CANADIAN URBAN ABORIGINALS: A FOCUS ON ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN TORONTO

Allison M. Williams
Health Studies Program
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario
Canada, L2S 3A1

Abstract / Resume

Aboriginal women, particularly Aboriginal female lone-parents, have been studied and discussed on a national level only. Studies dealing with Aboriginal women in metropolitan centres are rare. This study outlines the socio-economic situation of Aboriginal women living in Toronto, the largest city in Canada. The catchment area of the Native Womens Resource Centre is mapped and compared to socio-economic patterns of the Census Metropolitan Area. This verifies the social and economic impoverishment experienced by urban Aboriginal women, particularly female lone-parents, and suggests that this population is a factor in the increasing feminization of poverty experienced in Canadian cities today.

La femme aborigène, et particulièrement la femme vivant dans une famille monoparentale a été seulement étudiée dans un contexte national. Il y a très peu d'études sur spécifiquement la femme aborigène vivant dans les centres métropolitains. La présente étude adresse la situation socio-économique des femmes aborigènes vivant à Toronto, une ville qui contient la plus grande concentration de peuples aborigènes parmi les centres urbains Canadiens. En utilisant la liste d'adresses des clientèles de "Native Womens Resource Centre," la population desservie par ce centre est comparée avec la population de Toronto. Cette étude est centrée sur la pauvreté sociale et économique de la femme aborigène, vivant dans une famille monoparentale et suggère que ce segment de la population est un facteur significatif dans la féminisation de la pauvreté dans les villes Canadiennes.

Introduction

Canada’s Aboriginal peoples have been becoming urbanized for more than 150 years. The urbanization of Aboriginal Canada has brought large numbers of Canada’s First Nations people to the city. An increased quality of life has been the main attraction stimulating Aboriginal urbanization. Although Aboriginal migrants may have achieved an enhanced quality of life in the city, many urban Aboriginals and particularly women who are lone-parents are victims of poverty. The feminization of poverty is the process by which female-headed families become an increasing proportion of the low income or poverty population (Abowitz, 1986:209). This can be explained by a number of factors:

... feminization of poverty is increasing among all races in large measure as a consequence of the unjustly low wage rates, part-time work, and lack of security of employment in many “women’s jobs.” Other reasons are the shortage of affordable day-care, the failure of the legal and law enforcement systems to ensure that men pay the appropriate share of family support costs following separation and divorce, and the lack of adequate pension and pension transfer rights for older women (Yeates, 1990:181).

One of the main reasons for the feminization of poverty since the early 1970s is the growth in the number of unattached individuals, especially single parents; single-parent families (86 percent which are single parents with children) increased from 6 percent to 13 percent of all families in approximately two decades (Gundereson et al., 1990:16). The changing economic and social structure in the province and country are contributing to the feminization of poverty, as less resources are being made available for the poor.

Central cities, with their low-cost but often low-quality rental housing units, shelter the vast majority of poor women (Birch, 1985). The growing number of Aboriginal women, specifically lone-parents, migrating to Canadian cities is a factor in the increasing feminization of poverty in urban areas. It is women like Aboriginal female lone-parents, along with their children, that constitute the bulk of the poor in urban areas (Sidel, 1986). This research was conducted to explore the social geography of urban Aboriginal women through a locational analysis of their residence. It provides an illustration that the feminization of poverty (Yeates, 1990) is clearly occurring in central cities, as it verifies that urban Aboriginal women, and particularly Aboriginal lone-parents, are living in a state of social and economic impoverishment.
While confirming what has been previously assumed to be the marginal situation of urban Aboriginal women, this research is useful in a number of ways. First and foremost, this research provides a detailed look at the residential patterns of Aboriginal women at the local level. Canadian Aboriginal women, and particularly Aboriginal female lone-parents have been rarely studied; if they have, it has been at the national level only. Specific studies on Aboriginal female lone-parents in the large metropolitan centres of Canada have not yet been undertaken. Toronto is the Canadian metropolitan centre which holds the largest number of urban Aboriginal people and is the site of this research. Toronto is the home of the Native Womens Resource Centre (NWRC), which generously provided the data for this research. As possibly the first piece of work devoted to the social geography of Aboriginal women in the city, this research contributes to the understanding of urban Aboriginal women, and specifically lone-parents—a population which little is known. This research further provides insight into the emerging Aboriginal culture of Canadian cities while contributing to the knowledge of the spatial arrangements characteristics of urban Aboriginal women. The results of this work allows the needs of this sub-population to be better met, as the spatial arrangements of this population can be employed in locating social services (as discussed herein). This work can also provide insight into defining the processes of self-government in urban areas (Peters, 1992).

This paper has been divided into five parts. First, a short demographic history of Aboriginal urbanization provides the background of the urban migration process and contextualizes the urban Aboriginal experience. A brief overview of the problems encountered in the city by Aboriginal migrants precedes a discussion of the problems that are particular to urban Aboriginal women. Aboriginal-specific social service agencies in the city of Toronto are then discussed in light of the urban problems experienced. The Toronto case study of the NWRC makes up the fourth section of the paper. The final section is a discussion of the research results.

