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"Do they belong to the same group as their mothers? Identity of the aboriginal children in Canada"

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An extended abstract

In the past 15 years, the growth of the populations of Aboriginal origin or identity in Canada has been very large and cannot be solely explained by demographic factors or change in the quality of enumeration. To a big degree, it is due to the change over time or over generation in the ethnic identity reported by individuals. This ethnic mobility could be of two types: a) intragenerational, when there is a change in reporting by the same individual over time and; b) intergenerational when the ethnicity of children differs from that of their parents, especially when parents are not of the same identity group. Only the second type of ethnic mobility is the subject of the present study.

The study uses the 1996 and 2001 census data for children born during the five-year period prior to the census (aged 0 to 4 years at the census time). It looks at the identity reported in the census for these children and the identity reported by the mother (women aged 15 to 49 living in the same household) (see Table 1). The universe studied covers census families in the private households. The following types of families are considered: lone parent families headed by mothers and two-parent families where parents are opposite sex or both are females. To reflect the impact of social groups and a proximity to the same cultural environment, the analysis is conducted for families living on reserves and outside the reserves. In addition, the impact of the level of urbanization on ethnic mobility is accounted for.

Ethnic continuity indices (Table 2) and rates of ethnic transfer (or shift) are employed to assess ethnic mobility between children and mothers belonging to 3 aboriginal groups. The study demonstrates that the ethnicity of children born to aboriginal parents differs substantially from that of their parents. Among the 3 groups, Métis intergenerational mobility is the highest regardless of their place of residence. Inward mobility from the non-aboriginal population compensates the outward mobility for all the 3 groups, mitigating effects of declining fertility observed among the aboriginal populations in Canada. Using a projection cohort component model, the impact of the intergenerational mobility on the size the age structure and residential distribution of the groups is evaluated over the next two decades.

Table 1. Percentage of children aged 0 to 4 with aboriginal identity by mother's identity, Canada, 2001 Census

Identity of mother	Identity of child			
	NAI only	Métis only	Inuit only	Non Aboriginal
NAI only	90,1%	2,5%	0,1%	6,8%
Métis only	7,9%	69,0%	0,1%	22,3%
Inuit only	1,4%	0,7%	94,6%	2,6%
No mother present	11,8%	2,5%	0,8%	84,6%
Non Aboriginal	0,6%	0,5%	0,0%	98,9%
Total	4,0%	1,5%	0,3%	94,1%

Table 2. Continuity index* by Aboriginal group and area of residence, Canada, 2001 Census

Identity	Urban non-			
	On reserve	Urban CMA	CMA	Rural
NAI	1,04	1,10	1,18	1,19
Métis	1,15	1,15	1,17	1,15
Inuit	1,03	1,03	1,03	1,03

* Total number of Aboriginal children divided by the number of Aboriginal children that have the same identity as their mother