. Stories from the participants were rich and varied. Here, in snippet format, are excerpts of shared stories:

“I love the Territories. I love the freedom and I don’t like noise...I just find it fair and I’ve got many good friends here, a good Church life and I know I am happy up here.”

“I see the increasing ...income gap in the territory and the division between people with very little and very much...and as it becomes more pronounced, I think people at the bottom end of the scale are expected to make due more and more...the harsh reality that many people in the territory face.”

“People should be home when they are dying. When we are in the hospital, residential school, they took our young kids away and it broke up our home and everybody turned to alcohol. And they say, what’s wrong with us? And now the same people [survivors of residential school] are being sent into the dementia place - now sent back into these institutions to die. Sure, we may need these institutions but we need them at home.”

Influences on the QOL of Older Adults in the NWT

The Good Life / Living Well	Life’s Struggles
Social Connection and Support Being Active and Independent Traditional Living and Place Safety and Security	Pitiful Times and Transitions Cost of Living Health Concerns Housing Issues Social Isolation Environment/ Geography

Recommendations

- Advocacy
 - Continue to advocate for affordable cost of living, healthy communities for aging older adults, effective health services, drug and alcohol addiction, healthy public policy;
- Education
 - Assistance to apply for benefits, access electronics and internet, education on healthy aging, genealogy, health and well-being, financial management;
- Leadership
 - Capacity building of leaders within each community, representation and recognition of leaders, successional planning for leaders within the NWT Seniors’ Society;
- Research
 - Formal training of PAR for community members (photovoice), spontaneous translation in First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities, developing a research agenda for older adults, replicate the study with more communities, explore funding options for community partners.