

Early death among members of Toronto's Aboriginal Community

Walking in their shoes



Anishnawbe Health Toronto



Dr. C.P. Shah, Dr. R. Klair, Dr. A. Reeves

Background



- Our clinical observations at Anishnawbe Health Toronto & three other Aboriginal health and social service centres suggest that a large number of Aboriginal individuals in Toronto are dying prematurely—meaning, they are passing away long before would be expected for the average Canadian citizen.

Historical Context



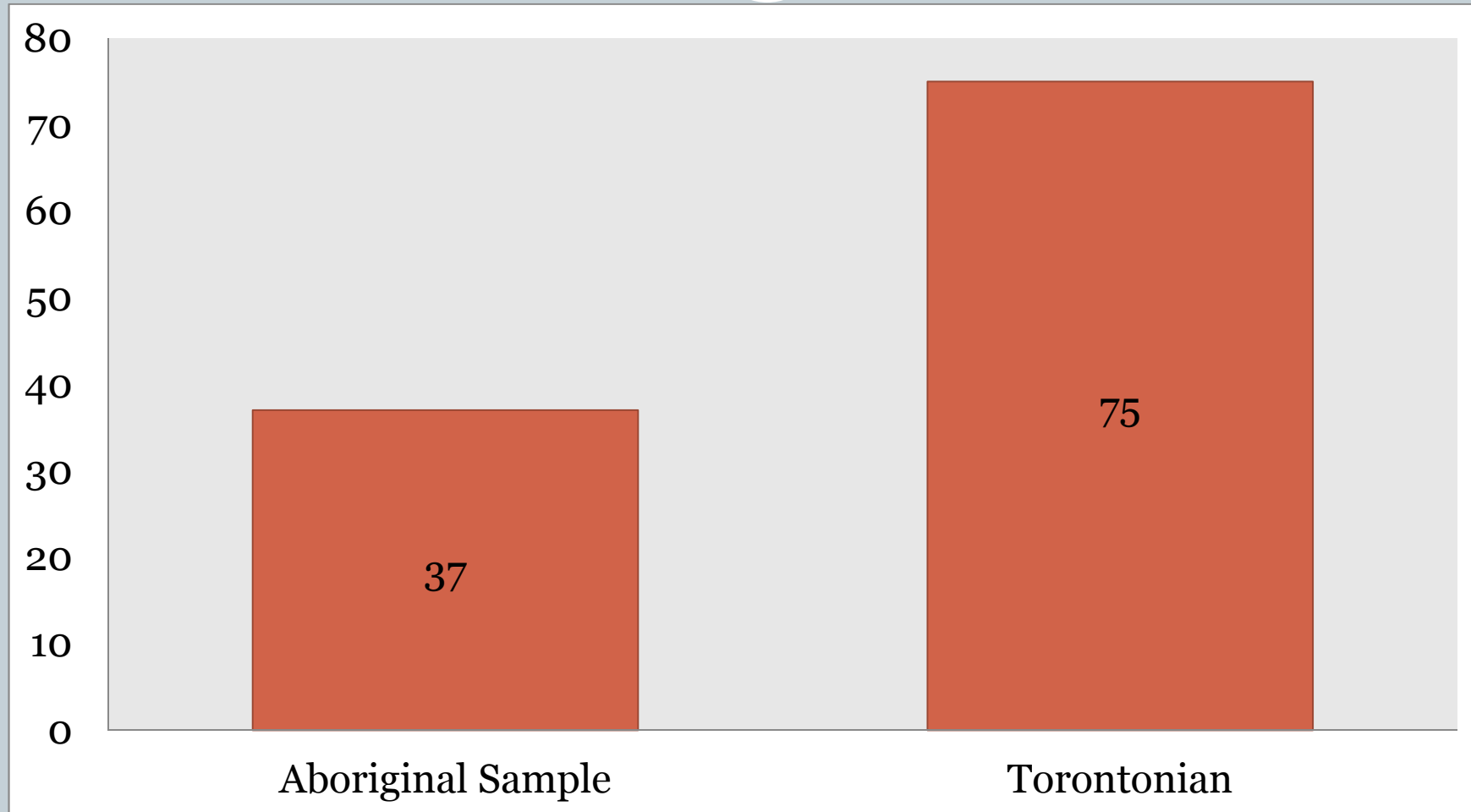
- In both developing and developed countries alike, Indigenous peoples face some of the heaviest burdens of ill health
 - This is due to histories of colonization, marginalization, discrimination & racism, which results in:
 - ✦ A multitude of issues, such as loss of identity, culture, unstable housing and homelessness, a lack of education and stable jobs, and a lack of social supports.