History of Aboriginal Urbanization

The demographic history of Aboriginal urbanization in Ontario shows that the trend towards urban living for Aboriginals has been largely influenced by the Euro-Canadian urbanization process, Canada's major transformation from a rural to an urban society occurred between 1921 and 1931; since 1931, Canadian urban centres have held the majority of the Canadian population (Bollman and Briggs, 1991). The movement of Aboriginals to the cities has shown to be also increasing during this transformation, with
Aboriginal urbanization particularly accelerating since the 1950s (Frideres, 1988). Euro-Canadian urban population growth from 1951 to 1986 varied by size of the urban area, with large centres growing more quickly than smaller centres (Bollman and Briggs, 1991). Most of the growth occurred in the urban cores of centres with populations of 100,000 and over, resulting in an increased concentration of population in Canada’s Census Metropolitan Areas. Sixty-five percent of all population growth in the country occurred in the three largest Census Metropolitan Areas: namely Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver (Bollman and Briggs, 1991). Migrating Aboriginals have followed the Canadian mainstream migration trend that has favoured large metropolitan centres. A large majority of Aboriginals living off-Reserve from the 1960s have been living in Canada’s large metropolitan centres; nearly 80 percent of off-Reserve Aboriginals live in large metropolitan centres (Frideres, 1988).

Although Aboriginal migration has followed mainstream migration patterns, the processes of Aboriginal urbanization are unique. The Aboriginal urbanization processes are different from any other culturally-specific urbanization processes. Aboriginal peoples do not constitute a minority like other Canadian ethnic groups do; they cannot be grouped in the same ethnological sense as can other minorities (Nagler, 1975). This is not only due to the fact that Aboriginal cultures are unique, influencing the perspectives which impact decision-making processes and motives for migrating, but because they have a distinct history in Canada. In addition, the origin from which many Aboriginal migrants have come is unique; Aboriginal Reserve communities are very particular living environments where the overall way of life—encompassing everything from the economy to the political framework—is characteristic only to the homogeneous spaces of these communities. Membership, identification and association with these Reserve communities translates into a migrant experience that is significantly different from any other:

The urban migrant...not only leaves a place of inalienable land rights, a home community, the local domain of one’s cultural heritage, and a rural way of life, but also leaves the special support of federal services. Those federal services may be negative in their paternalistic and colonial aspects, but they have provided the only pool of expertise in social services for Indians (Price, 1979:227).

It is due to these reasons, in addition to the specificity of the culture which has been highly impacted by Euro-Canadian relations, that a culturally-spe-
cific orientation is needed in examining Aboriginal urbanization processes and the impacts of these processes within the city.

When reviewing the contemporary research on Aboriginal migration, it becomes clear that, overall, "push" factors of the Aboriginal Reserve communities have been stronger forces than the "pull" factors of the cities (Denton, 1970; Dosman, 1972; Gerber, 1977; Ryan, 1978; Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1990; Frideres, 1988). Push factors have been described as the inadequacy of: employment possibilities; commuter services to centres where employment opportunities exist and; housing and social services in Aboriginal Reserve communities (Falconer, 1985). Migration is also influenced by trends in the birth rate, as population pressure impacts on each Reserve community's resources (Siggner, 1986). Population pressure undoubtedly influences the single major factor underlying the poor quality of life found on Reserve communities: abject poverty.

Nagler's provincial study, conducted between 1964 and 1966, determined that migration was largely motivated by the poor conditions of Ontario Reserve communities at that time. He found that Ontario Reserve communities could not provide satisfactory standards of living due to: the depletion of sustenance resources; the restricted size of the Reserve community; population growth and; the rising expectations among the Aboriginal population (Nagler, 1970). The push of life on the Aboriginal Reserve community was accompanied by the pull of the city; the potential for educational, economic, political and social benefits prompted movement to the city (Nagler, 1970). Nagler (1970) found that some urban Aboriginals, even without jobs, found comparatively better opportunities—such as the support provided by welfare agencies, training programs and other facilities—available in the city than on the Aboriginal Reserve community. Although not studied in depth, other possible reasons for deciding to migrate include: excitement, to escape boredom, reasons for health and retirement, to get away from family and legal problems, and the difficulty of life on Aboriginal Reserve communities (Nagler, 1970). Denton (1970), who also studied migration, concluded that the major factor for migration was employment, as few opportunities for work existed on Aboriginal Reserve communities. In addition to those noted by Nagler, Denton (1970) found two other reasons for migration: those related to marriage and children.

The pull of government incentives, which were channeled through urbanization programs where training, jobs and opportunities were set up, were implemented throughout the 1950s and 1960s in the hope that a new generation of Aboriginals would be strongly influenced by and integrated into the Euro-Canadian cultural majority in the cities (Falconer, 1985). The coupling of out-migration together with programs for integration into urban
areas was an explicit strategy of "assimilation" (Stevenson, 1968; Weaver, 1981). Toronto was the first urban centre chosen to implement the objectives of the 1956 Provincial Urban Placement Program.

Although Gerber (1977) has examined selective Aboriginal Reserve community characteristics and has noted the importance of individual characteristics, very little is known about the selectivity of individual migrants, independent of Aboriginal Reserve communities. Migration differentials such as marital status, family status, education, occupation and stage in the life cycle have not been studied in depth. What is known is that migrating Aboriginals are relatively young, being concentrated in the under-30 age group (Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, 1983; Denton, 1970). It has also been shown that the majority of migrants are female (Gerber, 1984). Peters (1992:64) has pointed out the lack of information about the family status of migrants: "a characteristic which has major implications for their needs and opportunities on arrival in the city."

