



Services de santé du
TIMISKAMING
Health Unit

2015



Social Determinants of Health

Health begins where we live, work and play... even in Timiskaming

It's easy to assume that health just means eating the right foods, being active, and having access to medical care because that is what is shown on the media and talked about politically. But really, things like your education, job, relationships, and even where you live actually account for most of your total health!

Health begins where we live, work, and play... even in Timiskaming!

Walking the edge: A family trying to make ends meet while working full-time on minimum wage

Michael works full-time at a local coffee shop as a baker. His wife Jennifer works full time as a hotel room attendant. They have two boys, Josh who is 7 years old, Ethan who is 5 years old and one girl Emilie, who is 3 years old. The family rents a home, which costs nearly half of their monthly budget; childcare makes up another 25% of their monthly income. How will this family make it work? How will they make healthy choices for themselves and their children?



Introduction

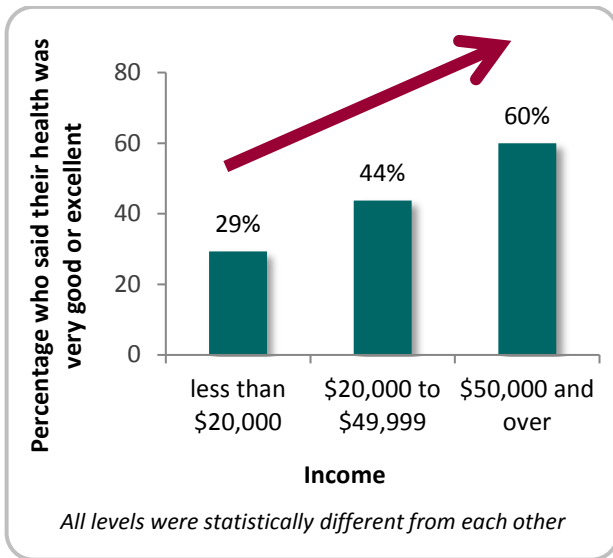
It's easy to assume that **health** just means eating the right foods, being active, and having access to medical care because that is what is shown on the media and talked about politically. But really, things like your education, job, relationships, and even where you live actually account for most of your total health!¹

All of the factors that are associated with health are called the "Social Determinants of Health". In this report, we will discuss twelve of the factors that determine a person's health. We will also explore how Michael and Jessica try to make choices for their family's wellbeing but are limited because of factors outside of their control.

Income

“Health improves at each step up the income and social hierarchy ladder”: at each rung up the income ladder, we have less sickness, longer life expectancies and better health.² It’s easy to see why because having more money is related to having safe housing and being able to buy good food. Even in Timiskaming, as income increased, so did the percentage of people who rated themselves as healthy.³

Percentage of Timiskaming residents who said their health was very good or excellent by income.³



For a family of two adults and three small children, it costs \$1,049.33 monthly to eat healthily in Timiskaming.⁴ Michael and Jessica may have to take money away from their food budget to cover other costs of living, such as clothing and transportation. Despite working full-time, Michael and Jessica are not able to afford a healthy diet for their family, and therefore are at risk for health consequences.

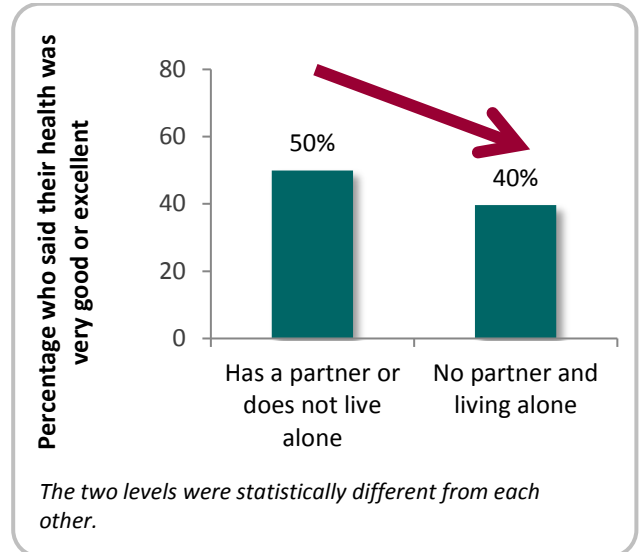
Social Support Networks

“Having support from families, friends and communities is associated with better health”.

Having a network of people to support us, help us to solve problems or assist us with difficult situations seem to act as protection against health problems.

