



# Suicide Prevention In Manitoba First Nations Communities: A Multi-generational Perspective



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## Introduction

Suicide, especially among Aboriginal youth, is an enormous problem in Canada.

Although not well understood, Aboriginal suicidal behavior is a complex problem linked to individual, family, community and socio-cultural factors. (Mayer et al. Can J Psych 2000;45:607-616)

The need to develop interventions to reduce suicidal behavior, especially for First Nations on-reserve populations, is evident. (Katz et al. J Can Acad Child Adolesc Psych 2006; 15(4):159-167)

Little has been reported on the perspectives of First Nations peoples on suicidality.

Inclusion of multi-generational perspectives can facilitate a culturally- and community-grounded framework for suicide prevention and intervention strategies.

## Objectives

To explore thoughts and perspectives of First Nations people on suicidal behavior and suicide prevention

## Methods

### Research Question

What are the perspectives of Manitoba First Nations youth, adults and elders on the causes of suicide and types of suicide prevention strategies needed?

### Qualitative Research Methodology

#### A Participatory Action Approach

-a University/First Nations partnership (University of Manitoba and Cree Nation Tribal Health)

#### Focus Group and Individual Interviews

-In-depth, semi-structured questions

## Methods continued

### Research Sites

8 Swampy Cree Tribal Council Communities in North-western Manitoba



Research Activities at Swampy Cree Nation Health Authority

### Recruitment of Participants

**Purposefully Selected** – youth, elders, parents, educators, band leaders, nurses, councilors, law enforcement personnel

**Community Liaisons** – assisted with participant recruitments and facilitation of Community Gatherings

**Community Gatherings** – community meal, project presentation, invitations to participate in the interviews



Community Gathering at Wood-Cree First Nation, Pukotagan, Manitoba

## Implementation

**Data Collection** - May 2008 – on going

### Participants

Total to date: n=136  
Females=84; Males=52  
Age Range=15-80 years

### Interview Questions

- From what you know, what are some of the reasons that a person might consider harming or killing themselves?
- What kinds of helpful programs are already happening in the community?
- What would help...
  - to develop healthy communities and healthy families?
  - to keep people from thinking about harming or killing themselves?
  - people who have already tried to harm or kill themselves?

### Data Analysis

Interviews, audio-taped and transcribed verbatim  
Thematic analysis used to identify preliminary themes

## Results

**Preliminary Themes** (based on subsample of 30 participants)

### 1) Reasons for Suicide

#### Brokenness

[Mother] That feeling of hopelessness and nobody cares and just feeling worthlessness, too, like there's no hope.

[Adult] Just lack of identity. No will to change. They are so broken down.

[Adult] Just lack of hope; that's the big thing. Don't know who you are, you don't know what you're supposed to – what you're here for...we losing our land, losing our culture, losing our identity.

[Youth] Not enough support from family

#### Inner Pain

[Elder] They're bottled up inside; There's not enough room to put more problems in there.

[Health worker] I think the biggest reason would be inner turmoil - in the mind, being overwhelmed from problems. A lot of pent-up pain and anger would really do it.

#### No Talking

[Parent] They got lots of problems. Like, maybe somebody already did do something to them and they can't come out and talk about it.

[Adult] Sexual abuse and neglect. Those would be the two most contributing factors as to why our community is the way it is. And there's been no form of healing whatsoever. Even when a person tries to speak out, they're told to be quiet.

## Results continued

### The Easy Way Out

[Adult] Cut it looks like an easy way out. They're not dealing with the \*\*\*\* so more. Hang themselves or – it's an easy way out. Some people, they just don't got it to take the hard way so they take the easy way. Cut who wants to struggle when he can do it easy, eh?

### 2) Helpful Programs in the Communities

[Young Adult] The support groups and the suicide prevention workshops, community wellness gatherings.

[Youth 1] Just the jobs that they've given us to keep us busy during the day...they give students jobs.

[Youth 2] We have culture camps during the summer. And when school's on, there are gym nights and school activities.

[Adult] That Yellow Ribbon program; it's about suicide prevention.

[Councilor] My program is drug and alcohol – we'll talk to them about bringing the Wicwaywin Program right away, because they are the ones who are trained to deal with it.

[Educator] The nursing station is where we go to whenever we have a fear that somebody is thinking about suicide...and they act immediately. The Health Authority are the ones who do the workshops...for suicide prevention for the community.

### 3) What More is Needed?

[Adult] I think our culture, our language will bring us together.

[Adult] I think there should be more programs for the youth. Things that they like to do – like more activities for them.

[Councilor] You've got to have the education...to educate the people on the suicide prevention and everything about it – the grief.

[Young Adult] Just knowing that someone cares about them, cares about listening.

[Councilor] You have to have somebody well-trained enough in that area.

[Elder] And then, the families gotta be able to recognize signs of trouble. And report it, regardless of what –

## Conclusions

Participants perceived hopelessness, loss of cultural identity, lack of support, and abuse as risk factors for suicide. Suicide awareness, First Nations culture and language, listening skills and youth programs were suggested as needed interventions.

The emerging themes and knowledge gained from this study will inform the design of planned future interventions at targeted levels.

## Acknowledgements

Funding:  
Canadian Institutes of Health Research



### Research Sites

Study Participants, Swampy Cree Community Health Administrations and Staff