When reviewing the many reasons known for migration, such as employment, education, and economic opportunities, large city size makes for a greater number of attractive options when compared to smaller centres. The comparatively large size of Toronto's Aboriginal population is likely due to the fact that Ontario has had the highest actual number of off-Reserve Aboriginals when compared to other provinces (Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, 1983). The existence of a distinct Aboriginal cultural group with whom to identify is undoubtedly another reason for the attractiveness of large urban centres. As the number of Aboriginal peoples living in cities has increased, so has the breadth and extent of the problems they encounter in cities:

...unemployment or sporadic employment, poor housing conditions and overcrowded dwellings, lack of basic services, alcoholism, and ill health... In addition, several problems such as high mobility, high crime and arrest rates, prostitution, lack of family or community support, and overt racism in employment, housing, and general social circumstances are often more pronounced for native persons... (Wotherspoon and Satzewich, 1993:98).

The major problems affecting urban Aboriginals all contribute to the socio-economic impoverishment experienced by this group.

Problems in the City

In 1978, the Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres identified the major problems affecting urban Aboriginal people to be: limited education, unemployment, inadequate housing, lack of cultural awareness, alcohol
abuse and discrimination (Maidman, 1981:18). The Ontario Task Force on Native People in the Urban Setting was formed to address these problems (Maidman, 1981). The Task Force saw these six core problems to be inter-related.

The major problems of low educational achievement and unemployment are the basis of the economic frustration felt by Aboriginals living in the city. Aboriginal students in both the province of Ontario and across the country show a very high early drop-out rate for children; this results in lower education levels when compared to the general population (Maidman, 1981). The low education levels are reflected in low-status jobs and high unemployment rates. When Aboriginals with little education do find jobs, the wages are low and employment conditions are poor; job insecurity and temporary work are two such conditions that accompany the low incomes earned. In terms of average incomes, Aboriginal peoples rank near the bottom relative to the incomes of other ethnic and racial groups (Gerber, 1990). As compared to the general Ontario population, the income levels of Aboriginal people are significantly lower (Maidman, 1981) contributing to the cycle of poverty that many urban Aboriginals find themselves in. The economic status of Aboriginals emerges as perhaps the most serious limiting condition in obtaining satisfactory housing.

The Task Force determined that lack of good affordable housing was one of the most serious problems facing urban respondents (Maidman, 1981). Contributing factors include limited finances and information about housing availability, as well as discrimination by landlords (Maidman, 1981). Not surprisingly, Aboriginal home ownership occurs much less than in the general population. Limited space is the critical feature of the inadequacy of their housing, due to the larger family size of Aboriginal people when compared to the Canadian norm (Pryor, 1984). In addition, Aboriginals often share their home and other material resources; this cultural tradition ensures a means of coping economically (Maidman, 1981).

The Ontario Task Force identified discrimination against Aboriginal people as a significant factor impeding their integration into urban communities (Maidman, 1981). Discrimination is most likely experienced in social interactions, such as: attempting to obtain employment and housing, in involvements with the justice system and, in the educational system (Maidman, 1981). Other less frequent instances of discrimination, takes place in encounters with public services, such as social welfare, financial institutions, the health care systems and public facilities (Maidman, 1981). Discrimination adds to the many social and psychological adjustments that the Aboriginal migrant must make to city life.
The frustration felt by Aboriginal migrants is also accompanied by the difficulty experienced in socially and psychologically adjusting to the city. The Aboriginals who are relatively new to city life are essentially breaking loose from their traditional culture, people, history, way of life and care-taking system of the Aboriginal community Reserve. They, like new immigrants, are entering an environment to which they are, for the most part, foreign.

Alcohol abuse could be viewed as a symptom of the difficulty of this cultural transition, as well as the harsh social conditions in which the majority of urban Aboriginals live. The circular effects of alcohol abuse on other urban Aboriginal problems are evident in the legal infractions involving alcohol-related crimes (Maidman, 1981). Alcohol abuse reinforces common stereotypes about urban Aboriginal peoples:

Urban concentration exacerbates and makes visible problems which are otherwise hidden away on reserves out of view of the general public, sometimes leading to simplistic conclusions such as native peoples are lazy, incompetent, or culturally unable to adapt to a new environment. But the complex inter-penetration of living conditions with differential labour market, political, and social circumstances contributes to a complex array of experiences within broader structures of class, "race," and gender given shape by distinct opportunities, resources, and barriers (Wotherspoon and Satzewich, 1993:99).

The accumulation of these inter-related problems makes for a very high probability of failure in the urban realm, particularly for women.

Aboriginal Women

Urban Aboriginals as a group live in a disadvantaged socio-economic position; Aboriginal women, and specifically Aboriginal female lone-parent families, comprise the most disadvantaged component of this group. The central problems of low educational achievement, consequent unemployment and resultant lack of financial resources which characterize Aboriginal women do not assist in effectively coping with city life.

