

STRESS AND BURNOUT AMONGST ABORIGINAL PEOPLES:

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE INQUIRIES

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Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to provide an understanding from a Aboriginal perspective of stress and burnout and how these phenomena exist within a Aboriginal worldview and environment. Using quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the research project seeks to identify the current burnout levels and occupational health of Aboriginal individuals and to compare these findings with the existing results from non-Aboriginal workers in Canada. To aid in understanding these results a narrative account of Aboriginal stress and burnout experiences is also provided. This research project is unique in that it seeks to provide an outlook about Aboriginal people from the perspective of Aboriginal people.

The findings suggest that Aboriginal burnout levels identified in this study are comparable and of a similar virulence to those experienced by non-Aboriginal workers both in Canadian and global work settings. Over a third of employed Aboriginals participating in this study showed high levels of depersonalization, lack of personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion. The qualitative interviews also revealed several causes of stress that are unique to working in a Aboriginal environment. Taken together the results identify that Aboriginal stress and burnout are important issues that need to be addressed at the individual, organizational, and community levels.

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Description of Terms

The term Aboriginal is used by the researcher to describe the original inhabitants of Canada and the subjects of this research project. There are three groups of Aboriginal people in Canada, as recognized by Section 35(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982. These groups are the Indian, Metis, and Inuit. The three general groupings all have distinct heritages, cultures, languages, and spiritual beliefs.

The other descriptive terminology used in place of Aboriginal has changed over the years and includes, but is not limited to, Natives, First Nations, Indian, and Indigenous peoples. However, it is not the intent to label or classify any person or group, as each person, and group have their own preference as to what, if any, identifying name they wish to be called. For purposes of the present study, only First Nations people from the Treaty Seven area participated.

A band consists of a group of First Nations people for whom land has been set aside, and money is held by the Crown. The land that is set aside for the use and occupancy of the band is known as a reserve. Each band has its own Chief and Council, which is the governing body. The Chief and Council may be elected or placed through traditional customs. The band members share common values, traditions, beliefs, and customs.

Smudging is the ritualistic purification and cleansing of an individual using prayer and the rising smoke of burning sweet grass and sage, which delivers the prayers to the heavens.

P R E S C R I P T

The primary aim of this exploratory study is to understand, describe, and interpret stress and burnout through a Aboriginal voice. This research project is unique in that it seeks to provide an outlook about Aboriginal people from the perspective of Aboriginal people. The research project has several objectives which include:

1. To identify the current burnout levels and occupational health of Aboriginal individuals who reside in southern Alberta
2. To compare these Aboriginal findings with the results from existing non-Aboriginal workers in Canada
3. To provide a narrative account of Aboriginal stress and burnout experiences
4. To offer policy and program suggestions that can be implemented at the individual, community, organization, and reserve levels

Guiding Principles

This research project has three essential, guiding principles. First, stress and burnout have and will continue to remain relevant and problematic to individuals, communities, organizations, and society. Consider for example these newspaper and magazine headlines and quotes published over the last 20 years:

- Dealing with stress can be a life and death challenge (1984)
- Stress, the modern malady, is still a mystery (1988)
- Stress, burnout could be added to disability list (1991)
- Workplace plague 'global phenomenon' (1993)
- Canadian stress levels increasing (1997)

- Is workplace stress a new 'Black Death' or is it the phoniest disease of our time? (1999)
- The case for compensating stress claims (1999)
- Working wounded (2000)
- Canadians feeling weight of the world: stress takes it toll (2001)
- Families are fed up and burnt out (2003)
- Pull the plug on stress (2003)
- Trust can ease the stress (2003)

Second, research on the prevalence and incidence of stress and burnout amongst Aboriginal peoples has not been conducted to date. There are a great many published studies which examine the phenomena of stress and burnout in western society; however, the Aboriginal experience has simply not been part of that coverage.

Finally, the question of whether available studies of burnout and stress in western society are in any way applicable to Aboriginal environments and work experiences must also be considered. The early answer to this question is probably not. Rather, the view offered here is that Aboriginal society does have a unique worldview, different from a western society's perspective. This third guiding principle is reinforced by Brant.

It has long been recognized that the culture of the North American Native differs substantially from that of the dominant white (non Native) society. Variations in customs, beliefs, ideals, and aspirations, as well as psychosocial differences, are well documented and generally accepted. (Brant, 1990, p. 534)

Sinclair (1994) further argues that there is a need to recognize and respect that First Nations have a different worldview and perspective than that of the dominant Euro-Canadian society and as such, conduct themselves differently.

People were told to ‘fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, and every living thing that moves upon the earth.’ In sharp contrast, the Aboriginal worldview holds that human beings are the least powerful and least important element in creation. They cannot influence events, and are disrespectful and unrealistic if they try. Human interests are not placed above those of any other part of creation. Regarding the relative hierarchy and importance of beings in creation, therefore, Aboriginal and Western traditions are diametrically opposed. (Sinclair, 1994, p. 23)

To sum up, stress and burnout are clearly important topics in any present day discussions we have about the western world of work. Whether the non-Aboriginal work experiences of burnout and stress are relevant and comparable to those in the Aboriginal workplace remains open to speculation given the paucity of available, empirical study. This research project represents one of the earliest attempts to fill such a void with its quantitative and qualitative examination of stress and burnout in the Aboriginal workplace and culture.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

Definitions of Stress and Burnout

Stress is an essential element of life today and has been with mankind since the earliest of times. This reality of the impact and duration of stress in our life is illustrated below.

Most of us believe that ours is “the age of stress,” forgetting that the caveman’s fear of being attacked by wild animals, while he slept, or of dying from hunger, cold or exhaustion, must have been just as stressful as our fear of a world war, the crash of the stock exchange, overpopulation, or the unpredictability of the future. (Selye, 1980, p. vii.)

Lazarus & Launier 1978 (as cited in Cherniss, 1980) define stress as occurring when there is a perceived imbalance between demands and resources. Too little demand produces understimulation and boredom, and it can be as stressful as excessive stimulation. The level of stress is a function of the perceived discrepancy between resources and demand and the perceived degree of harm that would occur if the demand were not met.

Bradley (1969) was one of the first individuals credited with using the term burnout. A few years later, Freudenberger (1974) used the term *burn-out* to describe the symptoms that he observed in himself, his patients, and colleagues. The current, widespread use of burnout in the popular press and academic literature is largely attributable to him.

One indicator of the prevalence of burnout in the present day mindset and society in general, is Boudreau and Nakashima's (2002), bibliography of burnout sources and citations, which span the period from 1990 to 2002. Boudreau and Nakashima (2002) have categorized the literature & publication types into 13 different categories which amount to 2138 reference citations. The specific types include, abstracts, books, dissertations, research papers, annual reviews, chapters, literature reviews, theses, articles, conference papers, popular press articles, unpublished papers, and websites.

There are probably as many definitions of burnout as there are researchers in the field. Freudenberger, Cherniss, Pines and Aronson, and Maslach and Leiter are among those researchers who have offered some of the most notable definitions for the construct.

Someone in a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the reward. Stated another way: Whenever the expectation level is dramatically opposed to reality and the person persists on trying to reach that expectation, trouble is on the way. Deep inside, friction is building up, the inevitable result of which will be a depletion of the individual's resources, an attrition of his vitality, energy, and ability to function. (Freudenberger, 1980, p. 13)

Burnout is a psychological withdrawal from work in response to excessive stress or dissatisfaction. Burnout involves a particular way of coping with job-related stress, one which emphasizes withdrawal, detachment, avoidance, lowering of goals, and blaming others. (Cherniss, 1980)

Burnout involves the painful realization that we have failed to make the world a better place, to help the needy, to have real impact on the organization-that all our efforts were for nothing, that we no longer have the energy it takes to do what we promised ourselves to do, that we have nothing left to give. (Pines & Aronson, 1988, p. 10)

The index of the dislocation between what people are and what they have to do. It represents an erosion in values, dignity, spirit, and will, an erosion of the human

soul. It is a malady that spreads gradually and continuously over time, putting people into a downward spiral from which it's hard to recover ... Lets assume that you are working in a situation of chronic imbalance in which the job demands more than you can give and provides less than you need...What might happen if you begin to burn out? Actually three things happen: you become chronically exhausted; you become cynical and detached from your work; and you feel increasingly ineffective on the job. (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 17)

The consistent theme that flows through all of the definitions is that the individual is experiencing emotional and physical drain on their resources as a result of prolonged and chronic work related stress which impinges on their work performance and ultimately their life.

Perspectives on Stress and Burnout

Several theories of who and how people experience burnout have been developed. These include the idea that the best, brightest, and most idealistic are most susceptible, or that long exposure to chronic stress is the culprit, or burnout may result from work over load or under load (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Pines & Aronson believe that,

Burnout tends to afflict people who enter their professions highly motivated and idealistic, expecting their work to give their lives a sense of meaning. It is a particular hazard in occupations in which professionals tend to experience their work as a kind of "calling." (Pines & Aronson, 1988, p. 10)

As explained by Maslach & Leiter (1997) burnout is considered an individual problem with flaws in character, behavior or productivity as the root. However,

as a result of extensive study, we believe that burnout is not a problem of the people themselves but of the *social environment* in which people work. The structure and functioning of the workplace shape how people interact with one another and how they carry out their jobs. When the workplace does not recognize the human side of work, then the risk of burnout grows, carrying a high price with it. (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 18)

Cherniss (1980) has distinguished three levels of analysis as factors that contribute to job stress and burnout. These are the individual, the work setting, and the larger culture and society. At the individual level, literature on burnout of health care personnel has linked the components of burnout with mental and physical health problems (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). These health related problems include: anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and links to various forms of substance abuse (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001).

At the organizational level, burnout is associated with negative organizational outcomes such as withdrawal, absenteeism, high staff turnover rates, diminished productivity and effectiveness, reduced job satisfaction and organization commitment (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993, Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001).

Golembiewski, Boudreau, Sun, & Luo (1999) report that as individuals progress through the eight phases of burnout, from least to most advanced, the following organizational changes in the character and quality of life occur:

- Job involvement and all facets of job satisfaction decrease.
- Turnover increases, both in intent and in actual departures.
- Group cohesiveness decreases.
- Physical and emotional symptoms increase.
- Features of family life deteriorate.
- Indicators of performance fall
- Costs of medical insurance increase significantly.

The preceding section on burnout definitions, and perspectives is reinforced by the observations of Boudreau (2000, p. 6) who states “our ever-expanding burnout jungle consists of a plethora of choices involving alternative paradigms, levels of analysis,

competing theories, measures and subscales, cut-offs, occupational and national differences; the list goes on.”

However, in spite of the “plethora of choices,” it is generally agreed that prolonged negative stress and burnout continues to have an adverse effect on the individual, the family, the organization, the community, and ultimately society.

Aboriginal Stress and Burnout

In 1990, Roland Chrisjohn lamented that there was nothing in the published literature dealing with the stress and burnout of Aboriginal people. It appears not much has changed in the intervening period. During the course of the literature review conducted for this project, no specific reference(s) to burnout and stress among Canadian Aboriginal populations were found. What follows next is a summary of related albeit indirect references to Aboriginal health and stress.

There are numerous, published research studies detailing the current health problems of Aboriginal peoples (Waldrum, Herring, & Young, 1995). For example, two well known research studies on depression in American Indian communities have been published (i.e., Manson, Shore, & Bloom, 1985; O’Neill, 1996). In addition, Native American healing rituals for extreme war stress (Silver & Wilson, 1988) have been examined. However, the focus of the majority of recent research efforts is on the social pathologies and negative conditions that exist in Aboriginal communities. The most notable of these are the alcohol, diabetes, and suicide epidemics that currently plague Aboriginal communities.

The recent 2000/01 Canadian Community Health Survey further reinforces the discrepancy between the health of Aboriginal people and other Canadians. The off-reserve Aboriginal population is 1.5 times more likely than the non-Aboriginal population to report fair or poor health, even after socio-economic factors are taken into account. The off reserve Aboriginal population is also 1.5 times more likely than the non-Aboriginal population to experience a major depressive episode (Statistics Canada, 2002).

A past president of the Canadian Medical Association highlighted the deplorable situation of Aboriginal health in a 2002 speech to the Ontario Medical Association.

One of the first priorities of the office is to do our part to move the yardstick on Aboriginal health. You will agree with me that the situation in First Nations communities is a national tragedy and a national shame. The situation needs to be addressed now. It must not continue! (Haddad, 2002)

In addition to health issues and concerns, it is also well documented that the socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal communities are far below the majority of other Canadians. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, (RCAP, 1995) Moreover, “the socio economic conditions of communities and the psychological states of individuals tend to reinforce one another.” (RCAP, 1995, p. 24) As stated by Smith (1999, p. 92),

Researchers investigating poor health or educational underachievement among indigenous communities often focus on the community as the sole source of the problem and, because this is their focus, obviously fail to analyze or make sense of the wider social, economic and policy contexts in which communities exist.

Culture stress is another area that has implications for the health and well being of Aboriginal peoples. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, (RCAP), report defines culture stress as:

The loss of confidence by individuals or groups in the ways of understanding life and living (norms, values, and beliefs) that were taught to them within their original cultures and the personal or collective distress that may result. (RCAP, 1995, p. 21)

To aid the reader in further understanding the conditions and concerns on a Aboriginal reserve as well as the discrepancy between the majority of non-Aboriginal Canadian communities and Aboriginal communities, findings from the following two studies are highlighted. The first study is a presentation of psychosocial stresses, while the second study focuses on environmental stresses. It is important to consider that these two studies were not conducted to examine stress and burnout levels per se, but rather were concerned with the broader area of Aboriginal mental health.