In Timiskaming, more people who had a partner or who did not live alone rated themselves as healthier than those who did not have a partner or who were living alone.³

Percentage of Timiskaming residents who said their health was very good or excellent by whether or not they have a partner and live alone.³



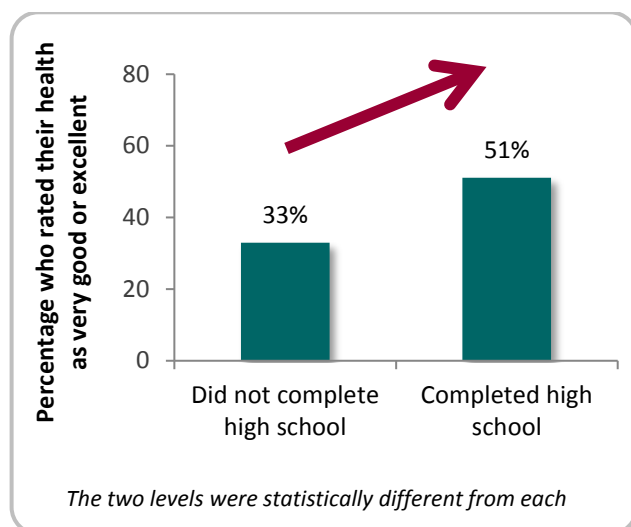
Education and Literacy

“Health improves with level of education”

Education not only creates more opportunities for jobs and financial security, it also helps to improve our ability to understand information that helps to keep us healthy. Education also seems to help by improving problem solving skills, which helps us to make good health decisions and provides a sense of mastery over life circumstances.

In Timiskaming, a higher percentage of people who completed a high school diploma or other post secondary education rated their health as very good or excellent compared to those who did not complete high school.³

Percentage of Timiskaming residents who said their health was very good or excellent by whether or not they completed high school.³



By not completing high school, Michael and Jessica's work opportunities are limited. Their busy lifestyle and finances restrict their opportunities to complete and continue their education. In addition, their children are less likely to complete high school.⁵

Employment/Working Conditions

Poor health is associated with unemployment, underemployment and unsafe working conditions.

In general, those of us who have fewer stressful demands at work and who have more control over our work situation are healthier and live longer lives. Unfortunately, the unemployment rate in Timiskaming was 11.0% in 2011, compared to 8.3% for Ontario, which means there are fewer opportunities for employment in our community.^{6‡}

Social Environment

People interact with their social environment everyday and it is an important piece of health.

How much we feel like we are a part of the community, how much we participate in the community and how much we feel accepted in a community all affect our health. For example, it would be difficult for someone to feel like they are a part of the community if they feel they are discriminated against.

Here in Timiskaming, 73% of residents felt like they had a strong sense of belonging to the local community.⁷

Timiskaming has a wide variety of community programs that depend on volunteers and the engagement of the community. For instance, the “Student Nutrition Program” helps to give some children in our area access to a healthy breakfast or snack to start their day at no cost to the students.

[‡] Data from the National Household Survey should be interpreted with caution because many people chose not to respond to the survey.

Physical Environment

Both our physical and mental health is related to the environment we live in. For instance, pollution in the water, air or soil can cause cancers, respiratory illnesses or gastrointestinal problems. Even factors like having access to good quality housing, the design of a community, or having access to transportation (or a transportation system) can affect our physical and psychological well-being.

Michael and Jessica have found mould in their apartment. They know that mould can be harmful to their family's health. Their landlord would not fix the problem and they are having trouble finding the time to learn how to navigate 'the system' to get the support they need to fix the problem. They do not have enough money to pay first and last months' rent to move and there almost a one year wait list to get low income housing.⁸

Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills

These are the actions that we ourselves can take to improve our health like taking care of ourselves, how we cope with challenges, and how we make choices that improve our health. Making healthy choices for ourselves is important but there is research that shows that personal life choices are linked directly to the environment that we live in. For instance, choosing healthy foods can be challenging if everywhere we turn there are unhealthy foods and if healthy foods are more expensive!

Michael is a light smoker, a habit he picked up in high school because everyone in his family smoked. Today, he continues smoking because he feels it helps with the stresses of living on the edge.

Healthy Child Development

There are many different factors that children and infants experience that affects how their brains develop, how they do in school and how healthy they are later in life. All the topics discussed in this report relate to the wellbeing of children and infants. For example, a child's development can be influenced by their neighbourhood, the safety of their housing, their family's income, their parents' education level, and so on.