Gerber (1990) uses Canadian census data for 1986 to reveal that the most disadvantaged Canadians, in terms of educational attainment, labour force participation and income, are members of visible minorities, female and specifically Aboriginal. Gerber determined that Aboriginal women are doubly disadvantaged because they are female and belong to a minority group (Gerber, 1990).
Analysis of the 1986 census shows that Indian and Métis women were less educated than their male counterparts, and were much less educated when compared to all Canadian women (because of the cost of specific up-to-date census data, the published 1986 statistical information is used herein). An average of 35.4 percent of all Aboriginal women had less than grade nine education, as compared to 7.7 percent of all Canadian women. A total of 68.3 percent of Canadian females had received education past grade nine (i.e. secondary certificate, trade diploma, non-university certificate, university degree, or post-secondary certification), compared to 29.2 percent of Aboriginal women (Statistics Canada, 1990:191). Although Aboriginal women are at least as likely to have finished university as their male counterparts, the trade and other non-university education that Canada’s Aboriginal women attain is reflected in the traditional female “ghetto” occupations with which they are employed (Pryor, 1984:38). They are not found working in trades, as are the majority of working Aboriginal men, but rather are found working in the typically female, lower paying clerical and services occupations. Gerber (1990) notes that occupational segregation by gender is highly evident and, to some extent, exaggerated in the employment experience of Aboriginals, since these women who have received their post-secondary training are usually employed in pink-collar occupations. The degree of education is not only related to the amount of occupational segregation, but is also connected to the labour-force participation rate, unemployment rate and average income.

The labour-force participation rates (those working or actively looking for work) for Aboriginals are roughly 15 percentage points lower than that of the general Canadian population. Further, Aboriginal female participation rates are about 20 percent points lower than the corresponding male rates (Statistics Canada, 1990). Unemployment rates appear to be equally dismal: they are up to three times higher for Aboriginals than for the overall Canadian population. The full-time, full year employment rates for Aboriginal males and females are roughly half those for the general Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 1990).

Both Aboriginal males and females have income levels which are lower than those of their fellow Canadians, and Aboriginal females consistently have lower incomes than their male counterparts and fellow Canadian females. Of persons reporting income in 1986, Aboriginal women’s median income of $6817 ranks below the median income of $8533 for Aboriginal men and $9601 for non-Aboriginal women, and is barely one-third the median income of $20001 for non-Aboriginal men (Statistics Canada, 1990). City-dwelling Aboriginal peoples may be even worse off than their Reserve community counterparts, as those in the city are more dependent
upon income for purchasing goods and cannot supplement income with other food stuffs and resources (e.g. hunted food), as can be done on Aboriginal Reserve communities.

The central problems of low educational achievement, consequent unemployment and resultant lack of financial resources are also accompanied by specific concerns that are characteristic of women in the city. Maidman has defined these additional problems as: limited skills, limited information (legal advice, women's services, birth control, family life and parenting), lack of day care, frequency of family violence, lone-parent status and depression (Maidman 1981:27). Aboriginal women new to urban life have limited “city-skills,” such as how to find an apartment or a job, how to use public transport, how to cope with traffic, crowds and the pace of city life. As well as lacking the expertise in city living, they often have never learned how to juggle motherhood and work at the same time. Day-care, with its inaccessibility and cost, is a necessity for mothers who have to work. The problems experienced by off-Reserve Aboriginals are clearly most intense for women:

High costs of housing and other living expenses, combined with inadequate or inaccessible community services, especially for women with young children, compound the dilemmas of unemployment and low-wage work. Several other factors interact to make life difficult for off-reserve and urban native women, including the amount of time women tend to be engaged in domestic labour and child-care activities and the matriarchal traditions of many native societies, which place added burdens on women... (Wotherspoon and Satzewich, 1993:102).

The growing prevalence of female lone-parents is evident in the impoverished lives most of these women lead (Gunderson et al., 1990; National Council on Welfare, 1985). Lone-parent status is one problem that is more common in the city than on the Aboriginal Reserve communities, as its occurrence is significantly higher in urbanized areas of Canada (White, 1985:22). Similar to Gerber's (1990) descriptive term of urban Aboriginal women living in “double jeopardy,” Aboriginal lone-parent women living in the city can be described as living in “triple jeopardy.”

Although the situation of urban Aboriginal women is very disadvantaged, “formal services are seriously inadequate in most cities, while informal community supports have been eroded or left behind for women who leave the reserves” (Wotherspoon and Satzewich, 1993:102). The inadequacy of formal services is due to the federal government opposing funding programs for urban Aboriginals on the ground that once urban Aboriginals leave the Reserve community, they cease to be the govern-
Canadian Urban Aboriginals

ment's responsibility. Aboriginal women, specifically those who reside in the city as lone-parents, are the hardest hit in terms of their ability to cope in the city.

Social Services in the City

A number of social service agencies have evolved in response to the needs of urban Aboriginals; these agencies have become more numerous over the years, reflecting the increasing numbers of Aboriginals migrating to cities. The first centre established is now called the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. It is presently located on 16 Spadina Road, in the downtown core of Toronto (Bloor and Spadina). This Centre, established in 1962, became the third Friendship Centre in Canada, following the lead of Winnipeg, and then Vancouver—all of which are partly funded by federal funds. The objective of these Centres is to ease the transition to urban life. The services provided do not distinguish between the categories of Status and non-Status Indians and Métis, as their functions are aimed at Aboriginal peoples as a whole; they include: drop-in and referral services, court appearance counseling, meeting facilities, and crafts training. The centre continues to work as a positive force in maintaining and developing a strong Aboriginal cultural identity within Metropolitan Toronto. More than a dozen other Aboriginal-specific social service agencies have since been established in Toronto. Services encompass emergency shelter, long-term residence, rehabilitation for drug use, mental health care and, skills training.