A study involving 600 non-directed interviews with Aboriginal people across Ontario was conducted in 1979 by Technical Assistance and Planning Associates (cited in Brant, 1990). This study identified psychosocial stresses such as frustration and deprivation. The specific list of stressors included:

- Inadequate housing
- Lack of employment and other income support, including adequate welfare benefits
- Absence of recreation facilities and programs
- Poor access to education and health resources
- Disorganized band administration
- Absent or inadequate transportation
- Disorganization and inadequacy of social services, including family and children's services
- Absence of counseling services to Indians

A survey of mental health needs on 57 Manitoba Indian reserves was conducted in 1984 and 1985, as reported by Rogers (1986). This survey identified several environmental

stresses as reported by frequency from each reserve. The results are offered in Table 1.

Table 1. Environmental Stresses

Stressor	% of 57 Communities
Educational Problems	98.2
Socio-Economic Status Factor	91.2
Lack of Recreation	77.2
Internal Resource Person Problems	73.7
Lack of Native Cultural Awareness	63.2
Family Break-Up	61.4
Government Funding Deficiencies	61.4
Transportation Difficulties	47.4
Overcrowding	45.6
Lack of Elders Influence	36.8
Poor Housing Quality	36.8
Lack of Adequate Water/Sewage/Sanitation	36.8
Crime Concerns	29.8
Lack of Effective Communications System	29.8
Environmental Problems	28.0
Law Enforcement Deficiency	21.0
Nutritional Concerns	19.3
High Turnover of Outside Personnel	7.0

Beyond culture, psychosocial, and environmental stresses, Chrisjohn (1990, p. 229) suggests that there are “**additional stressors that non-Indians working in their settings are not going to face and we are going to face directly.**” These stressors are briefly explained below.

- **Work overload as a matter of policy.** As defined by Native organizations that are chronically under funded and therefore constantly fighting for the adequacy of the services they are supposed to provide.
- **Institutionalization of the Impostor Syndrome.** When a person feels that they are not qualified to do what they are supposed to be doing. This is amplified by the public who reinforce this feeling through negative comments directed at those people who work with an Indian organization.
- **Many jobs have cultural conflict built in.** May conflict with their cultural upbringing.
- **Native people have built in societal conflicts and pressures.** Primarily deals with group cohesiveness, no detachment from the community and the job, as well as social control mechanisms.
- **Project Sabotage:** Competition for scarce resources in Native communities creates envy, both internally and externally, which can lead to project sabotage.

In addition to the Native stressors above which “**non-Indians working in their settings are not going to face**” there are still other kinds of stress triggers to consider. The majority of employment in a Aboriginal community occurs within the context of public service institutions, which are primarily mandated to provide aid and services to tribal members with limited resources at the Aboriginal band or organization’s disposal. The small size and communal aspect of Aboriginal communities produces the real possibility

that the person you deny services to today will also be the one that you see tonight at a social function, at the hockey rink, or at the local convenience store.

Finally, Chrisjohn (1990) also identifies several dynamics, which can possibly create burnout and stress in Native workers.

- **The experience of never finishing.** The program ends not due to success but due to funding being reduced.
- **Broadening of the job description.** An employee does more than required in order to keep the program going.
- **Feeling like being outcasts.** When we distance ourselves from clients, friends, and family.

All in all there has been some research study and discussion on Aboriginal health and stress. But this body of work remains somewhat piecemeal and incomplete. Research specifically directed at the incidence, prevalence, and understanding of burnout and stress amongst Canadian Aboriginal populations has not been conducted to date. This research project represents an initial attempt to fill such a void. Building on the earlier definitions of burnout, the next section of this review focuses on the theoretical approach used in this study of stress and burnout of Aboriginal workers.

Phase Model Approach

The experience of burnout includes descriptions of momentary states of low energy, severe depression requiring hospitalisation, and all in-between conditions leading to scepticism and confusion surrounding the term. For example, although its presentation can be debilitating there is no acknowledgement of burnout on the DSMIV classification for psychiatric illness. However, over the last 20 years the *Phase Model* has been used to document the incidence and patterning of worker burnout. The *Phase Model* approach originally proposed by Golembiewski, Munzenrider, & Stevenson, (1986), constitutes a promising response to this lack of definition and provides a means for guiding future action.

This approach rests on the early work of Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson, (1981), who described burnout along three dimensions: *Depersonalization*, or the tendency to view others as objects rather than as feeling, valuing persons; *Personal Accomplishment*, or the degree to which a person perceives doing well on worthwhile tasks, and *Emotional Exhaustion*, or the feelings of being emotionally overrun and exhausted by one's work. Responses to a modified version of the *Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)* permit assigning each individual a score on these three dimensions.

The *Phase Model* extends the description of the three **MBI** dimensions and proposes an eight-phase model of progressive burnout based on two conventions: An individual's three dimension scores can be coded as High (HI) or Low (LO), based on norms from a large population, and secondly, the three dimensions are not equally

significant in burnout. *Depersonalization* is considered the least virulent contributor to burnout and *Emotional Exhaustion* the most severe. The eight-phase model of progressive burnout is offered below. Notice that *Personal Accomplishment* is reversed, so a Low (LO) assignment on that dimension indicates an individual who is doing well on a task perceived as worthwhile. The phases are divided into three categories, Initial (Phases I, II, & III), Moderate (Phases IV & V), and Advanced (Phases VI, VII, & VIII).

Table 2. Phase Model of Burnout

Subscales	Phases of Burnout							
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Depersonalization	LO	HI	LO	HI	LO	HI	LO	HI
Personal Accomplishment (-)	LO	LO	HI	HI	LO	LO	HI	HI
Emotional Exhaustion	LO	LO	LO	LO	HI	HI	HI	HI

Although many features of this approach remain untested, the *Phase Model* remains one of the most comprehensive and systematic ways to study burnout with an accumulated database of over 40,000 cases.

This chapter has provided stress and burnout definitions and perspectives. Aboriginal stress and burnout and the *Phase Model* have also been touched on. The next chapter will focus on the methodologies involved in the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research project.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

The quantitative and qualitative approaches used in this research project will be described in the details to follow.

2001 First Nations Occupational Health Profile: A Quantitative Survey

The primary purpose of the quantitative inquiry used in this research project (i.e., from the Multidisciplinary Aboriginal Project, Boudreau & Amelinckx, 2001) was to examine the occupational health and incidence of burnout among Aboriginal peoples employed in both Aboriginal and predominantly non-Aboriginal work environments in Southern Alberta. Comparisons to non-Aboriginal, global workers were also planned.

Population Participants

The research project was conducted amongst the Aboriginal peoples who reside in the Treaty 7 area, which is located in the Southern Alberta region of Canada (see Appendix A). The Treaty Seven area is comprised of members from the Siksika (Blackfoot), Piikani (Peigan), Kainai (Blood), Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee), and the Stoney (Bears paw, Chiniki, & Wesley/Goodstoney) bands. The number of Aboriginals registered in the Treaty Seven Nations is 24,449, with an estimated 18,194 people living on the reserve while 6,255 live off reserve. The male and female demographic is nearly even with 12,034 males and 12,415 females (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, [INAC], 2004).

Survey Design

For purposes of this study, a self-report survey was developed to examine the incidence and severity of Aboriginal burnout in Southern Alberta. Specifically, the 2001 *First Nations Occupational Health Profile*, (see Appendix B), consisted of 72 questions including eight demographic questions, a productivity scale, and two burnout measures. The demographic questions included gender, age, First Nation Band status, current employment status, position level in organization, years in current job, years with present organization, and years in this type of work. The productivity scale asks individuals to rate their overall level of effectiveness on a scale from 1 to 100. The Modified Maslach Burnout Inventory (**MMBI**), a 23-item instrument, uses a 7-point intensity scale (0 = Very much UNLIKE me, 7 = Very much LIKE me), measures burnout based on three dimensions, *depersonalization*, a lack of *personal accomplishment*, and *emotional exhaustion*, and substitutes the word clients for co-workers. The Boudreau Burnout Questionnaire (**BBQ**), a 40-item measure, uses a 7-point intensity scale (1 = False, 7 = True). The **BBQ** assesses four dimensions of burnout, *(de)personalization*, *(in)competence*, *emotional exhaustion/energy*, and *fatality/resilience* (Boudreau, Amelinckx, Crow, Golembiewski, Goodfellow, Robertson, Scott, & Wedel, 2003). The survey concludes with a section for any qualitative comments about the content of the survey or work in general (Crow, Boudreau, Amelinckx, & Scott, 2002).

For purposes of this study, individuals were recruited from the Treaty Seven area in Southern Alberta through personal contacts, formal written requests, (see Appendix B

again), and presentations to the appropriate organizational authorities. The individuals were chosen due to the fact that they are “involved with people work of some kind.” (Maslach, 1982) Participants were from a variety of professions, which included, social work, health, correctional, senior management, and education professions.

The survey began in October 2001 and ran until March 2002. Approximately 1500 surveys were randomly distributed throughout the five Nations. The participants returned the completed surveys by mail. The goal was to obtain 200 usable responses from the Kainai (Blood), Piikuni (Peigan), Siksika (Blackfoot) , Stoney (Bears paw, Chiniki, & Wesley/Goodstoney), and TsuuTina (Sarcee) Aboriginal communities.

Data Quantification

The completed surveys were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (*SPSS 10.0*) for analysis. The data was input individually by two persons and then compared to eliminate input error. Missing data were treated as list-wise deletion. A *Word* file containing the qualitative comments from the mail returns was also created. The completed surveys are kept in a secure place with access to the original data limited to members of the research team.

A Qualitative Study of a Aboriginal Community

In addition to the quantitative survey of Aboriginal health and burnout, a qualitative inquiry into Aboriginal stress and burnout was undertaken as part of this research process (see Appendix C). This approach was used primarily for three reasons. First, Aboriginals have an oral tradition, which I believe will lend itself more readily to the qualitative aspects of understanding the Aboriginal viewpoint and “allow respondents to tell their story in their own terms.” (Mc Cracken, 1988, p. 34) Second, such inquiry is sorely lacking in the study of stress and burnout generally, and “qualitative research...could be valuable...especially in capturing richer descriptions of contextual factors and personal meanings surrounding burnout processes.” (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993, p. 17)

Third, I have the advantage of being Aboriginal and having life and work experiences in the same environment, which aided in forming the questions and opening the doors in the community. As reinforced by Smith (1999, p. 193),

When indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, people participate on different terms.

More specifically, the grounded theory approach suggested by Glaser & Strauss (1967) guided the qualitative inquiry used in this project.

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge.” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23)

Such an approach is consistent with the paucity of available data and information on Canadian Aboriginal stress and burnout, regardless of the chosen method(s) of study.

Interviews

The qualitative information was obtained through confidential, audio taped, personal, semi-structured interviews, (see Appendix D for the set of questions). The interviews were scheduled to run approximately one hour in length. Two pilot interviews were conducted with recruited participants to help familiarize the researcher with the questioning process as well as to establish the final set of interview questions. An additional six interviews were conducted for a total of eight usable interviews (cf. McCracken, 1988). In addition, two Elders were interviewed to gain an historical perspective on stress as it pertains to Aboriginal peoples. All ten of the interviews were conducted between July and September 2002.

The interview questions covered several areas: demographics, work history, non-work history, current attitudes, future plans, and stress responses (cf. Cherniss, 1995). Throughout the interview process I attempted to set a comfortable tone by ensuring that those interviewed understood, the purpose of the project, confidentiality, expectations of the interview, and the role of the participants in the project, (see Appendix E).

It was also made clear to all eight participants that the interviews were not intended to be an evaluation of their physical, mental, or emotional states. The primary goal was to obtain data on stress and burnout through the lived experience of a Aboriginal individual. I

also used discretion to tailor questions to the language and literacy level of each individual being interviewed.

Transcription

A research assistant then transcribed the audio-recorded interviews into separate *Word* documents. The transcriptions were then reviewed for clarity and accuracy. Next, *Atlas-ti* software was used to analyze each transcription. The interview transcriptions were coded and interpreted using grounded theory procedures as suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1990). Themes were identified, named, and reviewed for relationships and meanings. In reporting themes and during the results and discussion sections of this paper, the direct quotes of the participants are italicized and are used to maintain their value and voice. The quotes were edited to aid in readability.

It is important to note that in order to maintain confidentiality, the quotes used in this paper do not provide any identifying characteristics of who the respondent is. The reasoning behind this is transparent. The participants “*know and live among the people,*” and in small communities “*everyone knows everyone and knows what everyone is doing.*” The completed interviews are kept in a secure place with access to the original data limited to members of the research team.

Ethics

Both the quantitative and qualitative studies were reviewed and approved separately by the University of Lethbridge Human Subjects Research Committee whose policies are in accordance with those of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (1998).

To sum up this chapter has presented the quantitative and qualitative methods used in this research project. The next chapter will focus on the quantitative results of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

Quantitative Results

This chapter will present the results from the quantitative survey. Chapter 4 will describe in detail the results from the qualitative interviews.

As described earlier, participants were identified from the five tribes in the Treaty Seven area in Southern Alberta through personal contacts, formal written requests, and presentations to the appropriate organizational authorities (see Appendix B again). The survey began in October 2001 and ran until March, 2002. Approximately 1500 surveys were randomly distributed throughout the Kainai (Blood), Piikani (Peigan), Siksika (Blackfoot), Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee), and the Stoney (Bears paw, Chiniki, & Wesley/Goodstoney) Aboriginal communities. The participants returned the completed surveys directly to a researcher assistant or by mail.

