

The Impact of Inequalities Among Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Children on their Readiness for School



About the EDI

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a questionnaire that kindergarten teachers fill out for all their students. Since the 2005/2006 school year, the EDI is now completed biennially in Manitoba's public schools. This instrument measures five areas of development (or domains): physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication skills and general knowledge. The lowest 10th percentile of Canadian national norms is used to determine who is not ready for school in each of the five domains. In this study, children who were not ready for school, in one or more of the domains, were considered to have **poor readiness for school**.

Methods

In spring 2006, the Manitoba government surveyed a random sample of 1,000 parents of kindergarten children. This survey was linked with the EDI questionnaire. First, we compared poor readiness for school between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. Then we compared whether Aboriginal children were more likely than non-Aboriginal children to live in **vulnerable environments**, such as those with low socio-economic status (SES) or being in lone-parent families. Finally, we looked to see if being Aboriginal was still a determinant of poor school readiness when considering a variety of factors. To do this, we performed logistic regressions using the EDI poor readiness for school as the outcome. Separate regression analyses were done for three groups of children: Aboriginal children, non-Aboriginal children, and children (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in the lowest 30th percentile on the socio-economic status (SES) index.

Definition

Statistically significant: A p-value of 0.05 or less ($p < 0.05$) indicates the results are statistically significant. If the results of this study are statistically significant, we can be fairly certain – *at least 19 times out of 20* – that any differences in results are valid.



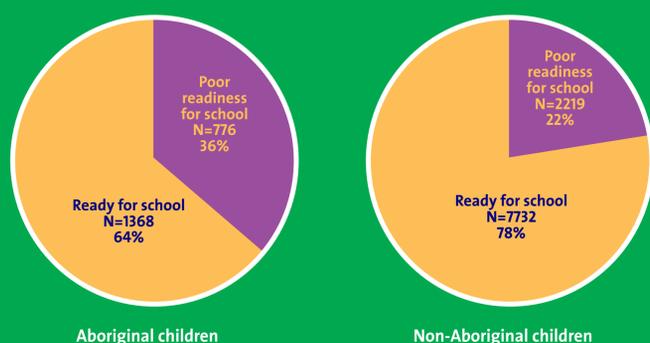
Purpose

The purpose of this study was to learn which factors influence a child's readiness for school in Manitoba, and to determine the policy implications from the results. The study examined socio-demographic factors, parenting, children's activities and children's behaviour. Aboriginal status was a particular consideration because more than 25 per cent of Manitoba children are Aboriginal. Previous research has shown Aboriginal children are less likely to be ready for school. Results from this study could help define the supports needed to prepare Manitoba's most vulnerable children (which include some Aboriginal children) for school.



RESULTS I – comparing EDI poor readiness for school by Aboriginal status

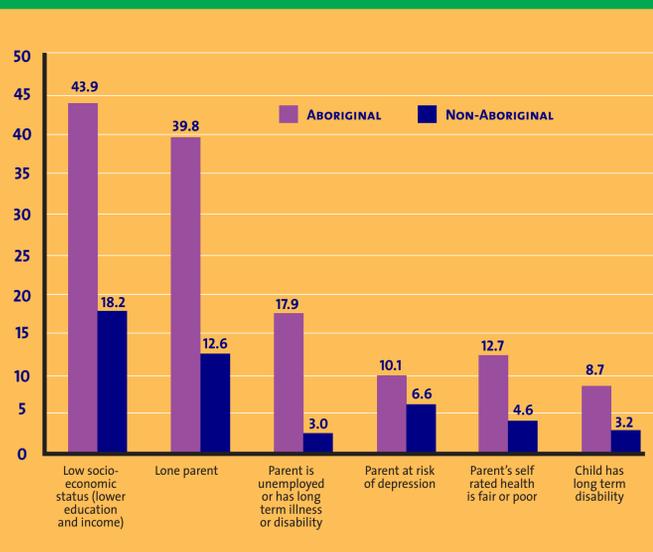
Figure 1. EDI school readiness by Aboriginal status



These pie charts show that Aboriginal children are more likely to have poor readiness for school (36 per cent) than non-Aboriginal children (22 per cent). These differences are statistically significant.

RESULTS II – comparing vulnerable environments by Aboriginal status

Figure 2. EDI school readiness by Aboriginal status



This chart shows that Aboriginal children are more likely to live in vulnerable environments than non-Aboriginal children. For example, Aboriginal children are often from low socio-economic households, live with one parent, have a parent who is either unemployed or not employed due to illness or disability, and have parents who rate their health as fair or poor. These are just some indicators of vulnerable environments. The differences between Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal children living in vulnerable environments are all statistically significant.

RESULTS III – Factors associated with EDI poor readiness for school

Table 1. Regression analysis results: Key indicators of EDI poor readiness for school

RISK FACTORS FOR POOR READINESS FOR SCHOOL	ALL CHILDREN	NON-ABORIGINAL CHILDREN	ABORIGINAL CHILDREN	LOW SES (FOR ALL CHILDREN)
Child is a boy	●	●		
Child is young		■		
Lower socio-economic status (lower education and income)	●	●	●	
Lone parent	●	●		
Parent at risk of depression		■		■
Parenting practices	●		●	■
Child has long-term disability	●			●
Child not participating in organized physical activity	●		●	●
Child has low pro-social behaviour		●		
Child has high hyperactive behaviour	●		●	●

● Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

■ Results are nearly statistically significant ($p < 0.10$).

Results for all children

Results show that being Aboriginal is not significantly associated with poor school readiness when other factors that influence this outcome are considered. After accounting for age and sex, the most important factors associated with poor readiness for school were: socio-economic status, being in a lone-parent family, parenting practices, children with long-term disabilities, children not participating in organized physical activities, and children with high hyperactive scores.

Results for non-Aboriginal children

The factors associated with poor readiness for school for non-Aboriginal children were: age and gender, low socio-economic status, being in a lone-parent family, having a parent at risk of depression, and low pro-social behaviour scores.

Results for Aboriginal children

The factors associated with poor readiness for school for Aboriginal children were: low socio-economic status, parenting practices, children not participating in organized physical activities, and children with high hyperactive scores.

Results for children in the lowest 30th percentile for socio-economic status (SES)

The factors associated with poor school readiness for children with low SES were: parental risk of depression, parenting practices, children with long-term disabilities, children not participating in organized physical activities, and children with high hyperactive scores. The results showed that being Aboriginal was not significantly associated with poor readiness for school.

Discussion

Results showed that children in the low SES group and Aboriginal children faced many of the same risk factors for poor readiness for school: parenting practices, not participating in organized physical activities and having hyperactive characteristics. However, there were some different risk factors between Aboriginal children and children with low SES that were associated with their poor readiness for school. Children with low SES were more vulnerable if a parent was at risk of depression or if the child had a long-term disability. Non-Aboriginal children, on the other hand, were more vulnerable if they were young boys, living in lone-parent families, or had low pro-social scores.

Conclusion

Many factors influence children's readiness for school and these factors may differ between groups of children. Aboriginal children and children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have poor readiness for school because they often live in vulnerable environments and face more risk factors.

Some of the risk factors identified for Aboriginal children and for children living in low socio-economic environments can be changed and point to strategies that can be developed to improve their readiness for school. Working with the Aboriginal community

and with communities helping high-risk families, supports could include:

- encouraging and teaching positive parenting practices
- making organized physical activities available to all children
- offering interventions for children who have high hyperactive behaviour
- increasing high-school graduation rates among Aboriginal children and children living in poverty

Cultural awareness and cultural safety are crucial in developing these supports.



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