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Aboriginal Homelessness in Flin Flon, Manitoba

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Abstract

While it is widely recognized that Aboriginal people are over-represented in the urban homeless population, most research has focused on Aboriginal homelessness in metropolitan areas. Very little attention has been paid to the issue in small northern towns. The small amount of research that has been done on the topic suggests that there are also challenges associated with Aboriginal homelessness in more remote urban areas, and that there are unique aspects to homeless populations in these areas. This study attempts to contribute to our knowledge about urban Aboriginal homelessness with research on this issues in Flin Flon, Manitoba, a small northern mining community.

Introduction

A number of studies have emphasized the over-representation of Aboriginal[1] people in the urban homeless population (Belanger et al. 2012, Leach 2010). Nevertheless there are few studies focussing on Aboriginal homeless people, and most of those have occurred in large southern cities. The characteristics of Aboriginal homeless individuals in small northern communities may be quite different from those in larger cities but to date there is limited work exploring this issue. This study investigates the nature of Aboriginal homelessness in Flin Flon, a small northern community in Manitoba. Flin Flon straddles the border of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. According to the 2011 census, the population of Flin Flon was 5,592, with 229 people living in Saskatchewan. Aboriginal people comprise at least 16.5 percent of the population of Flin Flon. Based on a collaborative research project with the Flin Flon Aboriginal Friendship Centre, this research documents the characteristics and needs of the homeless Aboriginal population.

1 The Aboriginal people of Canada include First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

Literature Review

Since the early 1950s, increasing numbers of Aboriginal people have migrated to cities in Canada (Kalbach 1987, 102). According to the 2006 Census, about 53 per cent of Aboriginal people live in cities (Statistics Canada 2008). Their movement to cities coincided with state cutbacks to social housing and related programs in Canada beginning in the 1980s. Hulchanski (2009) has associated these cutbacks with the emergence of the 'homelessness problem' in Canadian public policy. Aboriginal people disproportionately experience homelessness in Canadian cities. This section provides some background information about urban Aboriginal homelessness, identifies some challenges documented in the literature that smaller centres face in providing homeless services, and describes the Flin Flon context.

Urban Aboriginal Homelessness

Aboriginal people in Canada share the some of the personal characteristics that put them at risk of being homeless with other marginalized groups in Canadian society (Leach 2010). These include low levels of human capital (education, training, unemployment) and personal disabilities (physical and mental health status, substance abuse). Some of these elements are also identified in literature on Aboriginal homelessness (Beavis et al. 1997). However, additional factors affecting the situation of homeless Aboriginal people include the intergenerational effects of family violence, the legacy of the child welfare system, residential schools, and racism (Belanger et al. 2012, Brant Castellano and Archibald 2007, McCallum and Isaac 2011, Schiff et al. 2014). The serious inadequacy of housing on many First Nations reserves contributes to First Nations homelessness. Many First Nations individuals and families do not have their own housing on reserves, and many families on reserves are already over-crowded (Peters 2009, Peters and Robillard 2007, Schiff et al. forthcoming). Several studies identify the lack of life skills in navigating the rental market, filling out and submitting rental applications, and securing a lease as sources of urban Aboriginal homelessness (MCallum and Isaac2011, Ward 2008, 6–7). Schiff et al. (forthcoming) also identify landlord discrimination as an important contributing factor to Aboriginal homelessness.

Researchers emphasize that the challenges facing urban Aboriginal people need to be situated within the larger context of colonization,

including the effects of residential schools (Cedar Project Partnership et al. 2008, Silver 2006). As Wente (2000, 2) argued, "there are factors unique to First Nations' experiences all of which spring from the dispossession of land and culture and the consistent and ongoing systemic oppression." As a result of these factors, Aboriginal people are over-represented among the homeless in all of Canada's major cities (Humphreys 2006, Leach 2010).