The majority of these Aboriginal-specific agencies are located in the inner city. The close proximity of each of these Aboriginal-specific social service agencies suggests that the agencies co-operate, thereby forming a network of assistance. The concentrated location of the majority of these Aboriginal-specific social service agencies in the downtown core also suggests that an Aboriginal enclave or neighbourhood may exist in the inner city. A few of these agencies are gender specific, such as the NWRC and the Anduhyauyn shelter for women, and the Na-Me-Res shelter for men. These agencies meet the particular demands of these sub-populations, acknowledging that different gender groups are faced with different challenges while in the city.

The Native Womens Resource Centre meets many of the needs of Aboriginal women in Toronto. The NWRC services all women, whether clients are new to the urban realm or are more established city dwellers. The idea of a womens centre first began in the fall of 1984, when a group of Aboriginal women began meeting on a regular basis to discuss their concerns about the lack of appropriate and adequate services for Aboriginal women in Toronto. These women believed that the task of empowering
Aboriginal women must be done by and for Aboriginal women, as set forth below:

For native women, our work to empower ourselves begins with overcoming generations of learned oppressed behaviours... The native centre is a nurturing place for personal empowerment. [It is a] tool for survival I can develop for myself and pass on to my children (NWRC, 1991).

Furthermore, an increased desire had been developing among Aboriginal women to meet the apparent need for a “safe” communal space where support and training could improve the social and economic conditions of their lives.

In the same year of its inception, rental space in the basement of a building in the eastern part of the downtown core was offered free of charge to this small group of Aboriginal women, who then firmly established the NWRC. The mission of the Centre is to assist Aboriginal women in the city of Toronto. The Centre operates as a charitable educational and social institution and provides referrals and information about programs and services relevant to Aboriginal women's spiritual, physical, social, and economic well being and development (NWRC, 1991:3). The Centre is based on traditional Aboriginal teachings, which are promoted in the programs, and services offered by the Aboriginal staff members. The staff includes an executive director, a family worker/counselor, a community worker, a life-skills/crisis worker, and a literacy co-ordinator. Because the Centre cannot possibly meet all requests and needs, it has established mutually supportive working relationships with other social organizations, services, and groups throughout the city.

Many Aboriginal women are in transition, either from an Aboriginal Reserve community to a city, or from one city to another. To meet the needs of this transitional group, the Centre provides emergency short-term services, as well as a long-term supportive service. Emergency services include assistance with welfare, housing, employment, day care, food, clothing, and household items. Emergency services also assist women who are being abused. Long-term services include counseling and support services such as: crisis intervention, family court support, advocacy, urban orientation, housing, job preparation and management, employment search, resume preparation, and child welfare. Referral and follow-up is also provided for all services. Ongoing activities include a literacy program, Aboriginal women’s issues workshops, community outreach, skills training, discussion and support groups, beading and crafts group, and field trips (NWRC, 1991:4). The problems specific to Aboriginal women, and particularly
Aboriginal women lone-parents can be clearly addressed with help from the NWRC.

The Case of Aboriginal Women in Toronto

Research Methodology

Before over viewing the formal research methodology, it is important to define how this research was approached. The approach was practical or applied, and had a participatory lean. As is thoroughly discussed in Kirby and McKeena's book (1989), good practical research is participatory; priority is given to the voices of the participants in an egalitarian research process. This approach proved to be a challenge at first but, in the end, worked out well for all involved. When the “research” project was first discussed with the staff, most of whom were Aboriginal, they quickly became defensive as they felt that they, as Aboriginal people, had been “researched to death,” and that in the process, had reaped few benefits. They pointed out that much of the research conducted on Aboriginal peoples was produced in a manner which represents the political and social interests of the dominate group. “Research” was therefore seen as “a tool of domination which has helped perpetuate and maintain current power relations of inequality” (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:17). It took much effort to nurture a trusting working relationship with the executive staff at the Centre. Over the course of a year, innumerable visits were made to the NWRC in order for the staff to understand and feel comfortable and trusting of me, as (1) a person and, (2) a researcher. These visits made me aware of my positionality as a researcher, as I was very aware of the privilege that I had as a White educated woman who was raised within an urban sphere. It was continuously stressed that the research proposed was “not research on them, but research by, for, and with them” (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:28). As will be seen, trust was eventually established and a mutually beneficial relationship ensued.

