

Introduction

In Canada, Indigenous community well-being is currently measured using the Community Well-Being (CWB) Index that was created by the Canadian Government (Government of Canada, 2015). This index does not incorporate Indigenous principles of well-being, and it wasn't created with input from Indigenous communities. It can be argued that this well-being index is ineffective at measuring well-being, because Indigenous peoples in Canada, and around the world, have different values than the Western view of "well-being."

The CWB is made up of four components that are measured using data from Statistic Canada's Census of Population and the National Household Survey:

- 1. Income:** calculated based on total per capita income.
- 2. Education:** measures how many community members have graduated from high school, and how many of those graduates obtained a post-secondary education and then divides that number by the total population.
- 3. Housing:** this component looks at the number of community members whose homes are in an adequate state of repair, and how many individuals are living under one roof.
- 4. Labour Force Activity:** measures how many community members participate in the labour force (i.e. are currently employed or are actively seeking employment) and of those, how many community members are currently employed.

These four components are individually scored out of 100, and are then averaged to create a single score for each community. These scores can range from 0 to 100 and the average score for First Nations Communities in Canada in 2011 was 59, while the average score of non-First Nations communities was 79 (Government of Canada, 2015).

This index measures the well-being of non-Aboriginal (non-Indigenous) communities, First Nations communities, and Inuit communities. Both "First Nations" and "Inuit" are defined categories for Indigenous peoples in Canada, the third category being "Metis". There is no explanation as to why Metis people are excluded as a category, or whether they are included in one of the other categories, but it is important to understand that they are a distinct group of Indigenous peoples within Canada.

Indigenous culture is an important aspect of community well-being because it is part of a community's everyday life, and many communities claim that their culture is what has kept them alive over the last 150 years of assimilative and genocidal practices (McIvor, 2013).

The lower score of Indigenous communities compared to non-Indigenous communities is often attributed to differences in educational attainment. This is why I believe it is important to look specifically at the education component.

Methodology

To create an "Indigenized" version of the CWB Index, it became apparent that I would need to include important educational values of Indigenous communities into the calculation, in a way that would be cost-effective for the government to incorporate as well.

To do this, I decided to use the 2011 Census Profile Data from the 2011 Canadian Census of Population. From this data, I looked specifically at the proportion of people who speak an Indigenous language within a specific community. I then took two different methods to create my augmented education component.

1. The Addition Method

I took the existing measure of education and added to it my augmented measure of education to create my new education component.