Aboriginal Homelessness In Small Northern Communities

While there has been no comprehensive official national enumeration of the urban Aboriginal homeless population, homeless counts in different cities indicate that Aboriginal peoples are highly overrepresented in the absolutely homeless population (the population living on the streets or in shelters) (Belanger et al. 2012, Falvo 2011, Schiff et al. 2014). Hidden homelessness (where individuals stay with family and friends to avoid being on the streets or in shelter) adds to the size of the urban Aboriginal homeless population (Distasio 2004, Peters 2012, SIIT 2000). Sharing accommodations may be a strategy for coping with the high costs of housing for both First Nations hidden homeless individuals and the households in which they live (Distasio 2004). However this arrangement can be stressful for both the host household and the guest (Peters 2012).

While there is relatively little research on Aboriginal homelessness, there is even less work on Aboriginal homelessness in small town and rural areas. Most of the work on Aboriginal homelessness has focussed on large cities (Schiff et al. forthcoming). Schiff et al. note that: "Often, smaller centres, regardless of their local economic growth, remain magnets for Aboriginal populations who lack access to such services in their own communities. Others choose to leave their home community due to domestic violence and disputes" (forthcoming). They identify several key factors driving rural homelessness including the lack of affordable or subsidized housing in small communities, the lack of support services, higher food and utility costs, and housing in need of substantial and costly repairs (Schiff et al. forthcoming). A 2011 study of number of small communities in northern Ontario similarly found that a majority of homeless individuals were Aboriginal migrants from nearby reserves and that neither the reserves nor the federal government had provided funding to assist these individuals (Stewart and Ramage 2011, 8).

The Flin Flon Context

Flin Flon is a northern mining city located on the border of Manitoba and Saskatchewan about 850 kilometres north west of Winnipeg. The nearest town is The Pas, a town of about the same size as Flin Flon, about 150 kilometres south east. Flin Flon was founded in 1927 by Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting (HBM&S) to exploit the large copper and zinc ore resources in the region. The company, now known as HudBay Minerals Inc., is still the major employer in the area. The major public sector employers in Flin Flon include the Flin Flon Hospital, the Norman Regional Health Authority, and the Flin Flon School Division (Flin Flon Neighbourhood Revitalization Corporation 2011, 8).

Housing statistics in Flin Flon are quite similar to those of the province of Manitoba. Most dwelling units are single family homes, with apartments representing only about 14 percent of the housing stock. However, the housing stock is older than that of Manitoba in general. According to the Flin Flon Neighbourhood Revitalization Corporation (2011, 15) about 75 percent of units were built before 1946, compared to 50.8 percent for Manitoba as a whole. Age of construction is reflected in the proportion of households that said their unit required major repairs. In Flin Flon the rate was 15 percent, compared to about 10 percent for Manitoba as a whole.

While Flin Flon's demographics and housing characteristics are quite similar to those across Manitoba (except for the larger number of units requiring major repairs), there is also evidence that low income households experience particular challenges. The Flin Flon Neighbourhood Revitalization Corporation Housing Study (2011, 1) pointed out that low income households, especially single people, likely needed rent supplements or other forms of rental assistance because the private rental market would not be able to meet their housing needs, and there is very little assisted housing available in Flin Flon. These factors likely have an impact on homelessness in the town.

Method

Geographers have been challenged to decolonize their research relationships with Aboriginal people so that academic research begins to meet the needs and priorities of Aboriginal people themselves (Hodge and Lester, 2005; Pualani Louis, 2007). Collaborative research practices involving both academic researchers and Aboriginal organizations may begin to address some of these concerns (Howitt, 2001). This study was initiated by the Flin Flon Aboriginal Friendship Centre to explore the Aboriginal homelessness in Flin Flon, with special emphasis on the questions of the characteristics of homeless individuals and change in numbers during the previous five years.

The Flin Flon Aboriginal Friendship Centre provides services and a meeting place for Aboriginal people in Flin Flon. The Centre has a hostel and is exploring ways to meet the needs of an increasing homeless and at-risk-of homelessness population. Dr. Evelyn Peters developed a questionnaire in collaboration with Shelley Craig, Executive Director of the Friendship Centre, and Shelley hired two community researchers to conduct the interviews. The Friendship Centre administered the research process.

