

## **Study name: Sexual health and sexually transmitted infections in northern frontier populations**

**Project number:** Eol 1147

**Contact:**

**Dr Dionne Gesink Law**

University of Toronto  
Dalla Lana School of Public Health  
155 College St, 6th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5T 3M7 CANADA

**Tel:** 416 978 5869

**Fax:** 416 978 8299

**Email:** [dionne.gesinklaw@utoronto.ca](mailto:dionne.gesinklaw@utoronto.ca)

**Abstract (updated 12/2008):**

The objective of this proposal is to build the capacity to examine the individual, social and environmental factors that influence perceptions of sexual health and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in northern frontier populations. We propose to take a modified community-based participatory research approach to investigate sexual health, focusing on Alaska, northern Canada, and Greenland. Our aims are: Aim 1: Describe sexual health and the basic epidemiology of STIs in northern frontier populations We will describe and compare the burden of reported STIs in Alaska, northern Canada and Greenland by basic demographic characteristics including age, gender and race/ethnicity. We will incorporate community level factors to look for ecologic level associations with sexual health and STIs. Aim 2: Build capacity for investigating sexual health issues with northern communities. Key informants will be identified within these interested communities and interviewed using semi-structured interviewing techniques. The goal of key informant interviews will be to gain basic insights into sexual health and STIs in the respective communities and learn ways of talking about sexual health and STIs that will be culturally sensitive and respectful. Knowledge gained from aim 1 and conversations with key informants will be used to develop a series of talks that will be presented to the different communities through knowledge translation activities. Researchers will partner with communities to help develop and participate in research projects. Aim 3: Investigate sexual behaviors and STI transmission dynamics in northern communities. Community informants and qualitative data collected in aim 2 will help us develop appropriate survey and focus group discussion questions. A sexual health survey(s) will be developed and administered in northern communities. Focus group discussions will also be facilitated in these communities, using semi-structured questions to gain insights into perceptions on sexual health, behaviors, and STI transmission dynamics. Social, cultural, environmental and individual determinants of sexual health and STI risk will be explored.

**Project Status:** Active

**Project Progress 2007-2008:**

Since the 2007 meeting in Banff, we have:

Successfully Applied for Funding:

1. Greenland Medical Research Council, October 2007 (~\$6,000)
2. CIHR Team in Circumpolar Chronic Disease Prevention travel support (\$5,000)
3. University of Toronto, October 2007 (\$10,000)

4. Montana State University, November 2007 (\$10,000)
5. Kommissionen for Videnskabelige Undersøgelser i Grønland, April 2008 (~\$20,000)
6. Greenland Medical Research Council, October 2008 (~\$6,000)
7. International Network of Circumpolar Health Researchers Travel Award, October 2008 (\$5,000)
8. KIIIN, October 2008 (~\$40,000)

Applied for More Funding:

9. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, September 2008
10. National Science Foundation, November 2008

Obtained Ethical Approval from:

1. Kommissionen for Videnskabelige Undersøgelser i Grønland (February 2008)
2. University of Toronto (June 2008)

Greenland Sexual Health Project Update:

1. Capacity Building: Travelled to Greenland, September 2007
  - a. Presented our project idea at the NunaMed meeting in Nuuk, September 2007 and gathered support to conduct the study from local health authorities for several regions in Greenland (Nuuk, Sisimiut, Tasiilaq, Qaqortoq, Upernavik)
  - b. Built relationships with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer, the Hospital, and the Paarisa (health promotion)
  - c. Identified and began consulting with a local Nuuk midwife/information consultant (Ruth Montgomery-Andersen) who has been project manager for the study
2. Project Development and Implementation: Travelled to Greenland, June 2008
  - a. Developed, translated and back-translated a sexual health survey.
  - b. Hired three full-time, trilingual, research assistants from Greenland.
  - c. Tested and revised a sexual health survey using cognitive interviewing techniques (June 2008).
  - d. Recruited 150 Nuuk residents between 15 and 65 years of age to participate in Greenland Sexual Health Project (July to October 2008). Participants responded to an interviewer administered sexual health survey and self-collected urine and, for women, vaginal swabs, for STI testing (chlamydia, gonorrhea, mycoplasma genitalium, bacterial vaginosis, and trichomonas).