Response Rate and Characteristics of the Respondents

A total of 194 out of approximately 1500 surveys were returned for a response rate of 13%. It should also be noted that of the 194 individuals responding to the survey, a total of 78 or 40% offered some form of qualitative commentary.

A breakdown of the survey responses by selected demographic characteristics is offered in Table 3. Note that the last column in Table 3 offers comparative Treaty 7 population totals and percentages.

Table 3: Survey Responses by Selected Demographics for Sample and Population

	<i>Sample</i>		<i>Population*</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>P</i>
Surveys Distributed	1500		24449	100
Returned	194	12.9		
Female	133	68.6	12415	50.8
Male	61	31.4	12034	49.2
First Nations Band Membership				
<i>Kainai/Blood</i>	112	58.0	9611	39.3
<i>Piikani/Peigan</i>	38	19.7	3351	13.7
<i>Siksika/Blackfoot</i>	16	8.3	5818	23.8
<i>Tsuu T'ina/Sarcee</i>	9	4.7	1502	6.1
<i>Stoney</i>	0	0.0	4167	17.0
<i>Other**</i>	18	9.3	--	--
Current Employment Status				
Full-time, permanent	140	72.5		
Full-time, temporary	27	14.0		
Part-time, permanent	4	2.1		
Casual	12	6.2		
Self-employed	1	.5		
Other***	9	4.7		
Current Position Level				
Managerial	26	13.7		
Supervisory	28	14.7		
Front-line	136	70.1		

*Source: INAC (2004) First Nation Profiles. This represents the most current data source.

**Live and work in the Treaty 7 area but members of non-Treaty 7 Nations. (e.g., Cree).

***Summer students and term/contract positions.

Clearly a word of caution is in order given the very low response rate and the available comparisons of responders vs. non-responders across gender and band membership. From the data in Table 3 it is clear that both females and those from the Kainai (Blood) and Piikani (Peigan) Nations are over-represented in relation to the Treaty 7 population. The Siksika (Blackfoot) and Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee) response rates are lower than expected while no one from the Stoney (i.e., Chiniki, Bearspaw, Wesley/Goodstoney) bands responded to the survey. A more complete discussion about possible reasons for this low response rate as well as possible limits in interpretation and generalization given the limited "representativeness" of the present sample will be offered in Chapter 5. Suffice it to say for now that one needs to interpret the available data with caution and be careful in making generalizations to all of those living and working in the Treaty 7 area. I would also like to ask the reader to juxtapose this cautionary warning with the significance of this study as providing an important beginning to the dialogue so that we may gain an appreciation and better understanding about Aboriginal stress and burnout. With this in mind, I would like to offer selected comparative analyses using the sample of 194 respondents in the Tables and Figures to follow.

Demographic Profile

The typical individual responding in this study is a 38 year-old female front-line employee from the Kainai(Blood) band. For the entire sample we found that:

69% are female

Age range is from 19 to 63

Over ¾ of the respondents are from the Kainai (Blood) or Piikani (Peigan) bands

Over 70% are full-time permanent, front-line employees

Average number of years in current job is 4.4

Average number of years in present organization is almost 6 years

Average number of years in this type of work is almost 9 years.

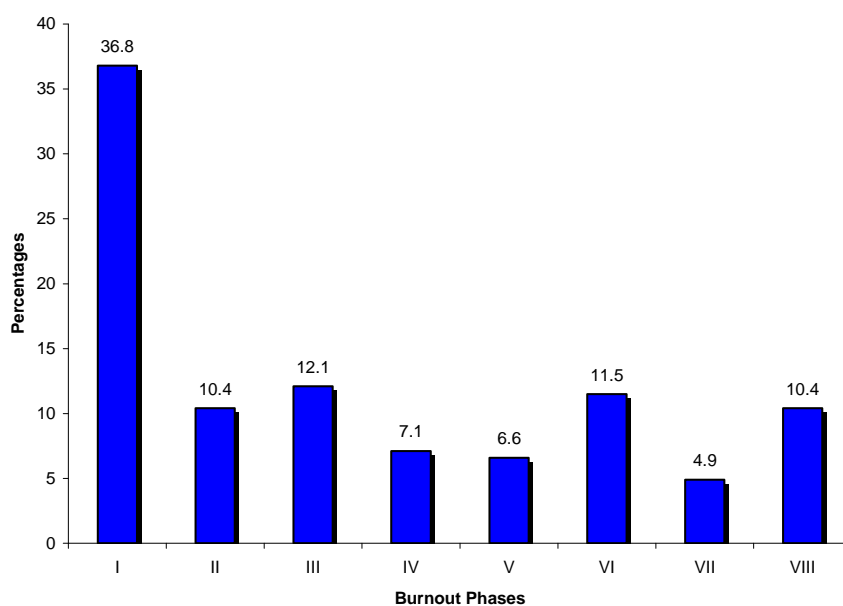
One can only speculate whether this demographic profile generally mirrors the population profile of Aboriginal peoples living and working in the Treaty 7 area.

Aboriginal Burnout

Using the 23-item, Modified Maslach Burnout Inventory (MMBI), subscale scores for *depersonalization (dp)*, *personal accomplishment (pa-reversed)*, and *emotional exhaustion (ee)* were calculated. Building on what has been done previously using the *Phase Model* approach in many other published studies, each individual was then assigned to one of eight phases of burnout using a set of universal norms previously identified (Golembiewski et al., 1996, p.51). *Global norms* are defined here as the median cutoffs available from two larger U.S. populations for the three subscales in the MMBI (specifically, *dp*, 18; *pa [reversed]* 26; *ee*, 23; see Golembiewski, Munzenrider, & Stevenson, 1986). *Local norms* refer to the median cutoffs for the three dimensions for a specific study and sample. Essentially, each individual is categorized as being high or low in each of the three MMBI subscales. Each individual is then assigned to one of eight possible phases of burnout. The assignments presented in Figure 1 using the global norms

as cutoffs indicate that 26.8% of Aboriginal workers are in an advanced stage or phase of burnout (i.e., phases VI, VII, & VIII).

Figure 1. Aboriginal Workers, MMBI, Global Norms



Comparisons of phase assignments using *global* vs. *local* norms and the MMBI (i.e., for *dp* 18 vs. 16, for *pa [reversed]* 26 vs. 23, for *ee* 23 vs. 18) for both eight and tri-phase assignments are presented in Figures 2 and 3 respectively. Using the local norms, the levels of advanced burnout are slightly higher.

Figure 2. Aboriginal Workers, MMBI, Global & Local Norms

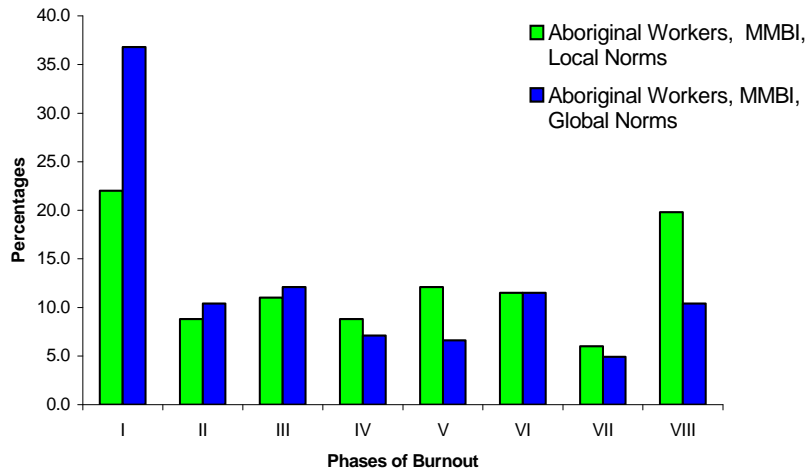
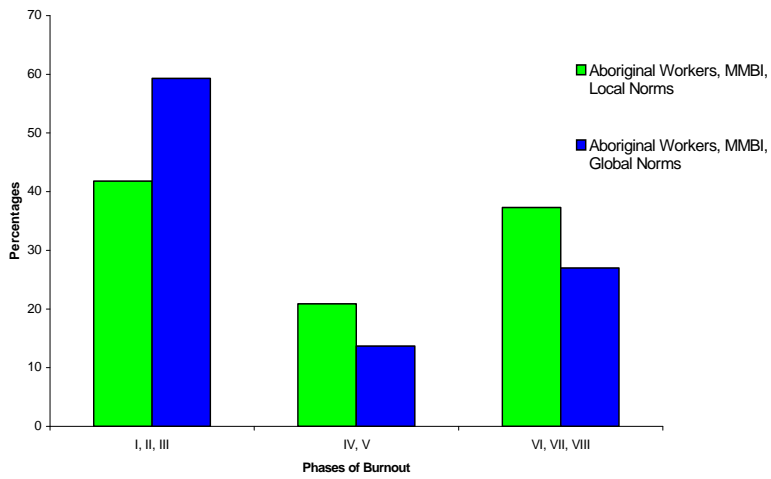
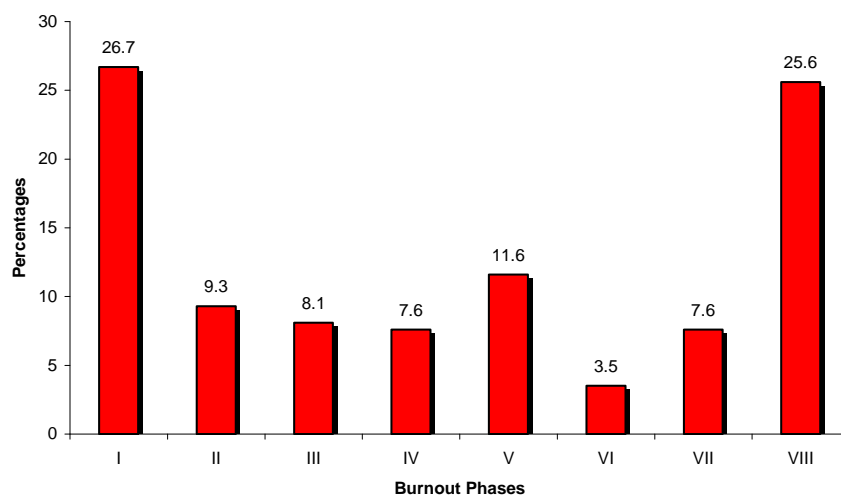


Figure 3. Aboriginal Workers Tri-Phase Classification



As part this survey, the Boudreau Burnout Questionnaire (BBQ) was also used to measure levels of burnout. Using the *local* norm splits for the BBQ (i.e., *dp* 22, *lpa*, 26, *ee* 30), phase model classifications for the sample of 194 Aboriginal workers are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Aboriginal Workers, BBQ, Local Norms



Figures 5 and 6 present the scores for the sample of Aboriginal workers for the two measures of burnout (MMBI, local & global norms; BBQ local norms) across the 8-phase and tri-phase distributions. Taken together these results indicate that on average, a third (i.e., 26.8%, 37.3%, & 36.7% in Phases VI, VII, VIII for each of the three sets of scores) of the Aboriginal workers who participated in this study were in an advanced stage or phase of burnout.

Figure 5. Measures X Norms X 8 Phases

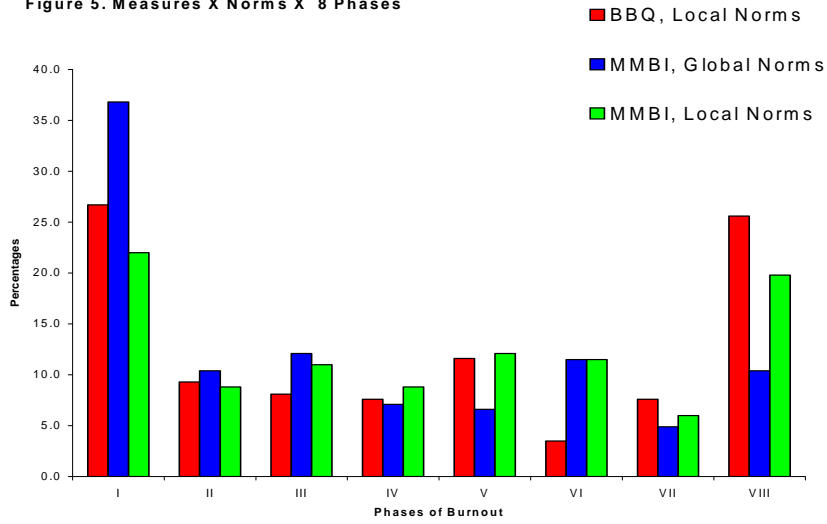
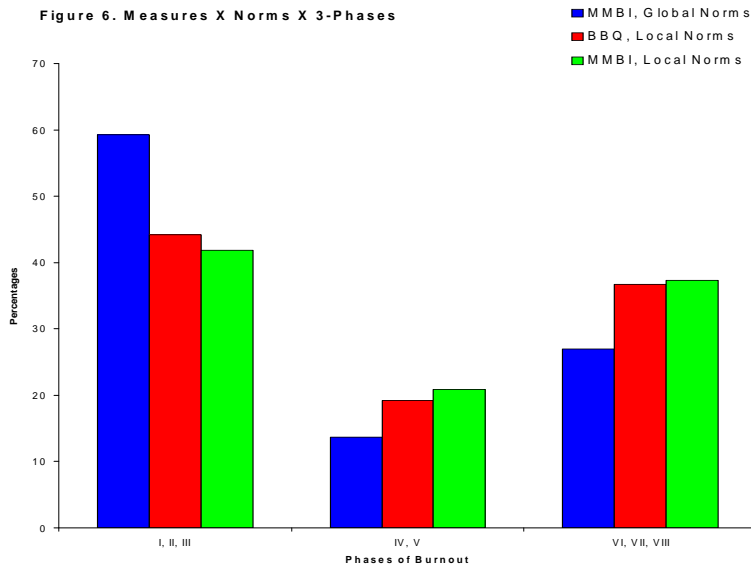


Figure 6. Measures X Norms X 3-Phases



Aboriginal Burnout: Selected Canadian and Global Comparisons

Using the Boudreau Burnout Questionnaire scores and the Phase Model approach, a comparison of Aboriginal results with a sample of Alberta doctors is presented in Figure 7. Figure 8 offers further comparisons of the Aboriginal findings with a survey sample of practicing Canadian physicians as well as a sample of New Zealanders working in various areas including police, fire, emergency services and health care, and manufacturing.