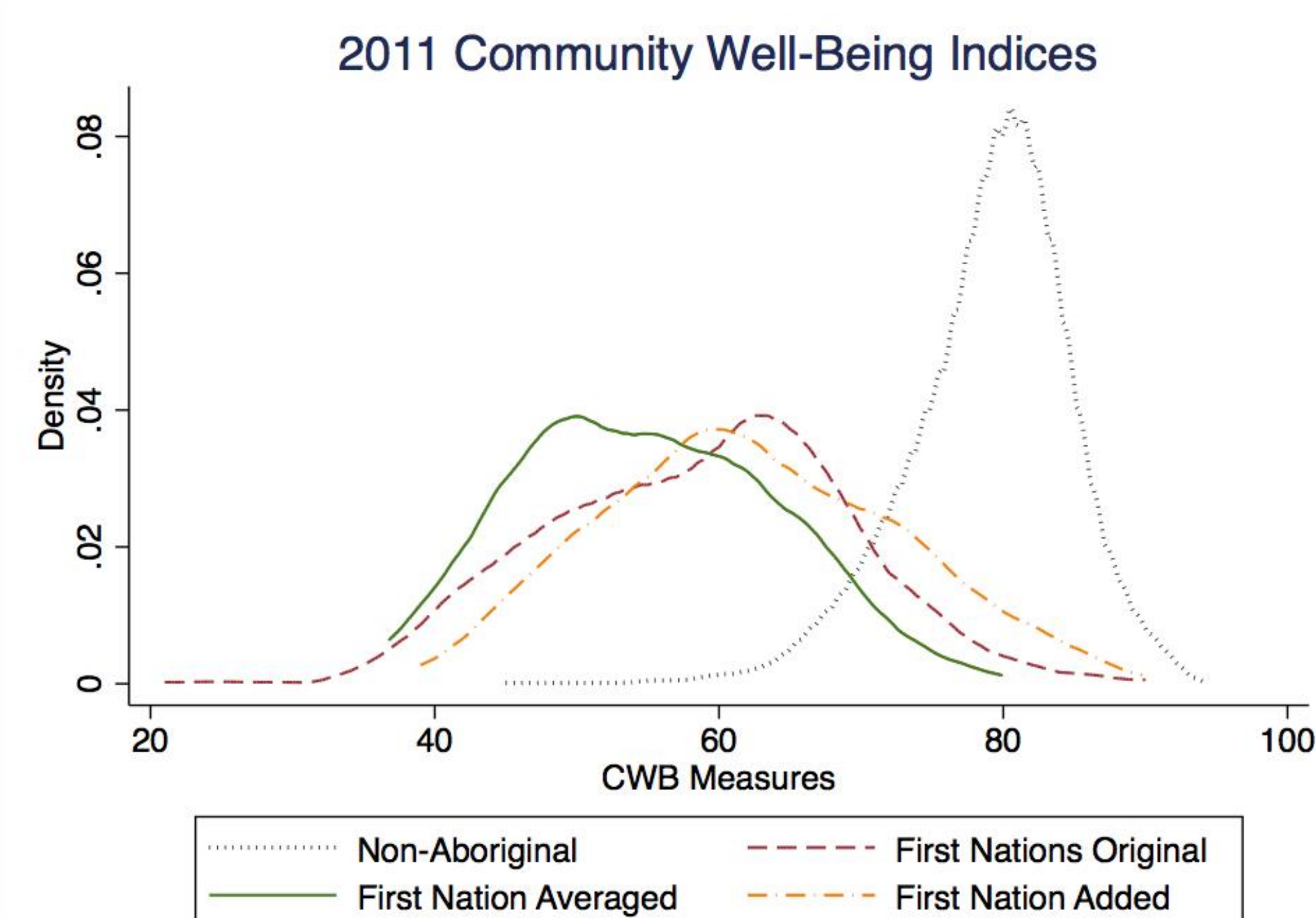
$$educ_{add} = education_{2011} + \left(\frac{\# \text{ Indigenous language speakers}}{\text{total pop}} \right)$$

2. The Averaging Method

I took the existing measure of education and added to it my augmented measure of education and divided this by two to create my new education component.

$$educ_{avg} = \frac{education_{2011} + \left(\frac{\# \text{ Indigenous language speakers}}{\text{total pop}} \right)}{2}$$

Figure #1



Results

When Indigenous language use is added to the existing education measure approximately half of the observations are greater than 100. To correct this, I decided to make all observations greater than 100 equal to 100. This created little to no change in many communities' CWB score, but for communities who had a low score before the addition, actually had an increase in score with the inclusion of Indigenous language use.

When Indigenous language use is averaged with the existing education measure, the average of the CWB for First Nations communities decreases. But communities who were below the 25th percentile actually had a 30% chance of being above the 75th percentile with the inclusion of Indigenous language use.