The purpose of the study was not to obtain a representative sample of Aboriginal homeless individuals in Flin Flon but to gain some understanding of their situation. The interviews took place between the beginning of August and the end of October, 2013. In total, 32 people participated. Participants for this study were reached through various avenues including interviewing some individuals staying in the Friendship Centre hostel, and by referrals through individual homeless networks. As she was known in the community, the Friendship Centre hostel manager, Dora Parenteau, conducted the interviews with homeless participants.

The majority of participants met the interviewer at the Friendship Centre where they signed a consent form. Each interview took approximately one hour. Participants received a meal voucher in exchange for the time they spent on the project. Other researchers involved with the project also interviewed staff at seven social agencies involved with homeless people in Flin Flon as well as the school division, the collegiate, the City of Flin Flon, the Chamber of Commerce and the RCMP in order to gauge their familiarity with different homeless populations, the services provide for them, and their sense of changes in the five years prior to the in-

terview. These interviews took place in agency offices with key people who were knowledgeable about the situation.

Evelyn Peters aggregated and analyzed information from the interviews and questionnaires and sent a report to the Friendship Centre for feedback. She subsequently presented the report to representatives of various community organizations and to homeless participants at a meeting organized by the Friendship Centre.

Findings

The research in Flin Flon demonstrated some of the challenges associated with providing housing and services to urban Aboriginal homeless people in Flin Flon.

Aboriginal Homeless Numbers

According to the Flin Flon Neighbourhood Revitalization Corporation (2011, 3) "[V]ery little data has been gathered on homelessness. Further research needs to be done in this area as no data is currently available to the FFNRC". The aim of the current study was not to provide a systematic count of homeless individuals in Flin Flon, but participants suggested that there was quite a large population. For example, one participant told the interviewer that he had "seen a lot of homelessness, people sleeping at the duck pond, sleeping in people's garages to try and keep warm, sleep in the hallways of apartment buildings, sleeping by the hospital to keep warm from the vents that throw heat." Agencies involved with homeless individuals in Flin Flon provided varying perspectives on the number of homeless individuals and whether there had been an increase in numbers over the last five years (Table 1). Estimates were probably influenced by the population with whom organizations interacted, so for example the Hapnot Collegiate mentioned transient families with children and the RCMP focussed on the population they had contact with when they received a complaint.

Six of the thirteen organizations thought Aboriginal homelessness had increased in the last five years. Most of these organizations had a substantial amount of contact with Aboriginal homeless people. One organization thought there had been no change, and one organization thought there was a slight decrease in Aboriginal homelessness in the last five years. Five organizations did not know if there had been a change. In her report to the Friendship Centre the hostel manager described her perceptions of changes in the Aboriginal homeless population in Flin Flon. She noted that:

> Around the late `90's …an influx of Aboriginal people to Flin Flon started out as a small trickle and since then has been increasing. Some were searching for a better way of life for their children; some were seeking an education; some were desperately looking for a job; and on a sadder note, young men were being banned from their communities with nowhere to go

TABLE 1 **Agency Perspectives on the Number of Aboriginal Homeless People in Flin Flon**

	Estimated Numbers	Change	Characteristics
Women's Resource Centre	Not sure	Not sure	Living at hostel, not aware of them living outside
Best Beginnings	About 20	An increase in young people moving to Flin Flon	Couch surfing
RCMP	Know about 10, estimate 15	Not aware	Primarily First Nations people who are couch surfing
Hapnot Collegiate	Approximately 50 individuals in families, with approximately 5 youth in high school	With the decrease in available housing the transiency increases markedly	Families with children who are transient, and children couch surfing after families leave
Flin Flon School Division	Approximately 60 families and individuals	Aboriginal population in schools has increased	Families and individuals, First Nation and Métis, in hostel, couch surfing, and "other"
City of Flin Flon	Familiar with about 25 people they receive complaints about as being "street people", being intoxicated on main street, or illegally using public lands and abandoned buildings	No answer	Aboriginal and some non-Aboriginal people
Flin Flon Chamber of Commerce	20–25	Unknown	Sleeping outside
MB Employment and Income Assistance	A couple of dozen	Doesn't think there has been a change in numbers	People couch surfing and in the hostel
NRHA - Housing	Estimates 25–30	More Aboriginal transiency is apparent	Primarily couch surfing and squatting in abandoned houses
Friendship Centre Hostel	Approximately 100	Definite increase due to lack of housing in nearby First Nation reserves	Characteristically families. Some people move back and forth between their reserves and Flin Flon
Friendship Centre Liaison	Approximately 100	Increase due to lack of housing on nearby reserves	Characteristically families, especially younger families.
Salvation Army	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Food Bank	Eleven families in winter, increasing 3–4 times in summer	Numbers may be going down	Individuals and families at the hostel and couch surfing

