

Factors Associated with Depression among NWT Adolescents



What we know from other research:

NWT adolescents experience high rates of mental health concerns. Mental health hospitalizations among children and youth in the NWT are almost 2.5 times higher than the national rate. ^[1]

Key Terms

Mental health: Psychological and emotional well-being.

Depression: A type of mental illness that negatively affects how a person feels, thinks, and acts.

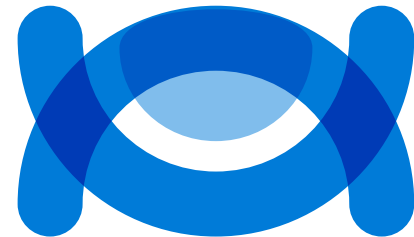
Food insecurity: Not having consistent access to enough food.

Dating violence: Coercive or abusive tactics employed by one person in a relationship to gain power and control over another person.

Gender: Socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people.



Food insecurity, which disproportionately affects the NWT ^[2], is known to be associated with increased risk of depression. ^[3]

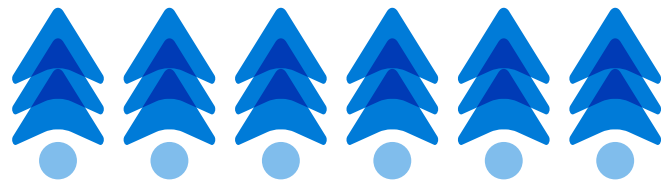


Dating violence among young women in the NWT is 10 times higher than the national rate ^[1] and is associated with increased risk of depression. ^[4]

Strengthening connection to culture, identities, and land builds resilience for Northern and Indigenous youth and their NWT communities. ^[6]



Early intervention for depression can reduce the likelihood that adolescents will develop severe depression or other psychosocial challenges. ^[5]



Our Research Questions:

- What factors related to depression among NWT youth are most important?
- How can we tailor interventions to the highest needs?

How We Conducted This Research:

- FOXY (Fostering Open eXpression among Youth), an Indigenous sexual and mental health organization, collaborated with schools and organizations in 17 NWT communities.
- 399 students aged 13-18 attended a workshop about sexual health and completed a survey exploring their health and well-being.

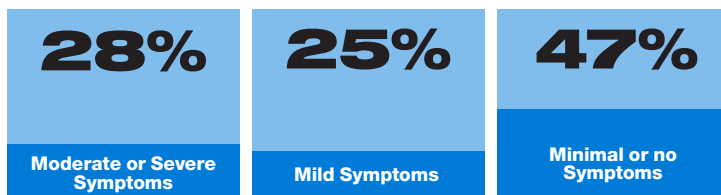
What We Found:

45%

Nearly half (45%) of the participants surveyed reported experiencing food insecurity.



Being a young woman was the only factor associated with mild depression.



28% reported moderate or severe symptoms, 25% reported mild symptoms, and 47% reported minimal or no symptoms.



Most (79%) participants identified as Indigenous.

The following groups were twice as likely to have more severe depression symptoms:



Discussion

- There are strong associations between food insecurity and depression, which possibly raises stress and feelings of shame and powerlessness.^[7]
- The link between youth dating violence and depression signals the importance of understanding and preventing the root causes of this violence. Higher rates of depression among sexual minority youth aligns with other research on sexual stigma as a mental health stressor.^[8]

Recommendations

- Interventions for adolescent depression must consider related contexts of food insecurity, gender, sexuality, and dating violence.
- Directly engaging and empowering youth to promote health-enabling environments and strategies can increase impact.
- An example of this approach is FOXY's Land-and-art-based programming.^[10]

To address and prevent teen dating violence in the NWT:

- Build partnerships with youth, and Northern and Indigenous organizations to leverage cultural and community resources and strengths.
- Develop structural and community-level interventions that target isolation and poverty, which tend to worsen violence.
- Apply a gender-transformative approach to explore and target the root causes of gender inequities in NWT adolescent health.
- Develop tailored programming and create safe spaces for young women and feminine-identifying folks (including trans and non-binary youth).

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