Figure 7: A comparison of Aboriginal Workers and Alberta Doctors

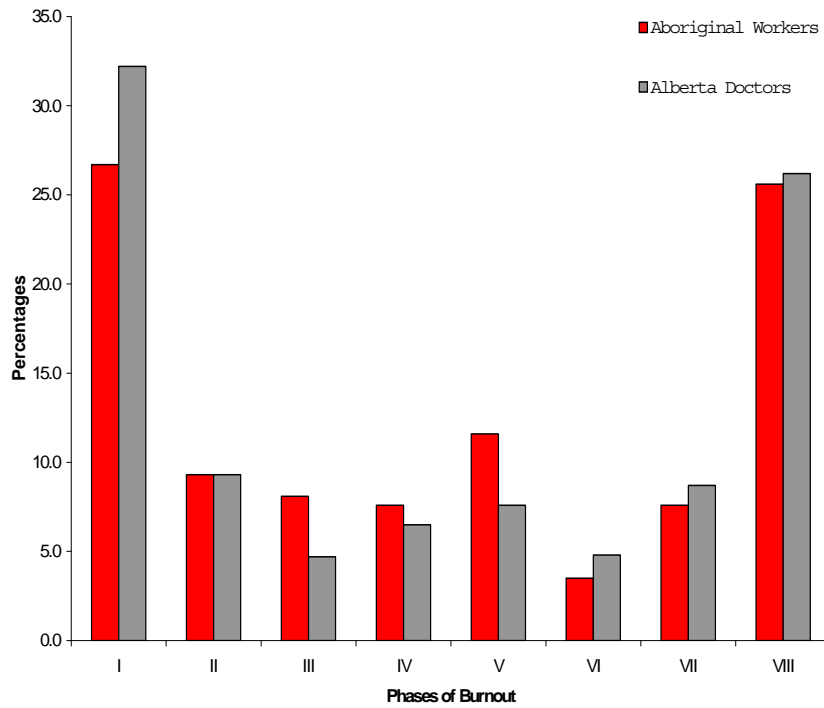
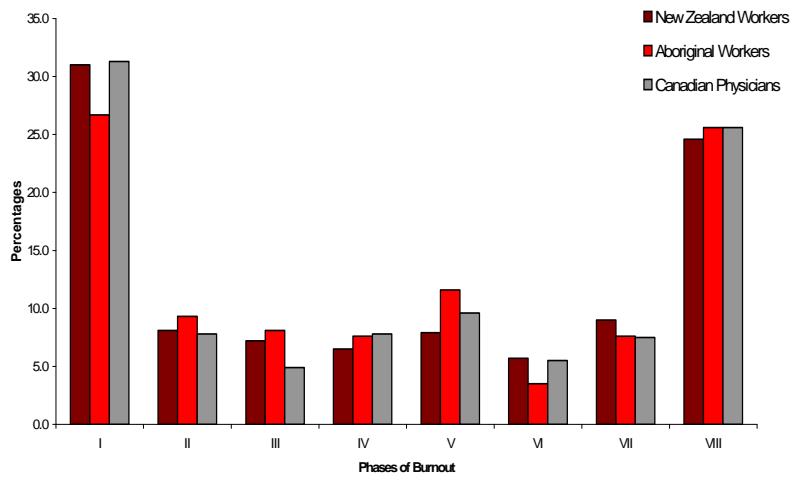


Figure 8. Aboriginal Burnout: A comparison with Canadian Physicians and Kiwi Workers



The findings from these last two Figures in particular, suggest that Aboriginal burnout levels identified in this study are comparable and of a similar virulence to those experienced by non-Aboriginal workers both in Canadian and global work settings. Over a third of employed Aboriginals participating in this study showed high levels of depersonalization, lack of personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion.

Measures and Subscales: Properties, reliabilities, intercorrelations, & factor scores

Descriptive statistics for the three subscales in the Modified Maslach Burnout Inventory (MMBI), the four subscales in the Boudreau Burnout Questionnaire (BBQ), and the single-item, self-report performance measure are presented in Table 4. In addition to these descriptive statistics, the range of item-total correlations for the seven subscales are also listed. In Table 5, specific reliability and validity data are presented. For one, statistically significant correlations were found between the comparable subscales (DP, PA [rev], EE) of the MMBI and the BBQ (DP/P, LPA/PA, EE/E; $r = 0.58, 0.47, 0.71$). Next, consistent with what you would expect, significant correlations (i.e., 6/7) were found between the overall performance measure and the various burnout subscales. The only exception to this was the statistically non-significant relationship of .12 found between performance measure scores and the MMBI emotional exhaustion subscale scores. Finally, the majority of the reliability alphas (Cronbach, 1951) were found to be mostly within the acceptable limits (e.g., Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998) of .7 and .9 with the exception of the Lack of Personal Accomplishment/ Personal Accomplishment and the Fatality/Resilience subscales of the Boudreau Burnout Questionnaire.

A complete listing of item-total reliabilities and rotated factor scores for the 40 questions in the BBQ and the 23 questions in the MMBI are presented in Appendix F. Overall, the results presented in Tables 4 and 5 and Appendix F offer strong support that the burnout measures and their relevant subscales are highly interrelated yielding a consistent and valid pattern of results.

As a final comment it should be noted that no appreciable differences or relationships were found among Aboriginal burnout levels and selected demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, current position level) used in this study. One interesting exception to this overall finding was the “years in current job” reported which was significantly related to higher scores in depersonalization and emotional exhaustion.

This chapter has presented the quantitative results of the research project. This included, a discussion of the response rates, demographic profile, Aboriginal burnout and selected Canadian and Global comparisons, measures and subscales properties, reliabilities, intercorrelations, and factor scores. The next chapter will focus on the qualitative results of the study.

Table 4. Aboriginal Burnout Measures: Selected properties, descriptive statistics, & reliabilities

Subscale/Measure	Response	Items	Range	Mean	Median	SD	Item Total Correlations	
DP/P - BBQ	Intensity	1-7	10	10-45	22.7	22.0	7.4	.17 to .43
LPA/PA - BBQ	Intensity	1-7	10	10-45	26.4	26.0	7.4	.08 to .36
EE/E - BBQ	Intensity	1-7	10	10-61	31.2	30.0	9.9	.19 to .63
FA/RES - BBQ	Intensity	1-7	10	12-53	27.9	27.0	8.0	-.05 to .51
MMBI- DP	Intensity	1-7	8	8-41	17.8	16.0	7.7	.20 to .51
MMBI- PA (reversed)	Intensity	1-7	8	8-46	23.3	23.0	7.8	.34 to .54
MMBI-EE	Intensity	1-7	7	7-47	20.8	18.0	9.9	.51 to .74
Performance Measure	Percentage	0 -100	1	20-100	77.1	80.0	15.2	--

Note. $n = 194$. BBQ= Boudreau Burnout Questionnaire; DP/P = Depersonalization/Personalization; LPA/PA = Lack of Personal Accomplishment/ Personal Accomplishment; EE/E = Emotional Exhaustion/Energy; FA/RES = Fatality/Resiliency; MMBI = Modified Maslach Burnout Inventory; DP = Depersonalization; PA (reversed) = Personal Accomplishment (reversed); EE = Emotional Exhaustion. Performance Measure score options = 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 70, 80, 90, or 100.

For BBQ items, all positive items were reversed such that high scores equal high levels of burnout. For MMBI Personal Accomplishment items, all positive items were reversed so that high scores equal high levels of burnout.

Table 5. Measures and Subscale Intercorrelations and Alphas^a

<i>Measure/Subscale^b</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. DP/P- BBQ	.64							
2. LPA/PA - BBQ	.62	.54						
3. EE/E- BBQ	.49	.61	.76					
4. FA/RES- BBQ	.54	.52	.64	.58				
5. MMBI- DP	.58	.51	.55	.53	.72			
6. MMBI- PA (rev)	.47	.47	.40	.38	.21	.74		
7. MMBI- EE	.35	.42	.71	.51	.57	.19*	.88	
8. Performance Measure	-.31	-.32	-.30	-.34	-.15**	-.38	-.12	-- NS

Note. *Significant at the .01 level. ** Significant at the .05 level. NS = Non-significant. All other correlations offered in Table 3 are significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

^aCronbach Alpha coefficients for each subscale/measure are shown in **bold** in the diagonal.

^b BBQ= Boudreau Burnout Questionnaire; DP/P = Depersonalization/Personalization; LPA/PA = Lack of Personal Accomplishment/ Personal Accomplishment; EE/E = Emotional Exhaustion/Energy; FA/RES = Fatality/Resiliency; MMBI = Modified Maslach Burnout Inventory; DP = Depersonalization; PA (reversed) = Personal Accomplishment (reversed); EE = Emotional Exhaustion. Performance Measure score options = 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 70, 80, 90, or 100.

For BBQ items, all positive items were reversed such that high scores equal high levels of burnout. For MMBI Personal Accomplishment items all positive items were reversed so that high scores equal high levels of burnout.

CHAPTER FOUR

Qualitative Results

This chapter will present the qualitative results of the study. The interview questions covered seven general areas, (see Appendix D again), including, demographics, introductory questions, work history, non-work, current attitudes, future plans and individual responses to stress and burnout. These areas were further refined to aid in organizing and providing structure to the results and will be discussed in the following order: Elder interviews, Aboriginal expression for stress, interviewee demographics, introductory questions, Aboriginal causes of stress (see Figure 9), and similarities between communities.

Elder Interview

This aspect of the research project was conducted to gain an historical perspective on stress and burnout. It is not intended to be a historical account of the way things were or a history lesson, but merely the viewpoint of those interviewed. Two Blackfoot Elders were interviewed for this facet of the project.

Was Stress A Factor To Aboriginals In The Past?

The question of whether stress was a factor in the lives of Aboriginals in the past was posed to the Elders. They were in agreement that yes it would appear to be something that all human beings deal with, and as stated by one of the Elders, *“it was recognized by those around an individual when he or she was under pressure, and the individual was left*

to deal with this on his or her own.” In other words “the community did not interfere, or they alleviated the pressure by helping out, in whatever way they could.” An example of this is described by one of the Elders, as when a family was going through a time when there was little food available, others would share their food to help out others.

However, the most apparent feature of this interview was the notion that: Yes, although stress was an element of traditional Aboriginal life, the people of that time were more balanced in their life and thus more able to cope, and as such not as affected by stress as they are today. As explained by one of the Elders, “*prayer - that’s part of our daily routine because it was part of their daily lives. They had to get up and smudge.*” Due to modern influences and disruptive historical events, such as residential school, many people have lost what used to be fundamental and essential aspects of life. It would appear that the practises of the past helped to insulate and protect individuals from the negative effects of stress. As stated by one of the Elders “*you have to have balance in your life, negative and positive balance in your life.*”

Aboriginal Expression for Stress

The Aboriginal language that is spoken amongst the participants and Elders is Blackfoot, which is a member of the Algonquian language family. As such, the intent of this section is to present the Blackfoot language expression for stress only. All Aboriginal spelling of the words or expressions used in this section are derived from the Blackfoot Dictionary. (Frantz & Russell, 1989) The definitions are described from the participants’ personal understandings of the expression or word as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Aboriginal Expressions for Stress

Expression	Definition (By Participants)
Aaksiiyikowa	“When somebody has to go through a real challenge mentally, physically, emotionally to reach his goals”
Sistsikoo	“ I’m, like I’m just tired ...really tired”
Nitsiikssawaahssi’ taki	“I’m Unhappy”
Aisttsisskini	“ The root word is hurt. He/She is experiencing stress/hurt. So worried that it hurts your head.”
Kitaako’ kaaa’tsoohsi	“You will experience burnout, over tire yourself. You are so tired you can’t do any more!”

A caveat is necessary to explain that not all of those interviewed expressed an opinion due to their inability to speak their native language. However, the Elders and all of the participants who had a working knowledge of the language were in agreement that there is no single word or expression for stress in the Blackfoot language, although there are some words that may contain a semblance of the meaning of stress and burnout. This is due to the complexity of the Blackfoot language, which is descriptive and does not easily translate into English since a single word can mean many words. This complexity is described by one of the participants,

I think we're really smart people, you can talk, especially in our own language, we're so smart, you can just say a few words, but in English you'd almost have to explain forever.

