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# Inupiat youth suicide and culture loss: Changing community conversations for prevention

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## Abstract

Inupiat living in Northwest Alaska have one of the highest youth suicide rates in the world. Other circumpolar peoples share this disturbing distinction. This demographic and ethnic health disparity has spurred research that investigates acculturation stress as a cause of Inuit youth suicide. Despite this body of knowledge, few studies describe how local people connect suicide to culture loss, even though this understanding is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. This article describes how Inupiat understand and talk about youth suicide and suicide prevention within public settings. I have used participatory action research (PAR) to illuminate the meanings and processes that surround youth suicide. In meetings focused on suicide prevention, local people clearly link self-destruction with historical oppression, loss of the Inupiaq culture and current manifestations of these realities in alcoholism, abuse and neglect. This

narrative typically focuses on young people and the Inupiaq community's current failure to lead them to a bright future. The article describes these understandings and offers suggestions to expand them in order to create new possibilities for community-based prevention and the promotion of wellness in circumpolar communities.



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## Keywords

Inuit suicide; Acculturation stress; Ethnography; Universal suicide prevention; Cultural renewal; Alaska; USA; Youth

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