

Research Article

Out on the Land: Income, Subsistence Activities, and Food Sharing Networks in Nain, Labrador

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In recent Inuit ethnography, a major concern has been how and to what extent contemporary Inuit participate in and depend on subsistence activities, particularly in the context of increasing wage employment and growing participation in the cash economy. This paper provides an analysis of these activities in the predominately Inuit community of Nain, Labrador. Using social network data and demographic information collected between January and June 2010, we examine the interconnections between subsistence activities—obtaining “country food” through activities such as hunting, fishing, and collecting—with access to the means of obtaining subsistence resources (such as snow mobiles, cabins, and boats), employment status, and income. Our data indicate that individuals with higher employment status and income tend to be more central to the network of subsistence food sharing, but not because they have greater access to hunting tools or equipment (they do not). We conclude that those individuals who play the most central role in the network are those who are financially able to do so, regardless of access to hunting tools/means.

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of Inuit ethnography, a major concern has been how and to what extent contemporary Inuit participate in and depend on subsistence activities, particularly in the context of increasing wage employment and growing participation in the cash economy [1–4]. Based on a social network research study of the predominantly Inuit community of Nain, Labrador, carried out between January and June 2010, it is clear that locally obtained resources continue to be a central aspect of Inuit household livelihoods. This is true despite the fact that a majority of adult residents in the community (54%) are employed and virtually all resource use in and around Nain involves modern equipment (boats, skidoos, guns, and modern fishing equipment) which must be purchased in the cash economy. While such results agree with data obtained in many Inuit communities and

present important testimony about the ongoing importance of hunted and collected foods in the lives of today's residents, it remains unclear how and to what extent participation in the wider economy has altered the actual circulation of what are referred to locally as “country foods.” This paper employs social network analysis to answer questions about whether the *circulation* of country foods in Nain is influenced by participation in the cash economy and the ability to possess or access the major means necessary for hunting, fishing, or what is described as “being out on the land.”

Subsistence hunting, fishing, and collecting vary widely in Nain and throughout Labrador. Most people fish for char and rock cod within the community at times when they are available. Similarly, many people hunt for ptarmigan (locally referred to as “partridge”) under similar circumstances. These, however, are less important in terms of total amount collected than either seal or caribou (see Figure 1). The latter