Figure #2

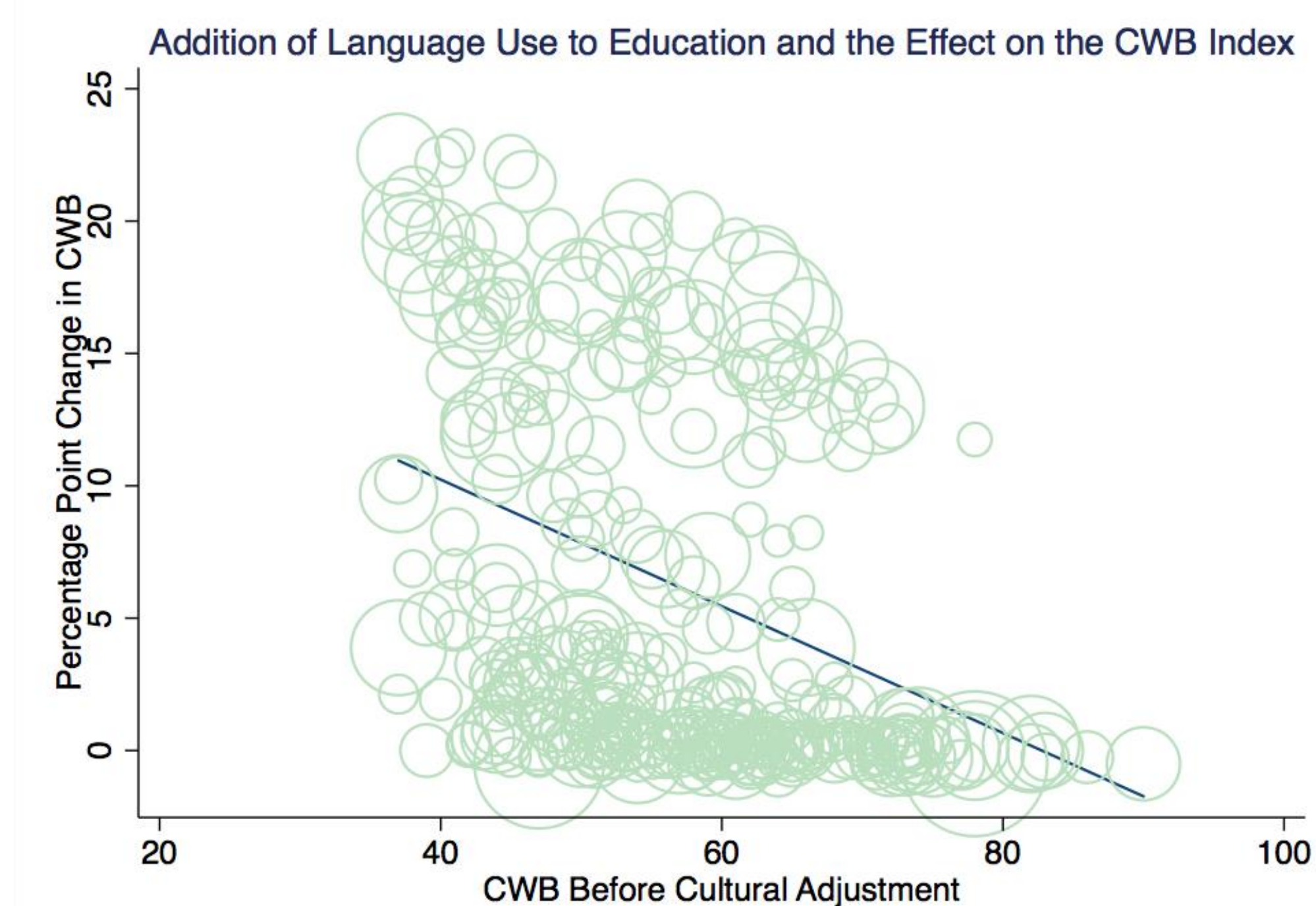