> except to urban areas such as Flin Flon, The Pas, Thompson and Winnipeg. When a young man is banned from a reserve sometimes his whole family will follow… (Parenteau 2015,2).

She indicated that in 2008 the hostel started taking homeless people and that since then the numbers applying had steadily increased.

The Friendship Centre's estimate of 100 Aboriginal homeless individuals in Flin Flon was the highest. When other agency estimates and comments by homeless participants are taken together, they lend support for these estimates. One homeless participant said she was staying with about fifteen others in a condemned house, and participants who were camping stated that they were staying with others (estimated ten individuals). The Collegiate estimated fifty individuals in families who were couch surfing, and the School Division estimated sixty individuals and families. The Friendship Centre hostel has eleven rooms with capacity for up to 26 individuals and the manager indicated that it would be filled with homeless people if there were spaces for them. Assuming that the Collegiate and School Division estimates refer to the same population,

adding up these different populations leads to an estimate of over 100 Aboriginal homeless people in the town.

Additional support for these estimates comes from the Food Bank, which indicated there were eleven homeless families in winter, increasing 3–4 times in summer. At an average family size of three (estimate) that comes to at least 99 Aboriginal homeless individuals in summer. If the figure of 100 homeless individuals is accurate, Flin Flon's Aboriginal homeless population represents 1.7% of Flin Flon's total population (including the Saskatchewan portion of Flin Flon). Gaetz et al. (2013) estimate that approximately 200,000 Canadians are homeless in any given year, representing 0.5% of Canada's population. Their count does not include people couch surfing and it includes non-Aboriginal as well as Aboriginal people. If we remove individuals the Collegiate estimate are couch surfing, Flin Flon's Aboriginal homeless population still represents 0.9% of Flin Flon's total population, about double the national rate. In other words, homeless Aboriginal individuals are over-represented in Flin Flon, compared to national averages.

Participant Characteristics

The interviews provided a picture of the challenges facing these individuals. The next section describes some aspects of participants' social and economic characteristics. Then there is a discussion of their housing situation. Finally we summarize data about health, addictions and trauma. The 32 interviews completed for this study focused on adults and did not capture the situation of youth homelessness.

Socio-economic Characteristics

Table 2 summarizes some of the socio-economic characteristics of participants. Slightly more men (56.0 percent) were interviewed than women (43.8 percent). Most of the participants were First Nations (75.0 percent), with the remainder (25.0 percent) indicating they were Métis or non-status Indians. Over half of First Nations band members were from Saskatchewan and only about one third were from Manitoba. This creates challenges in eligibility for receiving government support and also puts up barriers for agencies providing support to receive reimbursement. All of the participants were adults, with an average age of 39.4 years, and a range of 22–60 years of age.

More than half (53.1 percent) of the participants were single, although most either had adult children or children living with other adults, mostly grandparents. About one third (34.4 percent) were couples, mostly in common-law situations. There were four (12.5 percent) families with children. One two parent family with five children was staying in the Friendship Centre hostel, looking for work and housing. Previously they had been living with the mother's family in a band house on the family's First Nation reserve but they had moved because of over-crowding. A grandmother taking care of her two grandchildren, ages 8 and 15, had stayed in the Friendship Centre hostel for the past two years because of inadequate housing. She had just recently found a place, although she said it stank and it had water in the basement. Another man, his common-law wife (she was not interviewed), and their five children had recently found a small, cold, dirty house in poor condition which they shared with his brother, sister and sister's boyfriend.

