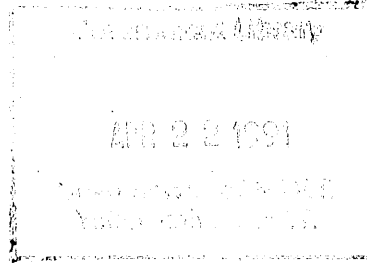
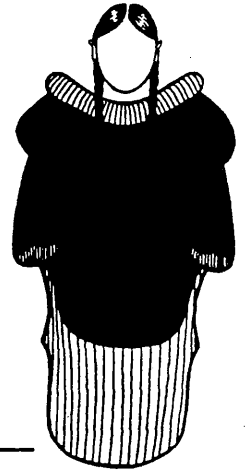


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SUVAGUUQ

PAUKTUUIT,
INUIT WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER



National newsletter on Inuit Social and Cultural Issues

SPECIAL ISSUE ON SUICIDE

This newsletter deals exclusively with one of the most serious social problems facing Inuit today. Inuit are killing themselves at a rate which is over three times higher than that of other Canadians; most of the victims are young and most of us have had friends or relatives who have chosen to end their lives rather than go on. The issue of suicide was raised by delegates to our Annual General Meeting and it was discussed at length at the 1989 Annual Meeting of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. The statement passed by the ITC delegates, "Suicide is a Symptom of Cultural Collapse", is found on page 7.

Last summer, a student hired by Pauktuutit did extensive research and prepared a paper on "The Problem of Suicide Among Inuit Youth". A summary of this paper is contained in the newsletter, along with a special message from ITC President John Amagoalik and some information on how to recognize a depressed or suicidal person.

As we come to grips with the magnitude of the problem, we are also beginning to talk to each other about suicide and what we as individuals and members of our communities can do. Certainly, suicide cannot be viewed as completely separate from the social, political and economic realities of the north and while the pain that leads a person to take their own life is very personal, the solutions are most likely to come through collective action. Suicide is a growing concern and the responsibility lies with each one of us to address this problem. Through the information provided in this special issue of "Suvaguuq", we hope to contribute to cooperative efforts underway on the prevention of suicide.


Mary Sillett, President



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- * Crying spells - uncontrolled weeping.
- * Lack of energy - everything just seems to be too much effort.
- * Inability to concentrate and make simple decisions.
- * Irritability - sudden bursts of temper followed by more feelings of guilt and worthlessness.
- * Anxiety and restlessness
- * A disturbance in sleep patterns - insomnia; an inability to fall asleep or sudden night or early morning awakening in an alert, anxious but still fatigued state; less common is a tendency to sleep around the clock.
- * Appetite changes - loss of appetite or weight; less common, an increased appetite.
- * Loss of interest in sex.
- * Withdrawl from social activities, family and friends.
- * Lack of interest in personal appearance.

Some people who are depressed try to treat themselves by drinking alcohol or taking drugs, including prescription drugs like tranquilizers. They think that a drink or a pill will act as a pick-me-up or help them relax or make them feel better. Unfortunately, alcohol is a depressant, as are tranquilizers like Valium and Librium. The depressant effect is most severe in people who are already suffering from the illness of depression.

How to Care for the Potential Suicide

Emergency Situations

The care provided for people who attempt suicide is first of all the care which is necessary to preserve life. If the person has already acted, some kind of counter action must be taken. Appropriate First Aid must be given and the person taken into medical care quickly. But being in hospital does not necessarily mean that the patient will receive counselling. Treatment of depression, if it has not started before the suicide attempt, should start as soon as possible. A good relationship with the medical and nursing staff should result in good communications with people from the community. The workers in the hospital and/or the community should be advised of the attempt so that a coordinated counselling and follow-up program can be planned.

