

4 QUEBEC FIRST NATIONS: INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Chapter 4 of the Quebec First Nations Regional Health Survey (RHS, 2008) presents data on the health risks associated with the residential school experience for Quebec First Nations. This is a summary of the information included in Chapter 4. Therefore, it does not include all the knowledge covered by the survey, and may be open to different interpretations. To have a complete understanding of the results, the reader is invited to consult the entire chapter.

The first residential school opened in Quebec in 1934 with the last one closing in 1980. Among those surveyed, 26.4% of adult respondents reported having attended residential school some time during their lives; while an even greater percentage of youth (69.5%) and children (79.1%) reported having a parent or grandparent who attended residential school.

As reported in the Quebec First Nations Health and Social Services Blueprint 2007-2017, the residential schools experience is a risk factor impacting the health of First Nations. In addition to the negative impact on their health during their stay in residential schools, the former attendees indicated having experienced the following: harsh discipline (29.9%), verbal and emotional abuse (26.8%), isolation from their families (40.2%), separation from their community (34.3%) and the loss of their cultural identity (28.9%). This summary will focus on three areas in which adults who attended residential schools, and youth and children of a parent or grandparent who attended residential schools, reported higher percentages of health risk factors than non-attendees.

Physical health

Health risk factors are associated with the residential school experience, including a higher risk of being diagnosed with diabetes and tuberculosis. As shown in Table 1, among adults who attended residential schools, 30.7% reported having been diagnosed with diabetes while the percentage is 20.5% for non-attendees. Of those surveyed, 6.6% of attendees and only 1.9% of non-attendees reported having a diagnosis of tuberculosis. These results are comparable to those found from the 2002 Regional Health Survey and are statistically significant.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents who answered "yes" to being diagnosed with tuberculosis or diabetes, based on residential school attendance (N=3,239)

Diagnosed illness	Residential school attendance			
	Attended		Did not attend	
	N	%	N	%
Tuberculosis	214	6.6	172	1.9
Diabetes	995	30.7	1,858	20.5

Suicide

Suicide is a serious health problem impacting First Nations, especially for those who attended residential schools. As noted in Figure 1, 32.8% of residential school attendees surveyed reported having suicidal thoughts compared to 22.0% of non-attendees. Among attendees surveyed, 17.9% also reported having attempted suicide compared to 9.3% for non-attendees.

Figure 1: Distribution of adults who answered "yes" to various questions regarding suicide based on residential school attendance



Non-prescription/illegal drug use

Youth and children of residential school survivors are also impacted by the intergenerational transmission of health risks associated with attendance. For instance, as shown in Table 2, youth of a biological parent or grandparent who attended residential school are more likely to have reported having used non-prescription/illegal drugs (50.5%) than youth who reported not having a relative who attended residential school (39.8%).

Table 2: Distribution of youth who have used non-prescription/illegal drugs based on parent or grandparent residential school attendance (N=3,661)

Non-prescription/illegal drug use (past or present)	Biological relative residential school attendance	
	Attended	Did not attend
	%	%
Yes	50.5	39.8
Never	49.5	60.2

Alcohol use

Youth of residential school attendees are also more likely to report having consumed alcohol. As noted in Table 3, 63.9% of youth of residential school attendees surveyed reported having consumed alcohol during the past 12 months compared to 49.7% of youth of non-attendees.

Table 3: Distribution of youth responses to the question "During the past 12 months, have you had a drink of beer, wine, liquor or any other alcoholic beverage?" based on parent or grandparent residential school attendance (N=3,639)

Had a drink in past 12 months	Biological relative residential school attendance	
	Attended	Did not attend
	%	%
Yes	63.9	49.7
No	36.1	50.3

Conclusion

The survey revealed the negative health risks associated with residential school attendance as compared to non-attendance among Quebec First Nations. However, there were also some positive results associated with residential school attendance. For instance, 86.3% of residential school attendees surveyed reported using a First Nations language on a daily basis compared to 58.9% among non-attendees surveyed.

Finally, this summary provides an overview of Chapter 4 of the Quebec First Nations Regional Health Survey. For more details on the survey results, the full chapter is available at the following link: <http://www.cssspnql.com/docs/centre-de-documentation/chapitre-4-pensionnats-eng-v2.pdf?sfvrsn=2>.



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