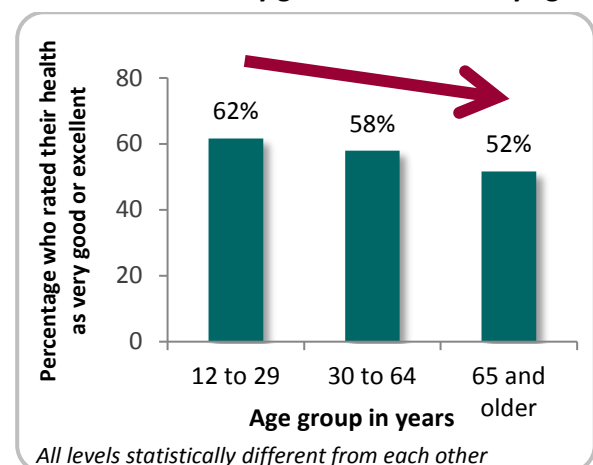
Many decisions that pregnant women make can affect whether or not their baby is born healthy, such as using tobacco or alcohol.² In Timiskaming, 25% of pregnant women smoked and 1.5% used alcohol.⁹

Biology and Genetics

People's genetics can influence health, such as being born with a health condition that has been passed down generation to generation. In addition, our genetic makeup can also affect health later in life by making us more or less susceptible to certain illnesses. Biological factors, such as age, are also very strongly linked with health.

In Timiskaming, as age increases, the percentage of people who rate themselves as healthy decreased.³

Percentage of Timiskaming residents who said their health was very good or excellent by age.³

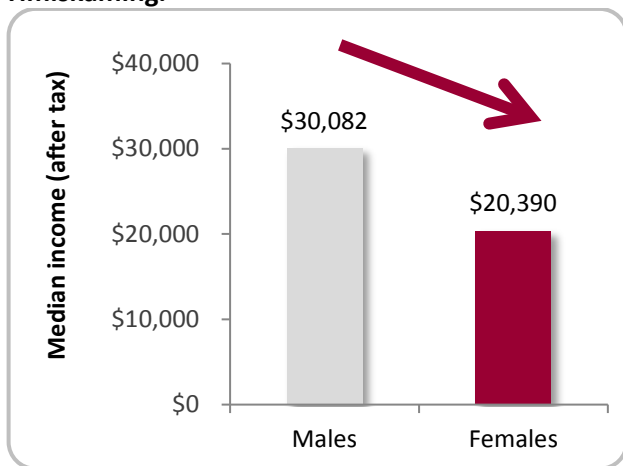


Gender

When looked at in more detail, gender is not only simply being male or female, it is also socially determined roles, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that a society places on the two sexes.² For these reasons, health is not equal for men and women, or boys and girls.

In Timiskaming, the median income for males was \$30,082 and was \$20,390 for females. As stated earlier in this report, income greatly affects health.⁶

Median income (after tax) for males and females in Timiskaming.^{6,9}



Health Services

Access to health services, such as a family doctor, nurse practitioner, or community health centre also influences health.² Health services treat illnesses, and prevent and monitor chronic diseases like diabetes or high blood pressure.

Michael and Jessica are having difficulty accessing health care because of inflexible work hours and

⁹ These data should be interpreted with caution because Timiskaming had a global non-response rate of 39.1%. This means that 39.1% of Timiskaming residents did not

expensive childcare. Living in Timiskaming means that Michael and Jessica have to travel to see a specialist for their daughter's recurrent ear infections and aren't reimbursed until after they go. Travelling to seek health care is challenging for families living on the edge.

Culture

Some people or groups of people face challenges because of their cultural heritage or values.²

Culture can be defined as the values that are consciously or unconsciously used in one's everyday life. It can strongly influence our beliefs, behaviours, language, diet, perceptions - basically the way we live our lives.

Jessica moved to Timiskaming from an Indigenous community in Northern Ontario where her primary language was not English. Before she worked as a room attendant, she struggled to find work because of language and cultural barriers and she often feels like she doesn't fit in.

Conclusion

Although it's everyone's responsibility to make sure they are as healthy as they can be, it is also important to draw attention to the bigger items that affect people's health like income, education, and the ability to make healthy choices. It is important to create good living conditions for people and society to progress. This can help to give everyone a fair chance to live a healthy life especially for those who do not have the same opportunities as others.

response to the survey or did not complete some questions in the survey.

References

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- ⁴ Cost of a Nutritious Food Basket (family of 5), Timiskaming Health Unit, 2015.
- ⁵ Bushnick Bushnik, T., Barr-Telford, L., & Bussière P. (2002). In and out of high school: First results from the second cycle of the Youth in Transition Survey (Catalogue no. 81-595-MIE—No. 014). Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.publications.gc.ca/Collection/Statcan/81-595-MIE/81-595-MIE2004014.pdf>
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- ⁸ Black, K. (2014). Ten Year Housing and Homeless Plan. District of Timiskaming Social Services Board. Retrieved from: <http://www.omssa.com/human-services/housing-homelessness/hhrc/housing-and-homelessness-plans/hhplan-timiskaming>
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