Although not normal practice, the Centre made available the family status and residential location of clients that were on file. This data is very unique, as it is virtually impossible to get gender-specific data for Aboriginals in Metropolitan Toronto. Although the ideal sample would have been the location and family status of all Aboriginal women in Toronto, difficulty in data availability permits this case study to focus on the NWRC clientele only. Although the sample is biased to the catchment area of the NWRC, it represents the only available data particular to Aboriginal women in Toronto. The fact that the data are so unique and so inaccessible verifies the many quantitative problems that exist in its use.
The data set is made up of a list of 88 entries. The majority of the users listed were repeat users, and the remaining were new users throughout the months of March, April and May, 1991. These 88 entries were, undoubtedly, only a percentage of the Centre’s clients, as staff shortages curtailed the thorough recording of all users. It is possible that, due to migration elasticity, many of the women who were on file may have since moved elsewhere, as studies point to the fact that a great degree of variability exists in the length Aboriginals stay in the city (Nagler, 1970; Denton, 1970; Guilleman, 1978; Stanbury, 1975; Peters, 1984; Lithman, 1984; McCaskill, 1979; Frideres, 1988; Siggner, 1980).

As mentioned, the benefits of the research were made very clear for the Centre’s staff; conducting a locational analysis of the Centre’s clientele would assist them in determining the new location of the NWRC, as they were planning on moving to a bigger “home.” The sample was divided into three categories according to family status: 1) female lone-parents; 2) women with partners (with or without children) and; 3) single women (no children). Each of the 88 entries was located and marked on a map of downtown Toronto, differentiating each of the three family status categories. Following the construction of a framed, wall-sized map of the Centre’s catchment area, where the residential location of clients were mapped, I was asked to assist in searching out a new building for the Centre. With the catchment area in mind, the Executive Director of the NWRC, myself and a real estate friend sought out possibilities for a new building to house the NWRC.

The living conditions of the sample of Aboriginal women is explored through comparing the mapped residential patterns of the clients with the 1986 distributions of socio-economic indicators (income and unemployment) compiled by Statistics Canada (1990). The limitations of these ecological correlations include the assumption that is made about continuity of data; it is assumed that because these Aboriginal women live in the areas characteristic of certain socio-economic indicators they, as individuals and as a cultural group, are also characteristic of these indicators. The poor availability of individual socio-economic data of the sample of Aboriginal women represented in this study disallows such a detailed ecological study to be conducted. Such data could only be acquired through using ethnographic research methods. Although I would have liked to interview the clients, such a procedure was seen by the executive staff as broaching confidentiality.
Data Analysis

The majority of the users, making up 46 percent of the total, are female lone-parents. Next are the single women who make up 43 percent of the total, followed by those women with a partner, who comprise 11 percent of the total. This confirms the research which note that women, and particularly lone-parents are most impoverished (Gundereson et al., 1990), as lone-parents make up the largest percentage of the sample of users of the NWRC. The spatial distribution of the residential locations of each of the three categories [please refer to Map 1: Spatial Distribution of Clients, Native Womens Resource Centre (Metropolitan Toronto, 1991)] will now be described, with special emphasis on the largest female lone-parent category.

The marginal living conditions of these urban Aboriginal women is revealed in the similarity of the residential patterns of clients with the 1986 Statistics Canada distributions of socio-economic indicators reflecting poverty (1990). The spatial distribution of the Aboriginal women clientele [Map 1: Spatial Distribution of Clients, Native Womens Resource Centre (Metropolitan Toronto, 1991)] clearly shows a concentration, making up 50 percent of the total sample, in the downtown core (central city). This concentration is found east of Yonge Street, West of Coxwell Avenue, North of Queen Street and South of Bloor Street, which turns into Danforth Avenue. The majority of single Aboriginal women (61 percent) live in this area, with the bulk west of the Don Valley Parkway. Almost half of all Aboriginal female lone-parents live in this area. A marked concentration of Aboriginal female lone-parents (18 percent) live in the vicinity of Queen Street and Pape Avenue, the home of a YWCA that offers independent living (1 year leases) at minimal cost for women with and without children. Aboriginal women living with a partner in this delimited downtown area make up 40 percent of those in this category. The majority of Aboriginal-specific social service agencies (focusing on the Aboriginal population) in Toronto are also concentrated in the central city, indicating a strong need for such services in the downtown core.

As with the remaining women in the lone-parent and single women categories, the spatial distribution of those Aboriginal women with a partner living outside this delineated central city is in the form of a crescent shaped "U," situated in a shape similar to a smile [Map 1: Spatial Distribution of Clients, Native Womens Resource Centre (Metropolitan Toronto, 1991)]. The delimited downtown core makes up the belly of the crescent shape formed by the spatial distribution of the NWRC clientele. The single women living outside the core area are dispersed more readily to the west, as they stretch up into Etobicoke. Those Aboriginal lone-parents not living in the
Map 1: Spatial Distribution of Clients, Native Women's Resource Centre (Metropolitan Toronto, 1991)

Legend
- Female Lone-Parent
- Female With-Partner
- Single Woman
core are dispersed both east and west, but more commonly to the east, with 8 percent living in Scarborough, in the vicinity of Gabriel Dumont Non-Profit Homes (an Aboriginal-specific housing project). Thirty-five percent of these lone-parents are located east of Coxwell Avenue, but west of Victoria Park, so they are living in the immediate boundaries of the downtown core.