The main source of income for research participants was provincial social assistance, mostly from Manitoba although four participants were receiving Saskatchewan social assistance. Individuals depending on band social assistance suffered the highest poverty rates because they received no shelter component on the assumption that housing was provided for them on the reserve. More than one fifth of the participants had no income. Three of these individuals were female common-law partners who relied on their male partner for

TABLE 2 **Participant Characteristics**

Gender	(n=32)	56.3% Male	43.8% Female	
Age	(n=30)	39.4 Average Age	22–60 Years Age Range	
Aboriginal Identity	(n=32	75.0% First Nations	25.0% Métis or non-Status	
Location of First Nation	(n=32)	58.3% Saskatchewan	37.5% Manitoba	4.2% BC
Family Status	(n=32)	53.1% Single	34.4% Couples	12.5% With Children
Income Source	(n=31)	61.3% EIA	15.6% Band Welfare	22.6% No Income
Average Income	(n=31)	$748.80		
Education	(n=31)	9.6 Average Grade	18.8% With High School	
Employment	(n=28)	96.4% Unemployed	57.1% Looking for Work	

income. Families with children had the highest incomes because they were eligible for social assistance for themselves and their children. On average, single women had lower monthly incomes ($434.00) than single men ($530.00).

Education rates were low and unemployment rates were extremely high. The average number of grades completed was 9.6 and fewer than one fifth had completed high school. None had post-secondary education. Only one man was employed, doing construction piece work. Low levels of employment and income help to explain why this population is unable to afford housing. Men reported that when they did work or had worked, they were mostly general labourers, engaging in demanding work such as construction, line cutting, wood hauling, firefighting, janitorial work, and commercial fishing. Women were similarly engaged in physically taxing work such as housekeeping and waitressing. One man had been a heavy equipment operator earning good wages before he was injured, underlining the risks of such employment opportunities.

These statistics describe an extremely marginalized population that requires significant assistance in terms of public services to meet their needs.

Housing Situation

Of the twenty four First Nations band members, none of them had their own housing on the reserve and only three had applied to obtain housing. Information was missing for three participants. Thirteen (61.9 percent of First Nations participants) said that they hadn't applied because there was no housing available on their reserves. Some indicated that it was particularly difficult for younger band members, especially young men, to obtain housing, and that there were long waiting lists. One explained that his house burned down 20 years ago and he had been homeless ever since. Only five (23.8 percent of First Nations participants) said they hadn't applied for housing because they didn't want to live on the reserve.

Of the twenty-four First Nations people who answered the question asking if they could stay on their reserve, most (90.5 percent) said that they could, but all said it would be with relatives and family and only short-term because the houses were already crowded. Almost two thirds (62.5 percent) of First Nations participants said they would stay on the reserve if there was housing there. In contrast to dominant narratives that view First Nations migration to cities as a way of escaping rural and reserve life and moving to opportunities, these responses demonstrate that the condition of housing on reserves is a major factor that pushes First Nations people on reserves into homeless situations in the city. A similar study of homeless First Nations people in Prince Albert found that almost half (48.9 percent) of participants would stay on their re-

serve if they could access housing (Peters and Robillard 2007). This raises major and contentious jurisdictional issues that have existed since the 1950s when the federal government decided that its responsibilities for Aboriginal people were only to First Nations people living on reserves. The lack of adequate housing on reserves, a federal government responsibility, forces some individuals to move to the city where they then access provincial and city services.

At the time of the interview, eight (25.0 percent) of participants were staying in the Friendship Centre hostel. Thirteen (43.8 percent of the participants) were couch surfing. Another eight (25.0 percent) were staying outside. Two (6.3 percent) were staying in other situations. All of the participants had experiences with other types of homelessness in the previous two years, for example moving between outside and couch surfing or staying at the hostel, or moving from one couch surfing situation to another, or moving from inadequate housing to the hostel. A comparison of demographic, socio-economic, and health and trauma characteristics of participants showed that there was little to differentiate people in these different housing situations.

Of the participants living in the hostel, six were there because they could not find housing in Flin Flon. Two did not describe their housing history. Most of the participants staying with friends or family did not have their own bedroom, sleeping on the couch or even with blankets on the floor. Most housing situations were extremely over-crowded, contributing to the instability of these shelter arrangements.