It is important to note that one of the participants interviewed stated that: “Kitaako’ kaaa’tsoohsi” is a close facsimile to stress and burnout. This expression is loosely translated as someone telling you that “*You will experience burnout, and over tire yourself. You are so tired you can’t do any more.*” However as stated previously it would appear that there is no single word or expression in the Blackfoot language for “stress” or “burnout.”

Participants Demographics

There were a total of ten individuals interviewed for this project. Two Elders were interviewed to gain a historical context while the remaining eight were interviewed for the main focus of the project. The participants identified themselves as members of the Piikani (Peigan), Kainai (Blood), and Siksika (Blackfoot) Nations. Refer to Table 7 , for more detailed information.

Table 7. Participants Demographics

Gender	Age	Occupation(s)	Years in Occupation	Work On/Off Reserve	Reside On/Off Reserve
M	44	Corrections Social/Case Work	17	On	On
M	50	Management	8	On	On
F	42	HR/Management/Social Work	10	On	On
M	37	Teacher/Mechanic	1/10	On	Off
F	36	Management	3	Off	Off
F	32	Labor Market Consultant	6	Off	Off
M	39	Management/Banking	10	Off	Off
F	51	Social /Case Work	15	Off	Off

Two participants considered themselves front line staff, two were middle management, and four were in senior management positions. All of the participants had education beyond high school, either at the college or university level, through training courses initiated from their place of employment, or through their own career choices. Three of the participants had college certificates or diplomas. Two participants had university degrees, while one individual had a year left to complete the degree requirements. All participants were employed in predominately Aboriginal-owned or Aboriginal-controlled organizations. The number of employees at each organization varied from a low of six to approximately 200 people, however, the majority had twelve or less employees in their organizations.

Interview Introductory Questions

The purpose of the introductory portion of the interview was to get a sense of what the participants knew about job stress and burnout and their experience with these phenomena. As explained by Cherniss (1980, p.20),

Burnout is a process that begins with excessive and prolonged levels of job stress. This stress produces strain in the worker (feelings of tension, irritability, and fatigue). The process is completed when the workers defensively cope with the job stress by psychologically detaching themselves from the job and becoming apathetic, cynical, or rigid.

In summary, all of the participants had knowledge or experience with the signs of job stress and burnout and the negative effects that they can produce. The following three separate quotes reflect the knowledge of the individuals in recognizing job related stress.

Attendance goes down, personal problems increase such as alcoholism, work avoidance, and people tend to maybe more irritable or less communicative. Those are the signs, I see of stress.

They begin to show signs of stress physically, emotionally. Employees start to break down easy. Other staff members start taking more time off work. They lose the quality of their work and they lose the focus of the mandate of their work. They break down easy.

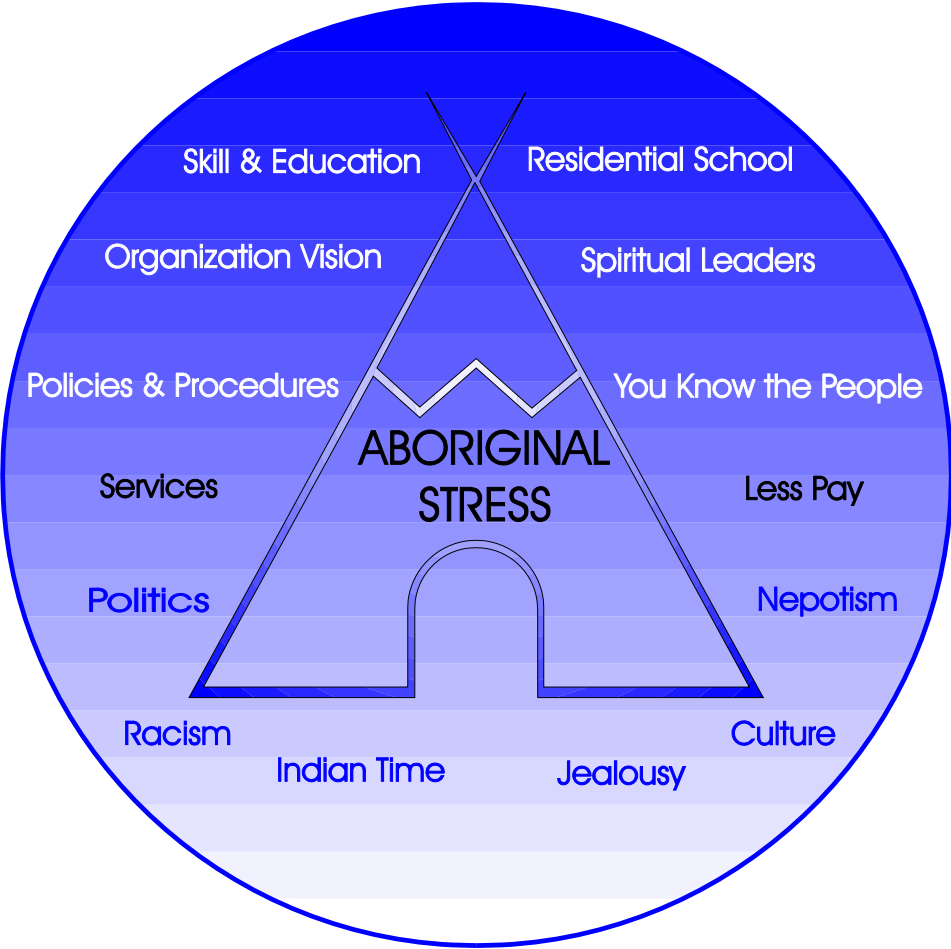
The definition is basically when the person can't perform their duties or function at work. Maybe in other areas of their lives, for that matter, but if we're just on the work place, it's pretty much they can't seem to cope with what's going on and so nothing's getting done and they seem to be having a lot of difficulties dealing with just, well I would say, the normal job activities. Some of the signs probably are irritability, absenteeism, confrontational. I guess in a more general sense low sense of self-esteem or self-confidence, and an unwillingness to try anything new or different.

The above quotes, which describe or define job stress and indirectly describe burnout and its effects, illustrate that the participants do have experience with these phenomena.

Unique Causes of Aboriginal Stress

As the analysis of the interviews continued, it became apparent that many causes of stress, as voiced by the respondents' were unique to working in a Aboriginal environment. These fourteen causes are graphically represented in Figure 9, and will be presented individually.

Figure 9: Unique Causes of Aboriginal Work Stress



Before proceeding with a discussion of the fourteen unique stressors, I would like to offer that the overriding theme amongst the participants was the sense of community and the fact that living and working in a small and close-knit community posed its own difficulties. This theme was not only voiced by participants who lived and worked on the reserve, where the community is relatively small, it was also the viewpoint of those participants who lived and worked off reserve. The reasoning for this is evident in the following quote,

What ever you do, you're serving the community, you're part of the community, you're the organization, you're in there all the way, no matter which way you look at it, you're part of it.

The unique causes of stress will be presented in an arrangement which should not be construed to represent ranking or importance and many of these causes of stress, are interrelated. The fourteen unique causes of Aboriginal stress will be presented in the following order: skill & education, policies & procedures, organization vision & focus, racism, residential school, culture, politics, nepotism, Indian time, services, you know the people, spiritual leaders, less pay, and jealousy.

Skill and Education

This became a topic brought up by many of the participants. The primary cause of stress in this area for the participants was due to a lack of education or limited skill levels. This perspective was not only from those participants who considered themselves skilled and or educated but also from those participants who may have lacked a formal education and skills training.

Due to the high unemployment rates amongst Aboriginals and the low number of Aboriginal students completing high school the lack of formal education and diminished skill levels should come as no surprise. The 1996 census, indicated that 54% of aboriginal students had not completed high school, compared to 45% of the non-Aboriginal population. Only 4.5% of Aboriginal people had attained a university degree or certificate, while for non Aboriginal people the percentage who had achieved the same level was 16% (Statistics Canada, 1998). For the year 2001 – 2002, in the Treaty Seven area there were only 77 high school graduates and 64 post secondary graduates. (INAC, 2002)

The lack of skills is a direct result of the limited employment opportunities available for the majority of Aboriginals. The unemployment rate on the reserves was about 29% in 1997-98, which is almost triple the official national rate of 10% (Indian Affairs and Northern Development 1998).

However, it is estimated that the 29% unemployment rate is considerably lower than the reality of an estimated 80-90% rate faced by many Aboriginal communities. The 80-90 % unemployment rate is difficult to quantify due to many bands refusal to allow researchers onto tribal lands. Another element which makes this statistic difficult to quantify is the provincial and federal governments' failure to acknowledge the situation since such a high rate appears very unfavourable and illustrates to the general public the failure of the Provincial and Federal governments paternalistic policies and programs as they relate to Aboriginals.

An interesting comment came from one of the participants in regards to management, where the feeling was that “*the staff was more skilled and educated than management.*” This created a situation of the staff’s input not being valued, allowed, or taken seriously due to insecurities and fear on the part of senior management. This is also related to the high unemployment rates amongst the Aboriginal population, since admitting one’s incompetence may open the door for someone more skilled or educated to eventually replace you.

Based on one individual’s experience there existed the possibility of management going on a “*power trip*” due to a lack of education. From the participants’ experience this was a result of new management coming in temporarily, and instead of focusing on the organization, the focus was on their newly found power and the fact that they were now “the boss”.

There was also a respondent who was concerned with efficient operation within the organization. It is important to note that the concern was not only from a management efficiency perspective towards the organization but also towards the staff involved.

They’ve been there for a few years doing manual stuff and so it’s stressful for them when we ask them. And it’s possible to do the job in a day but they need, like two weeks because they are doing it manually. Some of the staff there don’t have the education level to be able to work along side us and be a part of the team. They’re kind of dragging us down. I’m not able to go as fast as I would like to go, because the staff around me are not capable of doing that, and I’m not saying that about all staff, I’m just saying that about some of the staff. They’re not trained or educated to that level.

The lack of skills and education not only had implications for stress at the individual level, there was also the potential for factors at the organizational and or band level as described by one of the participants below.

That's definitely something that I see where the Native bands or organizations are really getting taken advantage of because they don't have that experience and that knowledge and so its just so completely in the hands of the people that they are dealing with on the other side of the table. I mean, they are forced to trust them, it's not like they want to, it's that they're forced to because they just don't have that experience.

The above quote also reflects the reality of many Aboriginal organizations and many senior management employees, who have spent years working for Aboriginal organizations, and feel that they have been “*researched or consulted to death,*” with no tangible benefits or outcomes for their organizations, communities, or the individuals who reside there. The quote offered above illustrates that the area of skills and education in Aboriginal environments are an indisputable cause of stress.

Policies and Procedures

Policies and procedures or the lack thereof was voiced as a source of stress by several of the participants. It was apparent that there were varying degrees of disdain and discomfort due to the issue of policies and procedures. The following quote reflects this perspective.

The politicians need better training and orientation in their job so that they can play their role properly. I think that the frustrating thing is they are not focused on what they should do which is the big picture things, with Treaty rights, Alberta, Federal, and Provincial relations. They don't care about policy, which is their job. They come from the people; they have a concept of what they should do. I want to help the people. And when they say I want to help the people, it's

always administrative things, like I'm going to get them a house. Then there's those kind of morality flaws where some actually do come in and try specifically to help a family member or a friend, try to set things up. That's a bad thing. Those who are the policy people walking all over policy, not studying policy, total disregard for policy and then that just goes on. Those same complaints and bad things go into staff, where a staff member will try to get just his, instead of focusing on policy. So it's the lack of following policy and understanding that is where you have to treat everybody the same, all of us are equal. Policy ensures that, but it's those character flaws or moral flaws or there's disregard for policy. So I think that's a big stressor. That's a bad thing I don't like about working on a Native community.

There was also the aspect of living and working in the community and the effect this had on policy and procedures as observed by one respondent, *“since you are serving your own people, they know you and therefore expect more, and feel you should not follow policy and procedure. As well you, “work with relatives, friends, nieces and nephews, and you deal with policies”* which ultimately makes policies difficult to enforce. This aspect is reinforced by the following comments: *“people do not understand that we have to follow our policies”* and the result is *“that we stick to our policies and procedures and the clients don't like that, but because we do, it makes us kind of look like the bad ones, bad people.”*

There was the opinion that several unwritten rules should be put in writing because, *“verbal policy changes day to day to suit the situation”* and ultimately *“results in not being fair or consistent in the treatment of clients or employees.”* This is not an issue that is particularly unique to Aboriginal organizations but is worth mentioning since many Aboriginal organizations are working with policies and procedures that were originally derived from Indian Affairs and are therefore outdated or considered the way we have always done business. The reality is that many Aboriginal organizations are still in their

infancy and are still developing along with their policies and procedures. As this section has illustrated, the aspect of operating with irrelevant or undeveloped policies and procedures or the lack thereof is a significant source of job stress and burnout.

Organizational Vision and Focus

The majority of comments from this area concerned a lack of organizational vision and focus. Rather, the immediate priorities for organizations were on the day-to-day operations. It must be clarified however, that not all participants felt that their organizations operated this way.

Among those participants who touched on this issue, it was felt that the lack of vision and focus created an organization which had no strategic direction and thus no long term goals and objectives which made it a difficult and stressful work environment since there was no sense of where the organization was going in terms of long range plans. One of the participants stated it this way, *“stress usually flows from the higher ups, Chief & Council. In Native First Nations administration the people deal with crises everyday, there is no long term planning.”*

This also produced a lack of commitment from some of the participants, since the employees could not envision a future with an organization that was unable or unwilling to determine its future path or operated in a crisis management reactive mode instead of developing the preferred approach requiring the *“need to manage a situation rather than just react to it.”*

The element of organizational vision and focus may not be considered a factor that is unique to Aboriginal work environments, but, one must consider that many of the Aboriginal organizations that are in existence now are in their infancy and therefore the requirement of a clear organizational direction is essential to the continued existence of these organizations.