If a person has not yet acted, but is actively threatening, then it is necessary to establish communication with the person. This should be done before any attempt is made to remove the weapons, pills, or whatever means has been chosen. A struggle with a person in this extreme emotional state may result in injury to the rescuer as well as the person. Keeping the person company. LISTENING and talking will provide a link to life. Take time. Do not rush in. A life is at risk, it may take a few hours before the acute stage is over. If it is necessary to leave the person, be sure that someone else will stay. **Do not leave the person alone.** Those who stay with a suicidal person should be instructed to LISTEN. They should not lecture. They need only to let the person know they are LISTENING.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE A SUICIDAL PERSON

Not all depressed people are suicidal, but most suicidal people are depressed. They also usually behave in the following ways:

- (1) Talk of death or suicide, their own or that of other people: unusual interest in other people's deaths or funeral arrangements; saying things like "my family would be better off without me", or "I can't stand it any more, I want to die".
- (2) Making plans for death or absence: giving away prized things; making wills; getting their affairs in order.
- (3) Have been very upset and agitated, but **SUDDENLY** become calm and cheerful (the decision has been made).

This is not to say that everyone who discusses death, or a previous suicide, or who makes a will, or who gives away a prized possession is necessarily thinking of suicide. And it doesn't mean that anyone who has been upset and finally becomes calm is thinking of suicide. It is a combination of the signs of depression and these other activities or behavior which is the clue. It is necessary to put all these activities together to get the picture of the person at risk of suicide and it is the family and close friends who know the person well enough to be able to do this. This is why everyone needs to know the signs and symptoms and whom to ask for help.

Counselling the Potential Suicide

You cannot counsel or reason with people who are drunk. Most suicide threats are made by people who have been drinking. To deal with this situation:

***Someone must stay with the person**

***As soon as the person is sober, tell them they were making threats against themselves**

***Be ready to LISTEN if the person is ready to talk about their problems**

***Encourage the person to talk to a social worker or others in the community who are trained to help**

PREVENTION IN THE COMMUNITY

Suicide is a subject that many people do not like to talk about or think about. If there has been a suicide or an attempted suicide, encourage people to talk and discuss ways to prevent others.

One suicide frequently leads to others in the same community, particularly amongst people similar to the victim. These people should be given special attention.

There are probably other people in the community whose behavior is self-destructive. Programs to lessen this kind of behavior can be centred around healthy activities. These could include parenting classes, organized pre-school activities, recreation programs, drop-in centres, community activities to celebrate graduation, achievement, anniversaries, etc., adult education, cooperative business ventures, family gatherings and religious activities. In other words, any program which improves the community and helps the people who live in it feel worthwhile, will serve as a suicide prevention program.

Statistics show that the majority of suicides in native communities are young men. This would suggest that community programs which involve men are essential, starting with planning for services to meet the special needs of men. For example, men may be unable to make use of services during normal working hours and they may feel uncomfortable in different sorts of surroundings. The figures tell us that threats of self-destruction by men should be taken very seriously indeed.

Because people have different strengths, live in different surroundings, and different resources are available to them in their community, each case must be dealt with individually. The common need is for recognition of the problem and the willingness by the community to do something positive about it. Everyone has a contribution to make.



THE INUIT WAY

A cultural orientation booklet, which can provide non-Inuit working in the North with a greater understanding and respect for Inuit culture, values and traditions, is now available at Pauktuutit's national office. It is printed in English, Inuktitut Syllabics and Inuktitut Roman Orthography and covers topics such as Traditional Law, Family Dynamics, Community Dynamics, Child Rearing and Diet. This guide is well worth its \$7.00 price tag. Please contact Mary Alainga at Pauktuutit, 804-200 Elgin Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 1L5 (613) 238-3977.

to purchase copies of *The Inuit Way*.



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The booklet Suicide Prevention: Guidelines for Helpers, by Ruth Elvey, Sheila Rymer and Ricki Devlin (published by Pacific Region, Medical Services, Health and Welfare Canada, 1985) was the source of the following articles: "Signs and Symptoms of Depression", "How to Recognize a Suicidal Person", "Counselling the Potential Suicide", and "Prevention in the Community".

