Researching Ethnicity and Health: Moving forward into the 21st Century

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What will the presentation address:

• Briefly examine historical perspectives

• Explore the changing demographic profile of Canadian society

• Examine the notion of ‘inclusive research sample’ pertinent for 21st century research

• Share details of research in progress
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• Global migration characterizes life in the 21st century

• Various reasons for relocation:-
  - Economic migration
  - Asylum seeker
  - Refugee populations
  - Consequence of colonialism
  - Immigration as a strategic population
  - expansion policy e.g. Canada
  - Brain drain
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The Roman Empire
Emperor Septimius Severus 193-211 AD
The Ottoman Empire
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- A relatively young nation state – vast geographical space with a relatively small population – 33 million

- Population growth over the past centuries a result of immigration (1870/71 census documents 3.6 million)

- Canada already diverse with 56 Aboriginal nations speaking 30 languages

- Canada is in the vanguard in respect of commitment to multiculturalism and substantive policies that focus on immigration
• The census enumerated 6,186,950 foreign-born people in Canada. They accounted for virtually one in five (19.8%) of the total population, the highest proportion in 75 years (Statistics Canada 2007)

• Between 2001 and 2006 the immigrant populations grew by 13.6%, while the Canadian-born population grew by 3.3%. The 1,110,000 new immigrants that came to Canada corresponded to 69.3% of the population growth (Statistics Canada 2007)
Number and share of foreign born people in Canada 1906-2006

Source: Statistics Canada: censuses of population 1906-2006
Region of birth of recent immigrants to Canada 1971-2006

Source: Statistics Canada: censuses of population 1906-2006

Foreign born as a percentage of the total population 2006
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- Canada often considered an exemplar of multiculturalism
- Broad public support in terms of policies that reflect diversity
- Being an immigrant may be considered an integral part of being Canadian
- Ethno-cultural diversity a fundamental characteristic of the nation
- Kymlicka (2003) notes: "multiculturalism now a deeply embedded part of the legal and political framework in Canada"
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• Canada’s explict policy commitment to multiculturalism is enshrined in legislation and the consitution (Canadian Multiculturalism Act 1988).

• Current policy documents espouse that:

  *Immigration stimulates Canada’s growth, prosperity and cultural diversity*” and “*Canada benefits from the talents, experience and energy of immigrants, whether they are skilled workers, business people, refugees, relatives of Canadian citizens and residents, foreign students, temporary workers or others. All stimulate economic growth and enrich Canada’s social and cultural life*”  
  
  (Canadian Heritage 2005)
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• Successive governments have pursued immigration as a population policy, attempting to impact upon a number of strategic goals:

  - Demographic
  - Economic
  - Social
  - Humanitarian
  - Security (Beach et al 2003)
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Researching ethnicity and health: A new demographic?
Defining Ethnicity

- Ethnicity as a concept differs from ‘race’ (*Higginbottom 2006*)

- The term has risen to prominence in health and related research

- The term moves beyond perceptions of phenotype (*Higginbottom 2006*)

- A complex coalition of the sharing of culture, values, traditions and perceptions of belonging that interface every aspect of the human lived experience (*Brady 2003*)

- Distinct nationality or old understandings of ‘race’ and not necessarily related to geographical locations or national boundaries (*Karlsen 2003*)
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- Modood et al. (1997) highlighted the notion of fused ethnicities
- Diaspora (Gilroy 1995, Hall 2002)
- Transnational families
- Hybridity (Anthias & Lloyd 2002)
Considering the demographic profile of Canada is ethnicity, like knowledge transfer, every researcher's business?
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• Is the diversity described reflected in research studies?

• Why is it important that research samples are inclusive?

• What does ethnicity mean?

• Why is it important that ethnicity is a feature of health and related research?
Taking account of ethno-cultural diversity in research

- US - National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act 1993 - suggests a clear and compelling reason for inadequate representation of these population (Corbie-Smith et al. 2003)

- Specific protocols for research with First nations and Aboriginal Health

- However, no explicit legal requirement in respect of state-funded social research in Canada or in the UK
Arguments for inclusive research samples

- Lower receipt of health care/technologies
- Later diagnosis
- Inappropriate or effective care
- Poorer quality of care
- Poorer health outcomes
- Is these appropriate outcomes for the Canadian context in the 21st century?
Arguments for inclusive research samples

• Economic
• Policy and practice context, funding imperatives
• Legal
• Moral
• Analytical
Inclusive research samples

- Untheorized or insensitive inclusion can have negative implications (Ellison & Jones 2002. O’Loughlin et al 2005)

- Dangers of research which linking genetic information to socially defined categories

- Potential to reinforce crude biological notions of race

- Potential misuse of research in political, scientific, or clinical contests (Project Update 2006)
Ethnic diversity in UK social science and public policy research: a consultation and development exercise to produce guidelines for sound scientific and ethical practice

Funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK

Research Team: Salway, Ellison, Tutton, Allmark & Gerrish
Project Aims

- Increase the quality and quantity of research that effectively and sensitively populations includes minority ethnic people

- Supporters research in the design and execution of their work

- Encourage researchers to actively consider whether and how their research can more adequately represent the diversity of the population

- Provide guidance for commissioners and reviewers to design and evaluate research proposals
Critical junctures in the research cycle

- Scoping and commissioning research
- Independent scientific review
- Ethics approval
- Peer-review at publication
Guidance on the use of race/ethnicity in health and biomedical journals

- 35 different guidelines identified (Tutton et al in press)

- Guidelines varied (Smart et al 2006)

- Largely not enforced (Ellison & Rosato 2002)
In conclusion

- The future of diversity and health related research in Canada in the 21st century
- Challenges ahead, but lots of opportunity for research to extend understandings and generate new knowledge
- Sophisticated rationale for inclusion of different populations in our study sample
- Where diverse samples are required we need a critical rationale for inclusion, which is morally, legally, ethically, methodologically, and analytically sound
- A nuanced approach to description of study populations and the issue of self-assignation of ethnicity is significant
In conclusion

• “We have more in common as humans than difference (this is both genetically and metaphorically true) but none of us is more human than another”
Thank you