

# Participatory Video: Exploring Physical Activity in Northern First Nations Communities



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## Introduction

- Physical inactivity is a risk factor for chronic diseases and conditions such as diabetes that disproportionately affect Aboriginal populations [1,2]
- Acquiring a culturally relevant understanding of physical activity can lead to improved and effective health promotion strategies [3]
- Community level physical activity can benefit beyond healthy lifestyle; it can also increase community participation and engagement [4]
- This research is a collaboration between the University of Alberta and the Yellowknives Dene First Nations (YKDFN) Community Wellness Program

**This research uses a participatory action research (PAR) framework to explore how physical activity is practiced in the Dene community and culture**

## Methods

- In PAR, researchers and participants co-develop the research process and co-create knowledge to understand a phenomenon of interest [5,6]
- By drawing out participants' own knowledge and lived experience, PAR aims to empower and build capacity in the community [5,6]
- Concrete actions can manifest in a variety of ways, at an individual level among the participants, and on policy and programming level [7]

### Part 1: Youth participatory video project

- Youth is often seen as agents of change in the community and can have important impact when delivering health promotion messages [8,9]
- In health and social science research, visual media such as participatory video and Photovoice are gaining popularity as a tool for engaging youth and community [8,10-12]
- 19 youth age 8-18 from YKDFN communities of Ndilo and Dettah participated in this project. They were recruited by word of mouth and through recommendations
- The videos and conversations with the youth were recorded, transcribed, and analysed for themes and meaning using a constant comparison approach [13]
- We spent three weeks in the community and on traditional land during cultural camp making participatory videos with the youth participants. We filmed footages and photographs, and edited the clips. Guided by SHOWEd strategy [14], we analyzed the videos for meaning, and discussed what physical activity meant in the context of their lives

### Part 2: Community focus groups or talking circles [15]

- We collected feedback on the completed videos from 3 groups of community members and workers
- These discussions were also recorded and transcribed for analysis [13]
- Feedback sessions further generated conversations and reflections about physical activity practices in the community, active living, and healthy lifestyle
- Participants shared insights and brainstormed ideas to motivate the community in addressing physical activity together

### Part 3: Sharing knowledge during family suppers

- We shared finalized videos and results with community members during Family Suppers
- Based on ideas generated by the youth and focus group participants, community members voted for their favourite physical activity idea that will be addressed by the Wellness Program in 2014
- Family Supper coupled movie previews and DVD distribution with traditional and nutritious food, a family quiz about healthy lifestyle, and recognition of the youth participants

## Results & Discussion

- The video project produced ten movies from film footages and photos
- Participants discussed what physical activity means: sports, exercise, recreation, being active, moving around, games, and fitness
- The youth recognized that physical activity is more than just soccer and running, but also traditional Dene games such as handgames and leg wrestling, as well as household activities such as cleaning and cooking
- They also identified traditional physical activities on the land such as hauling water, checking fishnets, and scraping moose hide
- Cultural camps involve the youth in traditional activities on the land, which benefits physical activity and recovers traditions [16]
- On one hand, it is important to prioritize cultural activities and promote health through traditional ways of life. On the other hand, for people, especially young people, who are straddling between the two worlds where one is becoming more dominant than the other, health promotion practitioners can be perhaps more effective by facilitating the reconciliation of different ways of life

**"I realize back in the day, our traditions, they are really based on physical, like keeping healthy and fit. [...] You have to be healthy and you have to be physically fit, you know, in order to do all of those activities."**

— Focus group participant

- Colonialism and residential schools are moving people away from their traditional life on the land to closer to town [17].

**"When we say camp... that doesn't put the meat to it [...] Camp's... a way of life, it's more powerful, because each one, each individual there's the relationship, with one another, with themselves, with others, with the land, it's a way of life."**

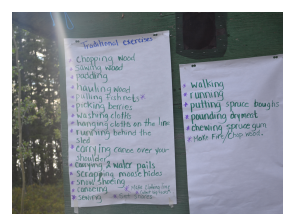
— Focus group participant

**"Later, we can watch [the video] and remember what we did for the week. And show people what it's like to live on the land."**

— Youth

## Conclusion & Implications

- This project demonstrates the various ways in which one First Nation community stays active. **Traditional physical activity and life on the land are critical aspects for the Dene people in terms of health and wellbeing**
- This research is not only raising critical consciousness of the communities about physical activity, but is also **empowering communities to take actions themselves to improve engagement and healthy lifestyle**
- Lessons learned from this project can provide insights for health promotion programs in YKDFN communities, and contribute to **a deeper understanding of community-level physical activity among Canadian Aboriginal peoples**



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Slipstream support for the graduate researcher provided by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and the CIHR Training Grant in Population Intervention for Chronic Disease Prevention: A Pan-Canadian Program Grant #53853.

Project funding provided by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Travel funding provided by Women & Children's Health Research Institute

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