SUICIDE IS A SYMPTOM OF CULTURAL COLLAPSE

Statement from the Annual General Assembly of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, Happy Valley/Goose Bay, May 1-5, 1989

Among some of the symptoms are sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, chronic unemployment, alienation from Inuit culture, family violence and breakdown, spousal assault, loss of control of day to day life, feelings of helplessness, despair and loneliness.

Although suicide is ultimately an individual's responsibility, the individual alone cannot be left to deal with it. The family unit and the community must be involved. Organizations and support groups such as hamlet councils, police, recreational committees and church groups must begin to address the issue. Attention must be paid to the role of elders and to recognizing their knowledge and their spirituality. Regional and national organizations have a responsibility to support these groups and to try and improve the overall situation for the well-being of Inuit.

We must accept the ownership of these problems. It is everyone's responsibility. It must be a cooperative effort, carried out in an integrated manner with input from all sectors of society. Political leaders, as well as others in a position of responsibility, must serve as positive role models.

Today, decisions are made from outside the Inuit homelands, such as Yellowknife, Ottawa, St. John's and Quebec City. The settlement of land claims and the right to self-government are fundamental. It will put more economic, social and political power in the hands of Inuit. Therefore the right to self-government is the foundation that would enable us to address these serious social issues.

We must begin discussing this problem openly. Everyone must take responsibility. Each organization must contribute in those areas for which they have responsibility. Preventative measures must be developed in the communities and everyone must implement what works best.

Examples of what can be done include open line shows on local radio, phone-in shows on IBC, workshops and discussion groups in the communities. The setting up of support groups and counselling services that are culturally appropriate must be initiated.

Government must provide the necessary resources and programs to enable communities and organizations to effectively deal with social problems. The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada is committed to short and long-term solutions. ITC will continue to promote the economic, social and political rights of Inuit in Canada.



It is.....

In recent years, something very sad has been happening in our communities.

Too many of our young people have taken their own lives.

They have left behind grieving relatives and friends.

Almost every Inuk in Canada has now been touched by this tragedy.

We each shed a tear every time we hear of another suicide.

We feel very sad and helpless.

We have all experienced times when we felt neglected, confused, angry, and frustrated.

We have felt ignored, that nobody cares, no one understands us, no one loves us.

If you have felt this way, you are not alone.

We all go through difficult times. But these things pass. They get better.

If something is bothering you, share it with someone.

Don't keep it bottled up inside you.

Talk to someone. A relative, a friend, a policeman, a social worker, a priest or minister, a spiritual leader in your community.

They care.

They can help you.

Committing suicide does not solve anything.

It only makes things worse for those you love and those who love you.

It is written that God created you in His/Her image.

It is wrong to end your own life.

This is the most exciting time in the history of humankind.

Billions of people in Europe and other parts of the world are celebrating their new found freedom.

The Berlin Wall has crumpled.

Apartheid is about to be defeated in South Africa.

Even here in Canada, people are beginning to understand the Inuit.

We are finally being recognized as good guardians of our environment.

Our rights to the land and our right to self government are being accepted.

Through the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, our international family, which lives in Canada, Greenland, Alaska and the Soviet Union, is being reunited.

It is a time to celebrate.

Great scientific discoveries are about to be made.

Humankind will expand its horizons as we explore the universe.

Life is divided into four seasons.

You are born into the cold world of winter.

Spring are your growing years.

Summer represents the prime of life.

The fall of your life are your golden years.

After that, it is dust to dust, ashes to ashes, as it is meant to be.

You are in the springtime of your life.

The long dark winter has passed.

Life is returning to the world.

The warm bright days of summer are ahead of you.

It is a good time to be young.

John Amagoalik
February 1990

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