

Socioeconomic inequality in past year suicidal behavior among Greenland Inuit

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Background

Suicide rates in Greenland are among the highest in the world and represent a major challenge for public health. Time trends in suicides and suicidal thoughts indicate a recent regional shift towards an increased marginalization between towns on the central west coast, villages and East and North Greenland. This study aims to gain a better understanding of this shift in relation to socioeconomic differences at the individual level.

Material and methods

Data on 2612 Greenland Inuit aged 18-64 years from the Inuit Health in Transition – Greenland Survey. Questions regarding past year suicidal thoughts and attempts were included in a self-administered questionnaire. Information regarding socioeconomic status was obtained through an interviewer-based questionnaire.

Socioeconomic characteristics included household wealth, occupational status, educational level and level of engagement in the on going social transition. Data were analyzed using multiple logistic regression models.

Results

The prevalence of past year suicidal attempts was 9.6% for men and 12.8% for women. The prevalence of suicidal thoughts was 3.6% and 4.4% for men and women respectively. Past year suicidal attempts and past year suicidal thoughts were associated with household wealth, occupational status as well as the level of involvement in social transition. In general the OR increased with a decrease in occupational status and household wealth. Gender differences applied.

Conclusion

The results indicate that socioeconomic characteristics at the individual level are important factors in understanding the distribution of suicidal behavior in Greenland. Following this observation, the recent shift in regional distribution of suicidal thoughts is likely to be linked to the substantial differences in living conditions between the regions. Preventive strategies and interventions should be targeted according to the social inequality in suicidal behavior.