Methods

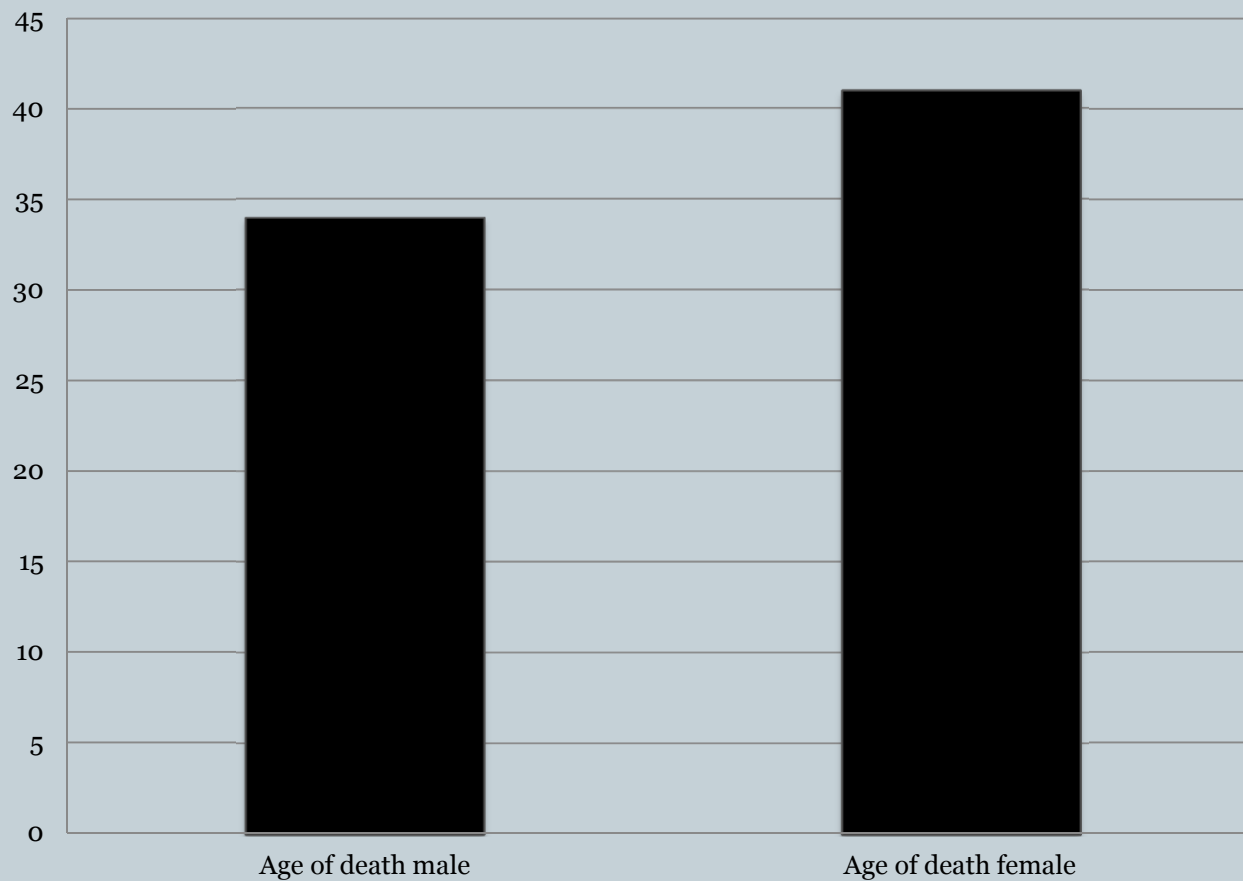


- Root cause analysis:
 - Quantitative chart review of deaths
 - ✦ AHT data between 2010-2012: 43 Deaths
 - ✦ Other three agencies: 66 Deaths
 - ✦ Total Deaths reviewed: 109
 - Narrative analysis of qualitative interviews
 - ✦ 20 interviews were carried out with community members close to the deceased

Average Age of Death in Years



Average Age of Death in years by Sex in this sample



Qualitative Results



The findings from interviews are organized around two overarching themes within this root cause analysis:

Impact of colonial & postcolonial policies on social determinants of health:

- *Assimilation Policy,*
- *Systemic Discrimination*
- *Cultural Disruption*

Impact of Colonial & Post-Colonial Policies on Health Determinants

[The deceased told me], “I went to residential school and the things that happened there—I can’t even talk about...that’s why I drank so much. I just couldn’t be a father.” (P.193)

It wasn’t [the deceased’s] fault...because the history of colonialism, and the historic trauma transmission delivered over the last 500 years has impacted Aboriginal people in many different ways. And I think it’s caused a lot of different levels of posttraumatic stress disorder, and it’s caused Aboriginal people to suffer spiritually, mentally emotionally, physically. So when you take them from their land, their spirit becomes damaged. (P.201)

