

ANIK AND NIBISHA SIOUI
HANDOUT WORKSHOP
HELD ON SATURDAY 21ST APRIL, 2007
(3:00 – 4:00)

Toward an ecosystemic, intergenerational and cross-disciplinary model for an understanding of suicide among Aboriginals of Canada: Groundwork for an efficient prevention

The socio-cultural situation of aboriginals in Quebec is evolving quickly. In the last few decades, Aboriginals have demonstrated openly and intensively their refusal to acquiesce to assimilation policies, and they have created organizations to protect themselves. This is particularly true at the political level; it is also the case at the socio-cultural level. Some socio-cultural initiatives are conducted under the aegis of the Nation; others are taken within the band itself. Although the family plays a fundamental role in the transmission of cultural values, not to mention the development and socialization of children, this entity is seldom called upon to ensure the strength of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada and elsewhere. In consequence, little is known about the modern Aboriginal family, whether on or off “reserve”. The objective of this workshop is to discuss the “modern Aboriginal family” as 1) the interface between historical and macrosocial risk factors and the occurrence of psychosocial problems among Aboriginal youth, 2) the hub of the child’s socialization and development by the exploration of the literature on family resilience and 3) as urban dwellers having to face the challenges of city life.

Canadian Aboriginal Family Resilience

In addition to the multiple adverse conditions many aboriginal families had and still have to cope with, until recently, they had been mostly studied under a negative view (Maton and al., 2003) and represented as non-resilient *a priori* (Sonn and Fisher, 1998). The evaluation of what is considered as a positive adaptation and what reflects maladaptation has been based on cultural norms and values of the dominant middle class, contributing to ignorance of the resilience developed by these families (Brodsky, 1999; Sonn and Fisher, 1998). This presentation focuses on the empirical knowledge status on Aboriginal Family Resilience. Firstly, the discussion relates the reality of the Canadian Aboriginal families “in communities”. This part introduces the traditional Canadian Aboriginal families and the historical adversity they had to deal with as well as the contemporary Canadian Aboriginal families living in communities and the challenges and difficulties they have to face daily. Secondly, the discussion refers to the North American research in relation to family resilience and strengths in aboriginal contexts. Thus, by exploring the strategies of aboriginal families to cope with adversities by which they are affected, the general goal of my doctorate thesis is to set up a family resilience model culturally adapted in an aboriginal community in the province of Quebec, Canada. The presentation will end with the statement of the planned research questions.

The reality of urban Aboriginal families

Little is known about the Aboriginal population living in an urban area since most of the research has been done in a reserve context. Even less literature can be found about the urban life of First Nation families, although they are a growing community representing about 50% of the total Aboriginal Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2001). Furthermore, a very limited number of culturally adapted resources as well as intervention and prevention programs exist in most of Canadian cities. This situation is worrying since we know that the urban Aboriginal population is poorer, more isolated, more likely to be single parent families and to face adversities. The first part of this presentation will introduce a picture based on the empirical knowledge available on First Nation families living in an urban context. We will more specifically look into the available knowledge on the families living in the city of Montreal in the province of Quebec, Canada. The second part will be a discussion on the issues and challenges which they are facing on a daily basis. The discussion will end with a presentation of different research areas and questions which are important to explore in order to better understand the reality of urban Aboriginal families and to offer more relevant programs and resources aiming the improvement their quality of life.