Youth-identified protective factors for mental health and well-being in a changing climate: Perspectives from Inuit youth in Nunatsiavut, Labrador, Canada

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Similar to other Circumpolar regions, the Canadian Arctic is experiencing rapid changes in climatic conditions, with implications for Canadian Inuit communities widely documented. Inuit youth have been identified as an at-risk population, with likely impacts on mental health and well-being. This study identifies and characterizes youth-specific protective factors that enhance well-being in light of a rapidly changing climate, and examines how climatic and environmental change challenges these protective factors within Northern Labrador, Canada. This research was led by the Rigolet Inuit Community Government, in partnership with the other Nunatsiavut Inuit community governments of Nain, Hopedale, Postville, and Makkovik and the Department of Health and Social Development. In-depth conversational interviews were conducted by local research coordinators with youth aged 15-25 from the five communities. Five key protective factors were identified as enhancing their mental health and well-being: being on the land; connecting to Inuit culture; strong communities; relationships with family and friends; and staying busy. Changing sea ice and weather conditions were widely reported to be compromising these protective factors by reducing access to the land, and increasing the danger of land-based activities. This work contributes to existing scholarship on Northern climate change health adaptation by identifying factors that may enhance youth resilience and, if incorporated into adaptation strategies, may contribute to creating successful and effective health adaptation responses and to fostering adaptive capacities.