Eight of the participants lived outside at the time of the interviews (early fall). Most had been homeless for a considerable period of time, and most were able to stay with a friend or family member when it was very cold outside. Seven of the eight indicated that they or someone else felt that they had a problem with alcohol, and some explicitly stated that their alcohol consumption meant that they were kicked out of places when they were couch surfing. Their situations, as described to the interviewer, demonstrate their extreme marginality and also their vulnerability:

- Lives outdoors in Flin Flon area with other homeless people, sometimes one of his sisters will take him in when he's sober or when it's really cold.
- On the street, sometimes someone will feed him and give him a place to sleep but that is not too often. Lives outside in a make shift house, tarp. When he did get a place it didn't last long because of his drinking.
- Has been charged for falling asleep in public places. In the summer, lives all over the place (between Flin Flon, Denare Beach, and Creighton). He will stay wherever he can or make a temporary shelter to keep warm. He goes commercial fishing when sober (winter months).
- He sleeps in abandoned vehicles or garages and sometimes stays with relatives (usually sister on reserve) when sober and has money. When he drinks he gets kicked out, then has nowhere to go.
- In Flin Flon, she usually sleeps outside in an old garage, tries to find a blanket to use. Sometimes she joins a place with about sixteen others who live in an old shack – share two blankets. Some of these people are relatives, some are friends.
- Living on the streets right now. Will stay at friends or anywhere someone will put her up. She usually gets thrown out because of her drinking. She had a place to stay a few years ago. When she got her residential school money, she was welcomed into a home of a so-called friend, but when the money was gone she was kicked out.

Two others had a roof over their heads, but the condition of the housing was very poor. One was living in a condemned house with 15 other peo-

ple, and one was living in a house in poor condition with her grandchildren.

Comments by the participants, summarized by the interviewer, underlined how difficult it was for individuals to find adequate, affordable housing:

- Everything is old and needs renovating like leaky faucets, leaky ceilings. Her mother moved in, in spite of poor conditions, because she really needed somewhere to live. When she first moved in the place was very cold and needed a lot of cleaning.
- He has a job right now so he can afford a place, but he can't find a suitable apartment. He's seen a lot of apartments but there is a lot of drinking, drug use, and violence in the areas where there are available apartments. There are a lot of slum landlords. Apartments are in awful conditions, with stained carpets, mold. He had an apartment for two to three months but the apartment and neighborhood were so bad he had to move.
- In the last ten years he had about five apartments. The houses he stayed in needed fixing up, water services were poor, and landlord did not fix up apartments. He always lived in unsafe neighborhoods.
- She's living in a condemned house with about fifteen others (including common-law, in-laws, friends, acquaintances, and strangers).
- The place stinks and has water in the basement.
- Low income housing opportunities are usually available for families with children but not as available for single adults with low income or those who are unemployed.
- Any house or apartment that he has rented for him and his children has been severely inadequate. Houses or apartments that he has tried to rent are in very poor condition. There is a lack of affordable housing for young Aboriginal families with a lot of children. He has been in many situations when he would have to move in with his mom for a while.
- It's very difficult to find even a one bedroom apartment.

The housing conditions described by participants are shocking in the context of statistics that describe the general Flin Flon housing situation as being similar to that in Manitoba. They show the very serious challenges facing low income Aboriginal people in small northern communities where there is little affordable and social housing available.

Health, Addictions and Trauma

Participant health conditions were very poor compared to those of other Canadians. Compared to Canadians generally, over half of whom (59.9 percent) rated their health as good or excellent, fewer than one third (31.1 percent) of participants in this study rated their health as good or excellent. This is despite participants' average age of less than 40 years. Over half (52.7 percent) were sometime or often limited in their daily activities, compared to slightly more than one quarter (26.3 percent) of Canadians. Almost all (91.0 percent) had one or more chronic conditions, compared to less than two thirds (62.2 percent) of Canadians.