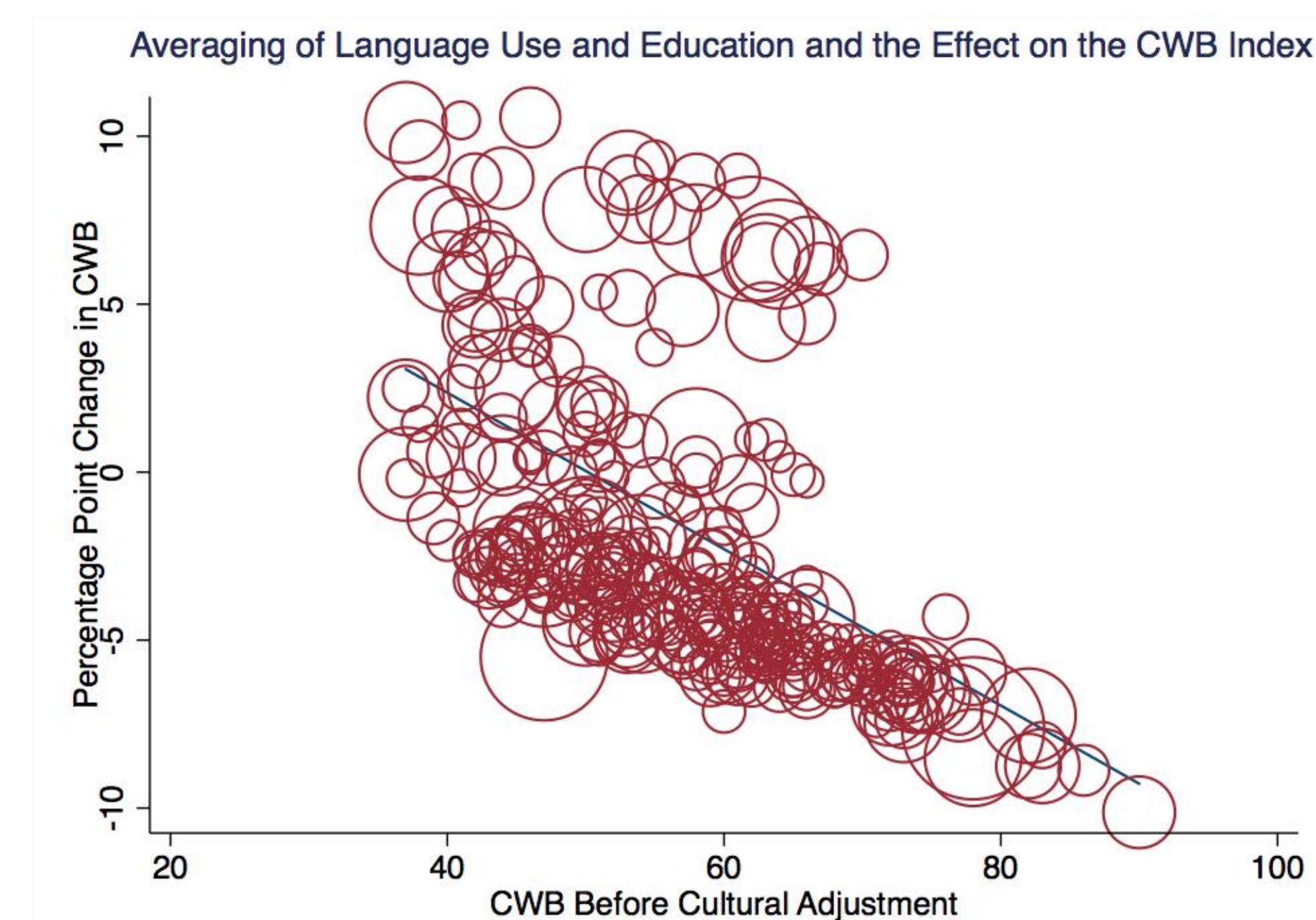


