

Mental Health, Social Support and Community Wellness

Notions of mental health and wellness depend on core cultural values. For Inuit, these include respect and care for others in the extended family and community as well as for the land, animals and the environment. Inuit understanding of the healthy person gives importance both to self-sufficiency and to interdependence. Healthy individuals show resilience in their ability to solve problems through innovation and resourcefulness and in their ability to work together with others for a common cause.

There is wide recognition that certain mental health problems have increased in Nunavik in recent years, most evident in the high prevalence of suicide among youth, and many people link this directly to the impact of sedentarization, economic and political marginalization, and the rapidity of culture change which has posed particular dilemmas for youth, families and communities. Understanding the sources of mental health, resilience and well-being is therefore of crucial importance to public health efforts in Nunavik. This summary presents the major findings of the Nunavik Inuit Health Survey 2004 on mental health and well-being, as well as the prevalence of common mental health problems, particularly suicide.

Overall, almost 3 out of 4 people in Nunavik are satisfied or very satisfied with their life. As for social support, only 1 in 3 people report they have someone to turn to when they need help all or most of the time. Women report higher levels of social support than men. However, women, youth (aged 15-29) and those with lower incomes report higher levels of emotional distress. Emotional distress is also associated with alcohol and substance use, a history of sexual abuse, and exposure to domestic violence.

In 2004, 35% of people reported having had suicidal ideation in their lifetime, and 14% in the past year. Almost 21% have made a suicide attempt in their life, and 6.7% have made an attempt in the last 12 months. Suicide ideation and attempts are much more common among young people and women. Suicide attempts are associated with higher levels of emotional distress, impulsivity, and the tendency to feel bored as well as with lower levels of self-esteem and lack of social support. The lifetime rates of suicide ideation and attempts were substantially higher in 2004 compared to 1992; however, the rates of suicide ideation and attempts in the past 12 months have not significantly changed.

Among people with suicidal ideation in the last 12 months, 2 out of 3 sought help from someone. Of those who sought help, most talked to a friend (80%) or family (43%); only a minority sought help from a health professional (28%), social worker (27%), elder (27%) or a minister or spiritual leader (16%).

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STATISTICAL ANALYSES

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