Qualitative Results



The findings from interviews are organized around two overarching themes within this root cause analysis:

Chronic stress as a result of these historical policies resulting in:

- *Violence towards self and other;*
- *Identity Issues;*
- *Mental Health Challenges;*
- *Addiction;*
- *Social Isolation.*

Chronic Stress



[The deceased] fought a lot because—you know...he never picked a fight but never backed down from one. And it was all really racist stuff that went on. (P.121)

Well, [the deceased] was shy, you know? Wouldn't ask anybody for help. [...] I think that [because of] residential schools or whatever, things that she had that she was dealing with...she couldn't really go out and try to get therapy or try to rise above and better herself. She was just stuck. (P.282)

Typical Medical Chart



- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Obesity
- Inadequate housing
- Tobacco addiction
- Substance abuse
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Posttraumatic stress
- Chronic stress

BROKEN SPIRIT



- *I really think it's like a broken heart syndrome. It was [the deceased's] loneliness for his true identity, like not knowing anything about who his people really are because his family and his parents and his traditions were all lost. (P.108)*

Root Cause Analysis: Delayed Tsunami Effect



Early Deaths

Physical Trauma

(violence, addiction, disease, addiction)

Mental, Emotional, Spiritual Trauma

(abuse, grief, poor coping)

Social & Interpersonal Trauma

(racism, discrimination, poverty)

Cultural Trauma

(loss of language, traditional practices)



Colonial Policies



All is not lost... Resiliency



[The deceased] cared so much about people! And it wasn't even just his own family! He'd take strangers food and call people in off the street! If he thought they were hungry. He was always feeding the neighbour's kids. I think it has a lot to do with us growing up in poverty. That he didn't ever want another kid to know what it was like to go hungry. (P.121)

[The deceased] saved his younger sister and brother, and then they, throughout the years, tried to stick together, and live as much as possible around each other, and try to take care of each other. (P.147)

Moving Forward



- As a ‘caring community’, what steps can we take to improve social determinants of health and quality of life for Aboriginal peoples in Toronto?
 - Partnerships with the Aboriginal community;
 - Partnerships with private and public sector;
 - Decrease empathy gap: Cultural competency training

City of Toronto Proclamation



Year of Truth and Reconciliation

Nov 12, 2013-Nov 12, 2014

“The City of Toronto's Urban Aboriginal Framework sets out principles and commitments that support reconciliation and the City reaffirms its commitment to implementing the framework through activities such as education of the Toronto Public Service on Aboriginal history; Aboriginal employment strategy; representation of Aboriginal people at City agencies and corporations; and partnership and capacity building.”

Moving Forward: Action Speaks Louder than Words



*Year of Truth and Reconciliation: City of Toronto's
Proclamation: 2013 - 2014*

**CREATE MULTI-YEAR DEFINITE ACTION
PLAN WITH DEFINED AND MEASURABLE
OUTCOMES**

Moving Forward: Action Speaks Louder than Words

Education of the Toronto Public Service on Aboriginal History

Aboriginal Cultural Safety Program aimed at:

- City Councillors, present and future
- Policy/ Planning Staff, present and future
- Staff at All Levels, present and future
- Programs supported by City in particular, present and future: Homeless, Low income Housing, Park & Recreation and others

ABORIGINANL CULTURAL SAFETY LEADING TO IMPROVED HEALTH OUTCOMES



Moving Forward: Action Speaks Louder than Words

Aboriginal Employment Strategy

Proactive Recruitment Strategy with Goals and Bench Marks within:

- City Employees
- Insert Clause in City Contracts about hiring practices
- Encouragement at Private Sector
- Special Attention for Programs supported by City in particular: Homeless, Low income Housing, Park & Recreation and others.

Moving Forward: Action Speaks Louder than Words

Representation of Aboriginal People at City Agencies, Boards and Corporations

- Within the City
- City funded Programs: Homelessness; Low income housing etc.

Moving Forward: Action Speaks Louder than Words

Partnership and Capacity Building

- Support the Board of Health for their Joint Initiative with Toronto Public Health & Toronto Central LHIN which incorporates strategies to address issues in Upstream (Social Determinants of Health), Downstream (Healthcare System) and Integrative programs at the City Council level

Moving Forward: Action Speaks Louder than Words

Partnership and Capacity Building

- Advocate at the Provincial level for the creation of an Unit which will deal with Policies and Programs focusing on Urban Aboriginal Issues;
- Advocate at the Toronto District School Board for Aboriginal High School provides a culturally safe venue for the aboriginal students promoting their recruitment and retention.

Moving Forward: Action Speaks Louder than Words

Partnership and Capacity Building

- Encourage “DiverseCity Initiative of Maytree Foundation” to consider inclusion of Aboriginal Peoples in their initiative.

Thank you! Miigwetch!



- Questions?