Figure #3



Conclusions

The inclusion of Indigenous language use actually decreased the average CWB score for Indigenous communities. But, communities who were previously doing poorly had a better chance of doing well with the inclusion of Indigenous language use than the Canadian measure.

An interesting conclusion that can be drawn from this is that "Western" values of education have become dominant in many Indigenous communities. This speaks to how over 150 years of assimilative policies have impacted Indigenous communities.

When averaging Indigenous language use into the education component of the CWB Index it decreased the education level of a majority of Indigenous communities. This means that they have higher levels of high school graduation rates and post-secondary attainment than they have of Indigenous language speakers. This result can be attributed to residential schools. In 2011, only 14% of Indigenous people reported learning their language at home (Fontaine, 2017). Although it would seem intuitive that Indigenous language use would have a positive impact on the education component of the CWB Index, it does not. Residential schools have made it so that Indigenous communities need to exert more resources in order to learn their languages, making it easier to just gain a "Western" education.

With this new measure, the government will be able to evaluate policies based on a more holistic measure of education, respecting Indigenous knowledge.

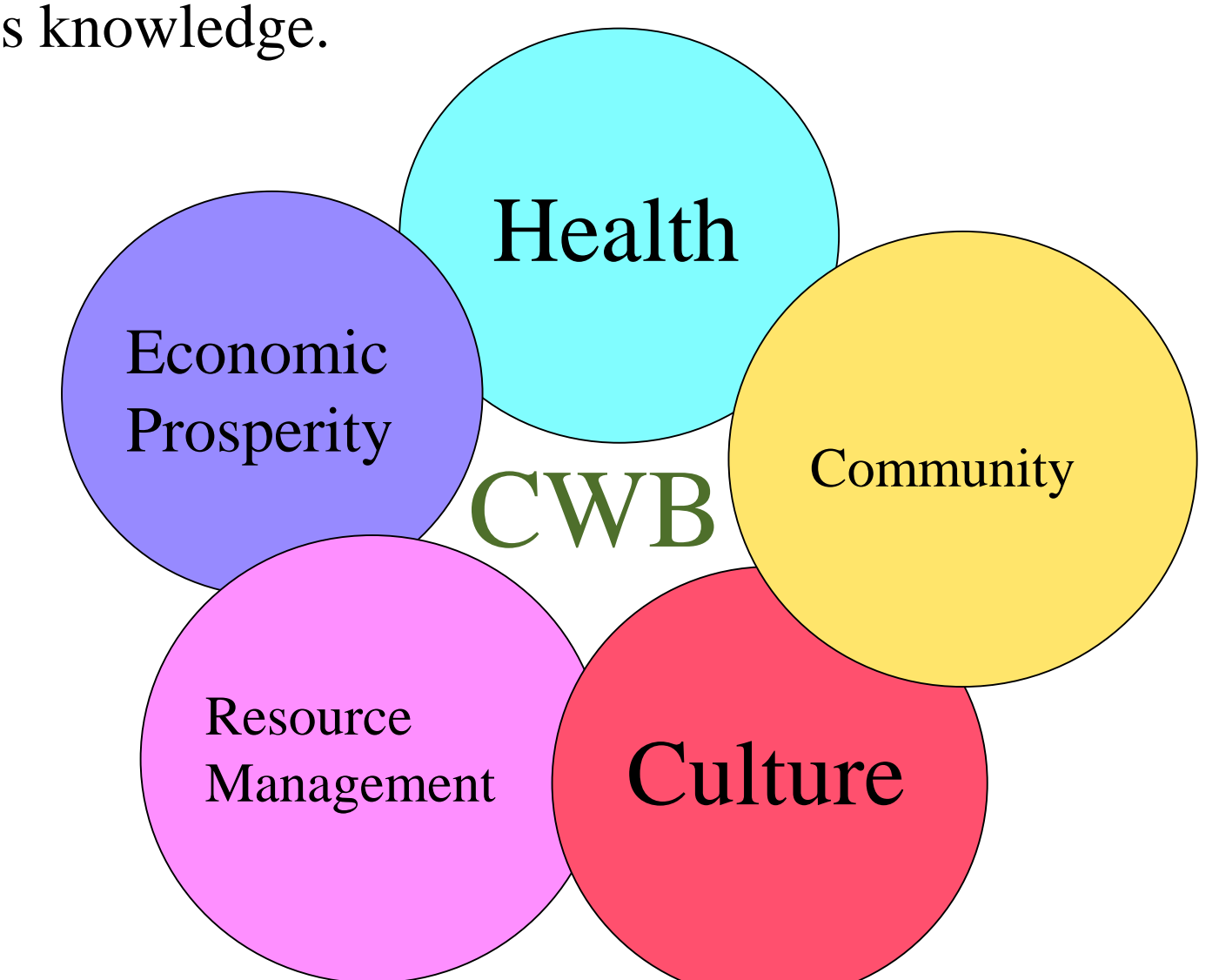


Figure 4: First Nations CWB Areas. Adapted from "Nanwakolas Community Wellbeing and Capacity Strengthening Plan" by Chris Roberts, 2014.

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