Suicide in the Northwest Territories (1999-2013): A Review of the Coroner’s Data

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Background

Suicide is a common cause of mortality in Canada, and has reached epidemic levels in regions of the North especially among Inuit populations. This study assesses suicide trends within the Northwest Territories (NWT), and also identifies risk factors associated with suicide as well as opportunities for enhanced surveillance and prevention.

Methods

From 1999-2013, data were collected on all suicide deaths in the NWT by the Office of the Chief Coroner using the NWT Coroner Service Suicide Form (CSSF). After compiling all data into a database, rates were calculated and descriptive analyses performed.

Results

A total of 125 suicide cases were identified during the study period. Age-standardized suicide rates were 8.0 per 100,000 person-years at risk (PY) for females (95% confidence interval [CI] 4.9, 11.2), 30.0 for males (95% CI 23.8, 36.2) and 19.4 for males and females combined (95% CI 15.9, 22.9). Rates were highest in males aged 14 to 44 years. While rates remain higher in males than females, the male rate appears to be declining. In terms of seasons, 74 deaths by suicide occurred in the spring and summer compared to 45 in the fall and winter seasons. Ethnic variation was identified, with highest rates among the Inuit population (58.2 suicides per 100,000 PY. 95% CI 40.6, 75.8). Frequently identified risk factors included: single status; unemployment; alcohol and drug use; depressed; emotionally distressed; issuing a statement of suicide intent; family breakup or separation; relationship breakup; death of a friend or relative; and extended separation from family due to school, medical, other.

Discussion

Suicide rates in the NWT are high, particularly among males aged 14 to 44 years. Specific high risk populations include the Beaufort-Delta region and the Inuit. These findings, along with several identified risk factors, highlight opportunities for prevention strategies to mitigate the profound impact of suicide in the NWT.

References