Colonialism, Residential School, and Racism: Background

The intent of the following section is not to get into a great discussion and background about the legacy of colonialism, paternalistic policies, assimilation, residential schools, and the overall effects these have had on Aboriginal peoples. One must be cognizant and recognize that these are all major factors that contribute and have impacted the way many Aboriginals conduct themselves to this day and thus have a genuine influence on the present day study of stress amongst Aboriginal people. The researcher is aware that the continuing effects of residential school, colonialism, and racism are important issues, however, they are beyond the scope of this project. Residential school and racism are therefore discussed only as a factor in regards to stress and Aboriginal people and from the perspective and opinion of those who were interviewed.

As a prelude to the numerous quotes and opinions regarding residential school and racism, the following will provide a brief description of colonization, residential school and racism from an Aboriginal perspective. Colonization refers to the encroachment and subjugation of Aboriginal peoples as a direct result of the arrival of Europeans. From a

Aboriginal perspective colonization refers to a loss of land, resources, culture, and an altered way of life and the imposition of foreign values.

Residential schools have been acknowledged as the vehicle through which the attempted assimilation of Aboriginal peoples was conducted. Residential schools were run and operated by churches on behalf of the federal government until the 1970s, and by other agencies until the 1980s. The ultimate goal of residential schools was the christianisation and civilization of Aboriginal peoples beginning with the children. Milloy (1999, p. 295), confirms the devastating aftermath that is the direct result of the residential school system.

By the mid –1980s, it was widely and publicly recognized that the residential school experience in the north and in the south, like smallpox and tuberculosis in earlier decades, had decimated and continued to decimate communities. The schools were, with the agents and agencies of economic and political marginalization, part of the contagion of colonization.

Racism has provided the justification for the continued inequality and subjugation of Aboriginal peoples. Racism takes three principle forms, as described by Dominelli (cited in Armitage, A. 1999).

1. Personal racism, as in stereotyping, derogatory comments, assumptions of personal superiority, and the like.
2. Cultural racism, as in the assumption that the culture and institutions of one group are superior to another.
3. Institutional racism, in which different treatment based on race, is entrenched and perpetuated by organized interests.

The section will now proceed with descriptions of racism and residential school as sources of stress as expressed by the participants.

Residential School

Residential School as a source of stress is best described through the words and experience of one of the Elders who was interviewed,

Some were maybe three or four years old when they were put in residential school. So that's where they grew up. The nuns, and priests were there helping, as role models, as parents. Because back then we were only allowed, I think, during the summer holidays, I'm not too sure, I know when I started I was only allowed to go home at Christmas, Easter, and then summer. The rest of the time I had to stay. So they were the only role models that we had to follow, where we couldn't express ourselves. We had to keep everything in, that's what's causing all this stress.

One interviewee reflected on the past and the lingering effects that residential school has had on Aboriginals.

It really stems from boarding school, before boarding school, when you look at the Indian way back, (in the past), he was mentally healthy and productive, he got up with the sun, he got up early. Then with boarding school, and then the loss of that culture, we became that big word, I guess, is lazy and somehow, sort of lost our spirituality. All those things that made us good people back then were cut off with boarding school.

Two additional residual effects of residential school are bullying and intimidation. The influence of bullying and intimidation on people's behavior is still seen today.

What boarding school taught people was you have to physically fight for things. The toughest kid in the schoolyard gets their way. As adults that's brought into their adult lives so there's always that physical intimidation. People would rather resort to violence and anger which is what they learned and that's how it was dealt with in boarding school. So that applies too, so I think there is always that. That's a bad thing.

As this section on residential school and the enduring effects that have been produced as result of this experience concludes, the following quote as it relates to stress

on employees and Aboriginal peoples is one of the most poignant and meaningful excerpts derived from the interviews.

They are dependent on their government; on the tribe to the extent that I've had people come in and say my whole life depends on you, help me. You need to help me with this, it's all me, and that really is boarding school, they created that.

Racism

Racism, in its various guises was encountered and voiced as a cause of stress by all of those interviewed albeit in varying degrees. The following section reflects the sentiments of those who felt racism to be major contributor to stress.

For one of the participants the stress was not based on racism per se, but more as result of a lack of knowledge or ignorance on the part of the non-Aboriginal professionals with whom the individual encountered through employment. The person felt it necessary to portray a very professional image and provide a good example since this was the first contact with a Aboriginal professional for many and the “*Native employee is usually the lone representative of their kind*” and the requirement to overcome biases, stereotypes, and barriers in the workplace is real. There was also “*a sense of being up against a bigger number or prevailing attitude.*” The “*challenge for one who is from one culture to work in another*” is described in the following quote:

I think, working outside in (non-Native) organizations there is a certain expectation when we are out there that we have to project, and that is being professional and that is setting a good example and a good overall image of ourselves because then it directly reflects with what the corporation is.

In regards to working with and amongst non-Aboriginals, there was also the “inability to cope with the environment and people not the job itself.” There was also the knowledge that racism was an “uphill battle that gets tiresome and redundant,... the same old thing”. However, as stated by one of the participants,

There's always the stereotypes that tend to follow you and at times those are difficult to break. But, you know, once you are able to do that and be able to position your credibility out there, well then it's a little bit easier to deal with at that point. But it does take time.

Racism as a factor or cause for stress in an individual is illustrated in the following perspective as well as the “frustration” that can occur as a result.

Just living here in _____ and being a Native and going out and trying to do business in the community. I mean, you run up against a real red neck attitude. And it's not just me it's my kids who feel it too. I mean, they run into it as well and so, it's something is so pervasive that anglo or larger society, or whatever you want to call it, doesn't even recognize that it's there or that they are perpetrating it. But yet from my point of view and my children's point of view it's very real and it, in some cases causes a lot of frustration and in some cases even leads to confrontations with different people because of their attitude, even though it might be a particular situation.

The concluding remarks for this section provide an excellent summation of the differences in perceptions of racism between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals: “Those problems just aren’t there for your regular, average, white, middle class person”, and “whether it’s taking a taxi, going into a bank, or a store or a school, I notice the difference” and there exists the knowledge that, “ it’s a real thing, it’s there, it’s strong,” and, “nothing I could do will ever change the way he thinks of Natives, so I keep away from

that person, I don't want to be angry all the time, I don't want somebody to be the cause of that.” And finally, *“in this day and age there is no place for that kind of stuff.”*

Chrisjohn & Young, (1997, p. 225), sum up the difficulty of distinguishing residential school, colonialism, and racism and the reality that the factors are intertwined and significant to this study of stress and burnout.

A second empirical delusion is that the effects of residential schooling can be examined in isolation of other pertinent factors, that, for example, we might be able to lay the blame on residential school for family violence while implicating racism for alcohol abuse and suicide. But racism is not separable from residential schooling, nor can either be distinguished from economic discrimination, and so on for all the factors mentioned above, and more. These factors are differences in rationale, emphasis, tactics, etc., not in purpose.

Culture

The participants, from varying perspectives, voiced culture as a potential basis for stress. This is not to be mistaken with organizational culture, but is used here to describe the participant's own Aboriginal culture as a possible source of stress. The perspectives varied from the different attitudes and worldviews between cultures to the cultural customs and traditions and the loss of culture that can cause stress in a working environment. However, it must be noted that one of the main perspectives and opinions was that culture was a great source of pride and is what has made Aboriginals strong and provided the character and ability to persevere in the face of adversity. The resurgence of this pride in identity is what will continue to ensure the survival and success of Aboriginal peoples.

“There is always that pride, we're First Nations, we know who we are.”

Culture as a basis for stress in a working environment is best explained with the following quote:

We're kind of forced to be cultural, you know, especially on the reserve. If you work on a reserve there's a lot of Native cultural activities. We're Natives and we know we're Natives but we feel like we don't always have to express it and sometimes it's kind of forced upon you. People might think that you should already know about stuff, and a lot of times you know, people don't. Let's say there's a powwow on and you have to go up and dance and a lot of people I know get stressed out about that because not everybody is a dancer. Working off the reserve you're never required to go to any cultural things and they would never force you to do anything you don't really want to do. On the reserve a lot of times you are forced into it, you get called to do stuff. I don't really get stressed out about it but I know other people they've complained and they've said "why do we have to do this." I know some people that are told they have to go to sweats, and they feel well I don't really like going to sweats but they have to. That puts on a lot of stress because they feel that they have to please people, or they might come back on them later on.

The difference in working environments from a Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural perspective is distinguished below.

The environment's totally different because now I work with some non - Natives that come in and they can't totally grasp our working concept. They opened up _____, because the non-Native people don't understand our ways of life and they use discipline while we use a, a manner that we try to assist the guy rather than condemn them. So there's always that big clash there and I've never known any of our programs to run through the non-Native system because there's no connection. Our connections are with the Elders and every program that we run, runs well because it's totally Native and it comes from the heart and a lot of them catch on easy.

The following quote by one of the respondents provides the best summation on loss of culture as a source of stress.

Our way of life is still unique, and it's totally different from the non-Native world because, first of all, we're in two totally different Nations. We were nomadic and we had the freedom to travel anywhere we wanted to go and pitch up our teepee

and then all of a sudden to take that away. Even on our reserve we didn't all live together as one big tribe, we had our little clans and we went off our separate ways. And now the clans don't exist anymore and it's just one big tribe. Many people are forced to live together. Maybe that puts a lot of stress on people.

Politics

The issue of politics as a cause of work related stress was one of the primary reasons given by the participants. This must be distinguished from organizational and personal politics, which are ingrained in organizations. The distinguishing feature for Aboriginal peoples and organizations is the fact that the politics in this case have a historical background that existed prior to the introduction of our own business and service organizations.

To gain an understanding of the impact of politics on the Aboriginal community a brief background discussion follows. As discussed in the Description of Terms section, the governing body on reserves is the Chief and Council who, in the Treaty Seven area, are elected from the band members.

Historically, the Chief and Council were the representatives of the band and the intermediaries between the band and the federal government and its agents. Therefore, in order to receive concessions or get things done, an individual or groups of individuals approached the Chief or a member of Council to act on one's behalf. This practise became ingrained and continues to this day.

However, today the government agents are now considered by many band members to be the band administration and staff. This is due to the many bands that have now taken control of their own resources, programs, and services. Therefore, today's Chief and

Council have the dual responsibility of representing the band members' interests and concerns not only to their own administration, which they oversee, but to the federal government as well. O'Neil (1997, pp. 100-101) states:

Because band councils are created under the Indian Act and derive their authority to operate from that act, they have no source of power other than the powers of administration and decision making described in the act.

This situation has created many conflicts between band members, administration employees, and Chief and Council. As one participant stated,

because of the political leaders not really carrying their load properly or the way they should, it definitely caused a lot of need in the community, a lot of demands, which were then directed at the administration, invariably.

There have been many instances where band members, who have not received a response in their favour from the band Administration, approach Chief and Council or board members to overturn the Administrative decision. Due to the traditional authoritative power that the Chief and Council possess, attempts can be made to overturn the decisions, which ultimately undermine the Administrations' authority. This situation is described by one of the participants below.

A lot of politics. It's hard to do your job when someone from your board is saying to someone that you're actually supervising that no, you're telling them no, that this is not policy therefore you're not going to be able to do it. They go above you and a board member says yup, go ahead and do it, I give you my authorization. And then the other staff start to see this happening and so you've got all of it coming at you and kind of more or less harassing you. It's difficult working under those conditions. I've experienced that a lot.

However, it must be understood that Aboriginal political leaders also experience stress as a result of their duties. Durst, (2000, p. 104), explains the leaders' situation in a Aboriginal community this way:

Every community has its competent leaders, but there are limitations both in terms of the number of individuals and the demands placed upon them. In most communities, the same individuals are consistently called upon to assume leadership responsibilities and are thus over-taxed, often leading to '*burn-out*.'

Nepotism

The cause of stress in the case of nepotism, is someone being employed or perceived to be employed due to having relatives on the board, committee, senior management, or in some type of authoritative or decision making capacity. In many instances this can and does occur. This also has the opposite effect of potentially undermining the achievements of those who have acquired their positions legitimately, without outside influences.

However, in small communities these types of situations and circumstances are unavoidable. In a closed community, which was traditionally based on a clan system, helping those within in your circle is expected and failure to do so is frowned upon. The fact that "*you work with relatives, friends, nieces, and nephews,*" further reinforces the potential effect of nepotism as a cause of stress.

Nepotism has been addressed in Aboriginal organizations through management policies. However, speaking from personal experience, policy formation has been largely unsuccessful, since the clan system is an entrenched part of Aboriginal society and

tradition. Therefore, nepotism will continue to be factor due the absence of abundant resources and opportunities. Until this situation is resolved helping those in your circle can be considered an unwritten rule or obligation.

Indian Time

The concept of Indian time is not unique to Aboriginal Canadian cultures. For example, in discussions with international university students you hear about African time, and Island time. It appears to be a concept, which is set in many indigenous cultures. The idea is simply that time is relative and things will happen when they are supposed to happen or “doing things when the time is right” (Brant, 1990, p. 536), not merely because the hands on a clock indicate it is time to proceed or conclude. Brant (1990) provides an excellent description of how this concept fits into Aboriginal life.