Two thirds (67.7 percent) of the participants indicated that they had been physically or sexually abused (Table 3). Over half (53.3 percent) had been physically abused, almost half (48.2 percent) had been sexually abused, and almost half (48.2 percent) experienced both.

Both men and women had been sexually abused. The rates of abuse are similar to those found in other studies for homeless women, but they are higher for men in this study than other studies have found. One third of participants had

TABLE 2 **Trauma, Abuse and Addictions**

Had experienced abuse	(n=30)	67.7%
Had experienced physical abuse	(n=30)	53.3%
Had experienced sexual abuse	(n=27)	48.2%
Had experienced both physical and sexual abuse	(n=27)	48.2%
Had experienced other trauma	(n=27)	33.3%
Abused alcohol	(n=32)	53.1%
Abused drugs	(n=30)	3.7%
Used solvents	(n=30)	0.0%

experienced other traumas including the death of family members and frequent exposure to violence. More than half of the participants indicated that they felt they had a drinking problem or that someone else felt that they had a drinking problem. A comparative statistics is that 18.2 percent of Canadian were classified as heavy drinkers in 2013 (Statistics Canada 2013a). One person (3.7 percent) said that they or someone else thought they had a drug problem, either using street drugs or misusing prescription drugs. None of the participants admitted to using solvents.

The high incidence of chronic conditions, addictions, trauma, abuse and addictions in the Aboriginal homeless population suggests that simply providing housing will not be enough to meet their needs. A variety of services also need to be provided.

Conclusions

Housing conditions for many homeless Aboriginal people in Flin Flon are poor, and in some cases the housing they occupy is in shocking conditions. Others are living in the Friendship Centre Hostel, are couch surfing, or living outside even in the northern winter. In many cases it appears that people are being pushed into Flin Flon because of the lack of adequate housing and the overcrowded housing on their home reserves. Many homeless people in Flin Flon cope with poor health and various other challenges. These problems are difficult to deal with in large southern cities. They are even more difficult to respond to adequately in smaller northern communities where resources are fewer.

The focus on metropolitan centres in existing research on Aboriginal homelessness implies that it is primarily a large, southern city issue. The research in Flin Flon shows that it is also an issue in small northern cities, as indicated in Schiff et al.'s (forthcoming) and Stewart and Ramage's (2011) research. Not only do Aboriginal homeless people in Flin Flon represent a higher proportion of city residents than averages across Canada, they also suffer from serious health issues, traumas and addictions. As Schiff et al. (forthcoming) argue, many small northern communities have limited capacity for addressing homelessness. In many, as in Flin Flon, emergency shelter options are limited. Most communities experience a significant lack of affordable and social housing infrastructure. Many also have a limited social services sector infrastructure. According to Schiff et al. (forthcoming) few northern communities are eligible for participation in federal initiatives and networks, including the Government of Canada's Housing First initiative. These factors exacerbate challenges facing small northern communities, and their inability to address the needs of Aboriginal homeless people further entrenches disparities.

Jurisdictional issues add another layer of complexity. Like many other northern communities, Flin Flon is near several First Nations reserves. On these and other reserves in Canada, housing, a responsibility of the federal government, is inadequate. Many existing dwelling units are in poor condition, overcrowding is rampant, and many individuals simply do not have access to housing. A significant component of Aboriginal homelessness in northern communities is related to the lack of housing on reserves, and when homeless reserve residents move to nearby urban locations, the responsibility for them is shifted from the federal

to provincial and municipal governments. In Flin Flon, which straddles two provinces, there is the additional layer of complexity of different provincial jurisdictions and responsibilities.

In summary, then, Aboriginal homelessness is a serious issue in small northern communities like Flin Flon, and these communities face significant challenges, often with no additional resources. The implications are serious, not only for the Aboriginal homeless individuals and families, but also for cities as they experience challenges in meeting the needs of homeless individuals with limited resources and personnel. The particular needs of these individuals and communities need to be recognized in public policy responses to homelessness. These policy responses should include, but not necessarily be limited to: attention to shocking housing conditions on reserves; productive dialogue between three levels of government to address jurisdictional issues; and some steps to ameliorate the under resourcing of small northern communities in terms of funding for social housing and homelessness initiatives.

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