The crescent-shaped "U" formed by the spatial distribution of clientele of the NWRC in Metropolitan Toronto corresponds to the same crescent-shape formed by various socio-economic indicators compiled by Statistics Canada for the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (1990). The high incidence of low income households in 1986 is illustrated in Map 2 [Private Households Receiving Government Transfer Payments (Metropolitan Toronto, 1986)] form the familiar crescent shape as shown in the spatial distribution of the clientele of the NWRC. This crescent shape is also evident in the high unemployment rate in 1986 (Map 3: Unemployment Rate in Metropolitan Toronto, 1986) and, the same crescent-shaped "U" shows residents total aggregate income being made up of a high precentage of government transfer payments in 1986 (Statistics Canada, 1990). By comparing Map 1 [Spatial Distribution of the Clients, Native Womens Resource Centre (Metropolitan Toronto, 1991)] with Map 2 [Private Households Receiving Government Transfer Payments (Metropolitan Toronto, 1986)] and Map 3 (Unemployment Rate in Metropolitan Toronto, 1986), it is clear that the crescent shape of each distribution readily corresponds to the others. The NWRC clientele are therefore contained within this low income and high unemployment area.

**Discussion**

Toronto's central city makes up the core of the crescent shaped distributions of low socio-economic indicators such as low income households and high unemployment rate. These crescent-shaped distributions reflect a remarkable likeness to the distribution of the NWRC clientele, demonstrating that the process of the feminization of poverty (Yeates, 1990) is clearly occurring in the central city. In Murdie's social-ecological study of Metropolitan Toronto, this area of the city is called Trinity and known as a low income, older, more compact area which has traditionally acted as the city's immigrant reception area (1969). There is consistent evidence that Canadian inner city areas contain disproportionate concentrations of less educated, low-income, and unemployed persons (McLemore et al., 1975; Ray, 1976; Broadway, 1989).

The feminization of poverty occurs to a different degree for minority women, such as Aboriginal women who were classified by Gerber as the most "doubly disadvantaged." The high percentage (46%) of Aboriginal
Map 3: Unemployment Rate Metropolitan Toronto, 1986.
women lone-parent clients in the sample demonstrates that this group more commonly uses the NWRC and is, therefore, likely to have the greatest need. In contrast, Aboriginal women with a partner show least need, as they only represented 11 percent of the total sample; they are also located in the furthest edges of the crescent-shape. The high concentrations of Aboriginal female lone-parents living in low-cost housing, such as the YWCA and the Gabriel Dumont Non-Profit Homes, further establishes the marginal condition of this Aboriginal sub-group.

Female-headed lone-parent families, which constitute one of the major categories of Canada's poor, are over-represented in the sample. In 1986, while 10 percent of all Canadian families were headed by a lone-parent mother, the comparable proportion among Aboriginal families was 16 percent (National Council on Welfare, 1985:113). The high incidence of female lone-parent families in urban areas (White, 1985) can be explained by various push and pull factors.

As in all Aboriginal migration, push factors partly explain why female lone-parent families migrate. One factor is that women appear to have a stigma attached to being a lone-parent, either on the Aboriginal Reserve community or in rural areas (Falconer, 1985). This stigma most likely translates into the community giving low priority to the needs of these female lone-parent families. As an example, Silman (1987) reported that Aboriginal women who were lone-parents had difficulty obtaining housing and money for housing repairs. Push factors specific to women are further confirmed by Peters (1984), who identifies a number of problems on the Aboriginal Reserve communities, including: lack of housing, difficult living conditions, lack of employment opportunities, lack of medical care and personal problems. Another determining factor in Aboriginal migration is the pull factor of the city: employment opportunities and child resources are two attractions characteristic of the city (Peters, 1984:9). The power of these push and pull factors are enhanced by the fact that most Aboriginal single mothers, like many single mothers in Canadian society, do not usually receive support (financial or other) from the men involved (Ryan, 1978). This is especially problematic when Aboriginal family sizes are larger than the Canadian average.

Aboriginal female lone-parent families are more likely to have more children than non-Aboriginal lone-parent families (Pryor, 1984). The average size of the Canadian Aboriginal female lone-parent family was 3.3 persons in 1981, compared to the non-Aboriginal female lone-parent family average of 2.7 persons (Pryor, 1984:14). Acknowledging that family income generally increases with a greater number of persons, Pryor has shown that, on average, the increase in family income per additional family
member for non-Aboriginals is substantially larger than the increase in the average family income for Aboriginals. Not surprisingly, Aboriginal female lone-parent families are at the bottom of the income scale, receiving on average, less than two-thirds of the income of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Pryor 1984:15).

The desperate situation of Aboriginal lone-parent women—which make up one, if not the most disadvantaged groups in Canadian society—is characterized as financially and socially impoverished. This condition makes them even more liable to the social ills that already inflict many urban Aboriginals, prominent among which are: alcohol abuse, family violence, criminal infractions and depression. The Toronto case study of the users of the NWRC has allowed the unique situation of Aboriginal women, and particularly female lone-parent families to be more closely examined.