Given the universality of the concept of time in Native society, Native people never seem to be inconvenienced or annoyed if social functions and other meetings start hours after the scheduled time. (Brant, 1990. P. 536)

This concept is most easily illustrated using the example of a business meeting. In non-Aboriginal society the meeting is scheduled to start at a set time, and barring some extenuating circumstance, usually does. In Aboriginal society the notion is that the meeting will start when everybody who needs to be there is there, then and only then, is the time right. The difference in the concept of time between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal can also be easily distinguished by the familiar saying “time is money.” This is a phrase, which is rarely voiced in a Aboriginal community, although this is changing due to the influx of Aboriginals with business and management educations.

The cause for stress for the participants in regards to Indian time is due to employees who use Indian time as an excuse for chronic tardiness. This line of reasoning from employees is described by one of the participants below.

You know, you've got to be here at 8:30, trying to discipline a person and that person says 'You should know about Indian time, you shouldn't be so hard on me, you're an Indian, you live on the reserve.'

This also serves to illustrate the duality of working and living in a Aboriginal environment and having to enforce policies that may not be particularly relevant for the people for whom the policy is written.

However, in today's society certain elements of managing and operating an organization or business are universal and if one is expected to be at his or her place of employment during certain hours then ultimately the employees should abide by these rules. The concern of one of the participants was, how can an individual manage and maintain control of an organization if the employees come and go as they please using the concept of Indian time. Such a situation is no doubt stressful for many.

You Know And Live Amongst The People

This cause is derived from a quote of one of the individuals who was interviewed and is a theme that was voiced by the majority of the participants. There were also many different interpretations of this stressor. The following quotes reflect the importance of this and how it affects the individuals.

You know who is living next door, that might be the person you have to discipline, or it may be a friend or relative that we're going to meet at the store or at the

administration building. When it's a non-Native person, you're not living with the people that you're working with and there's not that closeness.

People look at you as a community, not as an individual, you're all lumped together

The following illustrates and provides the best example of the causes and potential for job stress within the unique working realm of a Aboriginal community.

Our counselling services people have had to deal with the deaths and that's kind of their job to go out there and deal with the emotions that come from these deaths, and they have to deal with families and relatives. Some of our EMT personnel get really stressed out because when they are approaching an accident, it could be a relative and that's really stressful for them.

The preceding quote also signifies that the aspect of working and living in a community where “*everyone knows everyone and knows what everyone is doing,*” and also serves to support the importance of this element in the study of stress amongst Aboriginals.

Spiritual Leaders

The following situation is unique to Aboriginals due to the continuance of traditional cultural and religious practices into modern times. Many of the community members in a Aboriginal community are still involved in traditional religious, ceremonial, and cultural pursuits. There are certain protocols and etiquette that are observed and expected based on respect, tradition, custom, and religious society affiliation.

The potential for problems exist because spiritual leaders may also be employees. The reality and explanation of this situation and how it exists, is described by one of the participants below.

The other is um, um, some of our spiritual leaders are actually employed where I'm at, and they seem to expect preferential treatment and this is where it

sometimes gets difficult for me and I'm not very popular because I don't look at them as spiritual leaders, I look at them as the employee that they are and therefore because we're paying them, I have a right to expect certain things from them. That's where conflict arises because we're looking at things differently, from different angles and that becomes stressful because everybody else is kind of watching.

The participants hesitant, “*um, um*”, at the beginning of the above quote also serves to enlighten the reader on how this dilemma of organizational life in a Aboriginal community is considered “a touchy issue” and therefore difficult to deal with, since many are unwilling to discuss and resolve the situation.

For comparison, in non-Aboriginal society, religious leaders such as priests and pastors are primarily involved in that vocation and do not pursue employment outside their vocation. Therefore, the situation of having to discipline or admonish one’s religious leader due to work related issues would rarely, if ever, arise. However, if the situation did arise would a non-Aboriginal manager be willing or able to do so? This dilemma is a reality in Aboriginal organizations and communities, and easily illustrates a stressor that is unique to a Aboriginal work environment.

Services

Many of the comments from the participants centered on the services or lack of services available in the community versus those available in urban centres off the reserve. The lack of services available in a Aboriginal community and the participants opinion of this reality is obvious in the following: “*We are still years behind, years and years and years behind of what white society might have access to.*” This illustrates that some of the

most basic, taken for granted services, provide the greatest stress. This section will also offer a tiny glimpse of the reality of living on a Aboriginal reserve.

Roads. The condition of our roads, whether they be gravel or paved, is generally not an area of high concern for most Canadians. However, for the participants who rely on these roads for their livelihood, this is an issue. The potential problems of vehicle breakdowns, tardiness, and, absenteeism as a result of poor road conditions is a source of stress for the participants. Compound this with the additional work that can be accumulated as a result of absenteeism and one can understand why this is source of stress.

When you have to get to work, like these two winters have been a good example, it's like we're always the last ones that the road crew comes to grade our road and I can't get out. So therefore I'm not able to get to work until two days later. Or because of the flood our road is washed out and they take forever to come and fix the road. By the time I get back to work a week later, I've got like tons of work piled up and that's stressful.

This is related to services due to the fact that most Aboriginal communities have responsibility for the roads within reserve boundaries and are therefore responsible for their maintenance.

Housing. The comments and opinions in this section related to insufficient, poor quality, and overcrowded housing conditions. The abysmal housing conditions on Aboriginal reserves are well documented and will therefore not be presented in great detail. The following quote presents one of the greatest problems and sources of stress in relation to housing on a Aboriginal reserve, “*If I move back home where do I stay?*”

One of the participants was attempting to build their own house on the reserve in order to improve their own housing situation and was faced with the following:

I spoke to this contractor that's trying to build a house for us. With all the red tape that we had to go through, I couldn't even get to first base, so now we are planning to live off the reserve. Some of the issues that we had to go through with the red tape and the contracts. The contractor said I don't know how you Indians could be Indians, everything is against you guys, everywhere you go, right from the land dealer to the contractor, to Indian affairs. You know, how could you guys survive this kind of stuff thrown in your face day-to-day?

Consider these additional "service" quotes from participants:

- **Police service:** *"You call the cops, and it takes an hour."*
- **Customer service:** *"You don't get a smile from the people gassing you up or a thank you. It's almost like oops, sorry I'm bothering you to buy from you (laughing), I won't come again. So I think that stresses people, the level of services."*
- **Public service:** *"Attitude of (band office employees) what's in it for me not what can I do for the people."*
- **Community resources and facilities:** Which can result in *"Nothing for youth to do, so they turn destructive rather than productive."*

A lack of service delivery is also addressed below by one of the participants as it relates to the problems encountered by those who serve the public.

Not having any new housing construction for close to ____ years. That created a tremendous need in the community and because of that there was all kinds of demands that were not being met. So, it was directed either at Social Development or the Housing Department or in some cases Child Welfare. It was just a ripple effect that was very negative in that sense. It definitely created a lot of stress and problems that had to be dealt with on a daily basis for the employees that worked for those different departments.

An interesting and notable aspect of this section is the fact that all of the persons interviewed for this project are involved in service delivery of some type or form and are acutely aware of any gaps in service that are available in a Aboriginal community. In closing this segment on services, the following quote reflects the aspirations of the individuals who “*just want these services like any off reserve, so it’s really stressful for our people, they see off reserve and all these good services and clean..., clean garbage dumps, clean areas.*”

Less Pay

Currently Canadian Aboriginals who derive their employment income on a Aboriginal reserve do not pay personal income tax. The potential to receive more or less take home pay because an individual worked on the reserve became a source of stress for one of the participants who had worked in a trade occupation for years.

They had this thing called take home pay. You understand that it was our benefit if we worked on the reserve and we’re entitled to make what a journeyman made or whatever you were making, like a second year apprentice or whatever. But they were saying no, but you don’t have to pay taxes so we don’t have to pay you as much, and that put on a lot of stress. We felt like we weren’t getting paid what we’re supposed to just cause we’re Native. So in a way you got screwed off the reserve as a Native because you got docked taxes. Then when you worked on the reserve they thought and felt, well, we could pay you less.

The respondent also commented on the use of coercion by management and the stress involved with not being paid equal to his counterparts, who work off reserve, with whom he was equally qualified, since he “*did not have to pay taxes.*” He considered this as a source of stress not only for the lack of pay and recognition of equal qualifications but

also since the “*they*” he was referring to were his own Aboriginal people. This section visibly displays the source of stress as being underpaid but also being undermined by your own people.

Jealousy

There is a saying in Aboriginal communities that we conduct ourselves very much like crabs in a bucket. Once they see one crab trying to escape out of the bucket, the others all grab at the fleeing crab in an attempt to escape themselves or to pull the crab back down. The end result is always the same, that none of the crabs escape. This story has some truth to it in that Aboriginals do become jealous and maybe envious of individuals in their community who are trying to better themselves, either through seeking employment, training, education, abstaining from alcohol or drugs or other forms of individual, family or community improvement. This attitude is evident in the following quote: “*We are our own worst enemy...we don't like to see others succeed or get ahead.*”

Another familiar saying in Aboriginal communities is that he or she is “*acting too good.*” This may or may not be true but it is voiced regularly and may come as a result of an open display of wealth such as the purchase of a vehicle or a failure, whether inadvertently or not, to simply acknowledge another person.

At the organization level the following quote reflects what can happen to an organization as a result of this:

It causes a lot of dissention between a lot of workers and they begin to fall into traps that they can't really discuss at work. They manage to start chewing on each others legs and they fall apart, we all fall apart.

This section has presented fourteen unique causes of stress involved in working in a Aboriginal environment, as described by the participants. To recapitulate, the causes as presented were, skill & education, policies & procedures, organization vision & focus, racism, residential school, culture, politics, nepotism, Indian time, services, you know the people, spiritual leaders, less pay, and jealousy (see Figure 9 again, p. 44).

As this section on the unique causes of Aboriginal stress concludes, a failure to mention the many social pathologies that currently plague, directly or indirectly, many of the people who live and work in Aboriginal communities would be a major omission of the reality of Aboriginal existence in today's world. The disclosure that "*there is alcoholism, there's drug problems... your affected by it you know,*" and "*people are depressed or angry,*" is included to acknowledge these problems exist. However, the purpose of this project was never to focus on the social pathologies and negative conditions that exist in Aboriginal communities, since these are documented and researched elsewhere and no doubt are inexorably linked.

This chapter has presented the qualitative phase of the project. This included the Elder interview, Aboriginal expression for stress, demographics, introductory questions, and unique causes of Aboriginal stress. The next chapter will provide a discussion on the study of Aboriginal stress and burnout as a whole.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

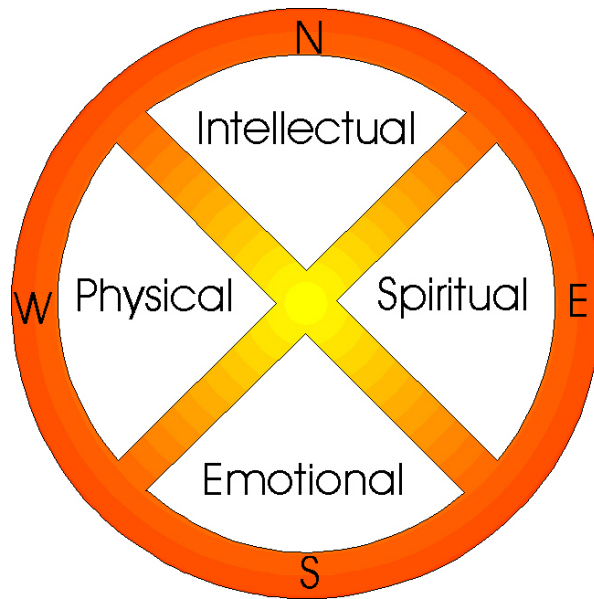
This chapter will discuss the quantitative and qualitative studies in this project. Coping strategies in the form of the Medicine Wheel, family support, and humour will be discussed first. Common Aboriginal experiences, and commonalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal work stressors will be discussed secondly. The chapter will conclude with the future orientated considerations of policy & program suggestions, research limitations, research directions, and final remarks.

The Medicine Wheel

During the course of conducting the personal interviews and through the collection of the survey data it became apparent that many of the participants gave reference to a holistic approach in relation to their own ability or inability to cope with stress and burnout. This introduces the aspect of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel provides a foundation for coping with stress and burnout among the participants.

The Medicine Wheel, as shown in Figure 10, is a representation of Aboriginal ideology, in a contemporary and traditional sense. The ideology of the need for balance in our life was reiterated by the Elders who were interviewed and who mention that “*you have to have balance in your life, negative and positive balance in your life.*” The Elders also confirm that this balance was a traditional aspect of Aboriginal life, which has been somewhat neglected by many of today’s Aboriginals.

Figure 10. The Medicine Wheel



As explained by Durst, (2000, p.47), “The concept of the circle is prevalent in indigenous cultures and is frequently used to organize, understand, and know life.” The Medicine Wheel has many variations, but the one commonality, is that the Medicine Wheel is based on the four directions, north, east, south, and west.