Canada update:

1. Organized the Canadian side of a joint Alaska-Canada meeting on "Sexually transmitted diseases among Alaska Native and First Nations/Inuit/Métis in Canada: Discovering opportunities for collaboration" in Anchorage, Alaska, April 2008
2. Presented at a meeting on resource extraction and sexual health in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, February 2008.
3. Successfully recruited a doctoral student (Gwen Healey) from Iqaluit who will work on sexual health and STIs in Nunavut for her dissertation (started Fall 2008).
4. Building capacity for a youth STI project across the Canadian North with Tom Wong from the Public Health Agency of Canada, as well as the Arctic Health Research Network.

Alaska update:

1. The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, spearheaded by Jessica Leston and Jim Williams, and the Indian Health Service, spearheaded by Scott Tulloch, Lori de Ravello, and Melanie Taylor, hosted the joint Alaska-Canada meeting on "Sexually transmitted diseases among Alaska Native and First Nations/Inuit/Métis in Canada: Discovering opportunities for collaboration" in Anchorage, Alaska, April 2008.

2. Collaborating with Jessica Leston and Jim Williams to develop Alaska-Canada-Greenland youth STI project.
3. Jessica Leston has been conducting focus group discussions with youth on sexual health and STIs in communities across Alaska.

#### **Preliminary results:**

##### Published Manuscripts:

1. **Gesink Law DC**, Rink E, Mulvad G, Koch A. Sexual health and sexually transmitted infections in the North American Arctic. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, International Polar Year Special Issue. 2008 Jan. 14(1): 4-9. Available from <http://www.cdc.gov/EID/content/14/1/4.htm>

##### Submitted Manuscripts:

2. **Gesink Law DC**, Rink E, Montgomery-Andersen R, Mulvad G, Koch A. Developing a Culturally Competent and Socially Relevant Sexual Health Survey with an Urban Arctic Community. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*. Submitted 20/11/2008.
3. Rink E, **Gesink Law DC**, Montgomery-Andersen R, Mulvad G, Koch A. The Practical Application of Community Based Participatory Research in the North American Arctic: Initial Findings from the Greenland Sexual Health Study. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*. Submitted 15/09/2008.

##### In Preparation Manuscripts:

4. **Gesink Law DC**, Leston L, Melanie Taylor M, Lori de Ravello L, Scott Tulloch S. Sexually Transmitted Infections North of 60: What we know, what we don't know, where we can come together. In preparation for the *American Journal of Public Health*.
5. **Gesink Law DC**, Rink E, Montgomery-Andersen R, Mulvad G, Montgomery-Andersen S, Poppel U, Binzer A, Koch A, Jensen JS. *Mycoplasma genitalium* in Greenland. In preparation for the *British Medical Journal*.

#### **Plans 2009:**

- Greenland:
  - Continue data analysis, manuscript preparation, and knowledge translation for Greenland Sexual Health Project in Nuuk, Greenland
  - Expand Greenland Sexual Health Project to Sisimiut, Greenland
- Canada:
  - Continue capacity building efforts for sexual health project in northern Canada, including attending a Sexuality and Sexual Health Workshop (January 15 and 16, Millbrook, Nova Scotia) hosted by the Atlantic Aboriginal Health Research Program. The focus will be on networking with community representatives from Labrador to develop and initiate a sexual health project in Labrador.
- Alaska:
  - Continue capacity building efforts for international sexual health project involving northern youth from Alaska, Canada and Greenland.
  - Implement clinical intervention involving self-collected urine and vaginal swabs for STI testing.
  - Develop community-based and community-driven sexual health education intervention and messaging campaign.

#### **Expected Completion Date:**

Ongoing