Conclusions

Both Euro-Canadians and Aboriginal Peoples have historically perceived greater economic opportunities in large cities as compared to smaller ones; the same is still true today, as metropolitan centres across Canada are viewed as the most attractive destinations. Toronto is Canada's metropolitan centre with the greatest number of inhabitants, including the largest concentration of urban Aboriginals. As the number of Aboriginals living in the city have increased, so too have the problems specific to this population. The major problems affecting urban Aboriginals—limited education, unemployment, and discrimination—all contribute to the socio-economic impoverishment experienced by this group. Aboriginal-specific social service agencies have become more numerous as the growing number of Aboriginal migrants has led to a greater need for such services. Aboriginal women and particularly those Aboriginal women residing in the city as lone-parents live in a unique urban milieu. The impoverished situation of Aboriginal women lone-parents, as set forth in the Canadian literature cited, has been illustrated by a Toronto case study of women who have sought help from the NWRC. The urbanization of Aboriginal female lone-parents continues to be a factor in the feminization of poverty in Toronto, as is likely similar in other Canadian cities.

The research findings presented in this paper contributes to the knowledge of the Aboriginal female population, specifically the female lone-parent population in the city of Toronto. It points to the need for Aboriginal-specific services in the core of the city, particularly those specific to female lone-parents. The detailed information pertaining to the spatial characteristics of this population have already been of use in locating the new NWRC. The correlation of the location of Aboriginal lone-parent
residences with areas of low income and high unemployment point to the need for specific services, such as job-training, to be offered. Clearly formal services are seriously inadequate. With the federal and provincial restructuring of services, the increased availability of services is highly questionable. The establishment of urban self-government may be the only hope in receiving adequate services and resources.

Because only a meager amount of information about Aboriginals living in the city exists, data such as the number and spatial distribution of Aboriginals in Canadian Cities needs to be thoroughly researched in order to better plan for residential and social services. There is a need for survey research which explores why Aboriginal women migrate, how they choose the cities and residences that they live in, and how they manage to cope in the city. Broader questions dealing with the macro-environment of the city should also be investigated. How do Aboriginal migrants impact on the configuration of the city? What do we know about the institutions and broad patterns of relationships formed and shaped by Aboriginals as they become socially organized in their new milieu? Information such as this could further contribute to understanding the evolving and growing urban Aboriginal culture, as well as have implications for processes of self-government in urban areas (Peters, 1992).

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Aiden McQuillan, Don Freeman, the anonymous reviewers and editor for the assistance they provided. A portion of this research is funded by The Canadian Tire Acceptance Limited Resident Scholar in Health Studies Project, Brock University.

Notes

1. In this paper, the term “Aboriginal peoples” will extend to all of Canada’s First Peoples, recognizing that there are many differences between them.

2. Population growth in Canadian urban areas shows variation by size of urban area, with large centres growing more quickly than smaller centres; most of the growth has occurred in centres with populations of 100,000 and over, resulting in population concentrations in Canada’s Census metropolitan Areas (Bollman and Briggs, 1991). In the period between 1951 to 1986, 65 percent of the country’s population growth occurred in the three largest Census metropolitan areas: Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver (Bollman and Briggs, 1991).
3. Migration due to children was of two types: some parents believed that city life had more to offer, while others followed their children who had been taken into custody by the Children's Aid Society (Denton, 1970).

4. The program was extended to the provincial north in 1958, when a placement officer was appointed to North Bay.

5. The majority of Canada's registered Aboriginals who live off-Reserve are women (54.7 percent in 1986), compared with less than half who live on Aboriginal Reserve communities (Larocque and Gauvin, 1989).

Due to the significant growth of the registered Indian population since the reinstatement process under Bill C-31, the proportion of off-Reserve Aboriginals has increased from nearly 22 percent in 1967 to 41 percent in 1992 (Indian and Northern Affairs, 1993).

6. Friendship Centres were formed not in opposition to state policies, but rather in order to accommodate Aboriginals into urban social relations and support systems; these Centres facilitated the state policy of Aboriginal urbanization (Wotherspoon and Satzewich, 1993).

7. The Centre has since been moved into a larger building further west on Gerrard Street. This has allowed the expansion of many programs and resources.

8. The problem of inferring characteristics of individuals from aggregate data referring to a population is called an ecological fallacy (Johnston, 1991:115).

References

Abowitz, D.A.

Birch, E.L. (Editor)

Bollman, R. and B. Briggs

Broadway, M.J.
Denton, T.

Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

Dosman, E.J.

Falconer, P.

Frideres, J.S.

Gerber, L.M.


Guilleman, J.

Gunderson, M., L. Muszynski and J. Keck

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
1993 Basic Departmental Data. Ottawa: Department of Statistics Management Information and Analysis, Corporate Services.

Johnston, R.J.
Kirby, S. and K. McKenna  

Larocque, G.Y. and R.P. Gauvin  
1989  *1986 Census Highlights on Registered Indians: Annotated Tables.* Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Service.

Lithman, Y.G.  

Maidman, F.  

McCaskill, D.N.  

McLemore et al.  

Ministry of Citizenship and Culture  

Murdie, R.A.  

Nagler, M.  


National Council on Welfare  
1985  *Poverty Profile 1985.* Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

Native Womens Resource Centre  
Peters, E.


Price, J.A.

Pryor, E.T.

Ray, M.D.

Richards, K.

Ryan, J.

Sidel, R.

Siggner, A.J.
1986 The Socio-Demographic Conditions of Registered Indians. *Canadian Social Trends*.


Silman, J.

Stanbury, W.T.
Statistics Canada


Stevenson, D.


Weaver, S.


White, P.M.


Wotherspoon, T. and V. Satzewich


Yeates, M.