The following description of the Medicine Wheel and what it has to offer is derived from the Four Worlds Development Project (1985). The Medicine Wheel teaches that the four symbolic races, white, red, yellow, black, are all part of the same human family. The Medicine Wheel teaches that the four elements, fire, earth, air, water, are distinctive but part of the physical world. The Medicine Wheel teaches us that we have four aspects to

our nature, the mental or intellectual (North), the spiritual (East), the emotional (South), and the physical (West), and all these must be equally developed and balanced in order to be complete. In addition, the Medicine Wheel teaches that the world and the life it contains revolves around the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, and winter.

The philosophy of the Medicine Wheel is that people need fulfillment in all these areas, (spiritual, emotional, physical, intellectual), to be complete and to feel productive, whole, and happy. The result of a deficiency in any one of these four facets can lead to stress and burnout for the individual. The following quote by one of the participants is a detailed example of an individual's need for balance as represented by the Medicine Wheel and how this balance can be easily overlooked.

You have to maintain the four balances of yourself. A lot of these younger guys now, they have the education, they have the physical abilities and then they have the emotional stuff that comes with it but the spirituality is always left out. Without that then their whole concept of life is blown out and with smudging daily and talking and praying from the heart, that makes a person strong.

As shown above, spirituality was viewed as the component that was most likely to be neglected. However, one of the more common themes that ran through the participants' observations of themselves in reference to the Medicine Wheel was the need for Elder support and guidance in the pursuit of spirituality and wholeness. This spiritual progression is reflected below by three of the respondents.

I started to work with an Elder that saw me in a different way. That's who I latched on to and in '96, after six years of work there, it just took the flame right out of the game and we changed my way of life. That's where I've been and right now I don't look back.

Spirituality's great, talking to Elders, they calm you down and they really simplify things. They're not so concerned about details, you'll give them details and you'll expect a response in those areas but they'll just give you a simple thing (chuckle), I mean, that's the key, don't worry about it, I think it's just because you can't do anything about it, they'll simplify it.

I don't necessarily go to church but it's a matter of connecting with myself and believing in that faith that I was taught. You know, remembering those things that I was taught and just learning to say ok, whatever happens, let's just put this, you know, in God's hands and let's see what happens.

Family Support and Humour

Family support was mentioned frequently as one of the primary coping mechanisms of those involved in the study. Family support as a coping mechanism could be viewed as a contradiction since the unique Aboriginal stress factors of “nepotism” and “knowing and living amongst the people” are issues and causes of stress for the respondents. However, the availability of an extended family support system where “we still have compassion for family and your tenth cousin is still treated as your close cousin,” is considered one of the quality features of living and or working in a Aboriginal environment. The importance and availability of an extended family support system is underscored below.

If I really do need to talk to someone, I'll usually end up talking with my dad or one of my nephews who are very close to me in age, so they're almost like brothers. If something's really weighing on me, that's who I talk to.

Being around friends and family or extended family, can make you laugh and forget the stress. You need to find someone you can trust and talk to and just share with that individual.

This last quote also reveals the characteristic that “humour is a part of everything,” which was apparent in the laughter & humour involved in all of the interviews. Laughter

as a coping mechanism is reflected in the common saying that “laughter is the best medicine.” I have had the opportunity to work in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal settings and can say with absolute conviction that the humour in a Aboriginal workplace is an intricate aspect of the working environment, and something many individuals miss when they move to a non-Aboriginal setting. This is not to say that humour does not exist in a non-Aboriginal setting, it is only of a different variety.

Similarities Amongst Aboriginal Communities

A caveat is necessary since the intent was never to generalize this research project to all Aboriginal communities; however, many of the participants felt that there were many things that Aboriginal communities have in common, regardless of geographic location.

The reasoning for the similarities as described by the participants are below.

The way we're all structured, we all deal with Chief and Councils. We all have the same political issues to deal with in each of the bands. Of course, they're all different but they're all the same. Also, because we're forced to live together on a reserve, it doesn't matter which reserve it is, they seem to always have the same problems. It doesn't matter if it's Canada or the United States. If you live on the reserve you're going to have those problems. I have friends on other reserves as far away as Arizona and they seem to have the same problems we have.

Each community is a bit distinct and has different personality types. I think their base root causes are the same, I've even traveled to the States and you almost feel at home. They all have town sites and they all look like this. All over North America, you go somewhere and there's a town site and it looks like this, and the people are like that. You almost feel at home.

They would all be the same across the board because we live under the same governing rules of the non-Native system. My experience involves the Yukon, Whitehorse, Arizona, Ontario, North Dakota, South Dakota, all these Native issues, every community that I went through had and there was no difference just a different geographic region.

As shown above, Aboriginal communities do share many common characteristics and experiences. This study was conducted with the intent not to generalize to all Aboriginal populations. However, I believe that many of the stress factors identified in this study as being unique to Aboriginal work environments would be articulated and confirmed by Aboriginals who reside outside the Treaty 7 area.

Commonalities Between Aboriginals & Non-Aboriginals

The comparisons of burnout results from the Boudreau Burnout Questionnaire with samples of Alberta Physicians, (39.7%), Canadian Physicians, (38.6%), and New Zealand workers, (39.3%), from the quantitative study suggest that Aboriginal burnout levels, (36.7%), are similar to those experienced by non-Aboriginal workers. The participants from both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study also reinforce some of the common sources of stress and burnout, which are abundant in the literature and therefore, mirrors many workplaces in the world. The sources of stress mentioned by the participants are listed below.

- Personality conflicts
- Equality
- No input in decision making
- Too many priorities, not enough time
- Conflict resolution
- Managing people
- Motivating people
- No teamwork
- Reality of the job versus expectations
- Time management
- Dealing with hard to deal with clients

- Lack of employee commitment
- Miscommunication

Numerous studies have shown that the stressors mentioned by the participants above are almost universal. To aid in illustrating this universality, Pines & Aronson (1988, p. 58) found that during many of the workshops they conducted with managers, the stressors mentioned were most commonly related to frustrated hopes and expectations. The stresses that were mentioned frequently were:

- Not enough power to have a real impact
- Inadequate money resources
- Inadequate staffing resources
- Political pressures
- Administrative and bureaucratic interference
- Inadequate recognition and monetary rewards
- Not enough opportunities for advancement
- Inability to do things the way they should be done

Pines and Aronson (1988, p. 101) have also found that employees in bureaucratic organizations listed three main causes of stress; overload, lack of autonomy, and lack of rewards. These causes are particularly relevant to Aboriginals since the majority of their organizational structures are bureaucratic in nature. This is due to the fact that the organizational structures, programs, and services offered by many Aboriginal organizations were primarily adopted from existing government policies and programs and therefore subject to the same operating regime and administration.

The above section has illustrated that the Aboriginals who participated in this study do have commonalities with non-Aboriginals in regards to burnout levels and causes of stress. However, I reiterate that this study has identified, through the observations and

voice of the participants, that Aboriginals do have unique causes of work related stress as well.

Given what we know, the issue of what can be done to alleviate this impending problem will be presented next in the form of policy and program suggestions.

Policy & Program Suggestions

The policy and program suggestions that can be implemented will be divided into two general areas, the individual level and the organization level, which will also cover the community and reserve.

Individual Level

At the individual level the approaches to stress reduction and stress management are extremely varied. I have listed a sampling of some of the more popular strategies for coping with stress: Lifestyle techniques, personal improvement, and other health related activities such as regular exercise, diet, relaxation techniques, time management, getting sufficient rest and sleep, and trying a new hobby are the most frequently mentioned stress reduction approaches. Regardless of the stress management strategy that is undertaken, self awareness is a requisite to coping with stress; in other words if you are aware that there is a problem, a solution is easier to find.

Additional strategies (Cherniss, 1980), that can be used at work include,

- Staff development
- Changing jobs & role structures
- Management development
- Organizational problem solving and decision making
- Agency goals & guiding philosophies

Organization Level

At the organizational, community, and reserve level, the following seven practical lessons that have policy & practice implications, (Cherniss, 1995), have been included to aid in identifying and improving work conditions for employees in order to boost morale and retain employees.

- Planning for better work environments
- Providing opportunities to develop special interests
- Making it easier to work with difficult clients
- Increasing organizational negotiation skill
- Relying more on the quality of previous work experiences in selection for professional training
- Provide more career counseling and professional development
- Giving professionals a greater role in the planning of change

There are also other organizational strategies such as: flextime, fitness facilities, improved communication, team building, sabbaticals, day care facilities, stress coaching, stress workshops, employee assistance programs, and culture sensitivity training and awareness. The culture sensitivity training and awareness would be beneficial to those non-Aboriginal organizations that were interested in attracting and retaining Aboriginal employees.

In concluding this section on policy and program suggestions the most important recommendation is that the individual and organization must be cognizant that the potential for problems related to chronic stress and burnout exist. Hopefully this recognition will aid in the process and willingness to enact positive change at the individual, organizational, and community levels.

Research Limitations

The primary limitation on this research project was the time available to gather the appropriate data. With such a diverse community of individuals, interests, various forms of employment, and geographic dispersion, the opportunity to provide a complete perspective was beyond the time frame and scope of this project and therefore, unrealistic. In addition, the focus of this project was on work related stress and burnout in a Aboriginal environment; such a focus does not fully take into account the many socio-economic factors that exist outside of work, which can also lead to stress and burnout. Therefore, the question of whether an accurate portrayal of a Aboriginal community was provided, will linger. There are many individuals who are unemployed, seasonal, or involved in work that does not provide a monetary reward, and although these individuals may have worked all their life they have not been represented in this project.

However, the intent of this project was to provide an early first glimpse into a Aboriginal perspective and understanding of stress and burnout not an observation which could be generalized to all Aboriginal peoples. Due to the many divisions and variations that exist along political, cultural, economic, social, religious, geographical, traditional and progressive lines, such an endeavour would be foolhardy.

When interpreting the results, care should be taken due to the 13% response rate. The survey sample does not necessarily reflect the Aboriginal population. The guidelines for response rates as suggested by Baruch (1999, p. 433), also includes the reality that “the

interesting question concerning possible differences due to culture or type of population could not be fully tested here.”

Questionnaires were distributed throughout the Treaty 7 area and the responses received were primarily from the Kainai (Blood), and Piikuni (Peigan), bands. The other bands, Siksika (Blackfoot), Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee) and Stoney (Bears paw, Chiniki, & Wesley/Goodstoney) had a few to no response (i.e., 16, 9, 0, respectively; see Table 3 again). As explained by Baruch (1999), the two principal reasons for non-response is the people did not receive the survey or they did not wish to respond. A reason for non-response and refusal to participate in research by Aboriginals is best described by Smith (1999, p. 3),

”We are the most researched people in the world” is a comment I have heard frequently from several different indigenous communities. The truth of such a comment is unimportant, what does need to be taken seriously is the sense of weight and unspoken cynicism about research that the message conveys.

Although, the response rate may be considered low for the quantitative phase of the project, the qualitative phase interviews did have the maximum number of recommended interviews (cf. McCracken, 1988). Also, the project did employ triangulation by utilizing a multi-method, multi-source approach to aid in the overall understanding of the stress and burnout phenomenon and to overcome the problems, such as low response rates, that can occur with a singular approach. It should also be noted that in the quantitative surveys returned, 40% offered some form of qualitative commentary. A great many of these comments substantiated the views expressed in the qualitative interviews.

In summary, one must be mindful that this study is a first and therefore subject to the limitations and obstacles that hinder those who break new ground in order to make the path easier for those who follow. This is not an excuse. Just a reality for this researcher.

Directions for Future Research

One area of investigation worth pursuing further is to thoroughly examine the differences between on reserve and off reserve Aboriginals and their sources of stress and burnout. Another area worth investigating is, could it be possible that Aboriginals are not as prone to stress and burnout due to the challenges and obstacles that they have had to overcome in order to remain a distinct society that has not been fully assimilated into mainstream society? What would the results of a longitudinal study on the interview participants be? As shown in the research limitations since there are many individuals who are unemployed, seasonal, or involved in work that does not provide an income a more comprehensive survey may be worth investigating. Perhaps, specific occupational groups may be researched. For example, nurses may have different stress & burnout levels in comparison to their non-Aboriginal counterparts due to the complexity of “*knowing and living amongst the people.*” Also, as discussed in the limitations section the question of how do you increase the response rates amongst participants should be investigated fully.

As I leave this section on future research directions, I realize that this is just a beginning and there are so many questions remaining and areas worth further research and study in relation to Aboriginals and their stress and burnout experience.

Concluding Remarks

The intent of the research project was to provide a description of stress and burnout in a Aboriginal community from the perspective of Aboriginal people. I wanted Aboriginal people to relate to the completed project and to feel or say, “yeah, that’s true, that can or does happen, I know what that person has experienced.” Whether this has been achieved can only be judged by those who have been interviewed and by those who have experience working within Aboriginal environments.

Although none of the participants in the qualitative study actually came out and said “I’m burnt out” the potential for chronic stress and burnout does exist and has been illustrated in this project through the words and observations of the participants and in the quantitative study results. The need to address this issue at the individual and organization levels is important and the knowledge provided by this study that the potential for problems does exist provides a starting point.

In conclusion, I realize that this could never be a comprehensive all encompassing study on the Aboriginal stress and burnout experience. I view this study only as an introduction for others to expand upon. With this thought in mind I leave you with the words of Smith (1999, p. 39).

“Decolonizing research does not mean a rejection of western knowledge; it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes.”

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Appendix A
Treaty 7 Area

Appendix B
Quantitative Survey

Appendix C
Letter of Request for Research Subjects

Appendix D
Qualitative Interview Questions

Appendix E
Letter of Consent

Appendix F
Rotated Factor Scores/Reliabilities

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Interviewee Demographics

